

Walter Fitz Robert de Clare

Just. Itin.

The first of this family who settled in England was Richard, the eldest son of Gislebert, Earl of Brion, in Normandy, whose father, Geoffrey, was a natural son of the first Richard, Duke of Normandy. Of this Richard Fitz-Gislebert, called also Benefacta, an account has already been given in the reign of William I. Richard's fifth son Robert was a favourite of King Henry I., who made him his steward, and granted him the barony of Dunmow in Essex, and the honor of Baynard's castle, in London; both forfeited to the crown by William Baynard. He married Maud, the daughter of Simon de St. Liz, Earl of Huntingdon; and, dying in 1134, was buried at St. Neot's, in Huntingdonshire. His wife survived him till 1140.

Walter Fitz-Robert was his eldest son, succeeding to all his estates, except the lordship of Daventry, in Northamptonshire, which was left to his brother Simon. He was probably very young at his father's death, as no mention is made of him, beyond the usual assessments on his property, until 22 Henry II., 1176, when he is recorded as one of the three justices itinerant appointed by the council of Northampton to go into the eastern counties of England. In this employment he was engaged for several following years; during which time, and perhaps before it, he took his share in the judicial duties of the Curia Regis. Madox gives two instances during the reign of Henry II., in the 23d and 26th years, 1177-1180, in which he was present as one of the barons and justiciars there. In 5 Richard I., 1193-4, also, he is named as holding pleas in Essex and Hertfordshire.

His knightly pursuits were not forgotten in the performance of his civil duties. He supported William de Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, the governor of the realm, during King Richard's absence in the Holy Land, in his contest with John, the king's brother; and was entrusted with the command of the castle of Eye, in Suffolk. In 6 Richard I., 1194-5, he joined the expedition into Normandy.

He died in 10 Richard I., 1198, and was buried in the choir of the priory of Dunmow, which his father had founded, and to which he himself had given divers churches and lands. Among other works of piety, he granted the church of Chedingham to the monks of Daventry; the churches of Thestone, Welle, and Henelingham, to the monks of St. Neot's; and the church of Wodeham to the Knights Hospitallers. The consideration for these gifts was the prayers of these holy persons for the souls of himself, his two wives, his children, and his ancestors.

These two wives were, first, Maud, daughter of Richard de Luci, the chief justiciary, who brought him the lordship of Diss, in Norfolk; and, secondly, Margaret de Bohun.

He left several sons; of whom Robert, the eldest, succeeded him, and was called Robert Fitz-Walter. His prowess as a warrior procured for him the addition of "the Valiant;" and, as leader of the barons confederated against King John, they styled him "Marshal of the army of God and the Holy Church." On the grant of Magna Charta he was at the head of the twenty-five barons appointed to enforce its observance. His grandson was regularly summoned to parliament in 23 Edward I., and the title lineally

descended to the seventh baron Fitz-Walter; who, dying in 1432, without male issue, John Ratcliffe, whose father had married his daughter Elizabeth, was summoned in 1485. He was beheaded in 1495, but his son was restored and created Viscount Fitz-Walter in 1525, and Earl of Sussex in 1529. These two new titles became extinct in 1641 by the death of Edward, the sixth earl, without issue: but the barony descended to Benjamin Mildmay, the heir of Frances, the daughter of the second earl. In 1730, Benjamin Mildmay, the twentieth baron, was created Viscount Harwich and Earl Fitz-Walter; but dying in 1756, without children, these titles also became extinct. The barony then fell into abeyance among the descendants of the five daughters of Thomas Mildmay of Graces, Esq., whose wife, Mary, was sister to Benjamin, the fourteenth baron.

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