

BIDDLESDEN ABBEY AND ITS LANDS.

By REV. H. ROUNDELL.

(Continued from Vol. 7, page 207.)

XII. In Turweston, County Bucks, Ralph de Stovil, whose family had obtained the Manor by grant from Richard the First after the forfeiture of the Felgeres, its first possessors after the Conquest, granted Biddlesden Abbey four virgates, chargeable with a quit-rent of six-pence per annum. Charters confirmatory of these and other lands in this parish were obtained on payment of fines of various amounts, from Matilda de Audley, describing herself as "the Rose of Turweston," her two daughters, Sibella and Agnes, and their respective husbands, John de Blake, and John de Pathe.

Some years later lands were exchanged at Turweston between the Abbey and Humphrey de Stovil, the younger, nephew of Ralph, and subsequently disputes arose between them concerning rights of road, ditches, boundaries, and especially a dunghill and pig-stye of De Stovil's, which stood in a position peculiarly offensive to one of the Biddlesden tenants; so that in 1245 arbitrators were appointed, and they having adjusted the minor articles of complaint, fixed boundary stones upon the disputed lands, and made further order "that the dung-hill should be placed immediately under the window of the house to which the pig-stye belongs, and that the door of the pig-stye should open opposite the door of the house, and that a fence should be made between the dung-hill and the house belonging to Biddlesden, and that no man should presume to disturb this settlement under pain of excommunication."

Yet this agreement did not secure undisturbed possession of their lands to the Monks; in 1274 they were compelled to pay a fine of twenty shillings to Florence de Stovil, and in 1286 they were sued in the King's Court

at Wycombe by Adam Sweet, descendant from Matilda de Audley, for restitution of the lands in Turweston that had been confirmed by her, and could only retain them on payment of two marks. In 1330 the whole revenues of the Abbey in this parish had sunk to 1*l.* 12*s.* 6*d.* annually.

XIII. In Codesford, now Cottisford, County Oxon, Roger Albus granted seven acres of land, and grass in his pastures and commons for six score sheep,* a benefaction, confirmed by charter from Matilda, widow of Wydone de Codesford, upon a fine of three shillings and two bushels of grain. In 1218 William de Bac leased to this Abbey, for a term of twenty years, all his houses in Codesford, with a dove cote, fish-pond, and other premises, for a fine of sixty shillings and an annual rent of three; and by a second lease he granted for the same length of time and at a yearly rent of half a mark, a farm-yard and rights of pasturage in Codesford for twelve score sheep, and covenanted to provide the stalls with straw for litter, and to thatch the sheep-fold as often as was necessary.†

Willis cites the Fine rolls of 1249, as proving that in that year Biddlesden held a messuage and lands in Codesford, but it is probable that these lands became subsequently alienated from the Abbey, as no mention of them occurs in the Chartulary, which appears to have been compiled at the close of the 15th or early in the 16th century.

XIV. Boycote, near Stowe, County Oxon, King Henry I. founding an Abbey of Black Canons at Cirencester, A. D. 1117, endowed it with lands in this parish, confiscated from the secular priest Rembald. Their estates here, confirmed by Charter from Hugh de Kennea, were held for upwards of a century by these Monks, who between 1230-1238 leased them to William de Stratford for the term of his life, at an annual rent of one hundred shillings, and shortly after sold them to Biddlesden, subject however to the above-named lease.

The extent of this Manor, described in the Cirencester Charter, as *Boicotam, et unam hidam terre in bosco et plano cum uno molendino* is ascertained from a survey, made about the time of the sale to Biddlesden, entitled *Tenentes ad Boicotam*, which recites the names of all the

* Cart. Ant. 84 F. 59.

† Cart. Ant. 84 H. 3 and 4.

tenants, fifteen in number, and the quantity of land in their several holdings, and has the following:—

“ Memorandum.

“ 1. That Richard the Miller owes fealty to the King
“ for one virgate of land, and pays yearly one mark for
“ the rent of the mill.

“ 2. That in Boicote field there are twenty acres, and
“ fifteen acres, and half an acre in demesne, and thirty
“ acres and a half were with the croft of Walter de
“ Bannebury.

