

How The Queen Found King Henry's Sweetheart

Following a Silken Thread She Had Pinned to the Fair Charmer's Skirt, Her Majesty Went Through the Blinding Secret Passages That Hid the Lovers' Retreat, and Plunged a Dagger Into Rosamund's Heart

RECENT discoveries have caused renewed interest in what is perhaps the most fascinating story in all English history—the story of "King Henry II. and Fair Rosamund."

The secret love of the great early English King for one who was called the most beautiful woman in England and his ingenious but unsuccessful efforts to conceal his intrigue from a proud, powerful and also beautiful Queen have excited the imagination of men for many centuries—ever since the twelfth century, when the events of this obscure story occurred.

It is established beyond question that King Henry loved Rosamund Clifford, the fair daughter of Walter Lord Clifford, not wisely but too well. What is doubtful is that part of the story which asserts that he kept his love in a strangely hidden house and that the jealous Queen Eleanor pursued her there and put her to death.

Now there has just been discovered on the Duke of Marlborough's estate, Blenheim Palace, at Woodstock, the buried remains of an ancient stone house, which is thought to have been that occupied by the King's love—"Rosamund's Bower," as the poets have called it.

The palace, which King Henry occupied when he had his love affair with Rosamund, was at Woodstock. The estate was a royal manor and was many centuries later given by Queen Anne to the first Duke of Marlborough after his great victories.

King Henry's palace disappeared centuries ago, and of "Rosamund's Bower" there has never been any definite trace. An old house in the village of Woodstock, not a stone's throw from Blenheim Palace Park, has been pointed to by villagers as occupying the original site of "Rosamund's Bower," but without any good historical proof. Another old house, within the grounds of the palace, has been less frequently described as the original site, but with the same lack of good evidence.

The newly discovered ruins on the Blenheim estate are regarded by antiquarians as having a better claim to represent "Rosamund's Bower" than either of the other two sites. The ruins are situated in a thick wood in a remote, somewhat neglected, part of the estate. The wood was recently cleared away to provide for the increased cultivation of foodstuffs.

Then came another interesting discovery. It was observed that at a distance of a hundred yards from the ruins there were a number of very ancient yew trees planted in a peculiar zig-zag line. These, of course, had always been a familiar sight, but now it appeared probable that they were a vestige of "the maze," which, according to legend, King Henry built around his sweetheart's house.

In response to the renewed interest in Rosamund Clifford, one of the foremost English artists, F. Cadogan Cowper, has painted a remarkable picture of "Fair Rosamund and Queen Eleanor" for this year's Royal Academy. It has proved one of the great successes of the exhibition.

The artist has chosen the moment when the Queen has surprised the guilty Rosamund in the dainty retreat which the King has built for her. The two women are wonderfully contrasted. On one side stands the handsome, strong-featured, majestic Queen, with crown on head, pride, determination, anger and outraged wifely dignity in every line. At her girdle she carries a terrible dagger, and in one hand a cup of poison—Rosamund must accept one or the other as the means of making her exit from the world. She also holds the thread by which she has traced down the lovers' retreat.

On the other side of the picture stands Rosamund, the fair, frail, weak, trembling sweetheart of a king. You understand instantly that she cannot continue to exist as the rival of the majestic Queen.

The artist has based his picture on a passage in old John Stow's "Chronicle of England," one of the most familiar sources of the fair Rosamund legend. This passage reads as follows:

"Rosamund, the fayre daughter of Walter Lord Clifford, concubine to Henry II. (poisoned by Queen Eleanor, as some thought), dyed at Woodstocke (A. D. 1177), where King Henry had made for her a house of wonderful working; so that no man or woman might come to her, but he that was instructed by the King, or such as were right secret with him touching the matter. This house after some was named Labyrinthus, or Dedalus worke, which was wrought like unto a knot in a garden, called a Maze; but it was commonly said that lastly the Queene came to her by a clue of thredde, or silke, and so dealt with her, that she lived not long after; but when she was dead she

Henry II., the Lover of Rosamund, Who Became King of England in 1154. From an Ancient, Twelfth Century Manuscript.

was buried at Godstow, in an house of nunnys beside Oxford, with these verses upon her Tombe: 'Hic jacet in tumba Rosa mundi, non Rosa munda.' Many of the facts of Rosamund Clifford's life have been well established. The English historian, Thomas Carte, gave much attention to the subject. She was a daughter of Walter Lord Clifford, whose family became one of the most prominent in England throughout the Middle Ages, a prosperity partly due to the generosity of King Henry II.

Henry II. was the first of the Plantagenet line of English kings, one of the great monarchs of the Middle Ages. By birth he was a southern Frenchman, related to the previous English kings through his mother. His life was an amazing series of triumphs and tragedies. At nineteen he went to England, made war on his uncle, King Stephen, and after making peace was accepted as heir to the English throne. During this period he met and loved Rosamund Clifford.

In 1154, when he was twenty-one, he inherited the English throne, but before going to England he seized the opportunity to marry a great princess known as Eleanor of Aquitaine. She had been married to King Louis VII. of France. He had divorced her on the pretext of consanguinity, but really because he was displeased by her gallantries and her violent temper.

To the ambitious Henry these defects seemed of little importance, for what he desired most was the possession of the great territories in France to which Eleanor was heiress. It was through her inheritance that England became involved in war with France for nearly one hundred years, including the Joan of Arc period.

