

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Thomas Boleyn, Precentor of Wells.

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THE beautiful tomb on the south side of the chapel of St. Calixtus, adorned with exquisite alabaster panels representing the Annunciation and figures of canons vested in the choir habit, was for a long time assigned to Dean Husee (1302–1305), in spite of the fact that its workmanship was of a much later date. Sir William St. John Hope, who some years ago identified it as the tomb of Thomas Boleyn, precentor of Wells, 1451–1472, has been good enough to write me a note stating the grounds of this identification. He says: “Burke gives the arms of Bullen of Stickford, co. Lincoln, as *Silver fretty and a chief sable with three silver roundels on the chief*. These are the arms on your tomb; and you will find at the foot of the effigy the broken remains of clerks singing at a desk. A date *c.* 1470 exactly agrees with that of the tomb.”

First, with regard to the arms on the tomb; the colour is so nearly obliterated that it is difficult to say with certainty what it originally was. There is no trace of roundels on the chief, so far as I can discover; the black colour of the fretty, is all that remains quite certain. The chief has a reddish hue, with a few specks of deep red paint here and there. In the absence of any rival claimant there is a presumption in favour of the view that the fretty sable and the chief point to Thomas

Boleyn. It is therefore worth while to collect such information about him as can be discovered. We shall find that he was a person of some importance in his day.

Master Thomas Boleyn appears in Bp. Beckington's Register, f. 85b, on 4 March 1449, as "having a collation of a canonry in the church of Wells and of the prebend of Dultecote, *alias* Dultyngcote vacant by the death of Master William Byconel, dated in the manor of Dogmersfeld on the 5th of November last past." He takes the oath of obedience to the bishop at his hospice in London, and receives letters of institution.

On 5 June 1449 the abbot and convent of Glastonbury presented him to the rectory of Wrington (Weaver, *Somerset Incumbents*, p. 304).

Our next notice is the grant to Thomas Boleyn LL.B, on 9 April 1450 of the canonical house vacated by the death of John Reynolds the subdean (Beck. f. 108b). Thus the bishop enabled his new canon to qualify for residence. Then, on 20 April in the same year, the bishop appointed him to the subdeanery and the church of Woky thereto annexed (Beck. f. 110).

The communar's account-roll for the year ending Mich. 1450 gives us a glimpse of the new subdean at a period of political disturbance in the county which threatened the safety of the cathedral church.¹ Sir William Bonville, the lord of Chewton-on-Mendip, a few miles above Wells, had a quarrel with the earl of Devon, which amounted to civil war, and culminated in the siege of Taunton by the latter in 1451. The following items are entered by the communar :

Expenses of William Bonvyle and Alexander Hody at Wells, 21 July [1450], because of insurgents against the peace of the church and the king. [This item is cancelled.]

Expenses of 4 clerks, guarding the church for 4 days and nights, 1s. 4d.

Mr. Lewis Rede [one of the canons], for men hired from Wales [*de Wallia*] to defend the church, 3l. 6s. 8d.

A mason hired at various times to hide the goods and jewels of the church by the advice of Thomas Boleyn, Thomas Chewe, and the communar, 16s. 10d.

1. Cf. Cal. of Wells MSS. II, 77f.

Expenses of the lord of Bonvyle etc. coming to Wells for the defence of the church and its ministers, *3l. 16s. 11½d.*

It may be that the local disturbance was part of the widespread discontent which broke out in various parts of England owing to the defeats in France and the sudden loss of Normandy. The brief rebellion of Jack Cade in Kent (31 May—12 July 1450), and the murder of Bp. Ayscough of Salisbury at Edington on 29 June, were contemporary manifestations of this discontent which formed the prelude to the Wars of the Roses. It is worth while therefore to call attention to two other items of the same account, as illustrating the history of the period :

Expenses of William Orewell to Salisbury, to enquire about the arrival of a large number of French at Southampton, with horse hire for the journey, *2s. 0d.*

Expenses of Thomas Cokyr at Salisbury, 16 Sept., to enquire about the insurgents there, *3s. 4d.*

As one of the canons residentiary, Thomas Boleyn attests a charter dated Wells, 7 May, 1451 (Charter 641).

On 20 May, as subdean and president of the chapter, he takes part in the presentation of a perpetual chaplain to the chantry of Henry Husee, formerly dean, at the altar of St. Calixtus (Beck. f. 125). This is quite a curious coincidence. It was no doubt the foundation of this chantry that led to the ascription to Dean Husee of the tomb which we are seeking to identify. The only other persons whom we know to have been commemorated at the altar of St. Calixtus are Peter of Chichester, who was dean from 1219 to 1236, and Nicholas Calton, archdeacon of Taunton, whose will was dated 25 April 1438 (Cal. of Wells MSS. II, 107, 671f.). Bishop Harewell was buried on the N. side of this chapel, where his monument has recently been replaced; but there is no evidence that he was commemorated at this particular altar.

