

## BIDDLESDEN ABBEY AND ITS LANDS.

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"Kings and princes became as fathers into the Church, the hearts of all men inclined towards it, and there grew unto it every day earthly possessions in more and more abundance, till the greatness thereof bred envy, which no diminutions are able to satisfy."

*Hooker.*—*Eccl. Pol.*, Bk. vii. ch. 21.

Although no vestiges of Monastic buildings or of the Conventual and Parish Church can now be traced, and not a stone remains to mark the ancient boundaries of a Burial Ground, to which were once committed the bodies of munificent or noble benefactors, St. Mary's Abbey at Biddlesden, formerly occupied an important position among the Religious Houses of Buckinghamshire. In 1812 its Abbot was summoned to the Conference of Cistercian Monks in London, held under the Presidency of the Pope's Legate, and three years later with consent of his Convent, advanced a loan of 100*l.* to Edward the Second. The possessions of the Abbey, lying partly in Northamptonshire, and partly in Bucks, comprised lands or houses in twenty-one parishes, and at the last survey before the Dissolution of Religious Houses the revenues were returned of the annual value of 138*l.* 4*s.* 3*d.* It is stated in the *Monasticon Anglicanum* that in the Library at Stowe were preserved no fewer than eighty-one original documents of this Abbey, with seals appendant to most of them, commencing from the reign of King John, and among them a sentence of excommunication issued by the Pope against the Abbot and Monks in 1245. And though these have been dispersed, ample materials for an account of this Abbey may be collected from Willis' printed works and MSS., Original Charters and documents in the Harleian and Cottonian Libraries, and the Public Records and Inquisitions, and from these sources the following paper has been compiled. It is probable that further information would be supplied by the Episcopal Registers at Lincoln.

I. The Lordship of Biddlesden in the Comity of Bucks, returned in the Survey of Domesday as held by the King, passed afterwards into the possession of Robert de Meperteshall, living *temp.* Henry I. This Robert stole one of the royal hounds, and when threatened with a prosecution, bribed Osbert or Geoffrey de Clinton, the King's Chamberlain and favourite, to secure him from a conviction, by the gift of Biddlesden Manor, and five virgates of land adjoining it in Whitfield, but afterwards marrying a relative of Osbert's, he recovered these lands in dowry with his wife. Meantime too he had become possessed of an estate called Marieland, in Syresham parish but adjoining Biddlesden, from the gift of William Fitz Alured. During the wars of Stephen's reign, Meperteshall neglected to perform homage to Robert de Bellomont, Earl of Leicester for these lands, which were consequently forfeited to the Earl, who bestowed them upon Ernald de Bosco, his steward. Ernald expecting that at some future opportunity Meperteshall would endeavour to reclaim Biddlesden, and acting upon the advice of his patron, conveyed this Manor with its lands in Whitfield and Syresham to Geroundon Abbey in Leicestershire for the endowment of a Monastery of Cistercian Monks under the protection of St. Mary the Virgin. Accordingly the Monastery was founded at Biddlesden 1147, and when subsequently Meperteshall commenced the anticipated suit, the Abbot and Monks bought out his claim by a fine of ten marks, and he in the presence of the Bishop of Lincoln, solemnly renounced for himself and his heirs all further title to these lands, which he confirmed to the use of the Abbey for ever.

Besides the Charters of the Founder and Meperteshall, King Stephen and Earl Robert of Leicester confirmed the foundation of this Abbey, and Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, admitted the Monks to possession of Biddlesden Parish Church with all its rights and privileges. Until 1209 the tythes of Biddlesden, Marieland, and the Abbey lands in Whitfield, were paid to the Canons of St. Mary's Church in Leicester, but by a composition then effected with the aid of Ernald de Bosco, the younger, and the Earl of Leicester, these tythes were released to Biddlesden Abbey, in return for which the Monks gave up a claim they had to the advowsons of the Churches of

Evington and Humberstone in Leicestershire, and also undertook to pay to the Church of Leicester one mark annually for ever.

