

# Ranulph III, Earl of Chester

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DURING recent years the Norman earldom of Chester has received some attention from historians. In particular, the question has arisen whether the term 'palatinate' may meaningfully be applied to the earldom before its annexation by the Crown in 1237. Did the term 'county palatine' have any meaning in the England of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries? Were the powers of the Norman earls as extensive as has traditionally been claimed? These questions have been posed, and some attempt has been made to answer them. In 1943 Professor Sidney Painter wrote: 'It seems to me futile to use the term palatinate before the reign of Henry II'.<sup>1</sup> He argued that the definition of a palatinate should be precise and narrow: if 'the king's writ did not run' within a particular county, then that county was a palatinate. Other historians have tried to solve the problem by trying to discover the first 'official' use of the term in record sources. At present the evidence points to 1293 as the earliest date at which it is used, in connection with both Chester and Durham.<sup>2</sup>

In trying to estimate the powers actually exercised by the Norman earls, historians have been hampered by the scarcity of evidence. Early writers were in little doubt as to the extent of these powers. As recently as 1938 it could be asserted that 'the gift of the county in 1071 to the earl, to hold by the sword as freely as the king held England by the crown, must have imported the acquisition of *jura regalia*, privileges and prerogatives of a king within the county. Cheshire thus became an *imperium in imperio*'.<sup>3</sup>

This assumption was first seriously questioned by Professor Barraclough in 1951.<sup>4</sup> He argued that it would 'be difficult, in the first century of its existence, to find anything to differentiate the organization and administration of the honour of Chester from that of the other great feudal magnates of the period'.<sup>5</sup> Barraclough's views received striking confirmation in 1970, when Professor Alexander showed how in 1293 a royal sergeant had argued that Ranulph III had not been an earl palatine, and had had no regal dignity.<sup>6</sup> Yet, even after the appearance of Barraclough's paper, historians continued to accept the term 'palatine' without reservation as a description of Ranulph III's dignity.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. Painter, *Studies in the History of the English Feudal Barony*, Baltimore, 1943, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Alexander, 'New Evidence on the Palatinate of Chester', *English Historical Review*, lxxxv, 1970, 729.

<sup>3</sup> R. Stewart-Brown, *Cheshire in the Pipe Rolls, 1158-1301*, L.C.R.S., xcii, 1938, xiv. In fairness, however, it must be added that the writer went on to admit that 'the description of its lord as a palatine earl has no very early official warrant', *ibid.*, xiv-xv.

<sup>4</sup> G. Barraclough, 'The Earldom and County Palatine of Chester', L.C.H.S., ciii. My references (cited as Barraclough, *Earldom*) will be to the page-numbers of the reprint of this paper, Oxford, 1953.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, *op. cit.*, 726 ff.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Professor Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century*, Oxford, 1953, pp. 3-4; Professor Holt, *The North-erners*, Oxford, 1961, p. 252.

There is, however, unanimity concerning the importance of Ranulph himself both in national history and in the development of the earldom of Chester, and it is the purpose of this paper to investigate some aspects of his career.

No full-scale biography of Ranulph has so far appeared.<sup>8</sup> The standard account remains that of J. H. Round in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>9</sup> Round drew on the work of Sir Peter Leycester<sup>10</sup> and Dugdale<sup>11</sup> together with the works of medieval chroniclers, but he used little local material and also failed, to some extent, to make full use of record sources. It is possible to expand, and in places to amend, his account.

Writers have so far accepted without question the correctness of the surname 'Blundeville' which (with variations in spelling)<sup>12</sup> is usually attributed to Ranulph. When this name is subjected to examination, however, it presents certain difficulties. Clearly it is not a surname in the modern sense of a name common to the members of a distinct family, for each of the seven Norman earls has a different 'surname' sanctioned by tradition. This point alone, however, would not provide a sufficient reason for rejecting the name. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries surnames in our sense were far from well-established. More serious, however, is the lack of any contemporary evidence for the use of the name 'Blundeville' in connection with Ranulph. Some noblemen did, indeed, use surnames regularly: examples among Ranulph's contemporaries are William de Ferrers, earl of Derby, and William de Warenne, earl of Surrey. Ranulph's nephew and successor, John, normally styled himself *Johannes de Scotia* in his charters. Ranulph, however, appears in his *acta* simply by his title: earl of Chester and (at times) duke of Brittany or earl of Lincoln. The earliest reference to the name 'Blundeville' which I have so far found is in the chronicle of Dieulacres Abbey (founded by Ranulph) which, in its present form, appears to date from the early fifteenth century.<sup>13</sup> On *f.* 137 this lists the earls of Chester, 'founders of Dieulacres', with their traditional surnames; but although it has the dates of Ranulph I ('Meschenes') and Ranulph II ('Gernons') approximately correct, it gets these names the wrong

<sup>8</sup> Professor Alexander is, however, preparing one. It is a matter for regret that the critical edition of the charters of the Norman earls of Chester, promised by Professor Barraclough in 1957 (*Facsimiles of Early Cheshire Charters*, Oxford, 1957, p. xi) has not yet appeared, since it would be of great use in tracing the development of some aspects of the earls' household and administration. A list of the earls' charters compiled by A. P. Duggan ('The Chancery of the Norman Earls of Chester': M. A. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1951), is so incomplete and badly referenced as to be of little practical use.

<sup>9</sup> *D. N. B.*, ii, 729-31, under 'Blundevill, Randulph de'.

<sup>10</sup> Reprinted in Ormerod, *History of Cheshire*, 2nd edition, ed. T. Helsby, 1882, i, 33-41, with additions by Ormerod and Helsby.

<sup>11</sup> *Baronage*, London, 1675, i, 41-5.

<sup>12</sup> These include, unfortunately, 'Blunderville' (R. V. H. Burne, *The Monks of Chester*, London, 1962, p. 22). It must also be pointed out that 'Ranulph' is only one of a large number of variant spellings of this Christian name!

