

## EXTRACT FROM CHADWICK, WILLIAM (1865) KING JOHN OF ENGLAND

### CHAPTER X. "IN THE SHADOWS:" DEATH.

WHILE John was taking vengeance on the barons of Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, and Norfolk, as the Earl of Arundel, Roger Bigod, William of Huntingfield, Roger of Cressy, and others ; the barons, making no way at the siege of Windsor Castle, thinking to intercept the King in Cambridgeshire, on his way to Lincoln Castle, suddenly raised the siege and marched for Cambridge. But the King had taken refuge in Stamford for a time, whence he proceeded to Lincoln Castle, now besieged by Gilbert de Gant, Louis's newly-created Earl of Lincoln, and was pursued towards Lynn. From Lynn he marched, probably precipitately, across the river Wellstream, where he took his carts, wagons, and baggage-horses, together with his money and all his valuables. The King and his army had a narrow escape from drowning ; but they did escape with their lives, and repaired to Swineshead Abbey for the night, some miles distant. This numerous party, by delay, had missed their calculation of rise of tide at the ford, and, like others similarly placed, ran every chance of drowning. No doubt but the King got a thorough ducking ; and as he had to travel in his wet clothes to Swineshead Abbey, ten miles off, he got a severe cold, which ended in fever.

The King was very ill ; but yet, as no time was to be lost, with the barons in pursuit, he left Swineshead Abbey at early dawn for the castle of Sleaford, distant about fourteen miles. Here he became worse ; but yet on the following morning he rode on horseback to Newark Castle, a distance of twenty miles, where he became worse still. This violent exercise, in his weak state of body, increased the fever ; so that at Newark he died, surrounded by some of his best friends, one of whom, Randolph Blandeville, Earl of Chester, wrote an account of his death, the particulars of which have come down to our time, and the substance of which we are truly happy to give here, as so many fabulous and malignant statements have gone to the world from the monkish writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The following account of John's illness and death is from the pen of the Rev. Samuel Pegge, in a very admirable Paper prepared by him :

" King John was at Linn, in Norfolk, on the 11th of October 1216-17, intending to cross the washes, or flooded marshes, which part the two counties of Norfolk and Lincoln. [1] In making the attempt to cross with his whole army probably from unexpected delay or loss of time in passing so large a force in a certain prescribed time he lost his opportunity he was overtaken by the tide flowing up the river Wellstream, which overflows these marshes at spring-tides, when all his baggage was lost, and he, with his army, had a very narrow escape of being drowned. He contrived to cross with his life, and arrived late at night, wet and worn out in body and prostrated with disappointment in mind ; and was here, where he remained one or two days, laid low by fever and dysentery. On leaving Swineshead Abbey [2] whether on the first or the second day for Sleaford, [3] on horseback, he found that he was unable to bear the fatigues of the saddle, and so had to be transferred to a litter, on which he was carried to Sleaford, [4] and the next day to Newark Castle, where he died, as all our best authors agree, [5] a few days after ; his bowels being buried at Croxton, [6] in the county of Leicester, and his body at Worcester." [7]

If there had been any truth in the story so industriously circulated centuries after the death of this King, that he was poisoned by a monk at Swineshead Abbey, surely this would have been the time for the detection of the crime. He died in his own castle, surrounded by his steadfast friends. His bowels were separated from his body, and each had a separate interment, one in the county of Leicester, and the other in the county of Worcester; and the process of embalming that body, accompanied with all the circumstance of such an office, superintended, too, by such friends as Peter de Rupibus, Bishop of Winchester, William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, Walter Gray, Archbishop of York, Randolph Blandeville, Earl of Chester, and others devoted to England's King and England's

interests ; and yet amidst all this melancholy scene not one word of suspicion breathed against the hospitality of Swineshead Abbey ; and this silence on the suspicion of poisoning remained unbroken for sixty or eighty years after this memorable death took place at Newark !

Be it remembered that at this time London, with all the south of England, was in the hands of the French king's adherents, to wit, Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, and his traitorous bishops, with the subservient baronage of England, marshalled under the flag of France, and kept together by French promises and expectations, if not by French pay.

This state of things in the south compelled the firm adherents of the King to rally round the royal standard, as a point of security ; which of necessity brought together many eye-witnesses of the first quality, in these realms, to bear evidence before the world of the last moments of the life of their friend and king.

King John died at Newark Castle on the 18th of October 1216, [8] Matt. Paris being then old enough to be professed at the monastery of St Albans the year following ; [9]and Roger de Wendover, who died A.D. 1236, was also a contemporary. Thomas Rudburne was also a contemporary. Without the least impeachment or contradiction, [10] Richard de Morins, author of the Annals of Dunstable, was also living at the time, he being elected Prior of his house A.D. 1202, [11] and dying A.D. 1242. [12] Also the Annals of Margan, which terminate soon after A.D.1232; and the Annals of Waverley, written probably about the same time, only say the King died, after three or four days' illness, at Newark.

The Annals of Mailros continued to the year 1270; and the Annals of Burton, whose author is thought to have been contemporary with Matt. Paris, agree in the same. Nicolas Trivet also, born about A.D. 1260, [13] says expressly, without transcribing from anybody, "Interim Joannes Rex, in ipso belli apparatu morbo correptus docubuit et post paucos dies defungitur apud Newark" &c. Matt, of Westminster too, who flourished A.D. 1307, gives the same account of the King's death at Newark.

#### FOOTNOTES

[1] These washes are between a place called The Cross-Keys, in Norfolk, and Fosdike, in Holland, in the county of Lincoln. Annot. on Rapin and Brady, p. 516. As for the Wellstream, see Dr Brady, p. 516.

[2] According to Caxton, an English chronicle cited by Mr Lewis, John Fox, and my (Rev. Mr Pegge's) MS. chronicle, he stayed two days at Swineshead. But see Brady, p. 515, and Appendix, p. 163.

[3] R. Higden makes him dine there, This was 14th October. Brady, p. 516.

[4] Pegge's Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of King John's Death. Archaeologia, vol. iv. p. 29. Sleaford Castle and Newark Castle, mentioned afterwards, were both of them now in the King's hands.

[5] P. Langtoft says he died at Hauche, but read Nauche i.e., Nauerche, or Newark.

[6] The Abbot of Croxton (perhaps Ralph de Lincoln. Willis, Mitr. Abb.II., p. 109) was his physician at Newark. M. Paris, p. 288.

[7] Dr Brady, p. 515, and App., p. 164.

[8] So most authors. See Dr Brady, p. 517.

[9] Tanneri Biblioth., p. 572.

[10]Leland, Collectanese II., p. 421.

[11]Hearne's Praef., p. 21.

[12]Willis, Mitr. Abb. II., p. 2.

[13]Cave's Hist. Lit., Appendix, p9

Source: King John of England : a history and vindication, based on the original authorities (1865)  
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