

## The Riches of John of Gaunt

*Based on an article for the Daily Mail by Naya Narain*

Most Ricardians are probably aware John of Gaunt, third son of Edward III, and married three times was one of the richest men of all time.

Now two authors have used probate records and other documents to calculate the wealth of people in the past and find John of Gaunt (described as a diplomat) as joint fifth with £55bn along with the admiral 11<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundal (1346-1397), and the famous Bishop Odo of Bayeaux (1030-1097).

Many of the richest of all time lived some time between the Norman conquest and the early part of the 15th century which argues the conquest of Saxon England and westward influx into Wales where the original princes and nobles were relieved of their property was certainly like winning the lottery for William's supporters and their descendants.

And according to authors Philip Beresford and Bill Rubenstein the largest ever fortune was amassed by Norman French landowner Alan Rufus (1040-1093) with £81bn.

Alan the Red, so-called because of his hair colour, is top of the list of the 250 wealthiest people in British history, excluding monarchs, called The Richest of the Rich.

Rufus, William the Conqueror's nephew, is followed by soldier William de Warenne (died 1088), the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Surrey, with £74bn and joint third the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel (1307 -1376), a general, and soldier Robert of Mortain (1031-1090) with £59bn.

Eighth is landowner Henry of Grossmont (1299-1361) with £43bn, and ninth Edward the Black Prince (1330-1376) with the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Warwick (1382-1439) worth £34; eleventh the 12<sup>th</sup> Earl of Arundel (1381-1415) with £29bn; twelfth banker Aaron of Lincoln (1125-1186) £28bn, 13<sup>th</sup> Thomas a Becket (1120-1170) £25bn.

Joint fourteenth are Bishop Ranulf Flambard (1060-1128), Duke of Gloucester (1335-1397) and soldier Sir Robert Knolles (1317-1407) with £22bn.

Alan Rufus's fortune included 250,000 acres of land in Yorks, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and London, given to him by his uncle for his part in suppressing Saxon rebellion in the north.

His real claim to fame is building Richmond castle in North Yorkshire and when he died was worth £11,000 - £81.33bn in today's money, more than 7 per cent of the national income at the time.



And the richest woman in British history? Perhaps not surprisingly considering her character: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Henry II's wife who comes in at 62 with just less than £10bn.



*broadcast on BBC Four*

"Nobody is likely to be as rich as Alan Rufus again," said Mr Beresford.

"But it is safer to be rich now. Rufus died in his bed but of the 250 on the list 29 were either executed or met a violent death."

And as for John of Gaunt he was married first to Blanche, heiress of Lancaster, who died of the Black Death in 1369, then Constance of Castile (1354-1394) in the hope of becoming king of Castile, and in 1396 his mistress of nearly 30 years Katherine of Guenne (1350-1403), widow of Sir Hugh Swynford - the first occasion in medieval times such an event had taken place.

Pope Boniface IX legitimized their children who had of course the name of Beaufort ...

***Katherine Swynford: The Story of John of Gaunt and His Scandalous Duchess by Alison Weir was published in October and recently***

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