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**Notes on Some of the Constables of Bristol Castle and Town**

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NOTES ON SOME  
CONSTABLES OF BRISTOL CASTLE AND TOWN.

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THE following document will, we conceive, be read with interest in connection with the recent Meeting of the Society at Bristol. But little appears to be known of the mediæval history of Bristol Castle or of the succession of its Constables. Barrett takes some notice of them, but it is very imperfect and inaccurate. He mistakes Hugh le Despenser, the younger, named in the document, for his father; whilst Seyer follows Barrett, generally, and though he corrects the error here mentioned, he makes a mistake in spelling the name of his successors as Clendon, and is very vague in other respects.

In the first year of his reign the King had conferred upon Bartholomew, Lord Baddlesmere, who had distinguished himself in the wars in Scotland under the King's father, and had been summoned to Parliament as a Baron, the custody of the Manor and Castle of Bristol with appurtenances;<sup>1</sup> and two years later this grant was confirmed<sup>2</sup> upon the same conditions as are expressed in the annexed charter. Lord Baddlesmere held the office until he became associated with the combination of the Barons in 1320 against the Despensers, when, of course, he was removed from the Constablership of the important Castle of Bristol. Hugh le Despenser, known as "the younger" (son of Hugh le Despenser, afterwards created Earl of Winchester), with whom the King had recently become as much infatuated as he had been with Gaveston, and to whom he had given his niece, Alianor, the eldest daughter and senior coheir of Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, in marriage, had loaded him with honours and lands and thereby incurred the hatred and indignation of the ancient nobility which

<sup>1</sup> Rot. Origin. 1st Edward II., m. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 3rd Edward II., m. 5.

Despenser had aggravated by his insolent and imprudent behaviour, so that they had determined upon his destruction. Upon the removal of Lord Baddlesmere the King, by writ of Privy Seal, tested at Shene on 1st Oct. 1320, bestowed the office of Constable of the Castle of Bristol and Keeper of the Town and Barton upon the aforesaid Hugh the younger during pleasure, upon the same conditions as it had been previously held. The tenure of the office by Despenser, was, however, very short. In the following spring the Barons rose in arms and demanded the perpetual banishment of both the Despensers, father and son, to which menacing demand, when backed up by an army of 11,000 men with arms in their hands, and commanded by his known enemies, the King was constrained to yield, and the Despensers were banished from the realm. The Barons were for the time satisfied, and returned to their respective homes. The office was now granted to Matthew de Clevedon and John his brother, in joint tenancy, upon the same terms as it had been held by the two preceding constables, as shewn by the charter printed below :—

Rot. Originalia 14 Edw. II. mem. 10. P.R.O.

Rex omnibus &c. Know ye that we have committed to our beloved and faithful Matthew de Clyvedon & to his brother John our castle, town and barton (berconam) of Bristol with its appurtenances to be kept so long as it shall please us. Paying yearly for it to us at our exchequer £210, viz., the one moiety on the Feast of Michaelmas & the other at Easter, and nevertheless the said Matthew & John shall keep the castle and barton at their own costs (suis sumptibus) & shall pay yearly to the Abbot & Monks of Tewkesbury for the rent of the mill at Bristol 60 shillings, & to them for a certain chantry which they maintain under the Castle for the souls of our antecessors £14 10<sup>s</sup> 0<sup>d</sup>, & to the forester of our forest of Kyngeswode daily for wages 3<sup>d</sup> & to the watchmen each night for pay one ½<sup>d</sup> viz to each 1<sup>s</sup> 4<sup>d</sup> and to the keeper of our sea wares (custodi maritime nostre) of Bristol for his livery (roba sua) yearly 26<sup>s</sup> 8<sup>s</sup> so long as he shall have the said custody. And it is commanded to Hugh le Despenser, the younger, constable of the castle and keeper of the town & barton, or to his deputy there, that to the said Matthew & John he shall transfer the castle, town & barton which are in his keeping together with the armour (armaturis) viduals & all & singular the goods in said castle by indenture in ordinary form. And it is commanded to the mayor, bailiffs & commonalty of Bristol that they shall behave towards the said Matthew & John as constables of the castle & keepers of the town & barton in all things which pertain to the same custody. Given at Westminster 10th May [1321].

Matthew and John de Clevedon held the Office until the 3rd May in the following year, when it was re-granted to Hugh Despenser, jun., on the before-mentioned terms during the King's pleasure ;<sup>1</sup> and three years later (viz., 1st June, 1325), under the same conditions it was granted to him for life,<sup>2</sup> under the description of Hugh le Despenser, son of Hugh le Despenser, Earl of Winton, and he held it until his revolting execution at Hereford on the 26th Nov. 1326, though it was not conducted with the cruelty intended by the sentence, for his body was not mangled until after he was dead, after which the castle was granted to Gilbert de Cleukerny, Robert Flemming and others.<sup>3</sup>

For further information see Miss Holt's charming tales, "In all time of our Tribulation," and "The Lord of the Marches," and Appendices thereto.

<sup>1</sup> Rot. Origin, 15th Edw. II., m. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 18th Edw. II., m. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 20th Edw. II. m. 15.

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