

# **Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900, Volume 23 — Grey, John de (d.1214)**

**Thomas Andrew Archer**



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**GREY** or **GRAY**, JOHN DE (*d.* 1214), bishop of Norwich and justiciar of Ireland, is said to have been descended from Anschitel de Gray, an Oxfordshire landowner in Domesday (FOSS, ii. 75; cf. *Domesday*, i. fol. 161a2). His grandfather, Richard, was a benefactor of Eynsham Abbey, near Oxford (FOSS; cf. DUGDALE, iii. 16); and his father, Anschitel, was this Richard's eldest son (FOSS; cf. BLOMEFIELD, i. 577-8). John de Gray was a native of Norfolk, and was already in Prince John's service by 8 Feb. 1198 (*Plac. quo Warr.* p. 831). Soon after John's accession he seems to have crossed over to England, and is found signing or issuing charters for the new king both here and in France during 1199 and 1200 (*Rot. Chart.* pp. 20*b*, 37 *a*, &c.; *Oblate Rolls*, pp. 12, 24, &c.) By 4 March 1200 he was archdeacon of Cleveland, by 11 April archdeacon of Gloucester (*Rot. Chart.* pp. 37 *a*, 47*b*), and by 7 Sept. he signs himself bishop-elect of Norwich (*ib.* p. 75 *a*), to which see he was consecrated on 24 Sept. (LE NEVE, ii. 460). Three months later his signature reappears (23 Dec. 1200) in the Charter Rolls, and is more or less frequent till the year of his death (*Rot. Chart.* pp. 82*b*-200*a*) When Hubert Walter died (12 July 1205), John had him elected archbishop of Canterbury, and he is found signing documents as archbishop-elect in December 1205. Innocent III, however, quashed the election in favour of Stephen Langton (20 Jan. 1207) (GERVASE OF CANT. ii. 98; WALT. OF COV. ii. 197; *Epp. Inn. III*, vol. ii. col. 1045; cf. POTTHAST, p. 260; MATT. PARIS, ii. 493). 'This appointment,' says Matthew Paris, 'was the seed-bed of all the ensuing

discord which for so long wrought England irretrievable damage' (*ib.*)

A little before this (c. December 1203?) John de Gray and Hubert Walter had charged an unsuccessful mission to Philip Augustus (GERVASE OF CANT. ii. 96; for date cf. POTTHAST, p. 175). On 2 Oct. 1205 he had bought the chancellorship for his nephew, [Walter de Grey](#) [q. v.], afterwards archbishop of York; and he himself acted as a justiciar in the king's court or itinerant judge till the eighth year of John's reign (FOSS, ii. 78). He was in Ireland by January 1209, and had probably succeeded [Meiler FitzHenry](#) [q. v.] as justiciar there before the end of the month (SWEETMAN, p. 58). In 1210 he was engaged in preparations for the king's visit and the campaign against Hugh de Lacy, in provisioning Carrickfergus Castle and mustering ships at Antrim (June and July) (*ib.* pp. 59-65). John was in Ireland from June to August 1210 (*Itin. of King John*; cf. MATT. PARIS, ii. 530); and on his return to England left John de Gray in the island as his justiciar, with instructions to build three castles in Connaught (*Loch Cé*, pp. 243-4). The bishop now led an army to Athlone, where he built a bridge and a castle. Here he met Donnchadh O'Brien, king of Munster, and Geoffrey de Marisco, who had invaded Connaught from the south; Donnchadh reconciled the bishop with Cathal Chrobderg, king of Connaught, who gave up his son Turlough as a hostage (*ib.* p. 245; *Four Masters*, iii. 167-9). In 1212 he built another castle at Cael-uisce (Narrow-water, co. Down), invaded

