

SHORT NOTE

SIR HUGH CALVELEY: A REASSESSMENT

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Many years ago, J.C. Bridge published the only comprehensive biographical sketch of the fourteenth-century Cheshire knight Sir Hugh Calveley.¹ Bridge's article is valuable, and any historian who wants to study Calveley's life in detail should be grateful for it. However, certain facts about Calveley escaped the attention of Bridge, and other facts have surfaced since 1908. Hence a fresh view of the life of this remarkable figure would seem appropriate.

To Bridge and to George Ormerod² we are indebted for drawing together certain essential information about Calveley's life. This may be briefly summarized as follows. Calveley was no doubt born at the manor of Lea, on the Weaver about twelve miles SE of Chester, but the year is not known. By January 1347 he was serving under Sir Thomas Dagworth, the commander of the English forces in Brittany. He was one of the thirty knights on the English side in the celebrated *Bataille de Trente*,³ which was fought in 1351 on a plain between the Breton castles of Ploermel and Jesselin. During the 1350's his career in France accelerated. He became the captain of his own company of mercenaries, and by 1359 he was in the service of the king of Navarre. Whether he was at Poitiers in 1356 is unknown. In the 1360's he served in the forces of John de Montfort in the latter's campaign against the duke of Brittany, and his role in the victory of Montfort at the battle of Auray (29 September 1364) was conspicuous. Toward the end of 1365 Calveley agreed to follow Bertrand du Guesclin to Spain for the ostensible purpose of a crusade against the Saracens, but the real objective of this campaign was to support Henry of Trastamare's effort to unseat Pedro the Cruel as king of

Castile. Calveley's agreement with du Guesclin included the proviso that he not be asked to bear arms against the Prince of Wales, to whom he owed homage. Calveley of course was enfeoffed of the prince as earl of Chester for his Cheshire estates. An entry in the *Register of the Black Prince* for 23 July 1362 grants Calveley respite for 'the homage and fealty due . . . for the manor of La Lee, co. Chester, until he shall join the prince in Gascony.'⁴

The troops led by du Guesclin and Calveley routed Pedro, and Henry rewarded Calveley with the grant of the county of Carrion and the title of count of Carrion. Pedro took refuge at Bordeaux with the Black Prince, who agreed to help restore him to the Castilian throne, and who therefore commanded Calveley and the other English companies to return from Spain. Thus, Calveley found himself commanding his company in Spain again, but, having switched sides because of his fealty to the Black Prince, he fought against Henry of Trastamare rather than for him. At the battle of Najera (3 April 1367) the English prevailed, and restored Pedro to the throne. He confirmed Calveley as the count of Carrion. The English captured du Guesclin at Najera, and Calveley because of their friendship gave 10,000 francs toward du Guesclin's ransom.⁵

From this point Calveley's career was marked by a number of distinctions. He became seneschal of Aquitaine in 1370, governor of Calais in 1375, governor of the Channel Islands for life in 1376,⁶ and in 1379 Admiral of the West. For a period in the 1370's he also was captain of Brest. During this time he was more clearly an English captain – commanding a company under John of Gaunt in the latter's Breton campaign of 1379, for example – than he was an independent mercenary. In 1383 he was chief military commander in the so-called crusade of the Bishop of Norwich against the Clementists in Flanders, and in 1385 he was with Richard II on the latter's Scottish campaign.

In 1385 Calveley purchased part of the advowson of Bunbury (and the rest in 1387), where he endowed a chantry and college, with a warden and six chaplains, and where he paid for repairs to St. Boniface church in 1386. In 1385 he was granted the royal manor of Shotwick for life, to which he made repairs. Whether these transactions are evidence that Calveley had settled in Cheshire will be discussed presently. It would seem, though, from entries in the Cheshire Recognizance Rolls of 1393, that until almost the end of his life Calveley was going overseas with retainers

from the county. He died on 23 April 1394 (not 1393 as in Ormerod and the *DNB*).

A number of variations from or additions to Bridge are significant. First, Bridge would make Calveley a murderer. He quotes (p. 114) Thomas Fuller's story (*The Worthies of England*) 'that killing a man is reported the cause of his [Calveley's] quitting this country [Cheshire], making hence for London, then for France.' Bridge considered the story 'extremely probable' (p. 114). On 18 January 1354 (not 1353 as in Bridge and the *DNB*) the Black Prince pardoned Calveley and others for 'all manner of felonies and trespasses committed by them in the county of Cestre' (*Register*, III, 141). In speculating on what these felonies might have been, Bridge writes that 'It seems most probable the principal one was the murder for which he fled the country' (p.126). The truth is that on 1 February 1352, the Black prince charged Calveley and Peter de Bunbury with 'keeping the body and lands of Ellen, sister and heir of Ralph de Calvilegh, which belongs to the prince' (*Register*, III, 55). The particular circumstances that led to this charge will doubtless remain unknown.

