Courtenay, Sir Philip

by David Beresford

Courtenay, Sir Philip (a.1355–1406), lieutenant of Ireland, was third son of Hugh Courtenay, earl of Devon, and his wife Margaret, daughter of Humphrey Bohun, earl of Hereford and Essex. He was appointed lieutenant of Ireland on 1 July 1383, replacing Roger Mortimer (qv), 4th earl of March. While Courtenay was not quite the nonentity that some historians have described (his brother William was archbishop of Canterbury 1381–96), he certainly had no connection with Ireland before his landing at Waterford (September 1383). He had previously served the king as admiral of the west, and with John, duke of Lancaster, in Normandy. His appointment as lieutenant was not the firm declaration of royal support expected by the Anglo-Irish magnates of the day.

His lack of connections in Ireland meant that he had to resort to measures of taxation and royal service that quickly antagonised the Anglo-Irish. In January 1384 he proclaimed a royal service to deal with the growing threat of Brian Ó Briain (qv), lord of Thomond, and his alliance of Gaelic lords, but the campaigns of that year failed to contain the threat. Courtenay's position as chief governor was not helped by the disturbances in Munster that arose from long-standing quarrels between the earls of Ormond (qv) and Desmond (qv). Opposition to Courtenay was led by Robert Wikeford (qv), archbishop of Dublin, who went to England in March 1384 to bring complaints against him; he was forced to go to England (November) to defend himself against these charges, and in December 1384 the archbishop was ordered to cease all interference in affairs not connected to his office of chancellor.

Courtenay was reappointed lieutenant for a ten-year term (1 March 1385), but was still unable to contain the Gaelic threat. While he campaigned in Leinster, Louth was subjected to raids from the north. Nor did his relations with the Anglo-Irish magnates improve, which led to a plea for royal intervention from the Irish parliament (October 1385). Courtenay's term in office was cut short by the king's creation of Robert de Vere, earl of Oxford, as marquess of Dublin, with a life grant of the land and lordship of Ireland (1 December 1385). He left office at Easter 1386 but complained that his dismissal by de Vere was contrary to his patent of office, which still had nine years to run, and accused the marquess of harassing him. He was eventually awarded 1,000 marks in compensation and returned to England. He returned to Ireland in the entourage of Richard II (qv) in the winter of 1394/5, but otherwise remained in England till his death in 1406.

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