

THE VISITS OF EDWARD THE FIRST TO BURY ST. EDMUND'S AND THETFORD.

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WHEN the long reign of Henry the Third had come to a close, he was succeeded on the throne by one of the most vigorous monarchs who have guided the affairs or extended the conquests of the British empire. Whether we consider the character of Edward the First as a warrior or a lawgiver, there is none in the extensive range of English history more deserving the regard and admiration of posterity. His matchless deeds of enterprise and valour in the Holy Land, actions which the enthusiasm and chivalry of the age consecrated to the service of religion, have placed him in the foremost ranks of christian patriots. His wise enactments for improving the laws and the constitution of the kingdom, whose destinies he swayed; the singular prudence of his councils, his high sense of domestic virtue, in an age when the doctrines of morality were lax and feeble; his affectionate treatment of the beautiful Eleanor of Castile, who shared in the perils of his conquests and requited him by her constancy and love, are all claims upon the grateful recollections of posterity. Any fact serving to illustrate the history of the age when so eminent a monarch flourished, will possess more than a passing interest and value. The period itself is one that presents us with the richest and most varied subjects for examination. It was a period when the arts of architecture and sculpture rose to an unparalleled height of perfection, and reached a degree of purity and grandeur which is fruitlessly sought for in succeeding ages. The military structures of North Wales, portions of the magnificent cathedrals of Wells, Lincoln, Norwich, Exeter, and York, and the two sepulchral monuments raised at Geddington and Northampton, as a hallowed tribute to the memory of his devoted consort, indicate the high degree of perfection architecture and sculpture had attained. So proud a height, that subsequent experience, trans-

mitted by the current of centuries, has taught us the humiliating lesson of imitating those productions of genius, rather than seeking out a more original style of realising our conceptions of material beauty. We are forbidden, indeed, to doubt the refinement of a reign so much advanced beyond all preceding ones in the execution of what is impressive, and in the just appreciation of what is truly sublime.

The monarch's wisdom and sagacity could not be turned to the affairs of his kingdom without producing an influence upon the public mind; and whether he personally took an active part or not, in encouraging the creative works of his day, he certainly gave the intellectual impulse to all the nobler feelings of his subjects.

When Henry the Third died, Edward was engaged in the Holy Land, having been excited to arm himself in defence of the oppressed Christians by the powerful exhortations of a Papal legate, who preached in their favour at a Parliament assembled in the Castle of Northampton, when the Prince was twenty-nine years old. He succeeded to his throne on the 20th of November, 1272, being at this time occupied in Palestine. We know but little of his proceedings during the period intervening between his father's death and his return to England, on Thursday after the feast of St. Peter ad Vincula, in the second year of his reign, when he landed at Dover; and on the Sunday next, after the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, he was solemnly crowned in the church of St. Peter, at Westminster.

From this time, to the day of his death, with the exception of an interruption hereafter to be noticed, we are able to trace the monarch during nearly every day of his reign. By means of an itinerary, I have drawn up for my own use, we shall therefore ascertain how much of his time was passed in the eastern counties of England, and more particularly the precise days upon which he visited Bury and Thetford.

Before, however, entering into the result of these enquiries, it may be desirable to state the general nature of the authorities, and the sources from whence such information is derived.

A reference to a variety of original documents, some printed, but by far the greater portion still remaining in manuscript, has supplied me with the requisite information for constructing these historical tables. A work, to which I was first invited by the example of Mr. Hardy, who has already laid before the world his valuable contribution to history, in an itinerary of King John, preceded by observations, bearing the stamp of his well-known accuracy and research, and characteristic of that fidelity and zeal which distinguishes the conservators of records in the Tower.

The authorities that have been consulted are the attestations to the royal Writs of the reign, the Teste of the King himself, to the various official documents requiring his approval. Such, for instance, as would be necessary to authorise payments, and therefore found on the Liberate and Clause Rolls, writs to perform military or parliamentary service, and therefore found on the Rolls of Parliament; the Scotch, the Welsh, or the Patent Rolls; the royal sanction to legislative enactments, and therefore inscribed at the end of statutes of the realm; and thus, also, the Gascon, Redesseissin, and Fine Rolls have occasionally served to fill up a gap in the daily insight obtained into the life of this able and virtuous ruler.

The first year (1274-75) of his residence in England was spent, for the most part in London, at Windsor, or at Westminster.

In the third year of his reign (1274-75) he visited the forests of Northamptonshire, Hampshire, and Oxfordshire. He was at King's Cliffe, in Rockingham Forest; at Geddington; Woodstock; Clarendon; and Beaulieu. On the 15th of April, 1275, he left his palace, at Westminster, and reached Royston by the following day. On the 17th, he was at Balsham, in the same county; and on the 18th at Bury, then called St. Edmund's. A reference to the Clause Roll of this year will describe the nature of the transactions then brought before his notice. He left Suffolk by way of Lavenham, and returned to Westminster on the 24th of the same month.

In the fifth year of his reign (1277) we find him again at Royston, where he spent the 6th, 7th, and 8th of March; on the 9th he was at Foulmire, on the 11th and 12th at Bardwell, on the 13th at Landbeach and Waterbeach, and on the 16th at Ely. At the close of the month he passed five days at Norwich, and went on from this city to Yarmouth, Dunwich, Framlingham, Orford, and Ipswich, which he reached on the 12th of April.

Edward's attention now became engaged by the outbreak on the North Welsh borders; and we accordingly find him passing much of his time, during the fifth year of his reign, at Chester, Rhuddlan, and Shrewsbury.

On the 23rd of November, 1278, he visited Newmarket, on his way to Norwich, where he subsequently spent five days (Nov. 27, 28, 29, 30, Dec. 1), and went on to Burgh, where he passed three (Dec. 3, 4, 5). In the 9th year of his reign he spent ten days at Burgh (Dec. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, Jan. 1, 2), and went on to Walsingham (Jan. 6, 7, 8), and Binham (Jan. 9). At Shouldham he staid five days (Jan. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18), and then proceeded to Westacre (Jan. 21, 22), Docking (Jan. 25, 31), and Castle Rising. He was at Culford and St. Edmund's on the 7th and 8th of February. So that very nearly six weeks were given to the county of Norfolk during his absence from Westminster.

The 10th and 11th years were chiefly passed in Wales. Seven of the months he resided at Rhuddlan, and two at Caernarvon and Conway. After the conquest of the Welsh, the time of Edward was chiefly divided betwixt the North Welsh borders and the two last mentioned towns.

On the 23rd of February (1285) in the 13th year of his reign, we first find him at Thetford; on the 24th he was again at St. Edmund's, from whence he proceeded a second time to the Priory of Binham, where he remained eight or nine days, and then went, on the 13th of March, to Gimmingham. The latter half of the month (altogether about three weeks) was spent at Burgh, since we trace him there from March 16th to the 3rd of April; on the 8th he is at West Dereham, and on the 10th, 11th, and 12th, at Ely. It is unnecessary to follow him any further at present, as he was continually moving about in various parts of England till the 14th year

of his reign, when, on the 14th of May (1286), he sailed from Dover for the continent, where he was occupied in the affairs of Guienne and continental war for three years, two months, and fifteen days. We know but little of his movements during the whole of this period, but, from the day he landed again at Dover (August 12th, 1289,) we are able to follow him in his itinerary, with very few interruptions, till the time of his death.

In little more than a month after his return he came to St. Edmund's, where he spent the 18th and 19th of September (1289). He left it for Castle Acre, Thornham, Walsingham, Burgh, and West Dereham.

In the month of November, 1290, the nineteenth year of his reign, he had to lament the death of his affectionate Queen, who died at Hardby, in Lincolnshire. After her funeral obsequies had been performed at Westminster, he withdrew himself from public life, and spent a clear month in quiet and mournful seclusion at Ashbridge, in Hertfordshire.

In the 20th year of his reign (1292) we find him again at Royston, Foulmire, and Newmarket, from whence he reached St. Edmund's on the 27th of April, betwixt which and Culford he sojourned a fortnight, leaving them for Walsingham, Wisbech, and Spalding, on his way to Berwick-upon-Tweed.

In February, 1294, the 22nd of his reign, we find Edward, on the 21st of the month, at Stowmarket, on the 22nd at Castleacre, on the 23rd and 24th at Cokesford, perhaps Cockfield, and till the 16th of March, a period of three weeks, dividing his time betwixt Walsingham and Binham; on the 17th of March Thetford had again the honour of receiving the King; the next two days were spent at St. Edmund's. From the 20th to the 24th of March I have been as yet unable to discover where he was, but on the 25th and 29th we trace him to Ipswich.

The insurrection of Madoc, in the 23rd year of his reign, carried him once more to North Wales, where he remained for nearly seven months. But after the peace of the two Kingdoms had been established, in the month of January, 1296, he visited St. Edmund's for nearly a week, spent the 22nd and 23rd at Thetford, and then went on as before

to Castle Acre, Walsingham, Messingham, and Stow Bardolf. He subsequently took Peterborough and Grantham on his way to the North, where he continued half a year.

The whole of November and December, 1296, and nearly all the months of January and February, 1297, Edward was living in Norfolk and Suffolk, chiefly at St. Edmund's, Ipswich, Walsingham, and Castle Acre. At the first of these places he passed three weeks. It does not appear that on this occasion he visited Thetford.

On the 10th of May, 1298, he was again at St. Edmund's, and on the 11th and 12th at Thetford.

On the 26th of January, 1299, he passed another day at St. Edmund's, and two at Hildeburgworth (Hilborough).

On the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th of May, 1300, he was at St. Edmund's, on the 12th at Thetford, and the 13th at Hilborough.

On the 2nd of April, 1302, he came to Thetford again, and on the two following days staid at St. Edmund's.

On the 9th of February, 1305, he was also at Thetford, and on the 10th at St. Edmund's.

These were the last occasions he visited this part of England, for although he made several journeys, his thoughts were chiefly occupied by the Scottish Wars, and in endeavouring to bring them to a successful termination he died at Burgh-upon-the-sands, near Carlisle, the 7th of July, 1307.

We thus find that Edward the First visited Thetford on seven different occasions, and spent there nine days of his reign, whilst he was at St. Edmund's no less than thirteen times, and passed there upwards of two months of his life after he had ascended the throne. No doubt on all these occasions he was entertained in the Religious houses where they existed, as we know they did at Thetford, Bury, Binham, Walsingham, and Castle Acre; whilst the Castles of Orford and Rising, and probably buildings erected within the present Roman structure of Burgh, received the Monarch when he could not avail himself of Monastic hospitality. The wardrobe accounts of Queen Eleanor for the 19th year of the reign contains many interesting particulars respecting the expences of her sojourn with the

King at this latter place. But it is enough now merely to indicate the existence of such facts, since anything illustrative of the history of that remarkable Roman Remain will not escape the attention of its accomplished possessor, who has shewn by his well directed zeal for the encouragement of English antiquities that he appreciates the value of this kind of enquiry, whilst his patriotic endeavours to save the ruins of Garianonum from spoliation, as they have already secured for him the affectionate respect of East Anglia, so will they confer upon posterity a perpetual debt of gratitude.

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