Eleanor was a typical product of southern France in the age of troubadours, tournaments and courts of love. It was the sole aim in life of a good knight to make love in the most romantic manner imaginable and of a lady to have as many adoring knights as possible. Eleanor had served as "Queen of Beauty" at many tournaments and was credited by the old chroniclers with having many affairs with knights and troubadours. She was handsome, hot tempered and of masculine vigor of body.

King Henry married Eleanor and took her to England, where he began to consolidate his power. In the midst of his cares he found time to spend with Rosa-

Queen Eleanor, with Dagger and Poison Cup, Surprising Fair Rosamund in Her Secret "Bower" by Means of a Clue of Thread. A Remarkably Skilful Historical Painting by F. Cadogan Cowper, A. R. A.

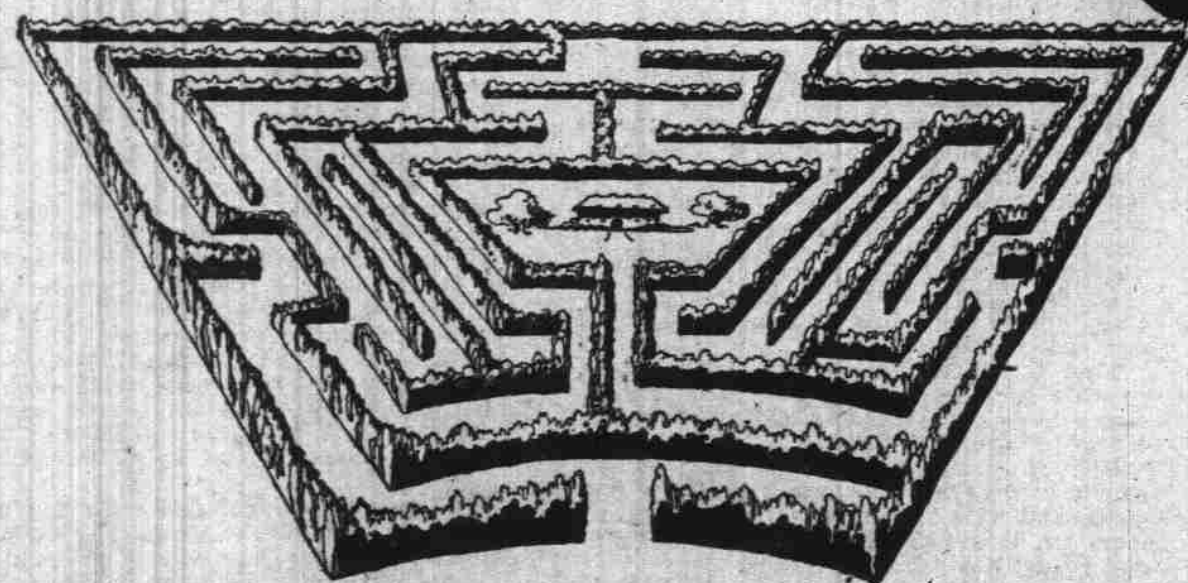
mund Clifford. There is some reason to believe that either before or immediately after his marriage to Queen Eleanor the King went through a secret marriage with Rosamund. In the isolated life of those days it would not have been difficult to conceal his other marriage from a young girl like Rosamund.

To make sure of secrecy the King constructed an extraordinary retreat for her at his domain of Woodstock, where he lived an idyllic if sinful existence, temporarily free from court cares.

An old historian named Brompton, who goes into considerable detail on the subject, says that this retreat was first approached by a maze, an arrangement of winding paths amid thick trees. Any one who did not possess the clue to the maze could never find his way to Rosamund's retreat, but would constantly find himself coming back to where he started.

It is popularly supposed that this maze was similar to the one at Hampton Court Palace, near London. Various types of mazes have, in fact, been constructed on English estates for centuries. It seems probable that the one that concealed Rosamund's house must have been much larger than that of Hampton Court.

When the King had made his way through the maze he came to a trap door hidden among the trees. He raised this and then entered a long, winding, subter-



The Famous Maze at Hampton Court Palace, Near London, Which Is Popularly Supposed to Have Been Copied from the One That Concealed Fair Rosamund's Retreat.

anean passage, or labyrinth. Finally when he had gone through this, he came up in a delightful little garden where stood "Rosamund's Bower," concealed in the remotest part of the forest.

During the two years following his marriage to Queen Eleanor the King was devoted to Rosamund. They had two sons, both of whom became great men in the land. It was not likely that such a woman

Rosamund Clifford, Weeping at the Discovery of Her Guilty Secret. From an Ancient English Painting.



through the maze to her secret trysting place.

When the King had gone away the fierce, proud Queen followed the silken thread and surprised poor Rosamund in her dainty retreat. The statement that the Queen carried with her a dagger and a cup of poison is entirely in agreement with what is known of her martial and vigorous character.

Poor Rosamund, caught helpless and alone, hesitated, what to do and, while she trembled in terror, the fierce Queen struck her to the heart with her dagger, as some writers assert, although others say she took the poison.

Certain historians say that the story of the maze and Queen Eleanor's dramatic actions is a fanciful embroidery. They assert that after King Henry's relations with Rosamund Clifford had been known for two years the Queen's violent remonstrances and the great scandal caused thereby led to the seclusion of the royal sweetheart in a nunnery at Godstow, where she died many years after.

The historians who reject the romantic story have never been able to prove that the King did not conceal his sweetheart in a maze. The story, which has been repeated by many chroniclers from the earliest times, has many elements of probability, and the discovery of the ancient ruins at Woodstock appears to confirm its accuracy in part.



Queen Eleanor, Who Put Rosamund to Death. From Her Tomb at Fontevault Abbey, France.