

= William of Wrotham =

William of Wrotham or William de Wrotham ( died c . 1217 ) was a medieval English royal administrator and clergyman . Although a late 13th @-@ century source says that William held a royal office under King Henry II of England ( reigned 1154 ? 1189 ) , the first contemporary reference to William is in 1197 , when he became responsible among other things for the royal tin mines . He also held ecclesiastical office , eventually becoming Archdeacon of Taunton , and served King John of England as an administrator of ecclesiastical lands and a collector of taxes .

William 's main administrative work was naval . He was in charge of the royal fleet in the south of England in 1205 , and was one of those responsible for the development of Portsmouth as a naval dockyard . He continued to be involved in naval matters until 1214 or later , but by 1215 he had joined the First Barons ' War against John . After John 's death in 1216 , William returned to the royalist cause . He probably died in late 1217 . Known to a contemporary chronicler as one of John 's " evil advisers " , William is said by modern historians to have had a " special responsibility for ports , customs , and the navy " , and was " keeper of ports " , a forerunner of the office of First Lord of the Admiralty .

= = Early life = =

Little is known of William 's background or family , except that his father Godwin held land in Shipbourne , near Wrotham in Kent , perhaps as a vassal of the Archbishops of Canterbury . William 's brother Richard was named as William 's deputy in 1207 .

According to late 13th @-@ century documents , the Hundred Rolls , King Henry II gave William the office of steward of Exmoor , and lands at North Petherton , Somerset . William was the prebend of St Decumans in the cathedral chapter of Bath Cathedral by 9 May 1204 . He claimed to have held the office since 1194 during a later dispute with Savaric fitzGeldewin , the Bishop of Bath and another canon of the cathedral , Roger Porretanus , who claimed the prebend . By 23 December 1205 , William had secured a papal judgement against Roger .

William may have owed his advancement in royal service to Geoffrey fitzPeter , a royal judge . In 1197 he granted William a manor at Sutton @-@ at @-@ Hone , Kent , which later was supposed to become a hospital , but instead eventually became a preceptory for the Knights Hospitaller . From 1197 William was responsible for the collection of revenues from Geoffrey 's lands at Lydford , Devon , and held the office of chief forester of Somerset ; it is unclear to whom he owed that position .

= = Royal service = =

In 1197 , Hubert Walter , who was Archbishop of Canterbury and Justiciar , appointed William to the administration of the royal stannaries , or tin mines , and in 1198 William was placed in charge of tin production , an office later known as the Lord Warden of the Stannaries . Under his control the mines became much more lucrative for the king , and accounted for a total of £ 1100 in William 's first year of administration . As part of his administrative work he became the first warden of Lydford Castle after it was constructed in the 1190s . In 1199 he was involved in a dispute over the stannaries with another official , Hugh Bardulf , temporarily losing control of them ? along with his office as sheriff ? in 1200 . The reason for the loss of these offices is uncertain . After restoration to office , he remained as Lord Warden of the Stannaries until 1215 .

In 1198 and 1199 , William was Sheriff of Devon and Sheriff of Cornwall , along with another royal servant , and served as a royal justice . In 1200 he was recorded as a receiver of the carucage , a tax on land , in the Pipe roll ; whether this meant that he was a local or a national collector of the tax is unclear . By 12 September 1204 , William was Archdeacon of Taunton in the Diocese of Bath , and he witnessed the election of Jocelin of Wells as the new bishop of the diocese . He was jointly placed in charge of the mints of London and Canterbury in 1205 , along with Reginald de Cornhill , with whom he also shared the collection of the tax of a fifteenth on merchants , a post the two had

held since 1202 . In May 1205 William , along with de Cornhill , was given custody of one of three dies for the mint at Chichester ; in July the king gave William 's custody to Simon of Wells , the Bishop of Chichester . William was one of the officials in charge of the collection of a tax of a thirteenth in 1207 .

William was also placed in charge of vacant ecclesiastical offices , collecting their revenues for the king . He performed this office for the Diocese of Worcester around 1200 , the Diocese of Winchester in 1204 , for Glastonbury Abbey in 1205 , and for Whitby Abbey in 1206 and 1209 . From his actions it can be assumed that Wrotham was a member of the royal household , probably working in the wardrobe .