<sup>13</sup> The relevant portions of this chronicle are transcribed by M. J. Fisher in 'Dieulacres Abbey', M.A. thesis, University of Keele, 1967: Chapter VIII of this thesis also gives an analytical description of the chronicle. Unknown, apparently, to Fisher, Barraclough had printed some extracts from the chronicle in translation, with commentary, in *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, lii, 1957, 17-27.

way round. The chronicle of St. Werburgh's Abbey, compiled about a century earlier,<sup>14</sup> gives only 'Miscinus' for Ranulph I and 'de Scotia' for John. An interesting genealogical account of the Norman earls of Chester from the monastery of Spalding<sup>15</sup> adds 'de Gernons' to these two, but again fails to mention 'Blundeville'. All that can be said, then, is that the name seems to have become associated with Ranulph some time during the fourteenth century.

Similar difficulties are encountered if we try to justify 'Blundeville' from the point of view of its derivation. Since the late sixteenth century it appears to have been associated with Oswestry. David Powel, naming Ranulph 'Blandevill', says that he was so called 'because he was born in Powys, in a town named Album monasterium.'<sup>16</sup> To this information Dugdale added 'now Oswestre',<sup>17</sup> perhaps following the rather more hesitant statement of William Smith in King's *Vale Royal*: 'Ranulph the third of that name (surnamed Blondeville) of that place in Powys, called in Latin Album Monasterium, which some say is Oswestry'.<sup>18</sup> Round accepted Dugdale's identification, and it does not seem to have been challenged since. *Album Monasterium* and its French equivalent *Blancmuster*, appear as recorded forms of the name Oswestry,<sup>19</sup> but this fact gives us little help, for two reasons: first, *Blundeville* is not a French version of *Album Monasterium* but of a hypothetical Latin *Alba Villa*; secondly, *Album Monasterium* is recorded not only for Oswestry but for Whitchurch (Herefordshire), Whitchurch (Shropshire) and Whiteparish (Wiltshire)!<sup>20</sup> The only record of Ranulph's birth which I have so far been able to trace gives the year (1170) but not the place.<sup>21</sup> In these circumstances I feel that the identification of the various Ranulphs and Hughs by number rather than by these alleged surnames is preferable.<sup>22</sup>

As with so many of the leading figures in medieval history, we know nothing of Ranulph's upbringing. His father, Hugh II, had in 1169 married Bertrada, daughter of Simon, count of Evreux.<sup>23</sup> Hugh died on 30 June 1181<sup>24</sup> and the lands of the earldom passed temporarily into the hands of Henry II. Royal custodians accounted for them at the Exchequer until Michaelmas 1187.<sup>25</sup> Presumably Ranulph received the earldom at this date, for the *Annales Cestrienses*, referring to his knighting by Henry II (in January 1189) already

<sup>14</sup> Edited, with translation, by R. C. Christie: *Annales Cestrienses*, L.C.R.S., xiv, 1886.

<sup>15</sup> *Monasticon Anglicanum*, iii, 217-8.

<sup>16</sup> D. Powel, *The Historie of Cambria, now called Wales*, London, 1584, p. 295.

<sup>17</sup> *Baronage*, i, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Ormerod, i, 124.

<sup>19</sup> The Latin form, however, is not given by E. Ekwall, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*, 4th ed., 1960, p. 352.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 513, 514.

<sup>21</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. (on Hugh II) J. E. Lloyd, *History of Wales*, 2nd ed., London, 1912, ii, 565 n: 'It is difficult to accept the statement of Powel that Hugh was born in Cyfeiliog and thence derived his surname; in 1147 the commote was beyond a doubt in the hands of the Welsh'.

<sup>23</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Stewart-Brown, *Cheshire in the Pipe Rolls*, pp. 6-25.

refer to him as earl (*comes*).<sup>26</sup> On 3 February 1189 Ranulph married Constance, countess of Brittany, widow of Henry II's son Geoffrey.<sup>27</sup>

By the time of Richard I's accession at the end of 1189 Ranulph, not yet out of his teens, had attained a position of eminence among the English baronage. His marriage had given him some claim to Brittany, and possession of the honour of Richmond. By it he had become stepfather to Constance's son Arthur, the only grandson of Henry II in the male line yet born, whom Richard was to acknowledge as his heir at some stages during his reign. As earl of Chester he controlled not only his own county (which, if not 'palatine', was certainly exceptional in status, as will be shown), but also lands scattered throughout England.<sup>28</sup> His family connections were impressive. He could claim a close blood relationship with Richard.<sup>29</sup> His mother was a Montfort: his connection with this family was later to be important, owing to its interest in the honour of Leicester. 'The' Simon de Montfort of English history was his first cousin.<sup>30</sup> Through his descent from the Lincolnshire heiress Lucy, who had married (among others) Ranulph I, he was closely related to the Roumare family. When William III de Roumare died childless in 1198 the honour of Bolingbroke in Lincolnshire went to Ranulph as the nearest heir. Ranulph's four sisters were to develop his family connections by making important marriages: David, earl of Huntingdon, brother of William I, king of Scotland, William de Ferrers, earl of Derby, William d'Aubigny, earl of Arundel, and Robert de Quency were to become Ranulph's brothers-in-law.<sup>31</sup> The earls of Chester also had important interests in Normandy, in the sensitive border area around Avranches, of which they were hereditary constables.<sup>32</sup> Their castle of St. James de Beuvron occupied a strategic position near the border between Normandy and Brittany. Painter believed that Ranulph was second only in territorial possessions among the barons of England to Richard's brother and successor, John, count of Mortain.<sup>33</sup>

During Richard's reign Ranulph appears in connection with two episodes narrated by the chroniclers. In March 1194 he was engaged with the earls of Derby and Huntingdon in attacking Nottingham castle, which was held against

<sup>26</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> The standard account of the lands of the earls of Chester outside Cheshire itself and Yorkshire is that of W. Farrer, *Honors and Knights' Fees*, ii, Manchester, 1925, 1-293. The one disadvantage of this monumental work is that it is impossible to gain from it a clear picture of the lands actually held by any earl at any given date. The writs authorizing the division of Ranulph's knights' fees outside Cheshire among his heirs, dated 12 September 1233, were addressed to the sheriffs of Yorkshire, Huntingdonshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, Rutland, Norfolk, Staffordshire and Lancaster (*Close Rolls*, 1231-4, pp. 263-4).

<sup>29</sup> Both were descended from Henry I.

<sup>30</sup> For the connection between Ranulph, the Montforts and the earldom of Leicester, see M. W. Labarge, *Simon de Montfort*, London, 1962, p. xii.