On 27 September he was one of two trustees to whom Bp. Beckington made over the site of his intended "New Work," the remains of which still form the north side of the market-place (Cal. of Wells MSS. I, 435). The Patent Rolls of

Henry VI show that on June 21, 1453, these trustees received license of mortmain to convey this property to the dean and chapter.

Then, on 25 October 1451, the bishop appointed him to the precentorship of the cathedral, vacant by the resignation of John Bernard (Beck. f. 132b). The church of Pilton was attached to the precentorship, and we find Thomas Boleyn presenting a vicar to it on 23 August 1461 (Beck. f. 265b); and again on 28 September 1468 (Weaver, *Som. Inc.* 165).

The date of Thomas Boleyn's death can be approximately fixed by the following facts. He was succeeded as precentor by Thomas Overay on 19 February 1472 (Stillington's Reg. f. 80b). His rectory of Wrington was filled on 25 February (Weaver, *Som. Inc.* p. 304); and his prebend of Dultingcote on 5 May of the same year (Still. f. 81). The Patent Rolls give us some further information about him and corroborate the fact that he died early in 1472. For on 16 May 1446 he had obtained a prebend in the king's free chapel of St. Stephen, at Westminster, exchanging for it the prebend of Morton Parva in the church of Hereford. And on 15 February 1472 this prebend of St. Stephen's, vacant by the death of Thomas Boleyn, was conferred on the king's clerk Master John Gunthorp, the king's almoner, who at the end of the same year became dean of Wells.

Accordingly we find that the precentorship of Wells was held by Master Thomas Boleyn for more than twenty years, namely from 25 October 1451 to some day near the beginning of February 1472. His successor, Thomas Overay, held office more than twenty-one years, being succeeded in his turn by William Warham in November 1493. When nine years later Warham left his Wells preferment for the see of London on his way to Canterbury, Bishop Oliver King wrote to Sir Reginald Bray:

I have loked upon the qwere and upon the dyvyne services doon daily in this my Chirche of Wellys and finde therein many enormyties by the absence of the chanter, for it ys that dignite that al the good ordre of dyvyne service dependeth upon. I have enquired also of the condition of that dignite. And finde that except Maister Wareham ther hath not been as eny man here can

Remembre eny chanter but that he hath kept personel Residence.¹

We must take this last statement as a tribute to the virtuous conduct of Precentor Overay. If the memory of man had extended over thirty years, there is reason to fear that it would have recalled another non-resident chanter in the person of his immediate predecessor.

For the activities of Master Thomas Boleyn were by no means confined within the limits hitherto described. He was running a career in the university of Cambridge which issued in his election in 1454 as the seventh master of Gonville Hall, now Gonville and Caius College. "He was ordained deacon," says Dr. Venn, the historian of that college (vol. III, p. 18), "by the bishop of Ely, Mar. 8, 1420-1; and priest by the bishop of Norwich in 1421, at which time he was a fellow of Trinity Hall."

When a royal licence was granted, on 30 March 1448, for the foundation of a college in honour of St. Margaret and St. Bernard (now Queens' College, Cambridge), it was prescribed that statutes should be drawn for it by seven persons; and of these Thomas Boleyn was one (Patent Rolls of Henry VI).

The mastership of Gonville Hall was vacated by Thomas Atwoode in 1454, and Thomas Boleyn was elected as his successor. There seems to have been trouble about this election, as we may gather from the first pages of the earliest of the Cambridge Grace Books. The first page of all is torn away: the next contains the register for the year 1454-5 of the two proctors, Henry Boleyn and John Gunthorp. The latter name has already come before us as that of Thomas Boleyn's successor in his prebend at St. Stephen's, Westminster, in February 1472. Henry Boleyn became precentor of Lincoln (1473-1481), and was also archdeacon of Chichester. Since it was customary for proctors to be young men of from twenty-four to thirty years of age, it is possible that he may have been a nephew of Thomas Boleyn. In the next year (1455-6) Henry Boleyn was proctor again, with John Bolton

1. *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, Vol. LX, pt. ii, p. 5.

as his colleague. In their register we find the following somewhat obscure entry :

Item de Magistro Calton appellante pro eleccione custodis colligii annunciacionis beate marie	xijd
Item de domino Thoma Boleyn pro appellacione iniurie sibi illate eodem tempore	xxd

