

The battle of Brampton, an addendum: more evidence of violence in the village

The fines of the month for December 2008 and March 2009

<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/month/fm-12-2008.html>

<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/month/fm-03-2009.html>

took as their subject the struggle of the peasants of Brampton in Huntingdonshire against their lords. Material on the fine rolls shed much light on the story. It was thus through a fine of £40, made by the men in March 1242, that they secured a letter patent fixing their customs and services at the level prevailing when the manor had been in the hands of the king. The aim was to restrict the exactions of the new lord, Henry de Hastings, not altogether successfully for a few months later the struggle erupted into violence. When Hastings' bailiffs came to tallage the manor, the men of the village chased them all the way back to Huntingdon, with axes and staves, and rescued the cattle which had been taken. The jury which recorded this added 'they do not know their names [the names of the perpetrators] because the greater part of the village of Brampton was there'.

This 'battle of Brampton', as it has been called, was the prelude to a long struggle which can be traced into the 1260s. The purpose of this 'fine of the month' is to add another piece to jigsaw, one which reveals further violence in the village. I first referred to the episode many years ago when writing about the weakness of the sheriffs of the 1250s. There I drew attention to the declaration of Richard de Lymminges that 'he would do no more for the sheriff than he would for his daughter', his point being that the coercive power of the sheriff and his daughter were on much the same level. Since Lymminges' lord, on whose behalf he was acting, was one of the king's Poitevin half brothers, the episode seemed to show how the king's foreign relatives and their agents acted as though they were above the law.¹

It was only looking at this episode again, in the course, of writing more generally about the period, that I realised it concerned Brampton and indeed provided more evidence for the violent conduct of the villagers.

The story is found on the roll of pleas heard before the council in the Hilary term of 1254. This was the council left in England under the queen and the earl of Cornwall during the king's absence in Gascony. In translation, the entry runs as follows:

'Cambridgeshire²: John le Moyne, sheriff of Cambridgeshire, complains of Richard de Lymminges that when the king sent him [John] a writ concerning returning the cattle of the abbot of Ramsey and other free men, he did not permit the sheriff to deliver the same cattle, but said that he would do no more for the sheriff than he would for his daughter. And when John leant this, he sent there bailiffs with a force from the district and they found there all of

¹ D. A. Carpenter, 'King, magnates and society: the personal rule of King Henry III, 1234-1258', *Speculum*, 60 (1985), 67, a paper reprinted in D. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III* (London, 1996), chapter 5 at p.103. I was wrong there to say the half brother was Guy de Lusignan. It was Geoffrey.

² This is in the margin.

the vill of Brampton making them *forstallum* [that is waylaying them to prevent the recovery of the cattle]. And then the sheriff sent a greater force, around eighty men, and then they found there around 500 men offering resistance by force of arms and preventing the order of the king being executed, this against the peace and in contempt of the king. And Richard comes and denies everything. And he acknowledges that he took the same cattle as they were found damaging [the property of] his lord, but he did not resist the sheriff when he [the sheriff] delivered the cattle according to his wish. And he places himself on a jury from the neighbourhood.’

The sheriff was then ordered to cause twelve men to come without delay before Henry de Coleville (a local knight and ex sheriff) to establish to the truth of the matter. This inquiry was to be returned to the court on 16 February. Coleville was also ordered to inquire by oath of the men as to ‘who, one with Richard, made the foresaid *forstallum*’. Those he found culpable he was likewise to bring before the court on 16 February. No record of the inquiry is given, however, and the case simply concludes at this point with the statement that ‘Afterwards Richard came and made fine for himself and the others by license of the lady queen for five marks. So then without day.’

The image of the relevant membrane is http://aalt.law.uh.edu/H3/KB26_152/0008d.htm, with the case being one from the bottom. The reference is The National Archives/Public Record Office KB 26/ 152, m.8d.³

Against the record of the case, the marginal annotation indicating its county is, as we have seen, Cambridgeshire. Likewise, John le Moyne, is described simply as sheriff of Cambridgeshire. In fact, however, he was sheriff of Huntingdonshire as well (the sheriffdoms were always held jointly), and it was in Huntingdonshire that Brampton was situated and the incident thus took place. Richard’s ‘Lymminges’ is evidently the Victoria County History’s ‘Liminge’, now represented by Lymage farm in Great Staughton, a village some six miles from Brampton.⁴ In this period, the manors of Liminge and Brampton were held by the same lord, and hence no doubt the way Richard de Lymminges was acting in Brampton as his bailiff. The lord at the time of the battle of Brampton was Henry de Hastings. After his death in 1250, his lands were conceded, during the minority of his heir, to the king’s half brother, Geoffrey de Lusignan. Geoffrey, therefore, was the ‘lord’ on whose behalf Richard de Lymminges had taken his action, and indeed Richard appears as Geoffrey’s ‘bailiff’ for Brampton and ‘keeper of the manor’ as early as 1251.⁵ The abbot of Ramsey was lord of

³ I am grateful to Paul Brand, Lesley Boatwright and Christopher Whittick for helping with the palaeography of the entry. In the ‘omnes de villa’ the clerk seems to have written initially a ‘b’ rather than an ‘o’ and perhaps he intended to write ‘bailiffs’ before altering it to ‘omnes’ ‘all’.