<sup>31</sup> Farrer, *op. cit.*, 9-11.

<sup>32</sup> Their lands are described in F. M. Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy*, 2nd edition, Manchester, 1951, pp. 335-6.

<sup>33</sup> S. Painter, *The Reign of King John*, Baltimore, 1949, p. 20.

the royalists by the supporters of Richard's brother John.<sup>34</sup> The castle held out, however, until the arrival of Richard himself. Ranulph was at the great council which followed its submission; he bore one of the ceremonial swords at Richard's second coronation; and he then followed Richard overseas.<sup>35</sup> The second episode is even more dramatic: in 1196 he appears to have started a war. Constance, his wife, was on her way (presumably from Brittany) to speak with Richard in Normandy, when Ranulph captured her at Pontorson and shut her up in his castle at St. James de Beuvron. Arthur, her son, failing to obtain her release, joined Philip Augustus of France against Richard and attacked Normandy; Richard retaliated with a devastating raid into Brittany.<sup>36</sup> This story implies that Ranulph's relations with Constance were less than harmonious. She was some ten years his senior; and by 1200 either Ranulph had deserted her<sup>37</sup> or *vice versa*.<sup>38</sup> Although there is no record of an annulment of the marriage, both Ranulph and Constance married again. Ranulph's marriage to Clemence, sister of Geoffrey de Fougères, was politically almost as important as his first.

Richard I's death in April 1199 brought Ranulph into a new position of prominence. Roger of Howden states that after Richard's death the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Justiciar, and William Marshal, who had decided to support John's claim to the kingship, summoned to Northampton all those barons and earls about whom they were most dubious.<sup>39</sup> Among these were Ranulph, his two brothers-in-law the earls of Derby and Huntingdon, and Roger de Lacy, constable of Chester. All swore to support John in return for his promise that he would 'render to each of them his rights'. Painter<sup>40</sup> took this to indicate that the men concerned had 'specific grievances'; he held that Ranulph, whose 'rapacious eye wandered hungrily all over northern England' and who 'wanted anything he could get anywhere'<sup>41</sup> was angry because he had been deprived of lands to which he felt entitled. Professor Holt takes a rather similar, though more moderate, line: 'Earl Ranulph of Chester's policies under John were largely determined by his desire to extend his interests into Lincolnshire and northwards from his earldom into Lancashire.'<sup>42</sup> It is always difficult to feel confident about ascribing motives to men of the middle ages; my own feeling is that John's adherents were worried about Ranulph for more obvious, though

<sup>34</sup> *Chronica Rogeri de Hovedene*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 1868-71, iii, 237.

<sup>35</sup> Ranulph's attendance on Richard can be traced from the witness-lists of Richard's charters, printed in L. Landon, *Itinerary of King Richard I*, Pipe Roll Society, N.S., xiii, 1935.

<sup>36</sup> *Hovedene*, iv, 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 46; R. Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. C. Babington and J. R. Lumby, Rolls Series, 1865-86, viii, 176. Higden thought that Ranulph's desertion of Constance might have been inspired by the example of King John.

<sup>38</sup> *Hovedene*, iv, 96-7. Roger of Howden connects Constance's action in deserting Ranulph with her flight with Arthur from Le Mans to Angers in October 1199.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 88.

<sup>40</sup> *The Reign of King John*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> J. C. Holt, *The Northerners*, p. 4.

less specific, reasons. John's position as Richard's heir was, to say the least, dubious; 'any prelate or baron of the Plantagenet lands could convince himself without much difficulty that either John or Arthur was Richard's rightful heir'.<sup>43</sup> The barons of Brittany and Anjou had already come down on Arthur's side. A review of Ranulph's position in terms of territory and of family connections, as outlined above, will show that his decision was of major importance. Hubert Walter, Geoffrey fitz Peter and William Marshal must have felt considerable relief at the outcome of the Northampton meeting. Ranulph honoured his promise: he was at John's coronation on 27 May.<sup>44</sup>

In the civil war which marked the end of John's reign Ranulph was one of the leading loyalist barons. Yet historians have drawn attention to what appears to have been a serious period of friction between Ranulph and John during the early years of the reign. Painter felt that John treated Ranulph with unjustified harshness:

In the first years of the reign when the king was appeasing several of the great barons Earl Ranulph received nothing. He was in fact slapped in the face. . . . To the end of 1204 John had refused all favours to Ranulph of Chester and had even deprived him of part of his rightful inheritance. . . . One would have said that John regarded Ranulph as his worst enemy among the English barons.<sup>45</sup>

The evidence for these assertions seems rather thin. Painter's argument rests on two foundations: his estimate of what Ranulph could legitimately claim by way of inheritance, and the two recorded instances of friction between Ranulph and John.

Painter held that John's decision to give the Roumare lands in southern England (the honour of Camel) to Hubert de Burgh rather than to Ranulph 'was bound to annoy him exceedingly' since 'in his mind they were unquestionably his as heir of the Roumares'. This was not so. Professor Cazal has shown that while Ranulph could legitimately and successfully claim the Lincolnshire honour of Bolingbroke through his connection with the Roumare family, he had no such ground for claiming Camel.<sup>46</sup> Again, Painter believed that while John 'very properly' gave the honour of Richmond to Constance's second husband, Guy de Thouars, after her death in 1201, his 'cruellest blow at the earl's ambitions' was to give it to Robert, earl of Leicester, when Guy defected to Philip Augustus in 1203. But Painter's assertion that this action angered Ranulph, and that these were 'the lands at which Ranulph looked most hope-

<sup>43</sup> *The Reign of King John*, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Hovedene*, iv, 90.

<sup>45</sup> *The Reign of King John*, pp. 25-9. This section of Painter's book is the source of quotations used in the next few paragraphs, where these are not specifically acknowledged.

