

## 65.08 Wars with France and Mary of Woodstock

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**Cross-references to Digital Supplement in red**  
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An increasing royal interest in Leighton and La Grava seems to have coincided with a decline in religious functions at La Grava Priory in around 1300, though obviously the link with Fontevrault remained. A factor in this may have been the regular wars with France. In the 13th century these wars, such as that of 1194–1204, seem to have had little effect but the war of 1293–1303 led to all of Fontevrault's properties in England being taken into the king's hands by 1294 (Calendar of Close Rolls, 1288–96, 298, 367). This was to set the pattern for much of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th, particularly during the on and off warfare of the Hundred Years War of 1337–1453 when La Grava and the manor of Leighton Buzzard were often in the king's hands though still owned by Fontevrault.

When in his hands after 1300 the king often granted the manor to people who were close to the royal family but otherwise those who held the manor were always tenants of the Abbess of Fontevrault. However, the first of these tenants maintained a more direct link between Fontevrault and royalty: Mary of Woodstock, a nun at Amesbury from the age of seven in 1285 and daughter of Edward I. From sometime before 1305 she held the manor herself from the abbess in lieu of it being taken into the king's hands, until her death in 1332 (Calendar of Close Rolls, 1302–07, 269, 280; Calendar of Close Rolls, 1330–33, 475; Green 1850) [67.12]. That she died in this year is also indicated in the Liberate Rolls where the succession of entries concerning the orders for the annual forwarding of oaks and wine to her at Amesbury (though sometimes money in lieu) came to an end in 1332, as did similar orders in the Close and Patent Rolls (Green 1850, 441). Although it is uncertain when Mary first obtained the manor, she had played a part in its affairs in 1293 when, as the abbess of Fontevrault's attorney in England, she wrote to her father, the king, in order to persuade him to deliver the 'manor of Leighton and of la Grave' to her acting on Fontevrault's behalf (Green 1850, 419). This he agreed to in 1294, the manor having previously been taken into the king's hands on account of the death of its keeper or guardian (Calendar of Close Rolls, 1288–96, 298, 367).

During the early part of Mary's tenure her brother, Edward II, is shown by entries in the Fine Rolls, Close Rolls, Patent Rolls, Chancery Warrants and Inquisitions Miscellaneous to have been a visitor at La Grava or Leighton – the names are used interchangeably. This was especially in 1307–10, usually only for a day or two at a time, but for longer periods during the winter of 1309–10 (List and Index Society, 211). He was there for several days in each of October, November and December 1309 and probably stayed at La Grava for three to four weeks in January 1310, on all these occasions with the court and household present. However, Christmas 1309 was spent with Piers Gaveston at Kings Langley (Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II, II, 1883, 162).

Confirmation of the king's presence actually at La Grava during October 1309 is indicated by an entry in the Chancery Warrants for 7 October: 'Mandate to let Gaston, count of Foiz, have the letters required by the businesses contained in the schedule enclosed, which were shown before the king in the chancellor's presence at La Grove' (Calendar of Chancery Warrants, I, 1244–1326, 300) [67.12].

During the same visit an unfortunate incident occurred at La Grava on 9 October: 'Notification that Philip de Wavendon, whilst on the King's service guarding one of his horses, lost an ear by its bite' (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1307-13, 194) [67.12].

It seems likely that Mary of Woodstock would also have stayed at La Grava: although a nun, she enjoyed a good life of travel, wealth, and comfort. The documents show she was regularly supplied with fuel for warmth, and wine and food by the king. Presumably she would have expected no less comfort at La Grava, which was probably required to be a suitable residence for her as Visitor for the Order in England and for other royal visitors.

Edward II is also recorded at Leighton Buzzard on single occasions in 1308, 1309, 1314 and 1316 (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1307-13, 135; Calendar of Fine Rolls, II, 1307-19, 47, 273; Hallam, List and Index Society, 211). Of course only the recorded visits to La Grava or Leighton Buzzard are known. There may have been other more private visits without the whole court and the workings of national administration though the documents this produced are the only reason we know of any visits at all. Leighton Buzzard or La Grava was a convenient stopping place on one of the various occasional royal routes northwards, especially when coming from the palace at Kings Langley along what is now the A41 and A4146, and then passing on to Northampton and beyond. Improvements to the convenience of the royal progress may have been in mind when in 1347 it was ordered that the bridges be rebuilt and repaired: 'from the town of Leghton Bosard to Fennystretford' (Calendar of Close Rolls, 1346-49, 397).

Edward III is also recorded at Leighton Buzzard for at least a week in November 1337 (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1334-38, 546-50, 557, 579; Calendar of Close Rolls, 1337-39, 207-9, 271, 275).

From 1338 Maud or Matilda de Burgo, Countess of Ulster, was appointed as custodian or keeper of the manor of La Grava by the king as it was in his hands due to the outbreak of the Hundred Years War in 1337 (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1338-40, 95, 116). This obviously caused difficulties with Fontevrault for in 1344 the pope first confirmed Fontevrault as possessing the manor and then in 1349 requested Edward III to allow Fontevrault to repossess the manor of which 'they had been despoiled' (Calendar of Papal Registers, III, 1343-62, 39, 169). In 1348 Matilda decided 'to enter religion and take the habit of a regular' (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1345-48, 372) and surrendered the manor to a group of six of her executors who were to take over custody until the king's substantial debts owed to Matilda's dead husband, Ralph de Ufford, were cleared (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1348-50, 97).

In 1356, due to the renewal of the war with France in 1355, custody of all of Fontevrault's lands in England was committed to Henry de Walton and John de Holt, Prior of Amesbury (Calendar of Fine Rolls, 1356-68, 17). In 1357 Edward III's daughter Isabel was granted the safekeeping of them: this presumably included La Grava and Leighton Buzzard (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1354-58, 622).