Next is Bridge's account of Calveley's role at the battle of Auray (1364). Bridge relied on Froissart, from whose chronicle he took a description, which seems romantically chivalric, of a situation involving Calveley and Sir John Chandos, who commanded the forces of Montfort. According to Froissart's version, Calveley commanded five-hundred lances. Chandos asked him to take the rear guard. Calveley at first refused because he considered it demeaning, but in a dramatic gesture he relented and took the rear when Chandos almost tearfully had to beg him to do so. In contrast to this story is that given by the late fourteenth century French poet Cuvelier (see note 5), in a long rhymed chronicle of the life of du Guesclin. Cuvelier reports Calveley's strength at two-hundred men, and says that it was Calveley who approached Chandos with the idea that he should secretly take his two-hundred, who he said loved him dearly, to the rear of the French lines, and should attack the enemy from that position at the opportune time – a suggestion that Chandos praised for its wisdom. Further, Cuvelier adds (p. 120) that when Calveley had gone into the valley before the hill on which the English were deployed, he had his men remove their thigh-pieces so as to be more manoeuvrable. It is this account that appears in the medieval military history of Sir Charles Oman, who

attributes the English victory to Calveley's shrewd tactics.⁷ There is no external evidence that Froissart witnessed the battle, and although his descriptions of Auray at times seem to be those of an eye witness, at the beginning of the passage he acknowledges that he was not there, writing that the confrontation between the two armies 'was a very fine sight, as I have heard those relate who saw it.'⁸

Further, absent from Bridge are several important aspects of Calveley's career in Spain. We learn from Cuvelier that in the campaign of Henry of Trastamare, in the winter of 1366, Calveley at Magalon stormed the Jewish quarter and massacred the inhabitants. At Briviesca the Jews met the same fate at his hands except for 150 who were converted.⁹ Other documents add to the dimensions of Calveley's involvement in Spain. In 1367, after the English victory at Najera, the Black Prince sent Calveley to the Aragonese court as his official envoy.¹⁰ In 1372, Edward III appointed Calveley the English ambassador to Aragon so as to further the imminent Spanish campaign of John of Gaunt.¹¹ Calveley was such an important figure at this court that he married an Aragonese princess, the Dna Constanza.¹² The evidence is incontrovertible, for Perroy cites a letter of 1377 from Pedro IV to 'nobili Constanzie de Aragon, uxori Hugonis de Calviley' on the subject of her dower.¹³ Thus the ancient tradition of Calveley's Spanish marriage, which is reported by Fuller but which Bridge and the *DNB* rejected, has been confirmed. For how long Calveley and Constanza cohabited, if at all, is a moot point, but we do know that the latter at some time left Calveley. A letter of 1380 from Pedro IV to the governor of Valencia and the bishop of Valencia orders them to seize Constanza so that she could be restored to her husband. A letter of 1381 from Pedro to his own son Martin orders the latter to stop living in adultery with Constanza.¹⁴ In 1393, Richard II gave Calveley a letter of marque and reprisal against the Aragonese crown for a debt of 300,000 francs,¹⁵ part at least of which might have been Constanza's dower.

Other, more specifically English aspects of Calveley's diplomatic and political career are rather neglected by Bridge. Following Froissart and Walsingham, Bridge does praise Calveley for his shrewd and sagacious behavior as governor of Calais, as admiral, and as the vice-commander of the Bishop of Norwich. But the situations described by Bridge are at least in some aspect an extension of Calveley's military function overseas. On the other hand, not only did Calveley perform diplomatic duties in Spain, but also he

was given responsibilities in England a number of times that reflect the confidence of the crown in his probity and diplomacy. In 1384, he was appointed to a commission to hear a case (whose nature is not specified) between William de Montacute, earl of Salisbury, and John de Montacute.¹⁶ In the well-known Scrope-Grosvenor case, whose litigation began in 1385, Calveley on at least one occasion served as the lieutenant of the chief constable, the duke of Gloucester, in conducting the proceedings of the *curia militaris* (the Court of Chivalry).¹⁷ In 1388, he was a member of a commission that included the dukes of York and Gloucester and a number of earls and bishops to negotiate a truce with France.¹⁸ In 1393, he was appointed along with John of Gaunt, three other knights, and two doctors of law to hear a cause of arms between 'Thomas Baude, plaintiff, and Nicholas de Syngleton, defendant, touching certain arms of *goules* with three chevrons *argent*.'¹⁹ Finally in this regard, he was a member of several commissions that heard cases involving the custody of prisoners.²⁰