<sup>46</sup> F. A. Cazal, Jr., 'Norman and Wessex Charters of the Roumare Family', *Early Medieval Miscellany or Doris Mary Stenton*, Pipe Roll Society, N.S., xxxvi, 1960, 78.

fully', lacks corroborative evidence. In fact, Painter admitted that Ranulph's claim to Richmond was 'feeble'. Indeed, if Ranulph's presence on the witness-lists of John's charters can be taken to indicate that he was in close touch with, and therefore on friendly terms with, the king, Painter's argument must be abandoned: Ranulph was with John frequently between November 1203 and May 1204.<sup>47</sup>

We are left with the two episodes which appear to demonstrate stress between John and Ranulph. The first occurred in April 1203, when John, having heard that Ranulph and Fulk Paniel (to whom Ranulph was connected through his second marriage) were preparing to desert him, appeared at the castle of Vire, demanding the surrender of Semilly castle, which had been in Ranulph's custody, and pledges for Ranulph's and Fulk's future good conduct.<sup>48</sup> According to Painter, John 'was in a savagely suspicious mood. He knew that he had treated Ranulph badly and thought he might be plotting with his wife's relatives'. But John's suspicion was 'essentially ridiculous'. My own feeling is that it was entirely understandable. The Fougères family, related to Ranulph through his second marriage, had just defected to Philip Augustus. It is probable that Arthur (in whom Ranulph may well have retained some interest) had very recently been murdered. To John, fighting to preserve his continental dominions, Ranulph's loyalty was essential.<sup>49</sup>

The second episode arose with equal suddenness. In December 1204 the sheriffs of Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire and Leicestershire and Yorkshire were ordered to seize Ranulph's lands in their counties into the king's hands, as John had heard that Ranulph (together with Roger de Montbegon) was in league against him with Gwenwynwyn, lord of Powys. On 20 December both men were given safe conduct to come to John to give security for their future good conduct.<sup>50</sup>

Now these events are dramatic, and historians have not been slow to realise their potential. The comments of Painter and Warren have already been quoted with regard to the first; on the second Holt comments, 'The north was on the verge of open war'.<sup>51</sup> Yet on closer examination two points seem to emerge. In the first place, neither episode is recorded by any chronicler: we know of the first through a narrative enrolled on the Patent Roll and the Norman Roll,<sup>52</sup> and of the second through one letter close and one letter patent. The second conclusion is that both episodes were over quickly. Ranulph soon had Semilly in custody once again after the first, and this was followed by a grant of the custody of the 'tower of Avranches'.<sup>53</sup> After the second, although there is

<sup>47</sup> *Rotuli Chartarum*, Record Commission, pp. 114b-134b.

<sup>48</sup> *Rotuli Litterarum Patentium*, Record Commission, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> According to Dr. W. L. Warren, *King John*, London, 1961, p. 109, Ranulph, 'a butt for the king's bad temper', 'behaved with dignity and tact'.

<sup>50</sup> *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum*, Record Commission, i, 16; *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 48b.

<sup>51</sup> *The Northerners*, p. 205.

<sup>52</sup> *Rotuli Normanniae*, Record Commission, pp. 96-7.

<sup>53</sup> *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 29, 30.

casual mention of a dispute over land between Ranulph and the king,<sup>54</sup> Ranulph soon appears again as a frequent witness of John's charters.<sup>55</sup> In March 1205, after the death of Robert, earl of Leicester, Ranulph received most of the honour of Richmond.<sup>56</sup> In May a debt of over £200 owed to the Jews by his father was pardoned.<sup>57</sup> At the end of the year amercements imposed on Ranulph and on his steward Walter of Coventry were first put in respite and then pardoned.<sup>58</sup>

From this time until John's death in 1216 there is no doubt of Ranulph's loyalty. Where the Charter Rolls have survived, his name appears frequently in the witness-lists. He was twice sent to conduct the king of Scotland to John.<sup>59</sup> In 1209 and 1210 he took part in campaigns against the Welsh.<sup>60</sup> In 1213 he was among those swearing to uphold the peace between John and Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>61</sup> He accompanied John on his expedition to Poitou in 1214.<sup>62</sup> When civil war began in 1215 he stood firmly on the side of the king. His name does not appear (in spite of Round's assertion to the contrary) among the witnesses to the Great Charter of June 1215, but his support for at least some of its provisions can be assumed from the fact that at roughly the same time he issued a comparable document for Cheshire.<sup>63</sup> When John made his will in 1216 he named Ranulph one of his executors.<sup>64</sup> Ranulph's territorial influence had increased considerably by this time. He was given custody of the lands pertaining to the honour of Leicester, claimed by his uncle Simon de Montfort, to hold for Simon's use in July 1215<sup>65</sup> and in 1216 he was made sheriff of Shropshire, Staffordshire and Lancaster.<sup>66</sup> His position in the north-west could be compared to that of Fawkes de Bréauté in the south-east.<sup>67</sup> His loyalty was rewarded with gifts of wine and money.<sup>68</sup>

John's death in October 1216 left England in a situation as difficult as that which he had inherited in 1199. His son Henry was only nine years old; some

<sup>54</sup> *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 18b. It seems, however, significant that John apparently did not know what lands were involved in this dispute.

<sup>55</sup> *Rot. Chartarum*, pp. 141-55.

<sup>56</sup> *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 51. Painter's explanation of this is ingenious, and provides an interesting example of his need to try to explain motives. He thought that John had wanted to use the earl of Leicester as a counter-balance to Ranulph's territorial power. When Robert died, there was no-one else capable of taking his place, and so by a kind of diplomatic revolution John changed from enmity towards Ranulph to support of him.

<sup>57</sup> *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 59, 60b, 67b.

<sup>59</sup> *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 56, 91.

<sup>60</sup> *Brut y Tywysogion*, ed. J. W. ab Ithel, Rolls Series, 1860, p. 265; *Annales Monastici*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series, iii, 1866, 32; Gervase of Canterbury, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 1879-80, ii, 106.

<sup>61</sup> *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, pp. 98b-9.

<sup>62</sup> Attestations in *Rot. Chartarum*, pp. 196-201b.

<sup>63</sup> See below, p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 255, gives a translation.

<sup>65</sup> *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 150.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-4b, 175b.

<sup>67</sup> Fawkes was sheriff of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire and Rutland.

