

*Edward I's Regent: Edmund of Cornwall, the Man behind England's Greatest King.* Michael Ray. Pen & Sword, 2022. xxiv plus 255 pp, 28 b/w ill. Hardback, £25.00. [ISBN 978-1-39909-354-5].

Though Edmund's family connection with Hailes Abbey may draw members of BGAS, there are many reasons to enjoy this book. Edmund was nephew of Henry III and cousin of Edward I, and always closely associated with the Crown. Since the Crown was his heir, his papers went to the governmental archives, presenting excellent materials for study. As a loyal servant of two kings, Edmund may have received less attention than others who challenged royal authority, but here we see life as lived by many in the later thirteenth century.

Michael Ray finds no complete work on Edmund since Margaret Midgley's unpublished thesis of 1930. In his first four chapters he presents a rapid chronological synopsis of Edmund's life. This is necessarily compressed, and sometimes a little confusing. We move swiftly from the Lord Edward's Crusade (1271-72), when Edmund returned with his brother Henry of Almain escorting the body of Louis IX of France. Ray explains how he possibly then witnessed Henry's murder, unexpectedly becoming heir to his father, Earl of Cornwall.

The second chapter charts Edmund's inheritance, and loyal service to Kings Henry III and Edward I, before the third discusses Edmund's performance as Regent in two respects: his administration of justice and response to the Welsh rebellion. Ray accepts the favourable view of Sir Frederick Powicke that the muster was rapid and effective. This is an interesting moment in the decline of feudal service; most of those who owed duty to the King were already serving in the royal forces, so this force had to be raised and funded.

Ray then moves to a series of surveys, firstly of family and friends, the section on various Earls being a *tour de force*. His appropriate conclusions develop a view of Edmund's character. There are studies of Edmund's 'affinity' - knights who witnessed his charters and went on campaign with him - and of the clerks and officials who managed his considerable estates and interests, as well as the attorneys (the term was coming into use at this time) who represented him in litigation and during his absences abroad.

Edmund's benefactions to religious houses are considered in Chapter 11 and include his foundation of the Bonhommes (who may or may not have been connected to a heterodox French sect of that name) of Ashridge; then the rebuilding of his father's Abbey at Hailes, probably influenced by the new Westminster Abbey; Edmund must have had access to those working there. Ray makes excellent use of the table of benefactions, to show that he was keen to endow religious houses and was not simply offloading properties, which could not be passed to a personal heir when his marriage failed to produce such, and then failed altogether.

There are three chapters which excellently analyse Edmund's wealth and its sources. Much is evident about how medieval life worked: the plethora of taxes and some offences, which also raised revenue, throw light on what people were actually doing, as well the value of markets, fairs and revenues particular to Cornwall, such as marine activity and the stanneries.

Ray comments on the accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall, as edited by Midgley, which reveal much about the levels of pay for all sorts of men. He mentions the loans made to the King, which totalled

£24,000 from 1272 to 1299. There is no apparent profit from these loans, and indeed the law prohibited usury, but Edmund was rewarded by a number of wardships, which could be very profitable for the guardian.

In Chapter 15 we review his acquisition of 823 land holdings in 27 counties, from parks and hundreds to thirteen castles, nicely illustrated in the pictures. Ray considers most of these to be too dispersed to have strategic value, but important as demonstrations of lordly power in their areas. The Chapter includes discussion of the relations of a tenant to his lord, which were weakening in this period, when many knights held land from different lords in different areas, in contrast to the feudal arrangements in the days of William I.

Chapters 16 and 17 consider Edmund's interaction with local communities. Ray considers that the various law suits are probably not indicative of particularly bad relations, considering the area which he controlled and more cases were probably initiated against him than by him. The range of these is great – advowson, distraint, debt, dower, wardship, but mostly land. Some of these relate to counties where Edmund held no land, and are probably the result of wardships. Whilst a man could be considered mean to be working to increase the revenue of an estate in wardship, there was also a responsibility to return the estate to its inheritor in a profitable condition.

Finally, Ray evaluates Edmund the man, commenting on other historians' judgements. Edmund's piety was clear to Powicke, as was his enthusiasm to innovate with the Bonhommes. Emily Holt's praise of Edmund, as the man who brought Protestantism to England far ahead of the Reformation, seems untenable. Ray's opinion is generally favourable, and he adds the interesting judgement that at the age of twenty-two, Edmund had no expectation of the position that would be thrust upon him as the wealthiest man in the kingdom. Many in that position would simply have abused their wealth.

Ray has conducted excellent research, and the book is interesting and enjoyable but there are some issues in the editing. A few misprints are not of great significance, though seeing Balliol reappear as Baliol is curious; Henry of Almain was murdered in 1271 on p. 12, but in 1272 on p.14, though 1271 is clearly meant. The most serious however is that, despite many references to the Appendices, there are seven which are not printed and there is no clue whether they are available anywhere. As yet, the publisher has not clarified this issue. Some of these might prove of great interest, including the list of Edmund's manors by name, county, and honour, or his known wardships, and could prompt further research. This should not however detract from Ray's fine achievement.

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