

Sir Walter Urswick (de Urswyk)

Compared to the somewhat disreputable, although loyal, Sir William de Anne, Constable of Tickhill Castle 1312-1327, and the financially unreliable Sir William Fraunk, Constable from 1336-46, Sir Walter Urswick was a person of greater probity who occupied the office of Constable of Tickhill Castle after it became part of John of Gaunt's lands; he had occupied the same position at Richmond Castle from 1362-1372. During that time he accompanied John of Gaunt to Gascony in 1366 and 1370 and to Spain to force Don Pedro from the throne of Castile. He was knighted on the field of battle at Najera in 1367 and given the manors of Catterick and Forcet near Richmond which brought him £40 per annum for life. Sir Walter had been granted his position at Richmond Castle for life but in 1372 John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, received Tickhill Castle from his father in exchange for Richmond Castle which was returned to John Duke of Brittany and Count of Montfort. Compensating for the loss of his post at Richmond Castle, John of Gaunt issued an indenture on 28 August 1372 binding Sir Walter to him for life in times of peace and war. In return Sir Walter was to receive £100 yearly from the manors of Gringley and Wheatley. Sir Walter was also granted the role of Master Forester of Bowland in 1372, then Keeper of Forests in Lancashire in 1379 and Chief Keeper of Lancashire chases the following year. Sir Walter was in charge of the duke's game as well as his timber and its sale and would have relied on many keepers and foresters to stop poaching and trespass. John of Gaunt's appreciation of Sir Walter is indicated in 1374 by a gift of a hunting horn expensively decorated with gold and pearls. His appointment as Steward of Tickhill Honour then Constable of Tickhill Castle came by 1381 in addition to his other roles in Lancashire.

On 18 June 1381 John of Gaunt made arrangements for Sir Walter to have payment for the maintenance of 20 men-at-arms and archers at Tickhill Castle as he placed his castles in Yorkshire on alert having only heard the previous day, when he was in Berwick, about the revolt led by Wat Tyler which had seen his London home, the Savoy Palace, burned down, his physician killed and damage done to his property in East Anglia. By 17 June Wat Tyler was dead and the young King Richard II had defused the rebellion, the Peasants' Revolt, in London but isolated trouble broke out in York, Beverley and Scarborough and in other parts of the country as a reaction to the imposition of a third poll tax, among other things. The rebellion was quickly suppressed by nobles loyal to the King, John of Gaunt having headed into Scotland thereby keeping clear of the trouble. There was no rebellion in Tickhill.

Given his duties in Lancashire plus the fact that he was M.P. for Lancashire in October 1383, then accompanied John of Gaunt to Scotland in 1385 and Spain in 1387, it is debateable how much time Sir Walter was able to spend in Tickhill. In 1394 Sir Walter was briefly once more Constable of Richmond Castle before it was granted for life to John Parker, esquire, following Sir Walter's death.

His effigy, right, can be seen in a recess on the south wall of St Anne's Church, Catterick, not built until two decades after his death. It is likely that the effigy was moved from an earlier church. Sir Walter is shown wearing chain mail and plate armour; his legs below the knees have been broken off. His feet once rested on the carving of a dog.



See A. Goodman, *John of Gaunt: The exercise of princely power in 14th Century Europe*, Routledge, 2014
R. Somerville, *Duchy of Lancaster*, Vol 1, 1265-1603, The Chancellor and Council of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1953
T. A. Urwick, *Records of the family of Urswyk, Urswick, or Urwick*, reprinted by Forgotten Books, 2015
W. Bowland *Portrait of a Master Forester* at website <<http://forestofbowland.com>>