HENRY IV

I haven’t yet read Chris Given-Wilson’s latest book on Henry IV and I’m sure it’s an excellent contribution to the Yale English Monarchs Series. So far I only have the reviewer’s comments to go on and I’m sorry to see that he makes it sound like the usual white-wash of a regicide as we were taught in school. That victors rewrite history we well know and Henry IV certainly rewrote much and (probably) destroyed more as anyone who has looked for primary sources on the reign of Richard II will testify. My main point of contention is your reviewer’s remark that Henry kept Church and State in harmony. Was this before or after he had the Archbishop of York executed without trial outside the walls of York? Was it before or after Henry’s hunting down of the followers of Wyclif who merely wanted to read the Bible in their own language? And was this ‘harmony’ before or after the first public burning in England for heresy with the brutal killing of Sir William Sawtre at Smithfield? Some harmony! Your reviewer gives the impression that once again an historian approves of this regicide and all-round murdering usurper - whom the French continued to call ‘so-called King Henry IV’ - and who incidentally set back the Reformation a hundred years until Luther called time on the pope. I shall make haste to read Given-Wilson’s book as soon as possible and trust that it is not just another paeon to treachery.