

Jean I^{er} Harpedane

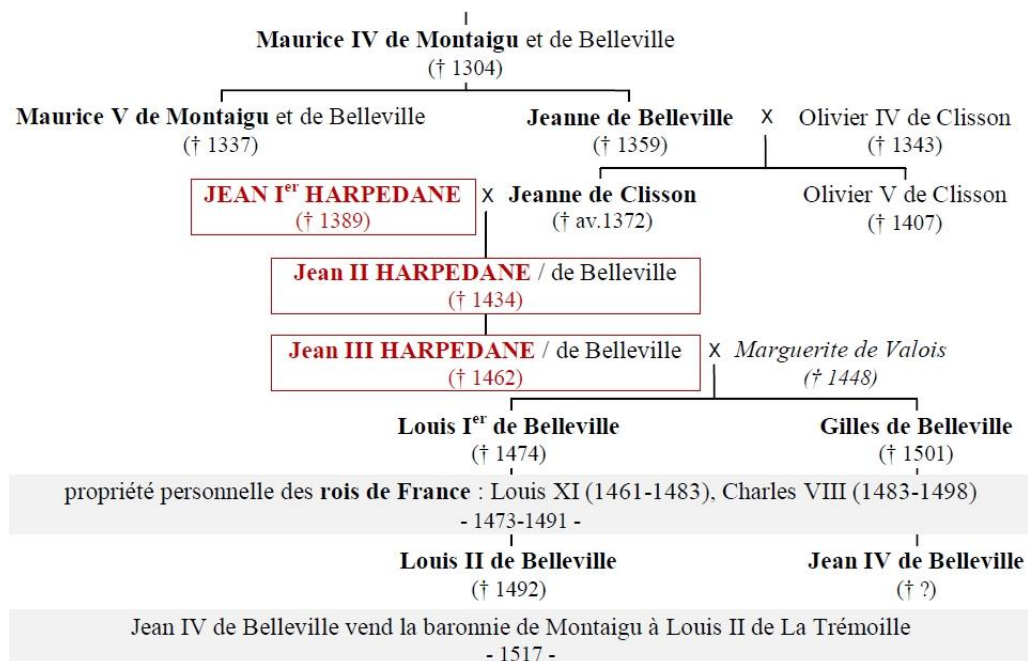
par [Maurice Mignet](#) - 2019

There is little information on the life of Jean I^{er} Harpedane, like those of his descendants and, more so, of his ancestors. It is best known to us by fleeting quotes from chroniclers of the time and at random from various legal archives (royal acts, minutes of trial, wills, matrimonial acts). Moreover, for the years 1380 to 1406, nobiliary dictionaries and genealogical works often confuse what concerns him with his son Jean II.

Harpedane are native to England. A village (Harpenden) located a few dozen kilometers north of London bears their name which could be of Scandinavian origin: the suffix "dan" can come from "danish". At the very end of the XIIIth century, a Guillaume (*William*) of Harpedene is in the records of the London Parliament¹, and later as Grand Bailiff (*High Sheriff*) Essex County. In 1312, his coat of arms ("*Argent a mullet Gules*") is among the coat of arms² of the thirty-six bannerets (lords whose number of vassals was sufficient to constitute a "*Banner*", unit of combat in a troop of the time) of the county near Berks (Berkshire). He is either the father or the grandfather of Jean (*John*) Harpedane and his brother Thomelin.



Born around 1330, Jean I^{er} Harpedane married in 1361 to Jeanne de Clisson, daughter Jeanne de Belleville, which made him the lord of Montaigu when his wife found the family possessions seized in



¹ *The Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons*, eds. 1827, vol. 1, p. 345.

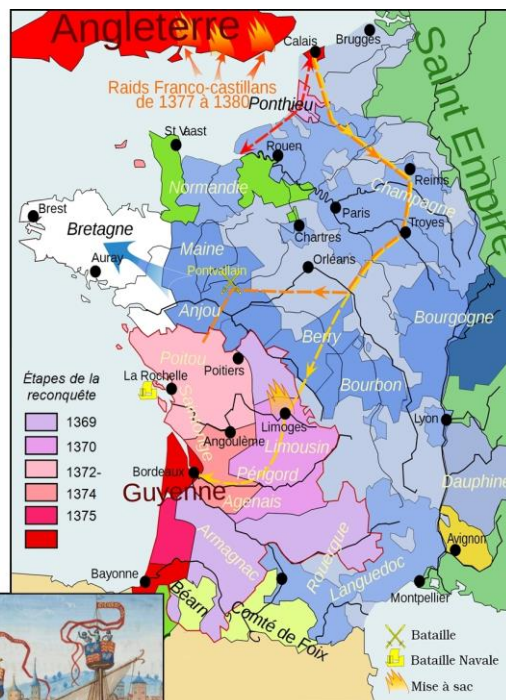
² The "*Role of the Parliament*" or "*Role of the Bannerets*", lists the names and coat of arms of the 1110 main English vassals of the King of England around 1312. It is composed of 19 vellum sheets, measuring 15.25 x 21 cm. (*The Great, Parliamentary, or Bannerets' Roll*, British Museum's manuscript collection: MS Cotton, Caligula A. XVIII, ff 3-21b, blazon No. 342).

1343 by Philippe VI de Valois. He had a son, the future Jean II Harpedane. Becoming a widower, he remarried before 1372 with Catherine Le Sénéchal Mortemer. It is through the remarriage of it in June 1390, we know that in early summer 1389. Jean Harpedane left Bordeaux and died soon after in England³.

For much of his life he fought alongside Jean Chandos whose role was decisive in the English successes of the Hundred Years War. He participated in particular in the "ride" of the Black Prince of 1355, then in that of 1356 which led the latter to defeat and capture the King of France Jean II le Bon at Poitiers. In 1360, the Treaty of Bretigny went to Edward III territories that their ancestors, the dukes of Aquitaine, had to abandon a century and a half ago, and the 1st October 1361, Jean Harpedane became for him lord and governor of Fontenay-le-Comte then later, at the same time seneschal of Saintonge where he had received a certain number of fiefs.

When he became king in 1364, Charles V tried to rally the feudal lords to him; so around 1370, Olivier V de Clisson, brother-in-law of Jean Harpedane, left the camp of the duke of Brittany Jean IV de Montfort to join that of the king of France. From 1369, taking advantage of the financial difficulties of the Black Prince, Charles V practiced a clever politics of reconquest⁴ made of negotiations, skirmishes, truces, seats of small towns and castles... After the Rouergue, Quercy, the Armagnac, Périgord and Limousin, it extended to Poitou and Saintonge whose lords had mostly rallied to Edward III. For Jean Harpedane, it was a period of constant fighting and displacement.

Les reconquêtes de Charles V entre 1369 à 1380 (dernière couleur : territoires toujours anglais en 1380), et les dévastatrices, mais contreproductives, "chevauchées" anglaises de 1369, 1370 et 1373.



Bataille navale de la Rochelle entre Anglais et Castillans, les 22 et 23 juin 1372, illustration dans les Chroniques de Froissart, livre premier, chapitres DCLVIII à DCLXI, folio 393 et suivants.

³ *Royal Acts of Poitou*, t. 5 (1377-1390), DCLXI (February 1383), p. 203, note (scan books of the National School of Charters).

⁴ See the *Great Chronicles of France*, t.5, of Jean (II) le Bon to Charles (V) le Sage (1350/1380).

1372 was a particularly dark year for him. Seneschal of Saintonge and warrior of his suzerain Edward III, it was in June of that year in La Rochelle which was invested by the constable Bertrand Du Guesclin. An English fleet, commanded by John de Hastings, Count of Pembroke, was sent to his aid, while a Castilian fleet, allied to the King of France, arrived in front of the town. Jean Harpedane went to his reinforcements, without succeeding in obtaining the support of the Rochelais who wished to limit themselves to keeping the city. Taking advantage of the play of tides, shoals and weaker drafts of their boats, the Spaniards destroyed the enemy fleet and made numerous and illustrious prisoners they sent to Spain⁵. Jean Harpedane was part of the number, and it will come back at the beginning of the year 1375.

La Rochelle having surrendered on the 23rd of August 1372, Du Guesclin advanced before Fontenay, which, according to Froissart, was valiantly defended by Catherine the Seneschal. But that can not hope to be rescued, the city and its castle surrendered on 9 and 10 October⁶, getting their supporters to retreat with their weapons on Thouars where they held all the knights of Poitou serving the King of England⁷.

Returning from captivity Jean Harpedane, with his wife, retired to England where he possessed in Raine in Devon a manor of which one has no traces. At that time, all his possessions on the mainland, in Poitou, Saintonge and elsewhere, had been confiscated by the king of France, including his first wife was found in 1360. The 1st March 1384 or 1385, he came in Bordeaux following his appointment as Seneschal of Gascony, a function that made him the direct representative of the King of England in his duchy of Guyenne, and which was considered the culmination of a career⁸. He was led to support his uncle, John of Ghent, Duke of Lancaster, in his royal ambitions in Spain. He exercised this high and heavy judicial, political and military function until June 25, 1389, that is to say until only a few weeks before the presumed date of his death.

By his marriages, for his possessions and, like most English nobles of that time, its culture, Jean I^{er} Harpedane although born in England was a predominantly French life. However, his loyalty throughout his life to his overlords Edward III and Richard II was remarkably consistent at a time when allegiances were very changeable. Also, one can wonder about what were his relations with his son, the future Jean II Harpedane, who very soon followed his maternal uncle Olivier V de Clisson in his rally to the Valois. Finally, Jean I^{er} Harpedane, if only for a short time, stayed at Montaigu, of which he could not really be in possession of the fact of his wife at best, from 1361 to 1372, seems very uncertain.

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⁵ Froissart (Jehan), *Chronicles*, chap. DCLIX et seq.

⁶ In 1890, Jean de Martrin-Donos published a historical melodrama in 3 acts and 7 paintings, entitled *Jehan de Harpedanne or the taking of Fontenay by Guesclin on October 9, 1372*, music of Paul Grouanne (Arch de la Vendée: BIB A 27/7).

⁷ Froissart (Jehan), *Chronicles*.

⁸ Bériac-Lainé (Francoise) and Challet (Philippe), "the Sénéchaux of Biscay: men of war (1248-1453)?" In: *Proceedings of the Congress of the League of medieval historians of higher education*, 29th Congress, Pau, 1998, p. 207-227.