“ 3. That in Boicote field there are twenty-six acres, and
“ eight acres, and half an acre in villenage.

“ 4. That the virgate in demesne contains twenty-
“ three acres.

“ 5. That the virgate in villenage contains twenty-
“ two acres, and two large acres (*acras majores*).”

“ In Demesne there are six and a half virgates.

“ In Villenage there are five and a half virgates.”*

As no leases or annual agreements for these lands have been met with, it is likely that they were cultivated by the Monks themselves and their labourers, but in 1526, when the fortunes of the Monastic orders began to be in peril, Abbot Richard gave a lease of Boycott for 49 years to Agnes Abbice, widow of Ludovic Abbice, saving however to his Abbey the Boicote woods, and all the trees, chiefly ash and elm, growing upon the estate.† Ten years later the timber thus reserved, excepting Boicote woods, was sold to William Risly of Chytwoode, for “ a certain somme of money agreeede and payde” who had license of the Abbey to cut it down and carry it away.‡

XV. In Charwelton, County Northampton, William de Chenduit conveyed to Biddlesden two carucates, described as all the land within his Lordship, and three virgates and a half within the Vill, a grant confirmed by Richard the First; and by subsequent Charter De Chenduit added his capital messuage in Charwelton with its mills, quarries, roads, pasturages, and other appurtenances to his former benefactions, and released the Monks from a payment of two besants annually with which his first grant had been made chargeable.

But within a short time, probably after William’s death,

* Harl: MSS. 4714 fol. 300.

† Cart. Ant. 84. F. 20.

‡ Cart. Ant. 84. F. 25.

his son Ralph possessed himself of a portion of these lands, for by suit in the King's Court to which the Abbot of Biddlesden was a party, he was compelled to restore lands in Charwelton to Lucie de Cokfield, and she about the year 1203, with her son Adam, confirmed to Biddlesden, all the lands within her fee of Charwelton, "to wit, all that the Monks formerly held, and all that she had recovered from Ralph de Chenduit" on payment of half a Knight's service to the Fee of Morton, and to herself and heirs twelve marks yearly. This rent-charge, descending to her grandson, Adam de Cokfield, was remitted by him 1272, and in exchange the Monks of Biddlesden released him from an annual payment of ten pounds, due to them from his Manor of Fautewelle, in the Diocese of Norwich, and which they had purchased two years previously from the Abbot of Belle Becce by a contribution of one hundred pounds sterling for the rebuilding of his Abbey.*

The Biddlesden estates in Charwelton had been also charged with an annual payment of nine shillings to the Monastery of Ashby, which Adam, Prior of that house remitted. Also with dues to the Priory of Warde, touching which an agreement was concluded in 1250, which assigned to Biddlesden all the emoluments in Charwelton of the Priory of Warde, and to Warde all the rights claimed by Biddlesden from lands belonging to the Priory in the vill of Bifield.

Another virgate in Charwelton was held by Biddlesden of the Fee of Berkhamstede. It had been given by Simon Herewarde, charged with a quit-rent of half a pound of pepper, and one pound of cummin, which was released by Thomas de Bronton, Lord of the Manor, for a fine of 6s. 8d. In 1276 Edmund, Earl of Cornwall, Lord of the Fee of Berkhamstede, confirmed the Monks in their possession of this virgate, and discharged them from all services in his Court, due upon these lands.†

A. D. 1480, Thomas Andrews obtained a lease of the whole estates of the Abbey in this parish, at a rental of £16 yearly; and obligation to keep in repair all the buildings, under a penalty of £40, recoverable by dis-

* Harleian 4714 fol. 98. b., and Cart. Ant. 84. D. 11.

† Cart. Ant. 84. C. 12.

traint, with remainder in the event of his death to his son Richard.

