

## Constance de Béarn

Constance de Béarn was owner of Tickhill Castle at various times from 1272 to 1310. Why did a woman from Béarn in south-west France have this connection with Tickhill and why did she lose control of her property here on two occasions? Born in c.1245, Constance was the eldest of four daughters of Gaston VII, Vicomte of Béarn. On 23 March 1260 Constance married the Infante Alfonso, heir to the kingdom of Aragon. Alfonso died three days later.

Constance's second husband was Henry of Almain, son of Richard Duke of Cornwall, nephew of Henry III and cousin of the Lord Edward, the future Edward I. The marriage ceremony at Windsor Castle on 19 May 1269 followed four years of negotiations to arrange a marriage contract. (Henry III ratified the marriage proposal on 6 March 1269.) It was a marriage of political significance as Constance was co-heiress of Gaston VII and signalled the opportunity to establish an English dynasty in Béarn and other lordships which would be part of her inheritance. This was hoped to strengthen the southern flank of English-held Gascony, protecting it from incursions from beyond the Pyrenees and from the King of France.

The plans were dashed when Henry was murdered in 1271 at Viterbo by his cousins Guy and Simon de Montfort in revenge for the death of their father Simon at the Battle of Evesham and subsequent mutilation of his body. The Honour of Tickhill, given to Henry of Almain in 1263 by the Lord Edward, became part of Constance's dower lands. On 27 January 1272 Henry III committed Tickhill Castle and Honour to Ivo de Elinton, an attorney, to look after its administration on behalf of Constance and Eleanor (wife of the Lord Edward and owner of Tickhill Castle from 1254. Her ownership overlapped with that of Constance until 1275 when Eleanor, by then Queen, was given other castles).

It is more than likely that Constance remained in France, having travelled to Gascony with Henry in 1270. Her father became involved in a rebellion against Edward I. As a result the King ordered an attorney, Raymond de Nolmeriis, in October 1274 to deliver all the money arising from lands in Constance's dowry to the Exchequer, both what he had in hand and what should come in, and not to carry it out of the realm. Two years later Constance caused further trouble in Gascony when she was accused of aggravating, disturbing and molesting Enald de Sancto Germano who was to be given 'reasonable support' by the King's seneschal in Gascony.

Constance found favour with Edward I in 1279 when she was given 'simple protection' for one year and had the Castle and Honour of Tickhill returned to her. On 11 March 1279 the King issued the following order:

Mandate to Nicholas de Stapleton to deliver the Castle of Tykehill and all the lands of the honour of that castle with the manor of Gringley, committed to him by the King, to Constance late the wife of Henry de Almain deceased together with the rents and issues thereof from the time they were committed to him.

As Nicholas de Stapleton had been Constable of Tickhill Castle since November 1276, it would seem that Constance received over two years' income from him. This coincided with Constance's third marriage to Aymon II of Geneva in 1279. Aymon died within a year of the marriage. After three very short-lived marriages Constance did not marry again. She had no children.

Constance later became a thorn in Edward I's side when she supported the King of France in a war with England in the 1290s. Edward reacted by depriving Constance of income from Tickhill and her other property in England. On 24 August 1299 the King gave all Constance's lands in England to Amaneus de le Bret until his lands in Gascony were returned to him. On 15 October 1303 Edward I issued the following order:

To Walter de Gloucestria escheator beyond Trent. Order to permit Amaneus de le Bret to hold the castle and manor of Tickhill and all the other lands that Constance, daughter of the late Gaston Vicomte of Bearne, held in England before the late war between the King and the King of France, with the knights' fees, advowsons of churches, wardships, reliefs, escheats and all other appertenances and not to meddle therewith in any way as the King has granted to Amaneus the said castle, manor and lands with all appurtenances which he had caused to be taken into his hands for certain reasons.

Constance's English lands including Tickhill Castle were restored to her in November 1304. She died in 1310 a year after Edward II gave her two years' respite from paying her debts to him and his father. Tickhill Castle reverted to the Crown; Tickhill was no longer linked with disputes in Gascony.

Studd, R., 'The marriage of Henry of Almain and Constance of Béarn' in Coss, P. R., & Lloyd, S. D., *Thirteenth Century England III*, The Boydell Press, 1991

For information on decisions made about Constance's control of Tickhill Castle as contained in the Calendar of Patent Rolls see website <<http://sdrclib.uiowa.edu/patentrolls/e1v2/body/>>