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Of Kings and family ties...



Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk -whose father rebelled against

Henry II and lost his title- managed to scrape his lands and his titles back from Henry II and Richard the Lion-heart despite a dispute with his step-mother and two half-brothers. He was known for his hard work as a lawyer travelling the country on the business of both kings. He is mentioned on the boarding list of noble hostages going to join Richard the Lion-heart in Captivity. Yet he appears on the Magna Carta as one of the twenty-five barons, along with his oldest son, who would ensure that John stuck to the deal that was made at Runnymede.

He got excommunicated for his pains in 1215 and it was only in 1217 that he made his peace with the guardians of young King Henry III, which must have made things difficult for his son who was married to William Marshall's daughter. Marshall famously managed to serve his Plantagenet masters loyally from the 'Young King' through to King Henry III.

Bigod's difficulties with King John were complicated by yet another family factor. William Longspee, King John's illegitimate half-brother was Bigod's step-son. William remained loyal to John throughout the period. One woman – Ida de Tosny, links the two men on opposite sides of the Barons' War.

History does not tell us exactly when Ida de Tosny was born nor are we totally sure about her parents. It is generally accepted that her father was Ralph de Tosny who died in 1162 and her mother was Margaret de Beaumont. After her father's death she became a royal ward.

We know that she attracted the attention of King Henry II who had a bit of a reputation for seducing young women including Alice of France who was to have married Henry's son Richard (the Lionheart). The fact that Henry was Ida's guardian did not stop him from making her his mistress. We do not know what Ida thought of the proposition and we certainly don't have a portrait of her.

It was only in 1979 that a letter written from William Longsword or Longspee was discovered and which identified his mother as Countess Ida pinning the position firmly on the wife of the Earl of Norfolk, Roger Bigod. Ida was married to Roger four years after William's birth in 1176.

It was at about the same time as the marriage that Henry II granted Roger a number of disputed manors that had been confiscated at the time of his father's rebellion but not his father's title. Roger had to wait for that until the reign of Richard the Lionheart. History does not tell us how Ida and Roger came to be married. All we can say is that young William stayed with the royal court while Ida went with her husband to his main seat at Framlingham Castle in Norfolk. She went on to have at least seven more children.

We cannot even say with any certainty when she died but there is no mention of her made in Roger Bigod's will, so in all probability she died before 1221.

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