

A NOTE ON KENILWORTH CASTLE: THE CHANGE TO ROYAL OWNERSHIP

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In a recent number of this *Journal*¹ Mr. John H. Harvey contributed a valuable paper upon Kenilworth Castle, dealing principally with its later history, and in particular with the building works of the later Middle Ages. The present paper is largely supplementary. It is concerned with the earlier history of the castle, especially with its political fortunes, in the reigns of Henry II, Richard and John.

The most important event in the political history of Kenilworth Castle in the period 1154-1216 is its transition from a private to a royal fortress. That Henry I had granted Kenilworth to Geoffrey de Clinton (I), who there founded the castle (and the priory), is well known.² It has also been generally recognised that Henry II gained possession of the fortress from the Clintons.³ But the precise date and manner of this event has never been clearly established, nor its significance sufficiently brought out.

For the surrender of the castle to the Crown there survive two pieces of direct documentary evidence whose importance, brevity, and, in the case of the first, comparative inaccessibility, merit reproduction here. The first is the transcript, in the *Little Black Book of the Exchequer*, of a deed of Henry de Clinton, clearly belonging to the early years of John's reign, quit-claiming to the Crown all his right in the castle.⁴

"Carta Henrici de Clinton"

Notum sit omnibus tam presentibus quam futuris me Henricum de Clinton' concessisse et quietum clamasse de me et heredibus meis Johanni Regi Anglie filio Regis Henrici et heredibus suis. totum ius et clamium quod ego habui in castello de Kenildeworde. et in boscis. et in uiuariis. et in terris et in redditibus. et in omnibus aliis rebus que pertinent ad eandem uillam de Kenildeworde. unde predictus Henricus pater eiusdem Regis Johannis fuit seisisit anno et die quo obiit. saluo mihi toto tenemento cum omnibus libertatibus unde ego habui seisinam in eadem uilla anno et die quo predictus Rex Henricus obiit. et ut hec concessio et quietia clamantia rata et stabilis in posterum permaneat. eam hac presenti carta confirmaui et sigillo meo roborau. Hiis testibus. Huberto Cantuariensi archiepiscopo. Willelmo episcopo Londoniensi. Eustachio Elyensi episcopo. Galfrido filio Petri comite Essexie tunc iusticiario Anglie. Willelmo Marescallo. Hugone Bardulf'.

¹ *Arch. Journ.*, ci (1944), 91-107, 'Side-Lights on Kenilworth Castle'.

² e.g. Dugdale, *Baronage* (i) 528: cf. *Cal. Charter Rolls* iii, 275.

³ e.g. Dugdale, *Antiqs. Warw.* p. 166: Harvey, *ante* ci, 93: *V.C.H. Warw.*, vi, 135: G. T. Clark, *Med. Milit. Arch.*, ii, 149: Oman, *Castles* (G.W.R.), p. 74.

⁴ The text which follows is taken from *Liber Niger Parvus* in the Public Record Office (Exchequer K.R. Misc. Books No. 12) f. 80d. The deed is printed in Hearne's edition of the book (1774), i, 372-3, with one or two minor discrepancies. Dugdale in referring to this charter cites the *Red Book of the Exchequer* in error (*Baronage*, i, 528; *Antiqs. Warw.*, p. 166).

Willelmo Briewer'. Roberto filio Rogeri. Willelmo de Albenni. Simone de Pateshull'. et multis aliis''.

The second piece of direct evidence comes from a survey of Buckinghamshire belonging to the years 1242-3, and reads¹ :—

"Swaneburne Inferior. Abbas de Woburne tenet iiij hidas et dimidiam de domino rege² que fuerunt date in escambio H. de Clinton' pro castello de Kenilwurth' . . ."

Taken together, these two extracts show that the castle was surrendered to the Crown in the reign of Henry II, and that, then or later, the manor of Swanbourne was granted to Henry de Clinton in exchange.

This conclusion is confirmed and augmented by the indirect evidence of the Pipe Rolls. These, the one continuous series of records of the central administration extant for Henry II's reign, normally only contain references to royal castles. Baronial castles only appear, with one or two exceptions, when they are in royal hands. The castle of Kenilworth first appears on the Pipe Rolls during the rebellion of 1173-4. On the Warwickshire and Leicestershire account for 1173 it is shown stocked, and on the account of 1174 garrisoned, for the Crown.³ After this no further references occur until, in effect, 1179; for on the roll of 1181 the sheriff of Warwickshire and Leicestershire accounts for 27s. 'de firma commorantium in clauso castelli de Kenillewurda' for three years.⁴ Thereafter this receipt becomes a regular annual entry on the rolls,⁵ and in subsequent years clear indications that Kenilworth has become a royal fortress are increasingly abundant. Repairs and minor building works are charged by the sheriff in 1184, 1190, 1191, and 1193⁶; the castle was garrisoned again by the Crown in 1193.⁷ It appears repeatedly throughout the reigns of Richard and John in the custody of royal officials,⁸ while John's large-scale building operations there will merit further notice later.

