



*Extracts from the Chapter minutes from 1733 onwards and divers historical prospecting.*

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*WEBPAGE/BLOG: jot-and-tittle.com*

## THE FORGOTTEN QUEEN

**B**érangère de Navarre, better known as *Berengaria* was the wife of Richard The Lionheart and Queen of England from May 1191 to April 1199. She is buried in Le Mans and her effigy (page 3) is at her Abbaye de l'Epau (*Courtesy of Mossot, GNU Free Documentation License*).

She was the eldest daughter of Sancho VI (*El Sabio, The Wise*) of Navarre. In 1185, Berengaria was given the fief of Monreal by her father. Eleanor of Aquitaine promoted the engagement of Berengaria to her favourite son, Richard. An alliance with Navarre meant protection for the southern borders of Eleanor's large Duchy of Aquitaine, and helped create better relations with neighbouring Castile, whose queen was Eleanor, a sister of Richard. Also, Navarre had assimilated the troubadour culture of Aquitaine and Berengaria's reputation was *unbesmirched*. It seems that Berengaria and Richard did in fact meet once, years before their marriage, and writers have claimed that there was an attraction between them at that time.

In 1190, Eleanor met Sancho in Pamplona and he hosted a banquet in the Royal Palace of Olite in her honour. The betrothal could not be celebrated openly, for Richard had been betrothed for many years to Alys, half-sister of King Philip II of France. Richard terminated his betrothal to Alys in 1190 while at Messina. It has been suggested that Alys had become the mistress of Richard's own father, Henry II of England, and possibly the mother of an illegitimate child; a marriage between Richard and Alys therefore would have been technically impossible for religious reasons of affinity.



Richard, now King of England, Duke of Normandy, Count of Anjou, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou, had Berengaria brought to him by his mother. Because Richard was already on the Third Crusade, having wasted no time in setting off after his coronation, the two women had a long and difficult journey to catch up with him. They arrived (via the Pyrenees and Alps) at Messina in Sicily during Lent (when the marriage could not take place) in 1191 and were joined by Richard's sister Joan, the widowed queen of Sicily. Berengaria was left in Joan's custody. En route to the Holy Land, the ship carrying Berengaria and Joan ran aground off the coast of Cyprus, and they were threatened by the island's ruler, Isaac Comnenus. Richard came to their rescue, captured the island, and overthrew Comnenus. Berengaria married Richard the Lionheart on 12 May 1191, in the Chapel of St. George at Limassol on Cyprus, and was crowned the same day by the archbishop of Bordeaux and bishops of Évreux and Bayonne. She was in her early twenties. Portrait above, *courtesy of The Medieval world.blogspot.com*.

Whether the marriage was ever even consummated is a matter for conjecture as there were no progeny. In any case, Richard certainly took his new wife with him for the first part of the Third Crusade. This was unusual (although Richard's mother and Berengaria's predecessor, Eleanor of

Aquitaine, had, when queen of France, been with her husband throughout the Second Crusade). Berengaria returned well before Richard left the Holy Land; on his return to Europe he was captured and imprisoned. Berengaria remained in Europe, based at Beaufort-en-Vallée,



attempting to raise money for his ransom. After his release, Richard returned to England and was not joined by his wife.

On his release Richard set about reclaiming the territories in France that had been lost by his brother John or taken by King Philip II. His focus was on his kingdom, not his queen. He was ordered by Pope Celestine III to reunite with Queen Berengaria and to show fidelity to her in the future. Richard, now mostly spending his time in France, obeyed and took Berengaria to church every week thereafter. When he died in 1199, she was distressed, perhaps more so at deliberately being overlooked as queen of England and Cyprus. Some historians believe that Berengaria honestly loved her husband, and Richard's feelings for her were merely formal because the marriage was a political rather than a romantic union. Richard was also a great womaniser and may even have been bi-sexual. There is a famous fact, quoted by Roger of Howeden in 1195. A hermit addressed Richard, *calling him a sinner and reminding him of the destruction of Sodoma*. The King then accepted the penitence, received his wife (he had not been with her for a long time), and he joined her so they were one flesh. We don't know for sure if this is true, but what we do know is that, again, Berengaria was not pregnant.

Berengaria never visited England during King Richard's lifetime; during the entirety of their marriage, Richard spent less than six months in England. There is evidence, however, that she may have done so in the years following his death. She is believed to have been present at the translation of St Thomas Becket's remains at Canterbury in 1220 (to the new shrine of Elias of Dereham). The traditional description of her as "the only English queen never to set foot in the



country" still would be true because she did not visit England during the time she was Richard's consort. She certainly sent envoys to England several times, mainly to inquire about the pension she was due as dowager queen and Richard's widow, which King John failed to pay. Although Queen Eleanor intervened and Pope Innocent III threatened

him with an interdict if he did not pay Berengaria what was due, King John still owed her more than £4000 when he died. During the reign of his son Henry III of England, however, her payments were eventually made.

Richard was buried at the family mausoleum at Fontevrault in Eleanor's presence. For unknown reasons, Berengaria did not attend the funeral. She did visit Fontevrault shortly after the funeral and had a brief meeting with Eleanor. She also discussed the marriage of her sister Blanca to Thibaut of Champagne with the papal envoy Cardinal Pietro di Capua. She attended the wedding at Chartres in July as a witness. When Thibaut died in 1201, Blanca provided a home for Berengaria for a few years. Richard had managed to cheat her out of getting her dower properties from their marriage and she was forced to rely on the French for her living. She became known as the Lady of Le Mans.