The privileges of a Monday market at Biddlesden, and an annual Fair for six days commencing upon the Eve of St. Margaret's Day, were granted to the Abbot and Monks by Edward the Second, 1325.\*

In the hamlet of Evershaw, now incorporated with Biddlesden, but having once a Chapel in the patronage of Luffield Abbey, and assessed under the Nonarum Inquisitions of 15 & 16 Edw. III. as a separate parish, Hugh de Evershaw gave Biddlesden Abbey a ten-acre field, called Wildfurlong, and a parcel of ground in assart. His younger son Ralph, confirmed these grants, and William, the eldest, styled Dominus de Evershaw, not only joined in confirming these lands, but by numerous charters endowed the Abbey largely with further estates here and in Gorril, another hamlet of Biddlesden. The preceding benefactions augmented with half a virgate, a messuage and two acres and a half, also in Evershaw, were confirmed by William de Bellocampo and his son Simon; and Beatrix, his daughter, widow of Oton, ratified all former benefactions upon condition that the Monks should pray for the souls of her husband, herself, and two sons, Oton and Robert.

The Abbey held also in Evershaw "in trust for the relief of the poor and sick lay-folk," an acre of land given by Albert Integres and his wife Basilea, the daughter and co-heiress with her sister Alice, of Hugh Seymor of Evershaw.

For the advantage and good government of these large estates, William de Evershaw gave the Monks the privilege of a free park, and licence to enclose lands in Evershaw, and also liberty to hold a Court for the punishment of felons, and the settlement of disputes.'

II. In Whitfield Parish the Abbey held considerable possessions, and by an Inquisition taken at Syresham in the Court of the Earl of Leicester, 1328, this Parish was found to contain twenty virgates, belonging to the Monastery, divided into three Lordships.

\* Rot. Chart. Ao. 8, Edw. II.

The first Lordship held by Biddlesden Abbey from the grant of Ernald de Bosco, the founder, containing five virgates.

The second Lordship, of ten virgates, formerly belonging to Arfast de March, had passed in dowry with Rohesia, one of his four daughters, heiresses, to her husband Thomas de Armentis. He, with his wife's consent, bestowed it upon Biddlesden, but subsequently Ralph Barri de Staunton and his brother Robert, sons of another daughter of Arfast, claimed two virgates of land in this Manor, as heirs entitled from the Earl of Leicester, and against Henry and Geoffrey, sons of Thomas de Armentis, then tenants of this land. To accommodate this claim the Monks gave Ralph and Robert Barri twenty marks, and to Henry and Geoffrey a virgate of the land held *in capite* of the Lordship of Arfast de March, and so retained possession, both Ralph and Robert Barri executing confirmatory Charters, as did also Henry Armentis, and Geoffrey, his brother; and the agreement then made was ratified by Robert Blanchmains, second Earl of Leicester, between 1177-1186. Among further confirmations by succeeding owners of this Lordship, one was given by Robert, Persona de Morton, who directed his burial to take place at Biddlesden. And when in the reign of Henry III, a certain Robert Foliot, descendant from Arfast de March, through Rhuoes, his eldest daughter, who married Robert Foliot the elder, put in a claim to this Manor, the King, at the solicitation of the Monks issued an injunction bidding him desist, but afterwards finding these lands to have been originally alienated without a royal licence, Henry took them unto his own possession, though he subsequently restored them to the Abbey by a Charter executed at Geddington in Northamptonshire.

The remaining five virgates, forming the third Lordship, belonged to Emma de Insula (Lisle), whose son Robert joined her in conveying them to Biddlesden, at a fee-farm rent of one mark yearly: this grant was ratified by her grandson, Alan, de Crancewell, and by Luke de Quartermains and his son Adam.

By leave from the Prior of Brackley, the Monks enclosed a piece of open field here in 1239, and by payment of four

marks purchased all rights in Whitfield appertaining to the Church of Luffield.

By the last survey the Abbey was returned as possessing rents here to the value of *2l. 5s. 4d.*, and 86 Hen. VIII. all the lands in Whitfield not included in the grant to Thomas Wrythesley were bestowed on John Fox and Thomas Hall.\*

III. In Syresham, County Northampton, besides Marieland, the Abbey held other lands, called Westinhill, of the gift of Ernald de Bosco. Gilbert de Pinkeney, and his wife Eustachia, gave confirmations of these lands circa 1160, as did subsequently Robert and Richard Wancy. In 1306, the Monks, by a fine of five marks, had licence to enclose twenty acres in Westinhill, in Syresham, within the boundaries of Whittlebury Forest, and their estates here became so extensive that in 9 Edward II. (1315) the Abbot of Biddlesden was returned to the Co-Lord of Syresham. †

In Westcote, another hamlet of Syresham, the Monks held seven acres of the gift of Ralph de Pinkeney, which after his death his widow Ida confirmed, 1230, upon a fine of three marks.