Thus from the Pipe Rolls Kenilworth castle appears continuously in royal hands from 1179. Moreover, the same rolls show that Swanbourne, which we know to have been given to Henry de Clinton in exchange for the castle, was first claimed by him also in 1179.⁹ Finally the Pipe Rolls indicate that Geoffrey de Clinton (II), son of the founder

¹ *Book of Fees* (Stationery Office), p. 878.

² The abbot is holding directly of the king because his immediate lord, Henry de Clinton (II) d.s.p. 17 Hen. III.

³ *P.R.* 19 Hen. II, (Pipe Roll Soc.), p. 178 : *P.R.* 20 Hen. II, pp. 139, 140, 144.

⁴ *P.R.* 27 Hen. II, p. 79.

⁵ e.g. *P.R.* 28 Hen. II, p. 96 : *P.R.* 29 Hen. II, p. 40 : *P.R.* 34 Hen. II, p. 119 : *P.R.* 7 Ric. I, p. 29 : *P.R.* 2 John, p. 179 etc.

⁶ *P.R.* 30 Hen. II, p. 43 : *P.R.* 2 Ric. I, pp. 37, 44 : *P.R.* 3 Ric. I, p. 123 : *P.R.* 5 Ric. I, p. 74.

⁷ *P.R.* 5 Ric. I, p. 57.

⁸ e.g. *P.R.* 2 Ric. I, p. 44 : *P.R.* 3 Ric. I, pp. 123, 130 : *P.R.* 5 Ric. I, p. 57 : *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium* (Record Commission) pp. 35, 74.

⁹ *P.R.* 25 Hen. II, p. 79, "Henricus de Clinton' debet iiij m. pro recto feodi dimidii militis in Suinburna versus Radulfum de Caisneto" : (the Pipe Roll Society text has *Sumburna* but an examination of the original roll shows *Suinburna* (i.e. Swanbourne) to be a possible, as it is a more probable, reading) cf. *P.R.* 26 Hen. II, p. 127 : *P.R.* 27 Hen. II, p. 125 : *P.R.* 28 Hen. II, p. 118.

Geoffrey de Clinton (I), died about 1174.¹ His son and heir, Henry de Clinton, first appears on the roll of 1174-5, apparently succeeding his father in his inheritance,² and apparently having some difficulty in so doing.³

The conclusions to be drawn from all the evidence taken together therefore seem clear. In 1173, during the rebellion of the young King, Henry II took Kenilworth castle into his own hands—probably as a result of the death of Geoffrey de Clinton (II), for on the death of a tenant-in-chief his castles no less than his lands reverted to the Crown to be regranted to his successor. In this case, however, perhaps on the grounds of some doubt in the succession or some complicity in the rebellion, Henry de Clinton was not allowed to succeed to the castle of Kenilworth.⁴ In 1179 some final agreement was reached whereby Henry de Clinton surrendered to the Crown all his right in the castle in exchange for the manor of Swanbourne. This agreement King John was careful to have ratified at the outset of his reign by a charter of Henry de Clinton, witnessed by an impressive gathering of royal officials and magnates, and carefully copied into the *Little Black Book of the Exchequer* for preservation and reference. Thereafter the castle remained a royal fortress until Henry III in 1253 granted it for life to Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester.

It is possible that Henry de Clinton obtained further compensation for the loss of Kenilworth in addition to his acquisition of Swanbourne, for soon after 1179 he gained possession of the castle of Lavendon in Buckinghamshire. This apparently minor castle, of whose history little is known, belonged in the earlier 12th century to the family of Bidun.⁵ John de Bidun died c. 1183-4 leaving his sisters as co-heiresses. Of these, the elder, Amice, was married to Henry de Clinton.⁶ Henry must

¹ Of Geoffrey de Clinton II Dugdale (*Baronage*, 528) says only that he was still alive in 1166. In the *Register of Kenilworth Priory* (B.M. Harl. MS. 3650) there is a deed of Geoffrey II not earlier than 1169 (f. 64d.) cf. the Pipe Roll evidence below of his son Henry's succession in 1175.