<sup>68</sup> *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 152b-3, 163.



kind of regency was inevitable. The civil war had reached a position of stalemate; although the rebels had as their leader Louis, son of Philip Augustus of France, they could not force a decisive victory. Ranulph again stood out, as 'the most outstanding in dignity among the royalists'.<sup>69</sup> Round believed that Ranulph was present at Henry's makeshift coronation at Gloucester on 28 October. The *Life of William Marshal*, however, has been accepted as giving an authentic account of the proceedings surrounding the coronation, and tells a different story. Ranulph, it declares, was not present; indeed, those who arranged the coronation acted with some trepidation, not knowing whether Ranulph would approve. He arrived on the following day, and, when he had expressed his approval of what had been done, was offered the regency by William Marshal. Ranulph refused, holding (as did the others present) that William himself was the only possible candidate for this position.<sup>70</sup>

As might be expected, Ranulph continued to play a leading part in the royalist campaign. He was among the witnesses when the Charter was renewed, in much less contentious form, in the autumn of 1216.<sup>71</sup> He led an attack on Mountsorrel castle in the following spring<sup>72</sup> and was among the leaders of the royalist force which inflicted on the rebels their heaviest defeat, at Lincoln in May 1217.<sup>73</sup> He received the title of earl of Lincoln.<sup>74</sup> As an indirect result of the battle he also acquired the manors of Leeds and Bingley in Yorkshire.<sup>75</sup>

In 1218, when the country was once again at peace, Ranulph set off on Crusade. He had apparently taken the Cross as early as March 1215, along with King John and others.<sup>76</sup> At the time of his departure he obtained quittance of all the debts which he owed at the Exchequer arising from his custody of Lancaster, Shropshire and Staffordshire, in consideration of the money which he had spent on maintaining the castles under his control.<sup>77</sup> He continued, however, to be named as sheriff, though under-sheriffs acted for him. In 1219 he was among the leaders of the successful Christian attack on Damietta, after which he returned to England, reaching Chester by 16 August 1220.<sup>78</sup>

'It is from this point', comments Round, 'that we begin to trace the change in his policy'. Stubbs called Ranulph from this time 'a leader of opposition to royal or ministerial tyranny'.<sup>79</sup> Powicke makes a similar point, though at greater length:

<sup>69</sup> F. M. Powicke, *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, Oxford, 1947, i, 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5; Kate Norgate, *The Minority of Henry III*, London, 1912, pp. 6-7; S. Painter, *William Marshal*, Baltimore, 1933, p. 195.

<sup>71</sup> W. Stubbs, *Select Charters*, 9th ed., Oxford, 1913, p. 336.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series, 1872-83, iii, 15.

<sup>73</sup> The only episode in the war mentioned by the *Annales Cestrienses* (p. 50).

<sup>74</sup> *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 308b shows that he was earl on 23 May, three days after the battle.

<sup>75</sup> Maurice de Ghent, captured at Lincoln, failed to pay his ransom, and the manors, which he had offered as security, were taken by Ranulph. Maurice tried to recover them in the royal court, but failed (*Rolls of the Justices in Eyre for Yorkshire*, 1218-19, ed. D. M. Stenton, Selden Society, lvi, 1937, no. 1133).

<sup>76</sup> Gervase of Canterbury, ii, 109.

<sup>77</sup> P.R.O., Exchequer (L.T.R.) Memoranda Roll 1 (E 368/1), m. 7d.

<sup>78</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 50.

<sup>79</sup> *Constitutional History of England*, 4th ed., Oxford, 1896, ii, 47.

A man like Ranulph earl of Chester was loyal to the core and well able to appreciate the claims of order and justice. . . . As events were to show, he could not allow himself to become a rebel against constituted authority, but he refused to admit that the king's closest governors and advisers had a greater right than he had to rule England. . . . He never let his pride and prejudices destroy his mental balance.<sup>80</sup>

These passages deserve quotation, since they illustrate the concept of Ranulph as a Man of Principle; they stand in sharp contrast to the assessment made by Professor Holt of the factors which lay behind Ranulph's activities:

Can we imagine that the earl of Chester would have shown himself so loyal but for the arrangements John made with him in 1204-5? . . . There is little evidence that the tie between the king and his men was based on anything but the continued expectation and provision of material reward in return for material service. This was not loyalty, but government by *quid pro quo*.<sup>81</sup>

Such varied judgements indicate the difficulty of trying to establish what ideas, beliefs or motives lay behind the recorded actions of such men as Ranulph. This difficulty can be illustrated by reference to his recorded activities in the years from 1220 to his death in 1232.

Viewed in one light, the chronicles present Ranulph as a querulous man constantly verging on rebellion but always drawing back from the brink, and motivated chiefly by jealousy of Hubert de Burgh, the Justiciar, who assumed a position of influence over the young Henry III after the death of William Marshal in 1219. In 1222 Ranulph was quarrelling with Hubert and with William, earl of Salisbury, the king's uncle.<sup>82</sup> By 1223 he was the ally of Llewelyn, prince of North Wales, whereas under John he had been Llewelyn's chief enemy.<sup>83</sup> At the end of the year he headed a group of dissident barons who, after an abortive attempt to seize the Tower of London, brought the country to the brink of civil war before finally agreeing to surrender their castles and shrievalties.<sup>84</sup> When the notorious Fawkes de Bréauté fell from favour in 1224, it was to Ranulph's territory that he fled, and Ranulph tried to intercede on his behalf with the king.<sup>85</sup> In 1227 when Richard, earl of Cornwall, was involved in a dispute with Henry III, Ranulph joined him.<sup>86</sup> In 1229 he held out against a grant of financial aid to the Pope.<sup>87</sup> In 1231 he

<sup>80</sup> *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, i, 50-1.

<sup>81</sup> *The Northerners*, pp. 252, 254.

<sup>82</sup> *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series, 1872-3, ii, 251.

<sup>83</sup> He was met by Llewelyn on his return from crusade (*Annales Cestrienses*, p. 50) and in 1222 his nephew John married Llewelyn's daughter (*ibid.*). In 1223, as Llewelyn's *familiaris et amicus*, he persuaded Henry not to attack Llewelyn (*Annales Monastici*, iii, 82).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 83; *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 82-3.

<sup>85</sup> *Walt. Cov.*, ii, 265; *Royal Letters, Henry III*, ed. W. W. Shirley, Rolls Series, 1862-6, i, no. cciv.