William de Pateshull, of Blecheshoe, (Bletsoe, Oxon), for himself and his heirs, released William de Loughteburgh, Abbot of Biddlesden, 28 Edw. III. from a rent of forty shillings and all sums due upon his fee at Syresham, and confirmed the Abbey in all its lands and houses there.

Upon the general levy of Scutage in 1280, the Monks of Biddlesden were assessed upon Marieland, but by favour of the Earl of Leicester obtained an Inquisition to examine into the liability of these lands, when the verdict was in their favour, the jurors finding that this land was and ought to remain exempt from this impost, inasmuch as the first Earl of Leicester had granted it to a former owner enfranchised from the payment of all dues and other service, and that it possessed a free Chapel to which tythes were annexed, and had been confirmed by Henry II. without any service.

Before the foundation of Biddlesden Abbey, the tythes of Whitfield, Syresham and Brackley, had been granted to St. Mary's at Leicester, and this appropriation confirmed by

\* Pat. 20 Oct. 36, Hen. 8. † Card. MSS. nom. vill. p. 6.

the Pope. But in 1209, William, Abbot of St. Mary's, sold those portions of tythe which were due from Biddlesden Abbey lands to his Convent, with a warranty against any claim that might subsequently be advanced to them by the Rectors of Brackley or Syresham, to the Abbot and Brethren of Biddlesden for the rent-charge of half a mark yearly. A special clause in this agreement reserved the tythes of Westcote hamlet for the Incumbent of Syresham; and another clause provided, that if at a future time Biddlesden should become possessed of lands in Brackley or Syresham, the tythes of which, at the date of that agreement were paid to Leicester Abbey, then these tythes should go to the Incumbent of the Church of the Parish in which the lands lay, saving, nevertheless, to Biddlesden the tythes upon all unenclosed lands that should be afterwards cultivated.

IV. Dadford, Parish of Stowe, Bucks. Between 1157-1167, William de Dadford and his wife directed their bodies to be buried at Biddlesden, and with consent of their sons, Robert, himself a further benefactor to the Abbey, William, and Ralph, endowed Biddlesden with lands in Dadford, which grant was confirmed by the Earl of Pembroke, Robert, Bishop of Lincoln, and many others. In reference to this grant, Willis states upon the authority of Bishop Kennet, that "Anno 1205, Thomas de St. Wallery confirmed to the Abbey of Biddlesden, all his lands in Dadford for the salvation of his soul, Edela his wife, and Avery his mother's soul, Annora his daughter's, and Reginald and Bernard, his brothers' souls."\*

The Abbey also held an acre of land in Dadford by the grant of Sister Felicia, (who deceased 1276), Prioress of Catesby, in Northamptonshire, upon an annual payment of one pound of wax to the use of her Convent. In the Testa de Nevill, circa 1 Edw. III., the Abbot of Biddlesden is returned to hold *medietatem villoe Dadford in pura elemosyna in com. Bucks.* Queen Elizabeth granted the Abbey lands here to William Typper and John Daw, from whom they passed through the Throckmortons to the family of Temple, ancestors of the present Duke of Buckingham and Chandos.

V. In Houghton or Horton in Northamptonshire, Ernald, son of the Founder, gave half a virgate of land to Bid-

\* Willis Bucks, p. 279.

dlesden where he appointed to be buried, and his son confirming this Charter added another half virgate, a moiety, *i.e.* the alternate presentation, of the Church, and half the Mill. About one hundred years later the Monks obtained from Robert Grimbalde, the younger, Lord of Houghton, the other half of the Mill, chargeable however with a yearly rent of four marks.

The remaining moiety in Houghton Church was bestowed by Matilda de Houghton upon the Priory of St. Andrew's Church at Northampton.\* This benefaction raised a dispute between the Abbot of Biddlesden and the Prior of St. Andrew's concerning their several interests in this Church, which appears to have been adjudged in favour of the former, as in the Chartulary of S. Alban's Abbey a copy of an injunction was entered, issued by King Henry II. addressed to Arvil of Northampton, commanding him under pain of certain penalties "without delay to put the Monks of Bittlesden in possession of "Horton Church, which they hold of Ernald de Bosco's "gift."† The dispute still continuing, a final adjustment was at last effected. Abbot Richard, with consent of his Convent, sold to the Prior of St. Andrew's the Biddlesden moiety in this Church, for a fixed rent-charge of two marks annually, and this sale was confirmed under Charter from Ernald de Bosco, grandson of the Founder. ‡

The above-named Matilda de Houghton was a great benefactor to Biddlesden. She released to this Abbey her whole fee in Houghton and one virgate of land, that the Monks might pray for the souls of her husband Robert, who had lived *temp.* Henry II., Paganus and Adela Raunes, her father and mother, and William, her grandfather.

VI. In Helmingham, County Northampton, Robert Brackel, son of Alured, gave the Monks an assart purchased of Matthew Roumeli, a messuage and an acre of land; and Matthew Roumeli and his wife, Sidonia, granted further lands here, confirmed to the Abbey by Isabel de Nonancourt, his sister, and her two sons, Robert and

\* Cotton MSS., Vesp. E. xvii. Plut xxiv. C.

† Harl. MSS. No. 66. fol.167.

‡ Excerpt, e Regist Prioratus S. Andr. de Northamp, folio 62. b.

William, and by Margaret De Quincy, Countess of Winchester.

Roger le Crest and his wife, Cecilia, passed by fine to Biddlesden, 1227, eleven virgates with their appurtenances and a portion of a Mill, and, by subsequent Charters, two virgates more, an assart of wood, and a parcel of ground, which they inherited from Isabel de Turville. These grants had confirmation from Simon de Montford, Earl of Leicester.

Petronilla de Turville, widow of Simon, gave a mesuage and one plough-land for the repose of her husband's soul.

It is found from the Lincoln Registers, quoted in Dodsworth's MSS., and confirmed by the Biddlesden Chartulary, that 11th Edw. I., William Turville, knight, the Abbot of Biddlesden, and Hugh de Herdebech joined to claim a moiety of Helmingham Church, but that upon trial this moiety was adjudged to belong to St. John's Hospital in Northampton. This Hugh de Herdebech appears to have been no obedient son of the Church. He possessed himself of two virgates of the Abbey lands in Helmingham, which he relinquished upon the institution of a suit against him before Richard Middleton and the other Judges in the King's Court at Northampton, and for the sum of twenty marks paid him, promised to secure the Abbey in quiet occupation. This pledge he afterwards broke, for in a Charter which, 1286, the Monks obtained from Prince Edward, son of Edward I., at Leicester, confirming to them the grants of Roger le Crest, with power to hold a Court at Helmingham, there is a special clause of protection against the encroachments of Hugh de Herdebech.

VII. In Estwell, a hamlet of Wappenham in Northamptonshire, William de Bolebec granted lands, called Blacknam closes, which his daughter Mabile, her husband William de Weedon, and her son Ralph confirm with the sanction of Robert de Pinkeney: in this hamlet the Monks held other lands given by Osbert de Wancy with consent of his wife Eliza, and with confirmations from his son and daughter Robert and Christiana, his grandson William, and Gilbert de Pinkeney, Lord of the Manor.

By the following Charter of early date, given by Robert

Chestney, Bishop of Lincoln 1147-1173, possession of the Estates already mentioned were further secured to Bidlesden Abbey :—

"Robertus Dei Grat. Lincol. episc. universis Catholice ecclie filiiis Salut. Ut religiosa religiosorum devotio in opportunitatibus suis celerem obtineat effectum in dilecto filio nostro Alexandro Abbati et fratribus suis in Abbacia de Bitlesdena Domino famulantibus, quicumque in .....canonice possideant, sicut Scripta advocatorum testantur, Confirmavimus et sigilli nostri attestacione communivimus que ..... dignum duximus exprimenda..... Ex dono Ernaldi de Bosco Villam de Bitlesdena et Marielonde cum omnibus pertinenciis suis et silvam de Wiche cum redditu silvarum quas idem eis contulit; Ex dono Thomam de Witefelde terram de Witefelde cum suis pertinenciis; Ex donacione Emme de Insule terram de Witefelde que ad jus suum pertinere agnoscitur; Ex dono Willemi et Roberti terram de Dodeforde cum suis pertinenciis; Ex largitione Osberti de Wancy terram de Estwell cum suis pertinenciis; Ex dono de Matthew Rumel terram de Helmeden cum pertinenciis; Ex donacione Matilde de Houghton et Simonis filii ejus terram quandam in Houghton et Braifelde; Ex largitione Gervasii terram de Leise cum omnibus pertinenciis.

"Volumus itaque ut quecumque filii nostri in nostra Diocesi justis modis obtinuerint vel in futuro obtinere poterint, in perpetuum possideant, ut illibata in elemosynam.

"VALETE."