The question of where in England Calveley spent the last decade or so of his life cannot be answered precisely. He was probably rather peripatetic, as were most members of the English medieval nobility. Besides those in Cheshire, he held estates in Wiltshire and Berkshire as well, the latter being more important. According to the *Victoria County History* of Berkshire, 'when the difficulties as to alien priories were renewed in the latter part of the reign of Edward III, the abbey of Bec [Normandy] was allowed to sell the valuable manor and impropriated rectory of Steventon, with the advowson of the vicarage, to Sir Hugh Calveley,' and 'in 1380 the king gave him [Calveley] the custody for life of the alien priory here and its possessions'.²¹ Following the Peasants' Rebellion, Richard II established commissions, by county, of knights whom he charged with the responsibility of keeping the peace. Calveley's name appears on the Patent Rolls among those appointed for Berkshire. No such commission existed for Cheshire, of course. In John Nichols' *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* is the statement that 'the lordship of Scalford continued [in the family of Hawberk] . . . till 1381, when Agnes, daughter of Sir Lawrence Hawberk, and heir-general of the family, became the wife of Sir Hugh de Calveley, of Calveley, co. Chester.'²² This was obviously Sir Hugh the younger, Calveley's nephew. On the other hand, Calveley's attention to the manor and castle of Shotwick after he

acquired it in 1385, his extensive repairs to the church at Bunbury, and his collegiate establishment there (1386) would seem to indicate that he was spending some time in his native county.

Altogether, it seems plain that even though Bridge attempted to treat Calveley's career thoroughly, he missed matters of some importance. Furthermore, modern historians writing more generally about fourteenth century England have oversimplified Calveley's career. They tend to lump him (and Knolles as well) with Hawkwood as just another of the *condottiere*. To be sure, both Knolles and Calveley were for many years mercenaries. However, by 1381 Knolles had retired to his new London house with his bodyguard, whose usefulness in protecting the youthful Richard II at Mile End is well known. In the case of Calveley, not only his political importance in Spain but also his activities in England after the 1370's have been less well known. Therefore, it is appropriate that Calveley's role in the conduct of English public affairs be given the recognition that it would seem to deserve.*

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NOTES

- 1 *Jour. Chester and North Wales Arch. Soc.*, 14 (1908), pp. 111-231.
- 2 *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, 3 vols., 2nd ed., ed. Thomas Helsby (London, 1882).
- 3 Ed. and tr. Henry R. Brush, *Modern Philology*, 9 (July 1911-April 1912), pp. 511-44; 10 (July 1912-April 1913), pp. 36-90.
- 4 *Register of Edward the Black Prince*, ed. M.C.B. Dawes, 4 vols. (London, 1930-33), III, p. 449.
- 5 *La Vie du Vaillant Bertrand du Guesclin d'après la Chanson de Geste du Trouvere Cuvelier*, tr. E.D. de la Jonchere, ed. M. Louis Moland (Paris, 1885), pp. 286, 288.
- 6 12 December 1376 (Bridge has 1372), *C.P.R. 1374-7*, p. 394.
- 7 *The History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. 2nd ed. (London, 1924), II, p. 178.
- 8 *Chronicles*, ed. and tr. Thomas Johnes, 2 vols. (London, 1839), I, p. 332.
- 9 Cuvelier, pp. 163-64.
- 10 P.E. Russell, *English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 119-25.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- 12 *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Richard II*, ed. Edouard Perroy, Camden Society, 3rd ser. 88 (1933), p. 233.

- 13 Perroy, p. 233.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- 15 19 Aug. 1393, *C.P.R. 1391-6*, p. 324.
- 16 29 Nov. 1384, *ibid.*, 1381-5, p. 507.
- 17 On 7 May 1385; see *De Controversia in Curia Militaris inter Ricardum le Scrope et Robertum Grosvenor Milites*, ed. Sir Nicholas Harris Nicholas, 2 vols. (London, 1832), I, p. 39.
- 18 2 July 1388, *C.P.R. 1385-9*, p. 502.
- 19 18 Nov. 1393, *ibid.*, 1391-6, p. 332.
- 20 12 Nov. 1382, 15 Nov. 1383, 10 Mar. 1385, *ibid.*, 1381-5, pp. 199, 356, 594; 24 Nov. 1387, *ibid.*, 1385-9, p. 394.
- 21 Ed. P.H. Ditchfield and William Page, 4 vols. (London, 1906-24), II, pp. 113-14.
- 22 4 vols. (London, 1795-1811), II, p. 314.

