Trouble at Gringley Mill © Michael Goddard 2017

John of Gaunt Duke of Lancaster

Source - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_Gaunt#/media/File:Johnofgaunt.jpg

In late summer 1374 John of Gaunt, King of Castile and Leon, Duke of Lancaster, the largest landowner and the richest man in England, visited his recently acquired honour of Tickhill and stayed briefly in its castle (one of thirty he held across England and France) before moving to the manor house at Gringley, with disastrous consequences for some of his poorest tenants. If it was not exactly 'trouble at t' mill', it was certainly trouble concerning it.

Something of Gaunt's character can be gleaned from events touching him that took place in the wider world of European politics in the couple of years immediately before his visit to Tickhill and Gringley. John of Gaunt was born in 1340, ten years after his brother the Black Prince and three years after the beginning of the Hundred Years' War between the ruling families of France and England. He was born at the very time and place (Ghent) that his father declared himself the rightful king of France. During the two years prior to his visit in 1374, as a member of the royal house, he had been involved in dynastic politics via the proxy wars of succession in northern Spain and Brittany that the kings of France and England were waging during their 1360s “truce” in the Hundred Years' War.

Firstly, the Black Prince's (largely illusory) military and diplomatic victories in Spain in restoring the ousted king, Pedro “the Cruel” to his throne in Castile and Leon perhaps inspired in Gaunt the idea that it was easy to set up and put down kings. For, following the death of his own first wife and the unfortunate murder of the restored king Pedro by his French-backed rival in 1369, Gaunt himself married the eldest of King Pedro's daughters in 1371, thus making himself - by right of his wife - a claimant to the throne of Castile and Leon, which he determined to win. They arrived back in England that November. His consort, the seventeen-year-old Constance, was probably thrilled at the prospect of marriage to a warrior who might avenge her father's death.

Secondly, the Richmond-Tickhill exchange in June 1372 had been the price demanded by one of the rival claimants to the disputed duchy of Brittany for the English king to secure his support and the free passage of troops. Unfortunately, shortly afterwards the French crown lost patience with this candidate's duplicity. (He had tried to conceal his involvement with England and made excuses about the presence of English troops in his duchy.) The French invaded Brittany, the duke's support amongst the native Bretons collapsed, and he fled back to the English court in May 1373. Nevertheless, for John of Gaunt at least, the exchange had the advantage of concentrating his own scattered lands into the north Midlands.

Both of these involvements had a bearing on Gaunt's conduct during the year immediately before he visited Tickhill. Firstly, within the first twelve months of the exchange of Richmond for Tickhill, he appointed new constables, porters, receivers, seneschals and supervisors at his various new castles and possessions; he received homage from many of his new tenants, and the rolls of accounts of the officers had been called in to his great palace of the Savoy in London in December 1372. All this needed to be completed because most of his existing adherents would be taking part in a grand invasion force of 15,000 men embarking for France under Gaunt's leadership. The expedition promised an opportunity for achievements to match those of his father at Crécy (1346) and his elder

brother at Poitiers (1356). He perhaps hoped that it might even give the chance to play a role on the European stage and, through conquest, win his Castilian throne. Unfortunately, while Gaunt was eager to emulate the king and the prince, he was a poor tactician.

The march that followed between August and Christmas 1373, on which Gaunt was accompanied by the ousted duke of Brittany, was not directed towards restoring the latter to his Duchy nor to reinforcing the hard-pressed Black Prince in Aquitaine by the shortest route, although it was seen especially by French contemporaries as a gloriously chivalric episode. They named it the "Great Chevauchee", partly because it resulted in such a huge swathe of burning, looting and destruction throughout central France at the expense of the peasants and townspeople of the area it passed through, but also because, as Gaunt's biographer says, "For five months he had offered the enemy whose lands he insulted constant challenge of battle, and that challenge had been constantly refused. . . . no army had dared to meet him in the field." As with all such raids in later medieval warfare the intention was to devastate the economic productivity of the enemy's lands to make it difficult to raise the revenue from them that was needed to pay the ransoms of their captured overlords and also to show that those lords had failed in their duty to protect their people. The prime example had been the raid that the Black Prince conducted across SE France through the territory of the count of Armagnac, marching from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean (Bordeaux to Narbonne) in October and November 1355, which John of Gaunt was perhaps trying to emulate. Whatever Gaunt finally hoped to achieve remains an enigma and his objective probably changed as the march progressed. The march did little to further English interests in the kingdom of France and it ended with a march to Bordeaux through the mountains of the Auvergne in the middle of winter. Of the 15,000 men he had led out of Calais only 8,000 were left, and only half of them still had horses. Little wonder that by November 1373, Parliament was expressing anger about the campaign, news of which was filtering back to England.