In a Charter, nearly similar in form of expression, bearing date 8th April, 1251, Henry III. confirms an earlier Licence given by King John to the Monks, to hold Ernald de Bosco's grant of Marieland, and lands in Whitfield, Dadford, and Westcote, and the lands given by De Wancy and William de Bolebec.

In the same parish of Wappenham, Sir Henry de Pinkeney, holding two hides there, *temp.* Henry II., gave the Abbey a meadow, called Smethmede, and bequeathed his body to be buried in the Abbey Church.

All the tythes of Wappenham, with the exception of a moiety settled upon the Rector of the Church, had been given with other revenues by Gilbert de Pinkeney for the endowment of a Priory, founded by him at Weedon, and annexed to the Benedictine Monastery of St. Lucie in Normandy. By law, the revenues of annexed Priors were always received by the Superior Religious House, excepting in the case of the inferior Monastery being united to one beyond the realm, when they were then paid only during peace between the two countries, and in time of war were escheated to the King. Accordingly, from the constant war with France in the fourteenth century,

the Monastery of St. Lucie derived small pecuniary advantage from Weedon Priory, and Ralph Garet, a Monk of the Convent, and James, of Normandy, were sent over to England to treat for its sale to Biddlesden. The purchase was effected for the sum of three hundred marks, and on the 29th of May, 1392, a Deed was executed, which conveyed to Peter De Mas, Abbot of Biddlesden, for the use of himself and Convent, "Weedon Priory with all its lands, tenements, rents, tythes, etc., together with the advowson of the Church of Weedon, and all things in the hands of the Abbot and Convent of St. Lucie, in the vills of Wappenham, Staines, Morton, Plumpton, and Astwell, Com. Northampton; and Miggleham, Huggelaia, Datchet, Ruthberge, and Estleia apud Datchet, Com. Bucks."\*

VIII. In Maids Morton, Roger son of Richard de Morton, gave an acre of meadow, and Walter de Morton endowed the Abbey with the Holme Meadow, another called Buckford, and a field adjoining the lands of John de Breuse in Bourton, adding to his Charter a special clause of warrantry "against all encroachments of Jews and women."

IX. In Bourton, in the Parish of Buckingham, John Fitz Hugo conveyed to Biddlesden an eight-acre meadow, known as Thornimede, and a second meadow of six acres, and his brother Henry gave other lands with the consent of Philip de Daumart, Lord of the Manor. Subsequently Henry and William, the sons of Henry, proceeded to annul the benefactions of their Uncle and Father, which the Monks resisting, a compromise was at length effected, and an agreement drawn up in St. Peter's Church at Buckingham, in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the whole Chapter of the Church. The Abbot of Biddlesden gave up all the land at Bourton, excepting Thornimede and one other field, both which he held upon a lease, having then sixteen years to run, and undertook to pull down and remove before the next Easter twelvemonth, all the houses the Monks had built there, and the two brothers, Henry and William agreed to pay to the Abbey ten shillings yearly for the fifteen years next ensuing, and

\* Harl. MSS. No. 4714. fol. 254.

to put the Monks in quiet possession of one culture of eighteen acres, called Poppy-Furlong. In addition to the above lands, the Monks acquired possession of a meadow in this hamlet, called after them Munkehay, which, in 1324, they let at a rental of eight shillings per annum.

X. In Buckingham, William de Breuse, son and heir of John de Breuse, confirmed to this Abbey, one messuage and culture of land within the town, then known as the Wynyard, which the Monks held of the gift of Hugh, the son of Ralph de Buckingham, and he further confirmed all that they held in his fee within the town of Buckingham. William de Breuse died 1277.

XI. Upon the completion of the Monastic Buildings at Biddlesden, Ralph Hareng and Walter de Westbury gave the Monks leave to cut timber in Westbury, and subsequently Ralph granted them five parts of assart in this parish, called "The Neuwood," a grant confirmed to the Abbey by John de Leise, who in right of his wife Susannah held land there of the fee of Ralph Hareng. Hareng had become Lord of this Manor by succession to Thomas St. Wallery, on whose ancestor Henry I. had bestowed it 1112, and when after the decease of Ralph Hareng the younger, son to the preceding by Isabel, his wife, Hugh de Chastillon became Lord of Westbury, he confirmed the Monks in their lands, and so they kept possession. In 1305, their rents were worth forty shillings yearly, but decreased in value afterwards, the return of 1534 stating them at thirty shillings only.

*( To be continued. )*