



Wallingford Castle.

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WALLINGFORD Castle holds a prominent place in the annals of our national history, but it is impossible within a limited space to do more than refer to a few of the more notable events. Leaving, therefore, the earlier history which carries us back to a remote period we will commence with the Norman Conquest.

Within a few days after the battle of Hastings, Duke William having met with a repulse at Southwark, hastily marched with his army to Wallingford into the territory of his friendly adherent the great and powerful Wigod who was then the possessor of the fortress. Wigod was the Cup-bearer of the Confessor at the time Duke William visited his kinsman 14 years before, and doubtless the friendship which then commenced brought the Conqueror to Wallingford and induced the great Thane to throw all his influence on the side of the Norman; he delivered up the town to the Duke and sumptuously entertained him, and among those who swore fealty to him was Stigand Archbishop of Canterbury. The festivities lasted several days and were closed by William giving in marriage Wigod's daughter to his favourite chieftain, Robert D'Oyley, who had come over with him from Normandy, an affair, it was said, of state policy between Norman and Saxon. Soon after the coronation D'Oyley was ordered to fortify the town with a new Castle, the site selected was the stronghold of Wigod, eight houses were destroyed in the progress of the work, which was completed before 1071 and D'Oyley became the Constable. He shared largely in the spoils of the Conquest, and in Domesday book the enumeration of his holdings occupies many pages. The survey of Berkshire commences with an account of Wallingford as being the most important possession of the Crown within the county and it may be added that, when the survey was completed, the recorded number of houses in Wallingford was 491, in Windsor 100 and in Reading 28 only.

Another large territorial proprietor was Miles Crispin, a powerful Baron, who married Maud the daughter and heiress of Robert D'Oyley. He held in her right the Castle and Honour which, on his death in 1107, reverted to Maud his widow. Six years elapsed and Maud was given in marriage by Henry I. to Brian Fitzcount, who became the possessor in her right. Fitzcount was a great warrior and when the Empress Maud, daughter of Henry I., came to England to prosecute the right of succession of her son to the throne, he strongly fortified the Castle and broke into determined rebellion against King Stephen, who at once marched with his army to Crowmarsh, a village on the opposite side of the river and in a meadow there, then and now called Barbican, he erected several forts which were strengthened from time to time. Then commenced the most stirring epoch in the contest for the Crown which for so many years involved the whole nation and particularly Wallingford in a dreadful civil war. Attack after attack was made on the Castle, but every renewal failed owing to the strength of the fortress and the indomitable courage of Brian. Prince Henry had returned to Wallingford from Normandy. King Stephen had greatly increased his army, and a desperate battle was impending when the Earl of Arundel assembled the Nobles and in forcible language urged that the war should be brought to an end by an amicable agreement. The two rival chiefs, Henry and Stephen's son Eustace, were the strong opponents but they were forced to yield. Peace was proclaimed under the Castle walls and the Treaty of Wallingford virtually settled. The Treaty abolished the evils of the anarchy which had lasted 16 years. Stephen was to hold the kingdom for life and Henry be his successor. The 1113 "Adulterine Castles" which had been built by the King's permission were to be abolished; usurped Crown lands resumed; foreign mercenaries banished; general security maintained; thieves and robbers hanged; commerce encouraged; and a uniform coinage struck. Henry, on his coming to the throne, held great Councils at Wallingford and observing not only the terms but acting up to the spirit of the Treaty he effected great constitutional reforms, and, as we are told in Stubb's Constitutional History, "the period for 60 years after the death of King Stephen was one of constant growth, the chain of events that connects the peace of Wallingford and the Charter of Runnymede is traceable link by link." At one of these great representative assemblies, the King granted and the Council confirmed the Charter of Liberties for the first Mayor of Wallingford in the year 1155, and the next year the

King granted to the inhabitants a Charter of exceptional privileges and immunities for (to use his own language) "helping him to the kingdom." With these privileges the possession of the Mercate of Wallingford was considered to be equivalent to a livelihood.

But before we leave this part of the subject, a little incident must not be omitted. In 1141 the memorable siege of Oxford took place. The Empress had repaired to the Castle there when Stephen suddenly appeared and furiously attacked the fortress, determined to capture the Empress. For three months the siege continued with great vigour; guards were placed around the walls and a strict watch in all the avenues was kept by night and by day, but notwithstanding all the precautions, good fortune, as on previous occasions, favoured the Empress and she effected a marvellous escape. Accompanied by three trusted knights clothed in white garments she issued forth in the dead of night and for several miles they made their toilsome way over ice and snow till Wallingford was reached and she secured herself in her Castle there.