= = Naval administration = =

William 's main administrative work concerned the navy . In 1204 he , de Cornhill , and William of Furnell were placed in charge of granting wool export licences . William of Wrotham was also one of the officials charged with supervising the ships dispatched to the coasts in 1204 , after the loss of Normandy exposed England to invasion by the French . In 1205 he was again one of the keepers of the royal fleet along the south coast . William was in charge of the 17 ships based in Romney , Rye , Shoreham , Southampton , Winchelsea , and Exeter , while the rest of the fleet came under Cornhill 's control . In the same year , he was also in charge of naval spending for the attempted invasion of France , which in June alone totalled over 470 pounds . William surrendered custody of Taunton Castle to Peter de Taraton in July and was in charge of purchasing the royal wine in August . No further naval duties are recorded until November , when along with Cornhill he was responsible for assessing the ports .

In 1206 William was in charge of the naval forces in the Cinque Ports and commanded the fleet that invaded Poitou . Whether he accompanied the fleet or stayed in England after it sailed is unclear ; according to two historians ? F. W. Brooks and R. W. Powell ? it is more likely he stayed . From 1206 until 1215 he was effectively commander of King John 's navy , and helped to develop Portsmouth as a royal dockyard . In 1208 William was put in charge of ensuring that no ships sailed without royal permission . That year he also oversaw the naval preparations made by the Cinque Ports . The purpose of these preparations is unknown ; the Annals of Dunstable ascribe to John a desire to oppress the Cinque Ports . During May 1208 a royal order was issued that William 's deputies in all the seaports should seize any ships in the ports that were from foreign countries , excluding Denmark , Norway and other countries that did not oppose John 's diplomatic efforts . A gap in the governmental records does not allow a detailed view of William 's activities for the next years , until 1212 , when William is shown performing many of the same duties as earlier . He was in charge of repair of some ships and the construction of a large new ship , named the Deulabenit , owned by the king . William was also responsible for impressing privately owned merchant ships into royal service . These ships were used in the naval action of the Battle of Damme at Zwyn in 1213 , when a fleet under William Longespee , the Earl of Salisbury , destroyed a substantial French naval force and sacked the town of Damme .

In late 1213 William was directing the efforts of the seaports of south @-@ western England and the Cinque Ports in naval affairs . He was also responsible for the setting up of a supply depot for the navy in June 1213 , for which he received supplies from the diocese of Chichester . In 1214 William had custody of some royal prisoners . The same year , the king ordered him to return a merchant ship if he had indeed seized it from its owner , Joscelin de Hampton . Also in 1214 , William co @-@ founded the hospital of Domus Dei in Portsmouth with Peter des Roches , the Bishop of Winchester . The foundation was confirmed by the king in October 1214 .

John rewarded William for his service with churches in Sheppey and East Malling , which were granted in 1207 , and the right to oversee the royal forests in Cornwall and Devon . Other grants included lands in Dartford and Sutton @-@ at @-@ Hone that had escheated to the crown , lands in Westminster and a prebend in the royal ecclesiastical foundation at Hastings .

= = Later years and legacy = =

During John 's reign , Pope Innocent III placed an interdict on England , forbidding public celebration of sacred rites in English churches . William supported John , and remained in England . The medieval chronicler Roger of Wendover named William as one of John 's " evil advisers " , or " most wicked counsellors " . Modern historians argue that Roger 's account of John 's reign , while containing some truth , was written to defame men who were prominent in the early years of King Henry III , John 's son who had succeeded his father in October 1216 . According to Nicholas Vincent , while Roger 's account of the exactions and crimes of the members of his list of evil advisers certainly had a strong basis of truth , it was also greatly exaggerated . W. L. Warren agrees and points out that many of the details of Roger 's accounts that can be checked with other records are wrong , making the other parts of his stories suspect .

In 1215 William joined the baronial rebellion against John , and lost his naval offices , the royal forester 's office for Somerset , and custody of Lydford Castle . In May 1216 the king offered William a safe conduct , which noted that William had fled overseas . The letters were witnessed by Peter des Roches . In mid @-@ 1217 , he rejoined the royalist cause , returning to the side of Henry III . This action regained him some of his lost lands .

William last appeared in documents on 25 July 1217 and was dead by 16 February 1218 , probably before 2 December 1217 , when someone else is mentioned as archdeacon . On 16 February 1218 , John Marshall became the guardian of Richard , William 's nephew and heir , who was the son of William 's brother Richard .

William has been described as having a " special responsibility for ports , customs , and the navy " by the historian Robert Bartlett . He is usually given the title of " keeper of ports " or " keeper of galleys " , which Ralph Turner equates with being First Lord of the Admiralty in later history . Sometimes this would be given as " *custos portum maris* " in Latin , or " keeper of the seaports " . At other times he was titled " keeper of the king 's ships " . Bartlett also called William " one of the king 's most important administrators " . Charles Young said that William 's service to King John was a " distinguished administrative career " , and J. E. A. Joliffe called William one of the " greatest of the king 's clerks " .