North Ireland, built the castle of Clones (co. Monaghan), and routed the people of Fermanagh. Shortly after he was defeated by Art O'Maelsechlainn, the chief of Brefny, and lost all his treasure (*Loch Cé*, p. 247; *Four Masters*, iii. 172-3). He remained nominal justiciar of Ireland till the appointment of Henry, archbishop of Dublin (23 July 1213); but he is said to have been defeated in France (1212) after some successes (SWEETMAN, p. 75; GILBERT, p. 76; BLOMEFIELD, ii. 361). During his term of office he had sent the king money in Wales and France (GILBERT, p. 76); and was certainly summoned to England about 30 Oct. 1212 (SWEETMAN, p. 73). In 1213 he brought over 'five hundred knights and many other horsemen' to join the great muster on Barham Down (about Easter) when Philip Augustus was threatening to invade England (MATT. PARIS, ii. 537-539). While justiciar he remodelled the Irish coinage on that of England (*ib.* ii. 530); and apparently sought to abolish native Irish law and to assimilate the Irish local government to that of England (*ib.*)

Matthew Paris reckons John de Gray among the chief of the king's evil counsellors during the years of interdict (*ib.* ii. 532-3); and for this reason he had long been under papal excommunication (GILBERT, p. 76). When the reconciliation began he became surety (24 May 1213) for the fair treatment of Stephen Langton: and next year he signed the same prelate's compensation bond (17 June 1214). The previous July he had accompanied William Longsword on an embassy to the Emperor Otho, previous to the great

coalition which led to the battle of Bouvines (RYMER, i. 171, 174, &c.) Together with the rest of the chief royal counsellors he was excluded from the general absolution of 1213, and had to receive his pardon (about 21 Oct. 1213) from Innocent III himself at Rome. Contemporary rumour imagined that he was commissioned to subject England to the papal rule (WALT. OF COV. ii. 213; RYMER, i. 187). Next year the legate Michael brought papal letters for the bishop's election to Durham; the monks unwillingly obeyed (20 Feb. 1214); but appealed to Rome in favour of their own candidate, Richard, dean of Salisbury. Innocent confirmed his own nominee, who, however, was now dead (GEOFFREY OF COLDINGHAM, pp. 29-31). Gray had returned by way of Poitou; he was at Rochefort on 17 June, and died at St. Jean d'Audely, near Poitiers, 18 Oct. 1214 (WALT. OF COV. ii. 217; HARDY, ii. 460; RYMER, i. 188; BLOMEFIELD, ii. 341; but cf. GERV. OF CANT. who gives 25 Nov.) He was buried in Norwich Cathedral (MATT. PARIS, ii. 581).

John de Gray is said to have been a 'pleasant and facetious companion,' 'of great learning,' and 'entirely beloved by the king.' He is also credited with antiquarian tastes, and with having written a defence of Geoffrey of Monmouth against William of Newburgh (BLOMEFIELD, ii. 340; cf. FOSS, *ubi supra*; TANNER, p. 338). He lent John money more than once, and in 1203 held the 'regalia' in pawn (BLOMEFIELD, ii. 340). He was a great patron of King's Lynn, for which town he procured a royal charter, and near which he built the episcopal palace at Geywood (*ib.* pp. 339-41). Blomefield

gives a list of his various appointments, but some of these seem rather doubtful (*ib.*) Tanner ascribes to him a book of 'Epistolæ ad diversos.'

[Domesday Book; Matthew Paris, Walter of Coventry, Gervase of Canterbury, Annals of Loch Cé, all in Rolls Series; Annals of the Four Masters, ed. Donovan; Foss's Lives of the Judges; Gilbert's Viceroys of Ireland; Charter Rolls, ed. Hardy, 1837; Oblate Rolls, ed. Hardy, 1835; Rymer's Fœdera, orig. ed.; Le Neve's Fasti, ed. Hardy; Potthast's Regesta Pontificum; Sweetman's Calendar of Irish Documents, vol. i.; Blomefield's History of Norfolk; Geoffrey of Coldingham ap. Tres Scriptores Eccles. Dunelm., ed. Raine (Surtees Soc.); Weever's Funerall Monuments, pp. 789-90.]

T. A. A.



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