⁴ See <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42514&strquery=Liminge>

⁵ *CR 1247-51*, pp.469-70.

Hemingford Abbots, next door to Brampton, so it is not surprising if his cattle had strayed or been deliberately pastured in the village.⁶

The relations between the villagers of Brampton and Geoffrey de Lusignan had been strained, as our fine of the month showed.⁷ In 1251, the then sheriff of Huntingdon, who was indeed, Henry de Coleville, was ordered by the king to see returned to Richard de Lymminges, as Geoffrey's bailiff, the houses of Henry de Hastings, which John Kechel, leader of the villagers in their resistance, had taken away on Hastings' death. One can only suppose this amounted to the removal of the manor house complex. The sheriff was also to give Richard the lands of a peasant who had fled from Brampton.⁸ At first sight, therefore, it seems strange to see the villagers rallying behind Richard to protect Geoffrey's interests. There may, however, have been more to it than that. If the cattle of the abbot of Ramsey were damaging the land of the lord, they were presumably also doing the same to that of the villagers. The villagers, therefore, may well have felt very strongly about the issue on their own account. In 1242, 'the greater part of the village' had taken violent action to recover the cattle taken by the bailiffs of Henry de Hastings. A similar body, 'all of Brampton' (in which we may include women), had likewise taken action in our episode, this time to prevent the recovery of offending cattle belonging to a neighbouring lord. Having failed in his first effort to effect the recovery, the sheriff sent a greater force, one eighty men strong, and was now prompted in his testimony, to put a figure on the number of the resisters. They amounted to around 500 men. The episode shows very clearly, like the earlier battle, how ready peasants could be to take violent action in defence of their interests. It also shows the large military forces which might be mobilized from English villages. This was something which Simon de Montfort appreciated in 1264 when he raised an army from the villages to resist the threatened invasion of the queen.⁹

The fine rolls for once disappoint in have nothing about this episode or indeed about Richard de Lymminges. His fine, made presumably with the court, would have been recorded not on the fine rolls but on the estreat roll sent by the court to the exchequer.¹⁰ The rolls do, however, provide a sequel about John le Moyne, and also an intriguing glimpse of Henry III's forgetfulness. In May 1255 the following entry appears on the fine rolls (no.409 in the Calendar).

Concerning a fine of John le Moyne. Because John le Moyne sometime sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire made fine with the king in the presence of the barons of the Exchequer, as the same John asserts, by 60 m. for the profit of the same counties from the time when he received that bailiwick until Easter last past, and has

⁶ See the entry in the Victoria County History: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42504>

⁷ <http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/month/fm-03-2009.html>, paragraph 17.

⁸ *CR 1247-51*, 470-1.

⁹ Carpenter, *Reign of Henry III*, pp.318-9. This is from chapter 17 which reprints my 'English Peasants in politics 1258-1267', from *Past & Present*, 136 (1992), 3-42.

¹⁰ I have not found the fine on the pipe rolls but it may be there. Sometimes there was a considerable delay in entering debts sent via the estreats of the central courts.

similarly made fine with the king by 10 m. for licence to retire from the aforesaid bailiwick in the aforesaid term, and the king does not remember the aforesaid fine, order to the barons of the Exchequer, if the fine, as aforesaid, is fully proved to them, to then cause the same fine to be enrolled and the aforesaid John to be quit of the aforesaid profit for the aforesaid fine.

For the image of the entry see, five items from the bottom:

http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/fimages/C60_52/m09.html

John's treatment at the hands of the Bramptonians was not the only reason for his resignation. He had never wanted the job and been in conflict with the exchequer over the amount of profit he could reasonably pay. But we may well think the Brampton episode, coming as it did only a few months before his departure, contributed to his decision. Richard de Lymminges, a mere local bailiff, had been highly insulting: 'he would do no more for him than he would for his daughter'. Was that the way to talk to the sheriff of the king and a distinguished knight? What made it worse, was that Richard had largely got away with it. His fine of five marks hardly seems commensurate to the offence. One wonders if it owed something to the protection of Geoffrey de Lusignan. Richard's working for Geoffrey makes another point, namely how ready Englishmen were to enter the service of the king's foreign relatives.¹¹

Richard's fine was made 'by licence of the lady queen'. As Margaret Howell has stressed, during Henry III's absence it Gascony, Queen Eleanor and Richard of Cornwall were not joint regents. Eleanor was regent, acting with Richard's counsel. In fact, as the fine rolls show (a subject for a future 'fine of the month'), before her own departure for Gascony in May 1255, she played a far more active part in day to day government than did Earl Richard. The fact that she alone licensed Richard's fine fits very much into that pattern.¹²

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¹¹ See H. W. Ridgeway, 'William de Valence and his *familiares*', *Historical Research*, 65 (1992); A.H. Hershey, 'The rise and fall of William de Bussey: a mid-thirteenth-century steward', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 44 (2000), and S. Stewart, 'What happened at Shere?', *Southern History*, 22 (2000), with another example of local men involved in violence.

¹² M. Howell, *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998), pp.112-7.