When we know that "the college of the Annunciation of the Blessed Mary" is the proper title of Gonville Hall, of which Master Thomas Boleyn had recently been elected master or keeper, we may interpret the entry with reasonable probability. Master Robert Calton, whose name occurs in the Grace Book in later years, was evidently a person of some importance, who felt aggrieved at the result of the election to the mastership. He made an appeal against it, which was dismissed as frivolous, and the customary fine of twelve pence was imposed on him. Thomas Boleyn, though he was the successful candidate, had also appealed on account of "a wrong done to him at the same time." What his grievance was we cannot tell: we only know that he paid a fine of twenty pence. If Henry Boleyn, the senior proctor, was his nephew, he must have felt a peculiar interest in collecting it. A charter preserved in the Bodleian Library shews us Thomas Boleyn engaged in an important transaction for the benefit of the college. For on 10 March 1467 Edward Story clerk, warden, and the scholars of the college of St. Michael, Cambridge, granted to Master Thomas Boleyn clerk, warden, and the scholars of Gunwilhalle, a certain messuage or inn called Seynt Margaretis hostile in Cambridge, in the parish of St. Michael.

Thomas Boleyn's mastership came to an end with his death early in 1472. He was remembered as a benefactor to the college: "He was the donor," says Dr. Venn, "of one of the windows in the old dining-hall, viz. the first towards the east, facing the court." If this glass had survived, the problem of his coat of arms would no doubt have been solved.

One or two further facts about him may be added here, before we proceed to ask to what family Thomas Boleyn belonged. In 1434 he was sent on the king's business to

attend the Council of Basle. He travelled in the suite of Edmund Beaufort, count of Mortaigne and afterwards duke of Somerset, uncle of the Lady Margaret who was the mother of King Henry VII. He had letters of protection for six months, dated 7 May 1434.

Dr. Venn tells us that he was rector of Hackford, co. Norfolk, 1436-7. He rejects, however, the identification of him with the Thomas Boleyn who was rector of Chelsea and a canon of St. Paul's, on the ground that this person is said by Hennessy in his *Novum Repertorium* to have died in 1451. Now Hennessy tells us (p. 120), as from Bp. Gilbert's register, that on 15 July 1442 Thomas Boleyn was presented by the abbot and convent of Westminster to the rectory of Chelsea. How long he held this living does not appear; but his successor is said to have resigned in 1450. We might fairly suppose therefore that our Thomas Boleyn had vacated it in 1449, when, as we have seen, he was presented to the rectory of Wrington by the abbot and convent of Glastonbury.

Again, on p. 45, Hennessy tells us that on 15 July 1447 Thomas Bolleyn LL.B. received the prebend of Portpool in St. Paul's Cathedral, exchanging for it the prebend of Abergelley.¹ His successor in the prebend of Portpool came in on 28 October 1451; and Hennessy states that Thomas Boleyn had died in that year. But a reference to Bishop Kempe's register, which the Archdeacon of London has kindly examined for me, shews that when Master Thomas Halle was granted the prebend of Portpool on 27 (?) October 1451, that prebend was vacant "by the death of the last incumbent." The rule of the register is to give the *name* of the last holder of a prebend; but here no name is given. We have no right therefore to assume that "the last incumbent" was Thomas Boleyn LL.B., who had been given the prebend in 1447. It is quite likely that he had vacated it, as he seems to have vacated the living of Chelsea, in 1449, when he received substantial preferment at Wrington and Wells. The degree of LL.B. was not very frequently taken at the period in question, and is highly im-

1. See the notes *d* 182 and *d* 183 on p. xliii of Hennessy's *Novum Repertorium Londinense*. I have not been able to find what the prebend of Abergelley was.

probable that it should be held at the same time by two clergymen of the name of Thomas Boleyn.

We have not yet exhausted the activities of Master Thomas Boleyn LL.B. For in Browne Willis's notes to Tanner's *Notitia Monastica* we read in the list of Masters of Maidstone College in Kent: "Roger Heron occurs 1438, as does Thomas Boleyn 1459. Tho. Preston succeeded 1470." This very incomplete statement may be supplemented from the register of Archbishop Bouchier (f. 71b), where we find the collation by the archbishop to Master Thomas Boleyn, "in legibus bacallarius," of the office of master or warden of the college of All Saints of Maideston, void by the death of Robert Smyth last master or warden. The deed is dated at Lambeth the [blank] day of November 1458: the entry occurs between one of 23 November and another of 27 November. I owe this information to the Reverend C. Jenkins, the Lambeth Librarian, who adds: "I cannot find the collation of Boleyn's successor at Maidstone in Bouchier's register, and there is great difficulty about it."