Henry III. granted to his brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall, afterwards King of the Romans, the Castle with the honour. It became the Earl's favourite residence and he kept it up in great magnificence by a vast expenditure, and his hospitality was unbounded. During his absence in Germany the Barons, headed by Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, broke out in open rebellion against the King and succeeded in taking possession of the Castle which was made the residence of his Countess. After a short period the Castle again changed hands. The fatal battle of Lewes followed, when the Royalists were completely defeated; the King, Prince Edward his son, Richard, King of the Romans and others were taken prisoners. The Castle, with the town, surrendered to Leicester, who himself conducted the royal captives thither for safe custody. Prince Edward effected his escape, and in 1263 the battle of Evesham was fought and won by the valiant Prince, with the death of Leicester and Henry Montfort his son. The victory secured the release of the royal prisoners and the property of the King of the Romans which had been sequestered was restored to him.

One of the first acts of Edward II. on ascending the throne was to recall Piers Gaveston from his banishment, grant to him the Castle and other large possessions, make him Baron of Wallingford and Earl of Cornwall and load him with honours. A second banishment, decreed under pressure of the nobles, the King met by

sending his favourite to Ireland and making him Viceroy. He was however soon recalled and on his return he proclaimed a great tournament to be kept near his Castle of Wallingford to celebrate the grant to him of that fortress. It was a grand gathering but the seeds were sown of a fearful day of reckoning. In scornful raillery he applied provoking and insulting sobriquets to many of his leading guests, which stirred up such a storm of discontent that the King was obliged to send Gaveston again out of the country. Again he was recalled and the King made him Principal Minister and ordered the Castle to be provisioned and repaired for his reception. The promotion set free the pent-up vengeance of the Barons. They took up arms against Gaveston and arrested him in the fortress of Scarborough whither he had sought refuge. He was committed to the custody of the Earl of Pembroke who yielded to the King's request for an interview with his minister at Wallingford but while on the way thither Guy, Earl of Warwick, the "Wild Boar" at the Tournament, seized the prisoner at night with a large force, carried him away to Blacklow Hill, near Guy's Cliff, and there he was beheaded.

The King then granted the Castle and honour to another of his favourites, Hugh Despenser the younger, and afterwards to Isabella his Queen, but she allied herself to Roger Mortimer, and sacrificed all sentiments of honour and fidelity to her husband. With a foreign army she invaded the country, making the Castle her headquarters, where she entertained in great state most of the magnates of the land, and at a Parliament summoned by her in the King's name Edward II. was declared incompetent to govern, the Prince of Wales was declared King and Mortimer was made Prime Minister, when his power became as formidable as his actions and intrigues were criminal. The Queen and Mortimer usurped the regal power for four years until the hardened rebel was arrested and condemned. He was the first person whose body hung on the gibbet at Tyburn, then called "The Elmes." The Queen released her interest in the Castle and was doomed to captivity for life.

The Castle and honour which had been held with the Earldom of Cornwall (afterwards elevated into a Dukedom) for nearly four centuries was formally annexed in 1335 by Act of Parliament and settled with other hereditaments on the eldest sons of the King's of England to support the dignity. Under this Act the Black Prince acquired the Castle and held it with the honour for upwards of 40

years. It was the favourite residence of his wife Joan, the fair maid of Kent, who died of grief at the Castle in 1385.

On the death of Henry V., the Queen Dowager Katherine of Valois, on whom the Castle and honour had been settled by the King, became attached to Owen Tudor who was squire of the body of the young King. Her connection with the Castle terminated in 1428, when the royal son was taken out of her care and the Castle made one of his summer residences. The following year Owen Tudor was a prisoner in the Castle dungeons.

The Suffolk family were Constables of the Castle for a long period. The head of it, the Duke of Suffolk, was accused of furnishing the Castle with warlike munitions to aid the French, to whom it was alleged he had sold the Kingdom. He was committed to the Tower but released by the King which so incensed the people that he fell a victim to popular clamour and was barbarously murdered. Six days after, the King granted the custody of the Castle to the Dowager Duchess.

When the civil war broke out between King Charles and his Parliament the Castle was repaired and fortified for the King's forces. The defence was committed to Col. Blagge and under this intrepid commander every attempt to take it by force failed. Ultimately sheer necessity for want of supplies led to articles of capitulation, under which the garrison marched out, more as victors than vanquished, with their horses and arms, colours flying, trumpets sounding and drums beating. Thus the Castle yielded in July, 1646, after making war for 65 days, with the loss of five slain and being the last Castle to surrender except Raglan and Pendennis. After the Castle had surrendered it became a state prison till November, 1652, when an order was issued for its total demolition and a fortress which had withstood successfully siege after siege for nearly seven centuries was almost entirely razed to the ground within seven months.