<sup>86</sup> *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 123-5.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 189.

quarrelled with Henry and withdrew from his court in a rage.<sup>88</sup> In March 1232 he headed the opposition of the baronage to a grant of money to Henry III, on the ground that they had served Henry in France and impoverished themselves by doing so.<sup>89</sup>

This picture, however, is selective and distorted. There are equally numerous instances during this period of Ranulph's loyalty and co-operation. In 1221 he helped the government in its attack on the rebel count of Aumale.<sup>90</sup> Although he gave refuge to Fawkes de Bréauté, he obeyed the king's command to join in the siege of Bedford castle, where Fawkes's brother William was holding out against the government, and eventually persuaded Fawkes to give himself up.<sup>91</sup> In 1230 he joined the king in his first expedition to France; he was left in command of the English force when the king returned to England, and conducted a successful campaign.<sup>92</sup> On two occasions he saved Hubert de Burgh's life: in 1229, when the king, angry at Hubert's failure to provide adequate supplies for the French campaign, flew at Hubert in a rage, and in 1232, when Hubert, now fallen from grace, was about to be dragged from sanctuary by a London mob.<sup>93</sup>

During these years Ranulph continued to receive marks of royal favour. Between 1218 and 1222 he received grants of the right to hold markets or fairs at Coventry, Chipping Campden, Navenby, Chartley and Wainfleet.<sup>94</sup> In April 1221 Henry III confirmed the agreement which Ranulph had made with the king of Scotland for custody of the land and person of his nephew, John, son of his brother-in-law the earl of Huntingdon, who had died in 1219.<sup>95</sup> He received loans of money in 1222 and 1223,<sup>96</sup> and although he lost custody of the Leicester and Richmond lands in 1230 he had in 1229 received all the king's land between Ribble and Mersey.<sup>97</sup>

It is, therefore, difficult to arrive at a consistent picture of Ranulph's activities during his last years. Bishop Stubbs showed this difficulty when he said that 'the earl of Chester, the strongest bulwark of the royal power, is also its sharpest critic, and, when his own rights are infringed, its most independent opponent.'<sup>98</sup> His importance, however, is not in question.<sup>99</sup>

So far Ranulph has been considered simply as a leading figure in national political life during the reigns of Richard I, John and Henry III. In the words

<sup>88</sup> *Annales Monastici*, i, 79; *Annales Cestrienses*, pp. 57, 59.

<sup>89</sup> *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 212.

<sup>90</sup> *Annales Monastici*, iii, 64.

<sup>91</sup> *Walt. Cov.*, ii, 267.

<sup>92</sup> *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 199-200; *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 57.

<sup>93</sup> *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 190-1, 225.

<sup>94</sup> *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 351, 361, 463b, 470b, 518.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 455.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 487b, 548b.

<sup>97</sup> M. W. Labarge, *Simon de Montfort*, pp. 29-31; *Patent Rolls 1225-32*, p. 325; *Close Rolls 1227-31*, pp. 221, 410-11; *Cal. Charter Rolls*, i, 101-2.

<sup>98</sup> *Constitutional History*, ii, 131.

<sup>99</sup> Two tournaments arranged in 1232 were put off, one because of Ranulph's illness and the other because he and others were needed by the king: *Patent Rolls 1225-32*, pp. 473, 498.

of Barraclough, 'Ranulph III impressed contemporaries and posterity not because he ruled a 'palatinate' in Chester but as a man of affairs, a statesman, a crusader and a stalwart soldier'.<sup>100</sup> Barraclough and others have, however, also emphasized his significance in the development of the earldom of Chester, and this may now be outlined. Of course, like his predecessors he had considerable interests outside Cheshire. His interest in contemporary economic developments can be argued from his participation in fen drainage in Lincolnshire<sup>101</sup> and his enthusiasm for obtaining fairs and markets. As has been shown above, he acquired at various times control of large blocks of territory outside Cheshire. There is also abundant evidence that he was interested in developing his own power within his earldom, in spite of the fact that there are very few specific dates on which we can be fairly certain that he was present in Chester.<sup>102</sup>

It is impossible to define the exact extent of the earl's powers in Cheshire. Even the royal courts of the time were in doubt on this point: in 1200 an enquiry was ordered into the powers which Ranulph and his father before him exercised in the county.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately the result of this enquiry is not recorded. All that can be said is that, with two exceptions, kings of England did not apparently think it politic to interfere in Cheshire affairs. One exception occurred when the earl was a minor. Both Hugh II and Ranulph had succeeded to the earldom when under age, and during these periods their lands had been in the control of royal custodians who accounted for them at the royal Exchequer. Secondly, the king could interfere in matters concerning the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield (also sometimes referred to as the bishopric of Chester) even when these concerned possessions in Cheshire. Thus in March 1208 Ranulph was ordered to seize into the king's hand the bishop's manors in Cheshire;<sup>104</sup> in August 1213 he was ordered to give their custody to the bishop of Norwich or to Henry fitz Simon.<sup>105</sup> But when Professor Alexander refers to 'the numerous instances of the exercise of royal power in Cheshire'<sup>106</sup> he specifies none, but gives instead a general reference to Barraclough's paper. I feel that the evidence points rather to an opposite conclusion. During normal periods the county contributed nothing to the royal Exchequer. There was no sheriff appointed by, and responsible to, the king. Itinerant justices did not visit the county. Cheshire made no return to the inquests of knight service conducted from time to time. The enquiry into the earl's powers ordered in 1200 was to be conducted by knights of the neighbouring counties rather than by men of

<sup>100</sup> *Earldom*, p. 16.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> I have so far discovered only four: 16 August 1220 (*Annales Cestrienses*, p. 50); 31 May 1222 (*Early Ches. Charters*, p. 47); 27 August 1228 (*Earldom*, p. 31); 21 August 1231 (*Annales Cestrienses*, pp. 56, 58). There are, of course, numerous instances of charters 'given' at Chester, but these do not have specific dates.

<sup>103</sup> *Curia Regis Rolls*, i, 392.

<sup>104</sup> *Rot. Litt. Claus.*, i, 107.

<sup>105</sup> *Rot. Litt. Pat.*, p. 103.

<sup>106</sup> J. W. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 724; the italics are mine.

