

## **Margaret de Enges, Prioress of Carrow**

Although historians aren't entirely sure, I was probably born near Norwich to a wealthy family. When I was eight or nine, I was sent to get an education from local nuns like many noble girls did. In my day, as a young woman you either had to get married or become a nun. There were definitely opportunities to become powerful through both. I became an oblate, which means a trainee nun, and then joined the Priory of Carrow in 1342. This was run by an order called the Benedictines and was just outside Norwich. It was a large priory, with 27 nuns living there. Lots of the other nuns would also have come from noble families, and my family would keep giving money as gifts to the Priory to show their devotion to God.

I was ambitious, and in September 1369 I was elected as Prioress! This meant that I was in charge of all the other nuns and had a lot more freedom and responsibility. I could travel, and even petition the King and council to ask for their help to make sure that the Priory was getting all of the land and rights it should do. I was in charge of all the money and wanted to make sure that Carrow Priory was left richer and more powerful under my watch. I continued to get money for the Priory from running one of the major fairs in Norwich, and also by getting even more land. This meant that I was the lady of this manor, and they owed their allegiance to me. Things were looking really good for the Priory.

However, I will never forget the events of June 1381 – I could have lost my life! On the morning of 18 June 1381, there was lots of local rebel activity. People in Wroxham, which was one of the areas of land owned by my priory, were unhappy. Two local men, Adam Smyth and Henry Stanford, decided that they had enough of the Priory being in charge! They attacked us with a band of men. We were all horrified that they would think to attack a religious building – and one of women – but that didn't seem to stop them. They demanded that I hand over the deeds and court rolls or they would kill me! Of course, I handed them over; there really was no alternative. The rebels burnt them in front of me and took whatever they fancied from the Priory.

If they thought that this was over and I had let them get away with it, the rebels were very wrong. The following year, when the Revolt was over, I felt that it was time to take legal action against the men for trespassing and stealing things. Even as a woman, my rights were the same, as I was a landholder. The local sheriff ordered the rebels to appear in court in January 1383. We went after the most wealthy of those present, such as John Nichol and his wife Margaret, as we wanted them to be able to afford to pay for the damage. Historians don't know the outcome of the trial, but Adam Smyth got a pardon and John Nichol continued to hold his land. However, two of the other men were put to death as the uprising was put down, so at least there was some punishment.

Thankfully, my remaining time as Prioress was not as dramatic. I continued to be in charge for the next 14 years until I died in 1395, when I was quite elderly (probably 60 or 70 years old) and was buried at my beloved Carrow.

This is the site of Carrow Priory today (image: [Norfolk Gardens Trust](#)). It was destroyed during the Reformation in the Tudor period. Carrow is now most famous for being the home of Norwich City's football stadium!

