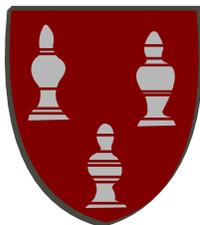




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presents



£2.00



SIR  
WILLIAM



DAME  
MARGERY

A MOMENT  
IN TIME  
HALESWORTH,  
A.D. 1415

SATURDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER  
11:30am

RLC MCMXIX





# A MOMENT IN TIME; HALESWORTH, A.D. 1415

*(A fictitious enactment based on historical fact)*

written and produced by Ann Wilkinson

## Dramatis Personae:

## Players:

Mother Julian/ Narrator

Win Sutton

Dame Margery

Helen Holmes

Master Richard

Carol Bostock-Smith

Sir William Argentine

John Frost

Sir John Heveningham

Steve Chadwick

Lady Margaret Heveningham

Paula Rowlett

Father Thomas

Jason Busby

Jack, the jester

Jon Lewis

*Musicians: Diana and Alan Furness, Ann Murley, Jackie Watts.*

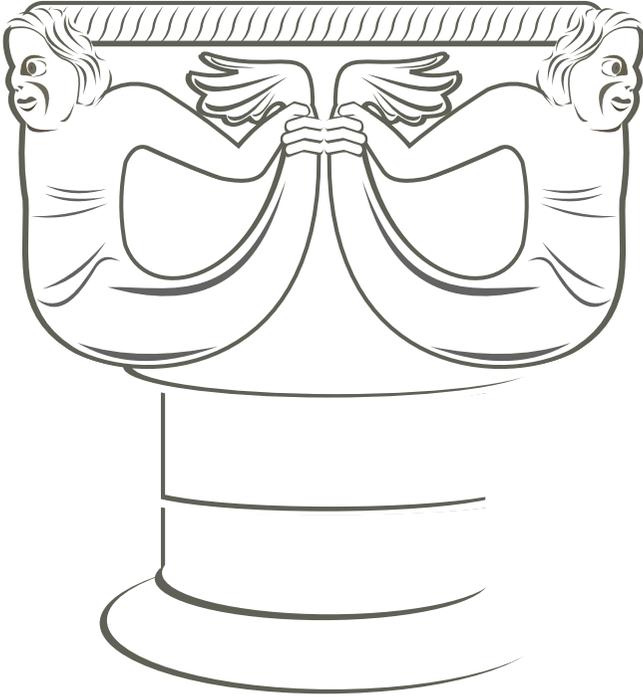
*Bellringing prologue provided by the Suffolk Guild of Ringers.*

*Set decor designed by Halesworth Mencap. The shields are inspired by Dave Wollweber's research into associated Argentine heraldry.*

## Act 1: Church and Argentine history

### Dancing Interlude

## Act 2: Fate casts a shadow.



Mermen Font  
Early 11th century

## HISTORICAL NOTES

The date, 1415, has been chosen for two reasons. Firstly it marks the end of the mediaeval build of this church, St Mary's, and secondly it signals the end of the Argentine Dynasty and its impact that family had on Halesworth.

To reference these two events within the theme of this year's, (2019) heritage weekend: 'Halesworth on the Map', we should note that:

- a. The Argentines, in their 300 year association with Halesworth, which included applying for a royal grant to hold a market (Richard Argentine, in 1229) gave Halesworth its 'Mediaeval Market Town' persona which persists till today. The Argentines came to these shores supporting William in the Conquest of 1066, and recent research credits them as being amongst his elite force; a decorated panel in Ely Cathedral records them as being billeted there while quelling the rebellion of Hereward the Wake in 1087.<sup>1</sup> A spirit of enterprise and a determination made the most of the reward of land holdings granted for loyalty on the battlefield. In time, (by 1130) Sir Reginald Argentine had expanded his estates to include Halesworth, in a marriage settlement, with the heiress, Rose of Halesworth. From then on, a booming economy in wool would take the town to sustained prosperity, some of which was channelled into rebuilding the saxon church to create the mediaeval edifice that stands here today.
- b. The church building, located as it is, and with the wonderful mediaeval tower completed circa 1415, acts as a landmark for travellers approaching from all directions. Adding to it's map credentials, is the fact that on arrival, it is a perfect compass; East (the altar) to the Holy Land, West to the sunset, South to the churchyard (early christians chose to be buried on the sunny side), North to commerce, amenities and transport connections.

<sup>1</sup> research by Dee Scotcher of Halesworth Museum

## FACT OR FICTION

Halesworth's proximity to Dunwich, which in the earlier mediaeval times was the largest city in East Anglia, could well have added to the town's prosperity. One can imagine exports of fleeces, to the low countries, perhaps woven into fine tapestries which still exist in a museum somewhere today. However due to heavy storms over the 13th and 14th centuries, much of Dunwich had disappeared under the sea by this point in history and it's most likely that other options would have been pursued for oversea travel. However, the romance of Dunwich having once been a major seaport, is irresistible to this drama.

For those travelling inbound with goods, perhaps Halesworth was a first watering hole. Where St Edmundsbury's Abbey was the quest of the pilgrim, perhaps 'new-builds', en route, would also have been of interest. Colours and gilding within the church - on both wood and stone decoration - with red rose motifs declaring allegiance to the Plantagenet House of Lancaster, must have made '**Our Lady of the Assumption**' a stunning sight for early pilgrims and townsfolk.

## AND THE CHARACTERS?

**Master Richard** is fictitious, created to bear the weight of conveying the church's history and to teach Sir William's grandchildren. After the death of his first born, John, William became their ward. It is a speculative stretch to suggest they would have needed a tutor at this stage but since the grandchildren were baptised at St Mary's, the manor may have become a second home for the young children and their widowed mother and education part of their early lives.

Thomas and Margaret Clement were major contributors to the final stage of the Mediaeval build. Their names are above the vestry door, with likenesses carved as head stops to the arch. **Father Thomas** and '**Queen Margaret**' assume their names in tribute.

**John Hevingham** and **William Argentine** were close enough friends for John to be the executor of William's will. They also shared experience of the military, sheriff business and representation in parliament. William's military

service was, however, more sustained. Church History records that the North Porch was built to celebrate Sir William's safe return from Agincourt. How could a man of 65 years possibly be part of that battle? *Could it be for support rather than combat?* From contemporary records (Patent Rolls) we learn that William received 'commissions of array' in 1399, 1402, 1403. Local historian David Elisha Davy (1769-1851) determines that 'we find William de Argentem at Agincourt, in the retinue of the Earl of Suffolk, among the *lances*.' Could this mean that he was checking that the weaponry was battle ready? The fact that his son and heir, William Argentine, esquire, was amongst the *lancers* as well as dutiful response to the king's bidding, may have driven him to 'one more commission'. When the Earl of Suffolk, fell at the preliminary combat - the siege of Honfleur - leaving his 21yr son as Earl and commander of the Suffolk retinue at Agincourt, William's anxiety for his second son may have further increased.

For the purposes of the enactment, we keep William in Halesworth, at this 'Moment in Time' and provide him with another military persona and motive to speed his departure to France in the aftermath of battle.

And, of course, **Dame Margery**. Her likeness can be seen in the bell tower - as a head stop to the archway over the tower door with Sir William's on the opposite side. She died in 1427 and was buried in Elstow priory church, in Bedfordshire, as Lady Margaret Hervy, next to her former husband, John. Where she died is uncertain but records state that, after young John Argentine (last male heir) died in 1423, she sold the wardship of his sisters to William Allington of Horseheath. Could this be when she returned to Elstow? Allington sons married the Argentine sisters, Elizabeth and Joan. On the birth of John Allington, the legacy would pass into new hands.

## ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

To mention the ones that you couldn't see on a church tour day, except in your imagination, but would have been seen pre-reformation, lets start with the rood screen. There is architectural evidence - a blocked staircase - to confirm that there was one. It's function was to divide the chancel (the priest's domain) from the nave (where townsfolk worshipped and gathered). If typical, it would

have held aloft the figures of Christ on the cross, Our lady and St John the disciple. These were adorned by candles and greenery on holy feast days - hence the need for the staircase, a head for heights and a steady nerve. This duty of sacred observance would have been undertaken by the priest, until he became less agile and provided a lad from the village with the opportunity of earning a few groats and testing his courage. Most often, rood screens were removed after the reformation, but many remain locally - an exquisite 16th century rood screen can be found nearby, at St Andrews in Bramfield.

