

Medieval Swansea: City Witness Activity

Lady Mary de Briouze

1. Lady Mary was of high social status, being the third wife of William de Briouze (senior).
2. Lady Mary's relationship with the hanged man is ambiguous. Clearly he stood against the interests of her husband (having attacked his castle!) but she seems to have taken an interest in his case and had previously intervened to plead for William Cragh to be spared.
3. Lady Mary watched from the castle and so was not physically present at any of the events. However, she sent John of Baggeham out with instructions to cut down the body, then sent him out again with string to 'measure' the body to St. Thomas. It was presumably on her instructions that, in the house where Thomas' body was laid, John led prayers to St. Thomas to intervene on the dead man's behalf. On hearing that Crach was recovering, Lady Mary herself went to the burgess' house to see and 'measure' him, returned the following day with broth, and oversaw the provision of sustenance for him until he was fully recovered. Lady Mary clearly had some interest or agenda where William Cragh was concerned.
4. Lady Mary's base in Swansea was the Castle, from which she regularly sends out people to interact with the town on her behalf. When she leaves the Castle and enters the town on both occasions in this story it is to witness the 'miracle' and to provide food.
5. Lady Mary's testimony raises more questions than it answers. Her interest in William Crach is mysterious and, if her testimony is to be believed, implies a hidden agenda. She was not a witness to the hanging itself and yet her instructions to John Baggeham give the impression that she was somehow manipulating events from the castle.

However, the manuscript itself is flawed as a reliable record of events. The witness statements were given 20 years after the events and the accounts were significantly edited after being copied into MS Vat. Lat. 4015. In Lady Mary's statement a central paragraph is written in much lighter ink than the rest of the text; it appears that this was written over an erasure. Since Hereford Cathedral had vested interests in ensuring Thomas became a saint, it is probably fair to be a little suspicious as to the reasons for erasures and edits. The cathedral would have been particularly keen for Lady Mary's testimony to be a powerful witness in support of Thomas' miracle as her high social status would have added weight and credibility to their cause.