Berengaria lived mostly in the palace of the counts of Maine (see page 2) with her household. She took an interest in the local church of St. Pierre. She involved herself in a feud between St. Pierre and the rival cathedral chapter of St. Julien and St. Pierre came under interdict. The Pope protected Berengaria during this feud but she did leave Le Mans and lived at Thorée until the interdict was lifted in 1216 and she was able to return. She devoted the rest of her life to charitable works and caring for the poor.



Berengaria eventually settled in Le Mans, one of her dower properties, in 1204. She reached an accommodation with King Philippe, passing over her inheritance of Falaise, Domfont and

Bonneville, in return for Le Mans and 1,000 Sterling Marks. She was a benefactress of L'Épau Abbey in Le Mans, entered the conventual life, and was buried in the abbey. In 1240, Archbishop Rodrigo Jimenez de Rada of Toledo wrote of Berengaria that she lived, "as a most praiseworthy widow and stayed for the most part in the city of Le Mans, which she held as part of her marriage dower, devoting herself to almsgiving, prayer and good works, witnessing as an example to all women of chastity and religion and in the same city she came to the end of her days with a happy death." The deaths of both King Philippe and his son Louis VIII left the throne to Louis IX (St.Louis) who was advised by his mother, Blanca of Castile, Berengaria's niece who aided her project to found a Cistercian Abbey called Notre Dame de La Piété-Dieu.

A skeleton thought to be hers was rediscovered in 1960 during the restoration of the abbey. These remains are preserved beneath the stone effigy of the queen, which is now to be found in the chapter house of the abbey (above).

## WHAT DID THE VICTORIANS EVER DO FOR US?

The following is taken from the Chapter Minutes in 1901. Preshute House was a large Cathedral property to the west of Marlborough and leased to teachers from Marlborough College: Thames conservancy state that discharge into the River Kennet must cease in three months. They have applied for an extension of time so that the property can be linked to the Marlborough sewage works, now under construction. Conservators of the River Thames extended until 24th February the time allowed for discontinuing the pollution of the River Kennet.

Letter from Marlborough Town Clerk's office November 1901: *The committee of the Town Council have conferred with their engineer with regard to your proposal to connect Preshute House with the Borough sewage system. The matter is I am sorry to say fraught with considerable difficulty.*

*Owing to adverse gradients it has been found impossible to lay a sewer in the roadway of the Bath Road in such a position that a drain from Preshute House running down the private road could connect with it, and the line of sewer has consequently been marked out for the greater part of its length in the higher ground on the North side of the Bath Road.*

*The engineer advises that there are two ways by which a drain from Preshute House could be connected with*

*this sewer. Either by a drain partly underground and partly above ground (on an embankment) running northeast across the water meadows to join the sewer near the College laundry. Or by a drain running down the pathway through the churchyard passing under the river by means of an inverted syphon and joining the sewer in the Bath Road at the point where the latter first comes out into the roadway.*

*The first proposal although probably the best from an engineering point of view is open to grave objection on other points. One point being the question of compensation; an embankment crossing the water meadows would seriously interfere with their use as meadows and would no doubt occasion heavy claims for damage from both owner and occupier.*

Left, Crossness Pumping Station, part of Sir Joseph Bazalgette's scheme for solving London's extreme sewage problem.

*The other proposal would not be open to this objection as the drain would be laid under a public*



footpath. Without even taking this into consideration the engineer estimates the cost of carrying out the second proposal at not less than £250 [Say £28,000 in today's money] which it must be admitted is a heavy expenditure to be incurred for the drainage of one house.

Under these circumstances I am directed to say that the Town Council might be willing to meet the Dean and Chapter in the matter if some fair and equitable terms could be arranged by which the expense of laying the drain could be shared between them.

Yours faithfully  
Llewellyn Gwillian.



Surveyor to be asked his charges to carry out an inspection.

Letter of December 1901 from Mr Harding, 58 High Street, to Chapter Clerk ref. meeting between them and Marlborough's Resident Engineer and Town clerk: He feels that their proposal is both costly and impractical and could result with any blockage of the main sewer backing up to Preshute House (above). He seriously suggests turning down the proposal and in its place advocates straightening the Church path and taking 38 *perches* (30<sup>1/4</sup> square yards) from the water meadows. The pipe could then be taken by a new footbridge over the river and would fall by gravitation to the main sewer. The cost would be similar to the proposal.

The clerk was instructed to forward this new proposal to the Marlborough Council and agree the best terms he could.

#### PUZZLE

**N**ow what could this be, a cure for the plague perhaps, or an enema for elephants? The symbol or christogram, of course is the *Labarum* or *Chi-Rho*, a monogram made from the initial Greek letters of 'Christ.' A clue is that it was originally a vexillum (military standard) and shield badge of the Emperor Constantine and his troops.

This pic came from QUORA, a website for history buffs (and weirdos). It is based on a question and answer format and recent editions covered such items as: What was the weirdest



medieval weapon? A repeating crossbow! Did Ghengis Kahn lose battles? Yes, the Battle of Thirteen Wings! Who did the German army soldiers fear most? The *Ladies from Hell* (Hitler's term for the Scots)! And finally, Was Rome aware of Han China's existence and Vice Versa? The answer is yes, with China and Greece having opened a Silk Route as far back as the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC!