

Sir William Fraunk

Having seen the calibre of Sir William de Anne in the previous Newsletter, two subsequent Constables of Tickhill Castle have been investigated. Here is the first one.

After serving as Constable of Lincoln Castle, William Fraunk, knight of the royal household, became Constable of Tickhill Castle from 1336-1346. He continued to have responsibilities in Lincolnshire as sheriff and escheator (an official who has oversight of escheats - property which passed to the King for lack of an heir or as the result of forfeiture). There are several instances of William dealing with escheats in the Calendars of Patent Rolls. An example of William's wider responsibilities came in an order of 10 April 1336 for the arrest of suspected persons in the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire and then to keep them in safe custody within Tickhill Castle. This was just one of several such orders issued in England by Edward III to ensure stability while he was in Scotland.

A more unusual task the King gave to William on 15 February 1342 was to 'seize the body of Elizabeth, daughter and heir of Nicholas Menill, tenant-in-chief, whose marriage pertains to the King, wherever he can find her, and to keep her in safe custody until the King give other order therein.' The previous November the King had arranged that Elizabeth, aged 11, should marry John Darcy of Knayth. Whether or not William took Elizabeth into custody is not clear, but in 1345 the marriage took place. In the following year John Darcy became Constable of the Tower of London. On his death Elizabeth, age 25, became the wife of Sir Peter (Piers) de Mauley in 1356. She died at the age of 36 in 1368 in the de Mauley family home, Mulgrave Castle.

Not all William Fraunk's dealings were reputable:

- In 1337 he seized wool at Boston belonging to three merchants, Nicholas de Rois, Conrad de Valteskere of Lombardy and Segresius of Brabant. William had not been appointed to take this action and was ordered by the King on 10 September to return the wool without delay.
- In 1338 William had to acknowledge an oversight in his management of affairs at Tickhill Castle. He accepted that he owed Master Paul de Monte Florum, Keeper of the Free Chapel of Tickhill, 1,100 marks. William was told by the King that the amount would be levied from his lands and chattels in Lincolnshire if he defaulted on payment. The amount involved was considerable, as a mark was valued at 13/4d, the total coming to £733/6/8 (in today's money this would have the equivalent purchasing power of over £400,000).
- This was not the first time William owed money. In 1329 he acknowledged that he owed the King £200. If he defaulted on payment it would be taken from his lands and chattels in Leicestershire.
- In 1342 William received a royal pardon 'in consideration of the good deeds done by him' for an indictment concerning trespass issued by Justice Nicholas de Cantelu.

As was the case with other Constables of Tickhill Castle, William travelled away from Tickhill at the King's behest. For example, he went to Brittany in 1342 with the King's army to help Joan, Countess of Richmond and Duchess of Brittany who was besieged in Hennebont. It was William who was then given the responsibility of keeping Joan and her household at Tickhill Castle after she returned to England. In 1344 William was granted 5 marks a week to cover the expenses of housing Joan and her retinue. (See 'Tickhill Castle as a place of imprisonment' in Newsletter 38 and in the snippet section of the website for the background to this.)

A mystery hangs over the later months of William's time in office. On 21 June 1347 Edward III issued a commission to Thomas Haukeston (William's successor as Constable at Tickhill Castle), William de Estfeld the Elder, Martin de Bergh and Robert de Heseleye 'to make inquisition on the oath of good men of the County of Nottinghamshire to certify the King of the whole truth touching alleged destruction in the houses, woods and gardens of the Castle and Honour of Tickhill, now in the hands of Queen Philippa by grant of the King, in the time when William Fraunk was Constable of the Castle and Keeper there.' Had something happened while William was away from Tickhill, for example, when he travelled to Flanders in November 1346 on the King's orders to arrest English ships for the King's service? (After the ships unloaded at Flemish ports he had to take security from masters and mariners to ensure the ships returned to the ports to which they belonged.) Had there been a severe storm, a fire, a rampage of wild animals, an attack by outlaws or a combination of some of these factors? Whatever the cause, the destruction of houses, woods and gardens must have affected the income Queen Philippa received from Tickhill Castle, one of 15 castles she had been granted by the King to provide an appropriate income for her. Why had William Fraunk not been able to deal with the problem? His death could have occurred before he had the opportunity to do so.

On 20 April 1347 William's son, heir and executor, Alan Fraunk, applied to the King for all his father's lands, goods and chattels which had been seized by the King, to be restored to him and his mother. The King had ordered the seizure of William's property because of his debts when he was Sheriff of Lincoln. The property was returned to the family until the following Christmas on the understanding that audited accounts would be submitted so that 'what is right may be done upon that affair'. It looks as though William's financial reliability was in doubt.

The next Newsletter will feature a Constable of Tickhill Castle appointed by John of Gaunt.

Details can be found in Calendars of Patent Rolls in the British History online website <www.british_history.ac.uk> Access to some material on this website is free but a subscription is needed to access some of the Calendars of Patent Rolls.