

Original Documents.

LETTER RELATING TO THE WARS OF EDWARD III. IN FRANCE, AND THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS IN THE YEAR 1346.

FOUND AMONGST THE MUNIMENTS OF ALAN CLAYTON LOWNDES, ESQ. OF BARRINGTON HALL, ESSEX, AND COMMUNICATED BY WILLIAM CLAYTON, ESQ.

WE are indebted to Mr. Clayton for a transcript of an original letter, without date, addressed to "Dame Alys de la Rokele," by some person unnamed, who should seem to have been in attendance on Queen Isabella, widow of Edward II. It communicated some news that had reached the Queen of a great battle, in which the King of Navarre, the Duke of Burgundy, Sir John of France, the Duke of Normandy, the Count of Blaisois, the Duke of Athens, the Duke of Britany, the Count of Hurbonie (qy. Aubigny), the Count of Blois, and the Count of Armagnac had been taken prisoners. It also mentioned a victory by the fleet of the north over the Scots, and the taking of Calais and Boulogne. It is written in French, on a slip of parchment $10\frac{7}{8}$ inches by $2\frac{3}{8}$, and was found among the muniments of Alan Clayton Lowndes, Esq. of Barrington Hall, Essex, annexed to a roll in the nature of a rent-roll or custumal, showing the rents and services of the tenants of the Manor of Wykes, near Manningtree, in the same county. The roll bears date the 27th Edw. I., but the letter must of course have been written several years later. On the back of the letter, in a contemporary hand, were some memoranda or notes of services (days' work), partly rendered and partly due, of some tenants of the Manor of Wykes, and among them of a few who, from the difference in christian names only from some on the roll, were probably their sons or other heirs. The letter read *in extenso*, except where the abbreviated words seem to admit of doubt, is as follows:

¶ Houm's ez reuerencys en touez chosys trechere dame, volvez sawer qe ce sunt le nouelys qe vynderunt ale Reygne Issabel ore lundr procheyn de le grauns qe sunt prys de Fraunce, le roy de Nawerne, le duk de Burgoyne, Syre Johan de Fraunce, duk de Normondye, le counte de Blasoyne, le duk de Athoneys, le duk de Bretayne, le counte de Hurbonie, le counte de Bloys, le counte de Ermanak. Ez sews furunt le seyniurys qe fuerunt de le baytalye. Ez barount de Stafforde ez Cralbe, ez Syre Johan Darsy, cu le¹ flote de Norz, suerunt de vers les ezscos, ez les pryterunt, ez les hut amene a noztere seyniur le roy. Ez la vile de Caleys la meyte ezt ars, ez la vile rendu; ez la vile de Boloynie ezt ars ez rendu; ez nous ahuūz² perdu nos archerys ez gransmye³ de nos awtre gens.

¶ Adeuz trechere dame ez vou doyne bone vye ez longe. A dame Alys de la Rokele.

¹ In the original, "le le flote."

² Probably "ahvunz," for avons.

³ Grauns mye ? great part. My or mi, the half. See Lacombe, and Kelham.

This news it has been found impossible to identify with any events of that period. It must have been false in its details, though most likely some great battle had been fought, the results of which were thus misrepresented. At no time do we find the above-mentioned princes and nobles, or the greater part of them, prisoners. Boulogne was not taken by the English at the same time as Calais; and the surrender of the latter was not contemporaneous with any great battle. The report respecting those towns makes it evident that the letter was written while the war was carried on in that part of France, and before Calais had been any considerable time in the possession of the English. The only campaign in that locality before the taking of Calais was that in 1346-7, which was signalled by the victory of Cressy, and the siege and surrender of Calais. That battle was fought on the 26th of August, 1346. The victorious Edward, without delay, marched through the Boulonnois, burnt St. Josse, Neuchâtel, and Estapes, and reached Calais on the 31st of August. The siege commenced a few days after, and continued till August in the following year, when the place surrendered; it remained in the hands of the English till 1558. The affair of the fleet with the Scots is not very intelligible. Lord Stafford was at Cressy, and therefore could hardly have been in that expedition. David, King of Scots, was taken prisoner at Neville's Cross, in October 1346. An attack by the fleet may have occurred shortly before that event, but was less likely to have happened in the following year. We may therefore conclude from all these circumstances, that the battle referred to was that of Cressy, and that the letter was written very shortly after it, viz. early in September, 1346.