Also now unseen, mentioned in Act 1, is the 'mermen font'. All that remains are some fragments in the sanctuary. These were discovered underfloor in the south aisle, as victorian church enlargement plans were underway. Sheila and Michael Gooch, local historians, based in Halesworth in recent years, came close, after exhaustive research, to concluding the stones were of norman rather than saxon origins. 'Mermen' fonts were rare. Two survive in Eastern England; St Peter's, in Cambridge and St George's in Anstey, Hertfordshire.

### PLAY WITHIN A PLAY

This device is used to demonstrate the honour bestowed on the Argentines of being cupbearers of kings at coronation banquets. (Originally, the scene was written for children to enact and Richard II, the ten year old king, provided a perfect role.) William's father, Sir John Argentine (1318-1382) contrary to the script, was still alive in 1377 to serve the young king. Historical fact gives way to dramatic license again when William claims to have served Henry V at his coronation in 1413. Strangely, on that occasion, the office seems to have been left unclaimed. However, we do know, as fact, that he performed the ceremony for Henry Bolingbroke in 1399, albeit the right was disputed with his half-sister's husband, Ivo Fitzwarren, who had not reconciled himself with the loss of his wife's inheritance. But that is another story!

*Leisured reading of 'A Little of the English Country Church'; Roy Strong, The People of a Suffolk Town; Michael and Sheila Gooch, The History of Parliament (online), The Mediaeval Soldier (online) and details from the Gooch*

*Archive (courtesy of Halesworth and District Museum) have mostly informed these notes. Further sources can be traced through them. Other acknowledgements are embedded in the text. Apologies for any omissions.*



## A GOOD HONEST WORKING CHURCH IN THE HEART OF A GOOD HONEST WORKING TOWN

### **The Regeneration of St Mary's, Halesworth**

In the heart of Halesworth – standing on a hill, and visible from much of the Town – is St Mary's Church. A beautiful strong building, not airy and elegant, or richly adorned and ornate – but solid, spacious and calm and it has been at the centre of Town life for hundreds of years. Next to the market square, it bustles with activity on market day, and is a short cut through from the market square to Steeple End. Sit quietly in a corner and you will see just how many people come in, chat, sit quietly, bustle about, meet friends, light candles, pray and think. Children come in and play about, dogs come in with their owners, older folk come in for a bit of peace and quiet, young mums sit and laugh, people join in services, attend concerts, coffee mornings, come to the food bank. And every so often I hear “where have the pews gone?”

Well the pews – unremarkable Victorian pine pews, dark and (it turns out) riddled with woodworm, of limited heritage value have gone. It is the first visible sign of the long talked about, and planned regeneration of St Mary's – which aims to restore St Mary's to its original purpose – a sacred space within a major community and civic space. When the church was first built it was deliberately designed with the wide empty space and beautiful medieval arches that make up the nave. At that time the church congregation stood during services, apart from a bench or two up against the walls for the elderly.

And when there were no services, people used the open space for lots of other purposes – including as a refuge in emergencies. Markets took place in the nave, children played, young women laughed and gossiped, young men paraded about and flirted, families met up there, folk came in to get a bit of quiet, or to sit, think and pray. And the priests (all men then of course) quietly

went about their business, meeting people, praying for them, listening to them, comforting, chastising, and teaching. The removal of the pews takes us straight back to the role of the church, the heart of the community, a busy honest space designed to meet the needs of busy honest folk. We plan gradually to return much of the church to exactly how it was when built, and as a result return it to being the centre of its community. It will take time, money, volunteers and effort but we will regenerate the Church Sir William was proud of.

Rev'd Jane Held, 23/9/19

There will be an opportunity, at the end of the performance, to make a donation towards the regeneration of St Mary's Church. Your generosity will spur on the work of the Friend's of St Mary's in raising funds to realise the vision described by the Rev'd Jane and pictured on the back cover of this programme, as well as making the church more usable, for us all, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



If you are a UK Taxpayer, please use the gift aid envelopes available and increase your gift by 25% at no extra cost to you.

If you would like to make a donation by BACS our account details are

Sort code: 20-53-06

Account number: 63008045

Account name: Friends of St Mary's Halesworth

with the reference Medieval Production.

Thanking you in anticipation.

We would be delighted to welcome you as a Friend of St Mary's.

Either pick up a leaflet and application form or contact the secretary,

Sarah Busby: [friendsofstmarys@talktalk.net](mailto:friendsofstmarys@talktalk.net)

Win Sutton, Chair of Friends





An artist's impression of the regenerated church of St Mary's, Halesworth