Cheshire itself. When John ordered the seizure of Ranulph's estates in 1204, his orders only extended to the earl's lands outside Cheshire.<sup>107</sup>

This evidence may be considered rather vague and negative; but the independence with regard to Cheshire which it suggests receives support from other sources. The Dieulacres Chronicle, indeed, seems to provide a definitive statement of the independence of Cheshire when it says that the county 'rejoiced in the prerogative of regality'.<sup>108</sup> The *Annales Cestrienses* describe Hugh I as a *nobilis princeps*, and Ranulph himself was described as a prince both within and shortly after his lifetime.<sup>109</sup> The term 'prince' at this time implied a considerable degree of territorial sovereignty. It was used, for example, by and of Ranulph's contemporary, Llewelyn of North Wales. According to Matthew Paris, the earl of Chester, as *comes palatii*, had the right to coerce an errant king.<sup>110</sup> There are several references which make it clear that contemporaries considered Cheshire to stand apart from both England and Wales.<sup>111</sup> Set beside this evidence, Hugh Louthur's declaration, in 1293, that Ranulph III had had no 'regal dignity' seems rather thin.<sup>112</sup>

Ranulph made his authority effective within the county in many ways. Like Henry II and John, he was interested in the development of legal processes. His motives, like theirs, may have been mixed: the establishment of new judicial procedures was good for the community, but also meant increased revenue for the earl.<sup>113</sup> The Cheshire 'Domesday Roll', on which charters and agreements were enrolled in order to give them greater security, apparently originated in Ranulph's time.<sup>114</sup> It was later claimed that Ranulph could, by virtue of his princely power, get what he wanted enrolled on it; but a royal court after his death asserted its authority as a record.<sup>115</sup> The office of justiciar of Chester, although not unknown before Ranulph's time, certainly developed in importance from the early thirteenth century. Philip of Orby, who resigned the office

<sup>107</sup> A point not noted by Holt (*The Northerners*, p. 205) or Warren (*King John*, p. 109), who both comment on the seizure. Cf. Barraclough's comment (*Earldom*, p. 18, n. 7) on the absence of accounts for Cheshire on the Pipe Rolls for the period when Hugh II was deprived of his lands for his part in the rebellion of 1173-4.

<sup>108</sup> *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd ser., lii, 1957, 26. This phrase also appears in Higden's *Polychronicon*, viii, 210, from which the Dieulacres material was, apparently, derived. But it is of interest to compare Barraclough's comment on it in *Earldom*, p. 19, n. 9, with what he said some six years later in the *Cheshire Sheaf*. By 1957 Barraclough also felt able to use the term 'palatinate' in connection with Cheshire institutions of the early thirteenth century (*Early Ches. Charters*, p. 48).

<sup>109</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 16; *Liber Luciani de Laude Cestrie*, ed. M. V. Taylor, L.C.R.S., lxiv, 1912, p. 65; R. Stewart-Brown, 'The Domesday Roll of Chester', *English Historical Review*, xxxvii, 1922, 497.

<sup>110</sup> *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 337-8; also quoted, with commentary, by Leycester (Ormerod, i, 42). Surprisingly, Barraclough states (*Earldom*, p. 19, n. 10) that this claim was advanced on behalf of Ranulph; it referred, of course, to his successor.

<sup>111</sup> *Liber Luciani*, p. 65; *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 189; J. Tait, *Chartulary of St. Werburgh's Abbey*, i, Chetham Soc., N.S., lxxix, 1920, 105.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Professor Alexander's own reservations (*op. cit.*, 727-8).

<sup>113</sup> In the year 1237-8 the income from 'pleas of the justiciar' amounted to £93 13s. 2d., or roughly one tenth of the total income from the county (*Ches. in the Pipe Rolls*, p. 36).

<sup>114</sup> R. Stewart-Brown, 'Domesday Roll', 497.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 497-8; *Cal. Patent Rolls*, 1247-58, p. 431.

at Easter 1229, had for over twenty years been the leading figure in Cheshire administration.<sup>116</sup> It was Ranulph who gave the county a register of original writs enabling litigants to use standard forms for initiating legal proceedings.<sup>117</sup> The term 'pleas of the sword' to describe the jurisdiction of the earls of Chester is first recorded in Ranulph's time.<sup>118</sup> The peculiar legal customs of Cheshire received definition in the so-called Magna Carta of Cheshire issued by Ranulph in 1215 or 1216.<sup>119</sup>

This document, which deserves more detailed study than it has so far received, shows some similarities to the charter issued by John in June 1215. It is also of interest because it shows that Ranulph, unlike John, felt that he could embody in it a statement that he had refused some of his barons' requests. Powicke commented that Ranulph had granted 'to his own barons and tenants a charter of liberties which was *directly inspired* by the Great Charter'; he later modified this assertion by saying that Ranulph's charter, which 'is an important indication of his outlook', was '*obviously suggested* by the Great Charter'.<sup>120</sup> Two points seem to call for comment. First, there is no evidence that Ranulph's charter was, in fact, later in date than John's. Tait, indeed, put forward a tentative suggestion that it could have been slightly earlier.<sup>121</sup> Secondly, it is open to question whether, as Powicke implies, Ranulph was entirely in sympathy with the terms of John's charter. Tait described Ranulph's charter as 'more rigidly feudal' than Magna Carta.<sup>122</sup> It would, I feel, be possible to argue that Ranulph was *not* in sympathy with John's charter in its more revolutionary aspects (any more than John himself was), and that this perhaps explains his absence from the list of those whose advice John claimed to have followed;<sup>123</sup> in this case the much less radical reissue of 1216 could well have met with his approval, and may in part have been inspired by him.<sup>124</sup> The refusal of Ranulph to accept some of the demands of the Cheshire barons would accord with such an argument.

Ranulph certainly seems to have been capable of enforcing his will within the county. In 1194 a dispute between two claimants to the abbacy of Chester was settled through his intervention.<sup>125</sup> In 1287 it was alleged that he had dispossessed the abbot of Basingwerk of the manor of Caldý in Wirral, and that he and the abbot of Chester had colluded in presenting Simon, the earl's clerk,

<sup>116</sup> *Ches. Sheaf*, 3rd ser., xxxv, 1940, 39-40; *Annales Cestrienses*, pp. 54, 56.

<sup>117</sup> *Abbreuiatio Placitorum*, Record Commission, pp. 268-9.

<sup>118</sup> Barraclough, 'Some Charters of the Earls of Chester', *Early Medieval Miscellany for Doris Mary Stenton*, p. 39.

<sup>119</sup> Tait, *Chartulary of St. Werburgh's Abbey*, i, 101-9, gives a transcript with commentary.