The whole episode could perhaps stand as an emblem of Gaunt's overweening view of himself, his place in the world and his abilities. This assessment of the man who arrived at Tickhill on the 21/22 of September 1374 and went on to Gringley on the 22nd comes from Jonathan Sumption's *Divided Houses* (2009), the third volume in his series on the Hundred Years' War: "Gaunt was an ambitious, flamboyant man who was never likely to be satisfied by the secondary role reserved for the younger sons of kings. . . . he wanted to carve out a principality for himself and to play a great part in the politics of Europe." And, in 1372 after his marriage to Constance of Castile, " . . . he set about giving himself the ways of a king. He was henceforth referred to in English official documents as 'King of Castile and Léon' and was officially addressed as 'Monseigneur d'Espagne'."

He returned to an angry reception in England in April 1374 and absented himself from court for ten months while he visited his newly-acquired northern estates. He obviously already had in mind the tour on which we met him at the beginning of our story, because on the 15 May a letter was sent to Robert Morton, the receiver for the duchy's Yorkshire estates, about the dilapidated state of Tickhill castle's walls, tower and bridge and giving orders for the repair and re-leading of the roofs of the chamber in the tower called the garret and the chamber over the gate, with orders to put right any similar defects in the manor house at Gringley. Joan of Flanders had spent fourteen years confined in Tickhill castle from 1343 until at least 1357 (see TDLHS Newsletter No 38, Autumn 2013), but after that the castle at Tickhill seems to have been left very much to its own devices. A subsequent piece of correspondence, dated at Gringley, points to what happened when he arrived in that manor a day later.

In 1331 the honor of Tickhill (which included, amongst other places, the manors of Gringley, Misterton and Walkeringham) had been one of the many possessions granted by the crown (in the shape of king Edward III) to his wife, John of Gaunt's mother queen Philippa, as part of her dowry settlement. Its administration had been left mainly in the hands of officials and there seems to have

been some concern on the part of the crown about maladministration, for there were several investigations between 1348 and 1365. Although other aspects, especially of the Queen's domestic expenditure, were also giving concern at this time, the story of Gringley mill perhaps illustrates a relaxation of strict control.

Although the manor of Gringley (which included Walkeringham and Misterton) had been part of the honour of Tickhill right from its creation in the time of Roger de Busli, at some stage it seems to have been 'sub-let' by de Busli himself to a follower, Roger de Lovetot - an arrangement that may be what was recorded in Domesday in 1086.

Just as Roger de Busli founded a priory at Blyth in 1088, so the de Lovetots founded the priory at Worksop in 1103 (today, like that of Blyth, it is the parish church). By the mid-twelfth century the de Lovetots also held Sheffield and many other nearby estates. Over the years they granted to Worksop priory the lands, tithes and possessions of many of their churches, including those of Gringley, Misterton and Walkeringham, as well as most of the town of Worksop and various other lands and privileges.

The last great heiress of the family of de Lovetot was Matilda, or Maud, who was only seven when her father died in 1181. As the sole heiress she became a ward of the crown, to be disposed of - along with her large inheritance - in marriage by the king. The temptation for the crown to hold on to the income from her lands seems to have been too great to resist, for she was only eventually married off at about twenty years of age to Gerald or Gerard de Furnival, the son of an older Gerald de Furnival who was a crusading companion of king Richard I at the seige of Acre. Matilda's husband also went on crusade, dying at Jerusalem in 1219. It was by this marriage that the de Furnivals became the lords of Sheffield and that Worksop priory became the mausoleum of the de Lovetots and de Furnivals. Several tombs and effigies can still be seen there, although much damaged at the Reformation.

The mill with which our story is concerned was paid for and originally owned by Matilda (or Maud) de Lovetot.