² *P.R.* 21 Hen. II, pp. 34, 98.

³ Cf. *P.R.* 22 Hen. II, p. 184 : *P.R.* 24 Hen. II, p. 79 : *P.R.* 27 Hen. II, p. 74 : *P.R.* 34 Hen. II, p. 113. Cf. *P.R.* 26 Hen. II, p. 104 : *P.R.* 27 Hen. II, p. 78 : *P.R.* 34 Hen. II, p. 113.

⁴ Save for the negative and inconclusive evidence that there are no references to Kenilworth on the Pipe Rolls between 1174 and 1179, there is no evidence for Dugdale's suggestion (*Antiqs. Warw.*, p. 166) that the castle was restored for a brief period after 1174, in support of which he quoted a charter of Geoffrey de Clinton II confirming a grant made "postquam castellum meum et honorem meum recuperavi". Since Geoffrey was dead by 1174/5 this could scarcely refer to a restoration after that date. In fact, the content of this charter (*Register of Kenilworth Priory*, loc. cit. f. 69d) shows it to belong to a period closely following Geoffrey II's own succession some forty years earlier. It reads :—" (G)aufridus de Clinton' omnibus hom-

inibus et amicis suis Francis et Anglis salutem. Sciunt omnes qui nunc sunt et qui post nos futuri sunt. quod ego postquam castellum meum et honorem meum recuperaui. reddidi Erminfrido de Ponte homini meo duas uirgatas terre in Meluertona sicut pater meus moriens mihi precepit uiua uoce. et per breue suum dapifero suo et ministris suis mandauit. Quam terram quia Erminfridus Anschetillo dapifero inuadiauerat pro xx s. et inde duos caballos pro viijs. ad portam castelli mei Rogero iam reddiderat. uolo ut sicut pater meus per breue suum precepit. quod superest de xx solidis reddat heredibus Rogeri iam defuncti. Precepi uero ut per manum Willelmi filii Odonis et Ricardi forestarii mei Erminfridus de predicta tenura sua saisiretur. Teste Willelmo de Clinton' auunculo meo qui preceptum patris audierat. et Roberto fratre meo. Ricardo de Tornariis. Rogero de Freuilla. Thome filio Erminfridi. Simone et Alberico de Clinton'."

⁵ *V.C.H. Bucks.* iv, 380 : *Rot. Hund.* (Record Commission) ii, 349 b. For the surviving earthworks at Lavendon see Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Bucks.*, ii, 163-4.

⁶ *V.C.H. ut supra* : cf. Dugdale, *Baronage* (i) 528.

have succeeded to the castle of Lavendon in right of his wife, for it subsequently appears in his hands.¹ Whether this inheritance was fortuitous or was aided by the Crown does not appear.

However this may be, there can be little doubt that to the house of Clinton Swanbourne, with or without the addition of Lavendon, was no adequate compensation for the loss of Kenilworth. For Kenilworth, with its massive square keep,² was one of the strongest and most important castles in the Midlands in the late 12th century. Indeed we may safely see in its importance the principal reason for its seizure by the Crown. It is scarcely credible that Henry de Clinton would have willingly surrendered this chief residence and centre of power of his line. Nor is it likely to be coincidental that his successor, Henry de Clinton (II), was among the rebels in the civil war which ended John's reign in 1215-16.

The Crown made good use of its acquisition of Kenilworth. Repaired, stocked and garrisoned, it helped to maintain the authority of the royal government against the over-mighty count John during King Richard's absence on crusade and in captivity,³ and John himself, as king, made it one of the strongest castles in his kingdom. In the course of his reign, and chiefly between the years 1210 and 1215, he spent well over £1,000⁴—a very large sum in the money of the period—upon the fortification of a castle whose defences were already formidable. The scale of this expenditure in terms of building becomes apparent when we find that the total recorded cost from the Pipe Rolls of Henry II's new castle at Orford (Suffolk) is some £1,400, and of John's new castle at Odiham (Hants.) some £1,100.⁵ This development can have done little to placate the dispossessed Clintons, while the importance of the castle in the eyes of contemporaries at the end of our period is indicated by the fact that (according to Wendover and Matthew Paris) it was one of the four castles to be put under the control of the barons as security for the execution of Magna Carta.⁶

¹ *P.R.* 5 Ric. I, p. 93 : cf. *Rot. de Oblatis et Finibus* (Record Comm.), p. 145.