Our final enquiry must be as to the family to which Thomas Boleyn belonged. We may conveniently begin with an extract from the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1849, ii, 155):¹

The family of Boleyn, or Bullen, was of Norman extraction, and was very early settled in Norfolk. They wrote their name Boulen, and were possessed of manors and lands at Salle and the adjacent villages in the twelfth century. John Boulen was witness to a deed for the sale of a messuage and lands at Woodrising, in a^o 35 Hen. II, now lying before me: and the register of Walsingham, f. 182, makes mention of John Boleyne of Salle, a^o 1283. Among the Blickling evidences there is a deed executed, probably by this John, a^o 8^o Edw. I, with his seal attached, somewhat decayed, but retaining enough of the arms to shew that he bore, at that time, the same arms as were afterwards used by his family. I presume that this will settle the question as to the "gentility" of Sir Geoffrey.

Blomfield's *Norfolk* (1807 edn.), vi, 386, gives us a genealogy and much information about this family. Geoffrey Boleyn of Salle had a son, Sir Geoffrey, who was Mayor of London in

1. This reference, with some others, I owe to the kindness of the Rev. F. W. Weaver.

1457. He was a great favourite of Sir John Fastolf by whose interest he was promoted, and from whom he got the manor of Blickling. He died in 1463, and was buried at St. Lawrence Jewry. He made Master Thomas Boleyn, his brother, supervisor of his will. He had a son named Thomas, whose will is also extant; and a daughter named Cecily, who died unmarried in 1458 and lies in the chancel of Blickling Church.

The Patent Rolls shew that on 20 March 1455 Ralph Botiller, knight, and others conveyed to Cecily Boleyn, Thomas Boleyn clerk, and others the manor of Stiffkey, co. Norfolk, and the advowson of the church there. The Record Office Index to Feet of Fines, vol. 4, p. 200, has an entry: "Between Thomas Boleyn clerk, Jeffery Boleyn, citizen and mercer of London, (and others), debts of the manor of Staines in Cottenham."

This last statement is taken from the *Bullen Collections* in the British Museum (Addit. MSS. 37,809—37,814), made by the late Mark Whittingham Bullen (d. 1909); and to these Collections I owe most of the references which follow.

Thomas Boleyn clerk was one of the plaintiffs in a plea of debt at Cambridge in 1439 (R. O. De Banco, Hilary, m. 58b).

Master Thomas Boleyn was instituted to the rectory of Dodyngton, 26 May 1456 (Reg. of Bishop Grey of Ely).

Among the seals in the British Museum is one of Thomas Bullyn, canon of Glasgow in 1460: an angel supporting in front a shield of arms containing a bull's head cabossed (Cat. of Seals, iv, 120).

A curious combination of names occurs twenty years after the death of our Thomas Boleyn in the will of *Thomas Boleyn of Gunthorpe*, 12 February 1492 (Norwich, Consistory Court, Norman 8). But this throws no light on our present enquiry.

It is clear from the evidence given above that Master Thomas Boleyn LL.B., belonged to an old Norfolk family, being the brother of Sir Geoffrey Boleyn who became Mayor of London. Sir Geoffrey had a son Sir William, who married Margaret daughter of Thomas Butler, seventh earl of Ormond. Their son, Sir Thomas, was the father of Anne Boleyn. Thus Master Thomas Boleyn, precentor of Wells and master of Gonville Hall, had a nephew whose great-granddaughter was Queen Elizabeth.

This is a result satisfactory enough in itself, but it raises a

serious difficulty in regard to the tomb in the chapel of St. Calixtus at Wells. For the arms of this distinguished family are well known to have been: *Argent, a chevron gules, between three bulls' heads coupé sable.* How then could Thomas Boleyn bear the *fretty and a chief* which seemed at the outset of our enquiry to connect him with the Bullens of Stickford, co. Lincoln?

Blomfield tells us that Geoffrey Boleyn the elder had "a brother William, who settled in Lincolnshire, and died in 1427; from whom the Lincolnshire Bullens are descended." He gives no authority for this statement, and it cannot be a true account of the origin of the Bullens of Stickford. For there were Bullens at Stickford as early as 1185, as is shewn by the Inquisition into the lands of the Knights Templars, printed in the *Monasticon*, vol. vi, pt. 2, p. 828b; where lands in Stikeford are said to have been given by Robert de Bolonia and Gilbert his brother. The *Bullen Collections* (Addit. MS. 37,811, ff. 113ff.) enable us to trace this family through several centuries: Hamo de Bolonia de Stikeford, 1290 and 1303; John and Margery de Boloyne, 1345; John Bolon de Stikford senior and John Bolon de Stikford junior, 1375; William Boloyne de Stikford, 1395; William Boleyne cousin and heir to William Boleyne of Stickford, *temp.* Hen. VI; and so on.

There seems to be no point of contact between the Boleyns of Stickford and the Norfolk family from which our Thomas Boleyn was descended. It may be that further investigation may afford a solution of the problem. In the meantime we cannot speak of the identification of the tomb as absolutely assured.