We have not found the names of any distinguished prisoners taken at Cressy. Froissart is silent on the subject, and from the description of the battle it is most likely they were very few. The Count of Blois was among the slain; Lord Aubigny was present and attended King Philip from the field; the Duke of Normandy, afterwards King John, was engaged in the siege of Aiguillon, in Guienne; the Duke of Britany, Charles of Blois, was taken prisoner the following year at Roche d' Errien. If the King of Navarre and Duke of Burgundy had borne a share in that campaign, much more, had they been captured, Froissart would hardly have failed to mention them. Boulogne, near Paris, had been taken and burnt a few weeks before: this may account for the report as to Boulogne-sur-mer, which no doubt was the town meant in the letter.

Though not able to discover exactly who Dame Alys de la Rokele was, we would make a few suggestions as to how this letter may have happened to find a place among the muniments of the Barrington Hall Estate. The memoranda at the back seem to show that, having fulfilled its mission, it came into the hands of some steward of the manor mentioned in the Roll to which it was annexed, who made that use of the back of it to which at all times letters have been subject, and noted thereon a few particulars as to what tenants' services were in arrear; and though attached to the Roll for a temporary purpose, it has accidentally been preserved to the present time. We are thus led to look for some connexion between the steward and the lady to whom the letter was addressed; and if, after so long a time, we should find the evidence fail to show this distinctly, we may perhaps be able to establish good grounds for believing that such a connexion did exist. In Madox's Form. Angl., p. 349, is a power of attorney from William de Bohun, Earl of Northampton, dated at Ramsden

Belhouse (Essex), the 6th of June, in 33 Edward III. (1359), authorising his dear and well-beloved Godfrey de la Rokele to deliver seisin of certain lands at Downham (Essex) that had been given by the Earl in exchange, and to accept seisin of others that had been taken in lieu of them. This was business likely to be transacted by a steward. A few years later, viz., in 44 Edward III. (1370), a Godfrey de Rokele was steward of the Honor of Rayleigh and Hundred of Rochford, in Essex,¹ which then belonged to Humphry de Bohun, who, as heir both of his father and uncle, was Earl of Hereford, Essex, and Northampton; the same having been granted by Edward III. in 1340 to his father, William de Bohun Earl of Northampton, who died in 1360.² This family, as is well known, held numerous manors in Essex. Among them were those of Wykes and Hatfield Regis; the former had been confirmed in tail general to William Earl of Northampton in 6 Edward III. (1333),³ and on his death it descended to his before-mentioned son Humphry, Earl of Hereford, Essex, and Northampton, who died, seised of it in 1372; ⁴ the latter, which in the seventeenth century became part of the Barrington Hall Estate, also devolved on him, having been granted to his grandparents Humphry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Essex, and the Princess Elizabeth his wife, and their heirs, by her brother Edward II.⁵ Another part of their patrimonial property was the seignory of the Manor of South Okendon, in Essex, which for several generations had been held of them by the Essex family of Rokele; but had been recently carried, by the marriage of one of two coheiresses of the elder branch, to the family of Bruyn.⁶ The Rokeles were a knightly family, and the coheiress who married a Bruyn, namely Isolda, daughter of Philip de Rokele who died in 1295, was one of the ladies attending on Queen Eleanor,⁷ the mother of Edward II. and Princess Elizabeth, Countess of Hereford and Essex. If, as seems highly probable, a cadet of the Rokele family were steward to either of the Earls above-mentioned, that was not by any means an ignoble condition, unbecoming the son of a knight; but an office to which, seeing the long feudal relationship that had subsisted between the two families, he was likely to have been appointed; and the interval of twenty-four years between the supposed date of this letter and the time when Godfrey de Rokele appears to have been steward of the Honor of Rayleigh and Hundred of Rochford, does not render it improbable that he may also have been the steward of Wykes and other manors of William Earl of Northampton, when the letter was written. Dame Alys de la Rokele, whom we do not find mentioned elsewhere, may have been his mother or other near relative, if not his wife. The connexion of the Rokeles with the Bohuns fully suffices to account for her having some friend in the Court of Queen Isabella, and as Humphry, Earl of Hereford and Essex, and his brother William, Earl of Northampton, were actively engaged in the campaign of 1346, the Rokeles, and especially the steward of the latter, could not fail to take great interest in the events of the war, even if none of their own family were among the retainers who fought under the banner of the gallant Earl William, when he led the second division at Cressy.

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¹ Cal. Rot. Pat. p. 186; Morant, i. p. 277.

² Morant, i. p. 274.

³ Cal. Rot. Pat. p. 115; Morant, i. p. 467.

⁴ Morant, *ib.*

⁵ Morant, ii. p. 503.

⁶ Morant, i. p. 99.

⁷ *Ibid.* and Harl. MS. 1541, p. 9.