<sup>120</sup> *King Henry III and the Lord Edward*, i, 50; *The Thirteenth Century*, p. 20, n. 1; the italics are mine.

<sup>121</sup> *Chartulary*, i, 107.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 108.

<sup>123</sup> Stubbs, *Select Charters*, p. 292.

<sup>124</sup> For an approach towards this line of argument, cf. J. C. Holt, *Magna Carta*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 269-71.

<sup>125</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 44.

<sup>126</sup> R. Stewart-Brown, *Calendar of County Court, City Court and Eyre Rolls of Chester, 1259-97*, Chetham Soc., N.S., lxxxiv, 1925, p. 59.

to the church of West Kirby.<sup>126</sup> He felt himself to be capable of resisting papal demands for financial aid, no matter what might be promised from other parts of the kingdom.<sup>127</sup> He could apparently raise arbitrary taxes within his own dominions.<sup>128</sup>

Ranulph died on 26 October 1232. He had previously resigned his earldom of Lincoln in favour of his sister, Hawise de Quency.<sup>129</sup> His bowels were buried at Wallingford, where he died; in accordance with his wishes his heart was buried at Dieulacres, the abbey which he had founded near Leek as a new home for the monks of Poulton; and his body was buried in St. Werburgh's Abbey.<sup>130</sup> He had failed to produce an heir by either of his marriages; as a result the long process of partition of the possessions of the earldom, which has been described in great detail by Stewart-Brown, began.<sup>131</sup> When his nephew and successor, John the Scot, also died heirless in 1237, the way was open for the annexation of the county by the Crown.

Within two centuries legends had begun to accumulate around Ranulph's name. Round and many others have cited the mention in the *Vision of Piers Ploughman* of 'rymes of Robyn Hood and Randolph, Erle of Chester' (though there were, of course, three earls named Ranulph). Some of these legends are perhaps embroideries of real events: such is probably the account of Ranulph's rescue from the Welsh at Rhuddlan by the constable of Chester at the head of a band of 'loose and dissolute persons',<sup>132</sup> and such is certainly the account, called 'highly mythical' by Round, of his efforts at the battle of Lincoln in 1217, as recounted by Dugdale.<sup>133</sup> The chronicle of Dieulacres tells several stories in connection with Ranulph, including the assertion (nowhere else corroborated) that he accompanied Richard I on his crusade and, on his return, was captured with Richard by the Duke of Austria, but managed to escape; it ascribes the foundation of the abbey to a vision in which Ranulph was confronted by his grandfather, Ranulph II; it tells how on his return from the Crusade in 1220 he was saved from shipwreck by the prayers of his monks, and how on his death

<sup>127</sup> *Chron. Maj.*, iii, 189.

<sup>128</sup> *Annales Cestrienses*, p. 52, referring to a mysterious *tallagium pedale*. We know very little about Ranulph's finances. The statement by Professor Alexander ('A Pinchpenny Patron: Ranulf III of Chester', *Cîteaux*, i, 1971, 23) that he 'had increased the value of his holdings in the county of Cheshire alone . . . from £245 in 1181 . . . to £975 in 1237' is based on inadequate evidence. The second figure is particularly suspect, since it represents the income from the Cheshire lands for which the custodians accounted at the royal Exchequer at the end of the year 1237-8; it has been pointed out that the valuation of the lands held by the earl in Cheshire was made by one Henry of Nottingham after the death of the last earl, and that the actual organization of the accounts was probably the work of the royal official Stephen of Seagrave (*Cheshire in the Pipe Rolls*, pp. 30-1, 38, 42). As for the accounts rendered during Ranulph's minority (*ibid.*, pp. 6-25), these seem to reflect a considerable degree of confusion and inconsistency at either local or Exchequer level.

<sup>129</sup> Ormerod, i, 28.

<sup>130</sup> *Annales Monastici*, i, 87; *Monasticum Anglicanum*, iii, 217-8.

<sup>131</sup> 'The End of the Norman Earldom of Chester', *English Historical Review*, xxxv, 1920, 26-54.

<sup>132</sup> Ormerod, i, 644, 695.

<sup>133</sup> *Baronage*, i, 41. This, incidentally, gives the only known reference to Ranulph's appearance: he was 'a little man'.

his spirit was saved from Hell.<sup>134</sup> By the fourteenth century, too, the name 'Blundeville' had come, as we have seen, to be associated with him.

In addition I have tried to show how modern historians have created their own legends about Ranulph by trying to conjure his ideas and beliefs out of a very limited amount of evidence. To Stubbs he was 'almost the last relic of the great feudal aristocracy of the Conquest', although 'his attitude shows very remarkably the alteration in the character of the older feudal nobility produced by the training of Henry II's reign'.<sup>135</sup> Lloyd felt that 'he left no peer in the King's dominions in territorial dignity and weight of influence';<sup>136</sup> to Powicke he was 'the greatest baron of the realm';<sup>137</sup> to Alexander 'a pinchpenny patron' of religious houses.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>134</sup> See the extracts given by Barraclough in the *Ches. Sheaf*, 1957.

<sup>135</sup> *Constitutional History*, ii, 47; *Select Charters*, p. 318.

<sup>136</sup> *History of Wales*, ii, 677.

<sup>137</sup> *The Thirteenth Century*, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> *Citeaux*, i, 1971, 23-39. A pleasant example exists of the formation of one of these legends. Professor Holt (*The Northerners*, p. 241 and n. 2) argues that Ranulph was claiming the earldom of Lancaster at the end of the civil war of 1215-17. This assertion rests on a reference to Ranulph as *comes Cestr' et Lanc'* in an entry on the Memoranda Roll for 1218 (above, n. 77). But this arises from a misreading by the person who prepared the typed transcript of this roll which is in the Round Room at the Public Record Office. I understand from Professor Holt that in the original roll it is impossible to tell for certain whether the clerk wrote *Lanc'* (for Lancaster) or *Linc'* (for Lincoln, which we should expect). The problem is, however, solved, as the letter concerned is also enrolled on the Fine Roll for 1218-19, and there the word *Linc'* is quite clear. This anecdote illustrates the unwisdom of basing an argument on an isolated piece of evidence: cf. J. C. Holt, *King John*, Historical Association, 1963, pp. 6-7.