The construction of a mill, whether water-driven or wind-powered, represented a considerable cost, not only initially but also in its maintenance. According to Christopher Dyer's *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, “Lords spent about £10 on building a new windmill, and would have to make regular outlays on repair, but could expect to gain an annual return of a pound or two” (e.g. a post mill built by Glastonbury Abbey in 1342-43 cost £11 12s 11d - half in wages, half in materials, including over 11% for the millstones; and the maintenance of it over the next few years cost about a quarter of its initial building costs each year). Nevertheless, lords could expect to make a profit from their investment.

The profit lay in their ability to charge tenants for 'suit of mill', meaning their obligation to have their corn ground at the mill of their local lord. As with most transactions during period, the payment was made in kind: a certain proportion of the grain or flour was retained (like a toll) to pay for its processing. Mills were therefore a valuable part of a lord's income.

The Miller described in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is an ugly, raucous fellow who was a teller of scurrilous tales and had little regard for social precedence. He shares the proverbial reputation of medieval millers for dishonesty. Here he is in Nevill Coghill's 1958 modernisation:

> “His was a master-hand at stealing grain.
> He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew
> Its quality and took three times his due -

A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!"

The toll in grain that was paid (called 'multure') varied between a twelfth and a twenty-fourth (i.e. around 6.25% on average), but the price of grain also varied depending on the harvest so that tenants found themselves being charged something more precious in times of shortage - hence the reputation of millers for extortion and dishonesty.

Inevitably the system led to people trying to avoid the charge, often by grinding the small amount of grain required for a household by using a hand-mill or 'quern' at home. If a tenant failed to 'render suit' to the lord's mill he would be fined in the manor court: around 6d. before judgement or 12d. after judgement. (Unskilled agricultural work paid about 1½ d. a day at this time.)

Re-enactment of using a quern © Wendy Meka

Three of Tickhill's mills were water-mills and when, on May 27th 1370, William de Estfeld was granted the income from "the king's mills of Tykhull, with the fishery, tolls and other appurtenances thereof" for the next ten years, it was in return for an annual rent or 'farm' (meaning the firm or fixed sum of money due for them) of £30, "provided that he undertake all the small costs of the mills, as in 'cogges', 'spynles', and 'billes'."

So, the lord often found it worthwhile to accept a fixed yearly rent for the mill from an individual tenant. Such, as we shall see, was also the case with the mill in our story.

However, this mill was not in Tickhill, but in Gringley-on-the-hill - and it was a windmill.

Before the late 1100s European mills for grain and industrial processing had all been powered by water, like the three belonging to Roger de Busli at Tickhill that were recorded in Domesday. However, between the end of the First Crusade (1149) and the beginning of the second (1189) the earliest authentic references in Britain to windmills occur. By 1200 there are nearly two dozen references. As a result, some people have suggested that the idea of the windmill was brought back by returning crusaders.

The Gringley windmill was gifted to Worksop Priory in the mid-thirteenth century by Matilda de Lovetot, later than the earliest mills of that type were recorded in England, but the fact that her husband, her father-in-law and two of her sons were all crusaders might be relevant to its introduction.

Various seizures, exchanges and bequests concerning the manor of Gringley took place during the shifting alliances of the second half of the thirteenth century that culminated in the turmoil of the second 'barons' war' (1264-67) against king Henry III. Inevitably, the rights to the manor and the rights to the income from the 'suit of mill' became tangled together and, in response to complaints by the priory that it was not receiving its entitlements, there were several hearings held (in 1276, 1279 and 1326) to determine exactly who had a right to what.

In all this confusion various characters closely connected with Tickhill played a major part.

In 1276 the jury actually found that the prior had been unjustly ejected from the mill. A year later the prior complained that, before this judgement had been given, a group of forty men, under orders from the constable of Tickhill, had pulled the mill down. Presumably they had moved it, because at the hearing in 1326 William de Anne, (who had been constable of Tickhill castle at the time of its besieging by Thomas of Lancaster: see TDLHS Newsletter No. 51), told how the mill by then was about two 'selions' away i.e. two field-strip widths, or probably about twenty two yards (a chain), so that it stood on the king's land, not on land that had been given to the priory.

Post mill at Laxton ©*The Mills Archive Trust*

Medieval windmills were post mills so that, like all timber-framed buildings (including, much later, Shakespeare's 'Theatre', which was re-erected as 'The Globe'), they could be dismantled and reconstructed elsewhere. (An example of a post mill is shown, left.)