XVI. In Preston Capes, County Northampton, Ralph de Castel, or Caldecourt, and his wife Agnes granted a virgate of land, upon condition that they should be provided by the Abbey "with food and clothing, roof and covering," and all necessaries during their lives and afterwards be received to sepulture in the burial place of the Abbey, and by other, but undated, charters, they bestowed on the same terms a second virgate, a messuage, and premises at Preston. And A.D. 1203, Ralph de Chenduit, in lieu of giving a warrantry upon lands in Charwelton, conveyed to the Biddlesden Monks his rights in the Manor of Preston, reserving to himself a rent-charge of five marks annually. Towards the close of the 13th century, Richard de Lyons, Lord of Warkworth and Preston, gave the Monks rights of pasturage in West Woode within his estates there, and in 1295 they enclosed and brought into cultivation a parcel of land in Preston field, upon agreement made with the Prior of Daventry settling a fixed rent-charge upon the land in question as composition for tythe. Next after Charwelton, where their revenues amounted to 16*l.* at the time of the dissolution, the Biddlesden Abbey rents in Northamptonshire were highest in value at Preston, being found by the Commissioners worth 7*l.* 14*s.* 4*d.*

XVII. Thornborough, County Bucks. The quit-rent of five marks yearly, due from Biddlesden upon the Preston Manor, passed by inheritance or purchase from Ralph de Chenduit to Hugh Donesterre. He, with his wife's agreement, founding in 1266 a Chantry at Littlecote, in the parish of Stewkley, endowed it with this rent-charge, but by a second charter in the same year he released the Monks of Biddlesden from this payment, placed in their hands the sustentation and patronage of his newly founded Chantry, and confirmed to them two carucates, and a meadow called the Holme, in Thornborough, subject nevertheless to a sum of forty shillings annually to the nuns of St. Margaret's Celle of Ivinghoe, and for the Capellane of Littlecote a pension of five marks and three quarters of corn, with one jar of oil, and the offerings and altarages of the Chantry, a provision which in 1481 was

commuted for a stipend of four pounds yearly, and so continued until the dissolution.

Prior however to the benefaction of Hugh Donesterre, the Abbey possessed lands in this Parish described as "one virgate given by Reginald de Fraxino, one virgate given by Alan, son of Hugo, two virgates given by Ralph de Fraxino, one virgate given by Alice, daughter of Ralph Morin, four virgates given by John Hastings, three and a half virgates confirmed by Alice, daughter of Robert Hastings, and one virgate given by Thomas de Monte," and by Deed in 1246 the Abbot ceded to Ralph Morin one messuage, a parcel of thirty-two and a half acres, four acres of meadow, with pasturage for 80 sheep, 20 pigs, 6 cows, 6 oxen and 5 heifers, a fish-pond, and privileges of hunting and hawking, all in Thornborough, in exchange for lands and similar privileges in Snelston and Harewald. Four years after this exchange Roger Foliot and Floria, his wife, obtained a lease of the Manor of Preston Capes for their joint lives, and in compensation conveyed to the Abbey four messuages in Thornborough, three and a half virgates, ten and a half acres, and a rent of ten pence, held at a fee-farm rent of four silver pennies from Reginald de Fraxino, who confirmed this charter for a fine of five marks and one quarter of wheat. A second confirmation of Foliot's conveyance was given by John, son of Alan de Wolverton, Capital Lord, and he in 1272, on being freed from a charge of six shillings yearly secured to the Abbey by Adam Harding upon a house at Stony Stratford and a virgate at Wolverton, gave the Monks a warrantry against all taxes that might be levied upon their lands at Thornborough by the Warden of Northampton.

XVIII. In the City of London, 1273-4, Cecilia, widow of William the Salter, citizen of London, granted Biddlesden her house in Distaff-lane within the parish of St. Nicholas, chargeable with the usual dues to the Lord of the Manor. This house, with one adjoining it also belonging to Biddlesden, was found A.D. 1291 worth xxv s. annually, subject to a deduction of xis. vi d. as tythe, and both three years later were leased, with two shops under them, to Thomas, Rector of St. Nicholas, for the term of his life upon a fine of five and a half marks, and a yearly rent of fifteen shillings.* In 1298 the Abbey purchased

* Cart. Ant. 34, E. 26.

another house in Distaf-lane for 100 shillings, but charged with half a mark yearly to the Abbot of Westminster, seven shillings to the heirs of William de Burwelle, 18d. to the Canons of St. Brech, 18d. to the heirs of Ralph Tanni, and one pound of cummin to the heirs of Dionysia, wife of John de Thesewykes.

