

January 2007

ELEANOR OF CASTILE

A report by Terry Sutton on a talk by Lea Oakley

Lea Oakley, who, with her husband, owns the 16-bedroom hotel Wallets Court at Westcliffe near St Margaret's, made a return visit in January to give a second talk about the links between their ancient property and Queen Eleanor of Castile. Her earlier talk had been about the restoration of Wallets Court.

Queen Eleanor was the devoted wife of Edward I (Longshanks) of England. Born around 1244 in Castile, she and Edward were married in 1254 - so she was about 10 years old - and they had some 16 children of whom only six survived. She died in 1290 at Herdeby near Grantham in Lincolnshire. The queen, reputed to be very pious, and her husband were devoted to each other and she even went on a crusade with him.

Mrs Oakley reminded the meeting that Wallets Court had for years been known locally as Queen Eleanor's Palace but she admitted she would be "grasping at straws" if she claimed that Eleanor had actually stayed there. But it was possible. Documents indicated that the manor of Wallets Court was one of 250 estates owned by Eleanor, who gained a reputation of acquiring as many estates as possible because she needed the income to support her lifestyle. Leeds Castle was just one of her possessions. One document mentioned that the Westcliffe estate was sold to Queen Eleanor in 1284 and it was possible she had a connection with the little church that still stands opposite Wallets Court.

Mrs Oakley, who gave an excellent PowerPoint presentation, recalled that when Eleanor died Edward had 12 crosses

erected at the places where the body rested on its way to Westminster Abbey for burial. Only three of those crosses survive and there remains a replica at the final resting place at Charing Cross, outside the railway station. In another link with history Mrs Oakley showed a document that proved that in 1804 (when England was at war with France) Wallets Court was leased to Prime Minister William Pitt who paid an annual rent of just over £9.



Eleanor of Castile, Wallets Court