² Students of military architecture have not been precise in dating the keep, but are in general agreement that it belongs to the Clinton period in the 12th century. (Cf. Clarke, *Med. Milit. Arch.* ii, 146 : *Birmingham Arch. Soc. Trans.* lxxvii, 18.) The record evidence supports this and gives no support to Hartshorne's suggestion that King John may have been responsible for it (*ante*, xxi, 379-80), for the Pipe Rolls give no evidence of any considerable building at Kenilworth under Henry or Richard while the Pipe Roll entries of John's large scale building (see below) make no reference to the keep, which is, however, mentioned as already existing in 1190 (*P.R.* 2 Ric. I, p. 37, "Et in reparatione *turris* et castelli et domorum de Kenillewurde xlvj li. et vijs").

³ *P.R.* 2 Ric. I, pp. 37, 44 : *P.R.* 3 Ric. I, p. 123 : *P.R.* 5 Ric. I, pp. 57, 74.

⁴ John's building expenditure upon Kenilworth castle as recorded by the Pipe Rolls

may be set down as follows :—

	£	s.	d.
1200-1	...	2	0 0
1205-6	...	22	0 0
1210-11	...	464	6 3½
1211-12	...	224	17 8
1214-15	...	402	0 0
Total	...	£1115	3 11½

It should be noted that the Pipe Roll of 15 John (1212-13) is missing, and that for 17 John (1214-15) is for the most part only made up for half the year. No additional expenditure has been discovered from any other source. This recorded total is approximately one half of Mr. Harvey's estimate of "well over £2,000" (*ante* ci, 93) which has been followed by the *V.C.H.* for Warwickshire (vi, 135).

⁵ Reckoned from 1166-1173 and 1207-1212 respectively.

⁶ e.g. Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora* (Rolls Series) ii, 603. The other three were Northampton, Nottingham and Scarborough.

The seizure of Kenilworth by the Crown is an important event in the history of the castle and of the family of Clinton. It is also an important and significant event in the general history of this period. The reigns of Henry II, Richard and John were marked by an increasing centralisation and efficiency in every aspect of government. The largely successful attempt to achieve centralised control was applied to castles, for upon them in the last resort the security of the kingdom depended. A contemporary described the royal castles as "the bones of the kingdom",¹ but the fact that they were heavily outnumbered by baronial fortresses² was a real if latent threat to the health of the body politic. The control of castles was one of the vital issues of the day, and there is little doubt that a careful study of the political fortunes of individual castles during these years would throw new light on the events and underlying motives which resulted in Magna Carta and the civil war of John's last years. It was not only that Henry II and his two successors sought effectively to prevent the building of private castles without royal sanction and destroyed 'adulterine' or unlicensed strongholds, nor that they resumed royal castles which had passed into private hands under Stephen and tightened their control over those which they held in demesne. They also seldom allowed to pass any opportunity of taking private castles into their own hands, and while their centralising policy provoked opposition, they made rebellion, or even suspected disloyalty, the occasion of confiscation or demolition. If we take Warwickshire and Leicestershire as an example, we find ten castles mentioned in the records over the whole period—Belvoir, Brandon, Castle Donnington, Churchover, Groby, Kenilworth, Leicester, Mountsorrel, Sauvey and Warwick. In 1154 nine of these (all save Sauvey) already existed and all were baronial. The Crown possessed no stronghold in either shire, and even the castles of the two county towns were in private hands.³ By, say, 1213, two of these nine castles, Groby and Leicester, had been demolished by Henry II; three, Castle Donnington, Mountsorrel and Kenilworth, had been confiscated and were in royal hands; and the new (though probably minor) royal castle of Sauvey had been built. There is little doubt that the restoration of confiscated castles—or in some cases the grant of the control of royal castles to which they claimed a right—stood high among the aims of the rebel barons of 1215, and no doubt that Clause 52 of Magna Carta promised the restoration of castles unjustly seized by the Crown:—"Si quis fuerit disseisitus vel elongatus per nos sine legali iudicio parium suorum, de terris, castellis, libertatibus vel jure suo, statim ea ei restituemus".⁴

¹ William of Newburgh (Rolls Series) i, 331.

² Cf. Professor Sidney Painter, *Speculum* x, 324.

³ Namely, of the earls of Warwick and Leicester respectively.

⁴ Stubbs, *Select Charters* (9th edition), p. 299.

This Clause is putting into practice the vital Clause 39 (*ibid.*, p. 297). Cf. also H. G. Richardson, 'The Morrow of the Great Charter', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xxviii (2), p. 443.