XIX. Ebrington, with Charingworth, County Gloucester. This Manor held by Ernald de Bosco, founder of Biddlesden, descended by the female line to Roger Corbet, who 6 Edward III. obtained grant of free warren there, and from him to Robert Corbet and his wife Sibella, with a reversionary interest in default of heirs to John Lovet, who had married Isabel, daughter of Ernald de Bosco, the younger, and whose only daughter Elizabeth was the wife of William Lord De La Zouch.* And when, in the reign of Edward III. repeated destruction of the crops by blight, added to the periodical occurrence of a fatal distemper among the cattle, had thrown out of cultivation large tracts of land in Buckinghamshire,† and so impoverished the tenants under Biddlesden, that many of them were unable to pay their rents, whereby the revenues of the Monastery became reduced to such an extent, that the religious services were neglected, and the house almost empty, and unable to offer its customary hospitality to the wayfarer and the poor, Robert Corbet in the year 1371 richly augmented its endowments with four cottages at Ebrington, seven virgates in Ebrington-field, and keep for one bull and twelve cows, with his whole rights of pasturage on Ebrington-common, together with one messuage at Charingworth.

Some years previously Robert Corbet and his wife had sold for one hundred marks the advowson of Ebrington Church with an acre of ground appurtenant, to their relative William Lord De La Zouch, and he in 1378, "for the affection he bore to the memory of his kinsman "Ernald de Bosco, buried at Biddlesden," conveyed his

* Fosbrooks's Gloucestershire, vol. 2. page 332.

† The distress in Buckinghamshire from the failure of the crops and loss of the cattle, is attested by the Nonarum Inquisitions of 14 & 15 Edw'd. III. Other Religious Houses besides Biddlesden suffered from this misfortune. Luffield Abbey sought a Royal Licence for the augmentation of its revenue in 1336, and the petition of the Prior of Chetwode praying for the annexation of the Parish Church to his House, alleges in support of his request—*quod expensas Prioratus per sterilitatem agrorum et alia infortunia per istam concessionem minime valent economari.*

advowson and land to the Abbey; John Lovet, of whom it was held in capite, Robert Corbet, James Rex Castel, joining with confirmatory charters, together with Henry Denys, husband of the sister of Robert Corbet, who for a fine of one hundred marks sanctioned the conveyance.

The appropriation of this rectory was further secured by the Archdeacon of Gloucester, the Prior and Canons of Worcester, the Bishop of Worcester, (who appointed the ordination of a vicar, vesting the patronage in Biddlesden,) the Archbishop of Canterbury, and ultimately by Pope Urban in 1381. At the dissolution the value of Ebrington Rectory was returned at 16*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* annually, reduced however by the payment of 6*l.* to the Vicar, 13*s.* 4*d.* to the Bishop of Gloucester, a like sum to the Prior of Worcester, and 1*s.* 4*d.* to the Archdeacon of Gloucester.

The Charter of Lord De Le Zouch granting the advowson of Ebrington, and the acre of land annexed to it, probably misled Dodsworth, on whose authority Willis appears to rely, in attributing the donation of the large landed estates in Ebrington which Biddlesden held to the De La Zouches, an error strengthened no doubt by the existence of a mutilated tomb of one of this family at Biddlesden, when Willis surveyed the ruins of the Abbey on 5th Oct. 1709. And any doubt that may have arisen from any supposed confusion of the original grant with its confirmatory Charters, is set at rest by the evidence of a document of Peter De Mas, Abbot 1376-93, in which he enjoins his consent to receive into the benefit of their prayers *nobiles viros, Dominos, Robertum Corbet patrem, et Robertum Corbet filium, milites, tanquam fundatores, ac nobilem Dominam Beatriam uxorem prædicti Roberti patris, ac bonæ memoriæ Sibillam nuper uxorem dicti Domini Roberti patris, necnon Aliciam nuper uxorem dicti Domini Roberti filii tam defunctas, ac ceteros liberos Roberti et Roberti tam viros quam defunctos, qui pauperem domum Monasterii de Biddlesden multiplicauerint de donis suis et bonis temporalibus uberrime ditauerint.**

* Harl. MSS. 4714. fol. 271.