Scrope, Stephen

by David Beresford

Scrope, Stephen (c.1355–1408), justice and deputy lieutenant of Ireland, was third son of Richard, Lord Scrope of Bolton, and his wife Blanche, daughter of Sir William de la Pole, and became connected to Ireland late in the reign of Richard II (qv). Although his early career is obscure, Scrope became (through his marriage to Millicent, daughter and co-heir of Robert, Lord Tiptoft) lord of Bently in Yorkshire and Castle Coombe in Somerset. It seems most likely that Stephen Scrope served in the retinue of his brother William Scrope (qv) and came to Ireland in the service of Richard II.

When the king divided the governance of the lordship of Ireland between Roger Mortimer (qv), earl of March, and William Scrope, it was Stephen Scrope who seems to have done most of the work of governing and protecting Louth, Munster, and Leinster; he was formally recognised as his brother's deputy in September 1396. He appears as one of the magnates witnessing a grant of liberties to the city of Galway, but in general his activities appear to have been confined to Leinster, where he was responsible for maintaining the settlements created by Richard II. Although he did travel to England in the summer of 1396 with representatives of the Gaelic lords of Leinster, his position in Leinster was increasingly weakened by the growing tensions between the Anglo-Irish magnates and their Gaelic counterparts. Scrope was forced to withdraw outlying garrisons in 1396, and in April 1397 his brother's powers as justiciar were removed and the earl of March became the sole lieutenant.

Scrope returned to England, where he benefited from his brother's influence at court. He was granted custody of Roxburgh castle in October 1397 and served as a JP for the North Riding of Yorkshire in the same year. He was one of the few who supported Richard II till the king's arrest and deposition, but swiftly accommodated himself to the new regime, receiving confirmations of grants made by Richard. In the summer of 1400 he was accused of having plotted to free Richard, but was acquitted.

Scrope was chosen to accompany the king's son, Thomas of Lancaster (qv), to Ireland and arrived in the lordship in August 1401. As Lancaster was only 13, Scrope was recognised as deputy lieutenant and governor of the wars. He pursued a policy of negotiation with the Gaelic lords who bordered the Pale, and secured their submissions to Lancaster in the winter of 1401–2. Unfortunately, the extreme poverty of Lancaster’s administration undermined this initially promising start, and for the next few years Scrope shuttled back and forth to England looking for the financial support needed to govern the lordship.
During his absences (winter 1403/4–October 1404, June 1405–summer 1406, December 1407–August 1408) Scrope tended to use the 3rd (qv) and 4th (qv) earls of Ormond as his deputies, although he did not always make formal arrangements for this. In March 1407 Scrope joined with the earls of Ormond and Desmond to defeat the Clanricard de Burghs and the O'Nolans near Callan. On his last sojourn in England, Scrope was active in preparing for the return of Thomas of Lancaster to Ireland. He returned to the lordship with his royal master in August 1408, but within a month he had died of the plague at Castledermot.

----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------