At the hearing of 1326 the prior was given permission to rebuild it where it had stood formerly, but was told that his only recourse to recover the right of suit to it was by invoking the common law. According to *Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire*, “There was more ado afterwards concerning this mill and suit to it in the former part of the reign of Edward III.” The hearing in 1326 took place just six years after the view of the extent of the honour of Tickhill dating from 1320-21 which mentions Wickersley as the supplier of the millstones for Tickhill's mills, and it was at just about that time that the honour was passed first to Edward III's mother, Isabella of France (1327), and then to his wife, queen Philippa (1331).

The priors of Worksop would have been increasingly anxious during this time to repossess the mill and its income because of the financial difficulties in which they found themselves thanks to the activities of another of Tickhill's most famous medieval sons.

John of Tickhill, a canon of the priory, had been elected prior there in 1303. By 1313 he had been removed for 'incontinence', most probably connected with the cost of producing that very beautiful (but expensive) manuscript, the *Tickhill Psalter*. A sense of its magnificence can be gained from looking at it online at the New York Public Library website. However, it was never completed and it seems that its production almost bankrupted what had been, thanks to the de Lovetots' and de Furnivals' endowments, a very wealthy establishment.

The manor of Gringley had eventually found its way back into the hands of the crown after passing, with many other royal properties, through the hands of the Hull wool merchant and king's banker William de la Pole, who provided much of the crown's credit for the early part of the Hundred Years' War and whose methods had raised the money for the successful Crécy campaign.

Gringley was consequently part of the honour of Tickhill when John of Gaunt made his visit and the mill seems to have been part of the property of the honour, but the right to the income from it (the 'suit of mill') had been farmed out to the prior of Worksop (like the arrangement with William Estfeld at Tickhill in 1370 mentioned above). Possibly this arrangement with the prior reflected a compromise that had been arrived at to settle the long-running dispute over the mill's ownership and its income.

However, all was not well in September 1374. It seems that the prior had a grievance.

In an order "given at the manor of Gringley" on 23rd September instructions were given to Oliver de Barton, steward of Gringley, which explain that the prior of Worksop held the mill there "in farm of us," but that "our tenants in the village of Gringley have withdrawn their attendance at the said mill" (and consequently avoided paying the toll or 'multure' for milling their grain) because of the querns (or hand-mills) that "they hold in their houses." This, Gaunt says, "is to the great prejudice of our right." The steward is told that "we require and charge you that you should have all the querns of our said tenants in the village of Gringley, who have done thus in prejudice of us, removed and demolished" ("ouster et abatre").

What subsequently took place we have no way of knowing, but the use of hand-mills must have been a common medieval response to the rapacity of mill-owners and their millers. It is almost certain that the hand-mills would have originated from the same local source as the millstones for the king's water-mills at Tickhill: i.e. Wickersley. The stone quarried here was world-famous even in the nineteenth century, though by then it was more commonly used for grinding steel blades, and there are still three grindstones displayed on the roundabout on the A631, shown, right, at the entrance to the village to remind us what the wealth of the village was built on. (*Photographs © the author*)

Incidentally, John of Gaunt had gathered portable millstones exactly like those which caused so much trouble for the tenants of Gringley for his own expeditionary force of the previous year, because orders had gone out to all French local authorities to strip the land ahead of the English columns of everything that could be of use to them "right down to the ironwork of the mills" to deprive the invaders of their use.

Some years earlier, in 1306, the abbot of Cirencester, faced with the same problem had ordered his bailiff to tell his tenants to desist from using their hand-mills. When the men refused the bailiff was accused of breaking some of the hand-mills and confiscating others. However, these tenants appealed to the royal justices, who adjudged that, although the tenants had no right to withdraw their suit from the mill and the abbot could seize the mills, he ought not to destroy them because they belonged to the tenants. It would seem therefore that John of Gaunt was acting 'ultra vires' - although nothing about his behaviour or character would suggest that it might bother him! As his biographer, Sydney Armitage-Smith said, "The Duke of Lancaster was never peculiarly sensitive to public opinion. Secure in the consciousness of his own power, he was usually contemptuously indifferent to the feelings with which the people regarded him."

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