

## On the Family of Roger Bacon.<sup>1</sup>

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BY T. BOND, ESQ.

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SOMERSETSHIRE may well be proud of having given birth to Roger Bacon, one of the greatest philosophers that England has ever produced, and it cannot but be a matter of some interest to enquire what were his parentage and connexions? How became they associated with this county? What property did they possess, and where did they reside?

Roger Bacon is said to have been born near Ilchester, in 1214 (16th John); and he tells us himself that his family was wealthy. They espoused the Royal cause in the wars with the barons, and his brother having been frequently taken prisoner, had been almost pauperized by the heavy fines he had paid for his redemption. Little beyond this has hitherto been discovered respecting the origin and relations of the celebrated friar; I therefore venture to offer a few facts which, though inconclusive, will show the probability of his being a scion of the same stock which, in after ages, again ennobled a name that in itself (unless thus distinguished) might sound homely and plebeian. But, in truth, it was by no means of that character, for it has been borne for ages by a family not only distinguished by learning, but filling a high social position.

That the English Bacons were a branch of a family of the same name in Normandy, amongst whom, as well as with their English relations, the Christian name of Roger long continued

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to find favour, admits, I think, of very little doubt. The village of Molay Bacon, near Bayeux, in Normandy, was the chief residence of this family, and they were still living there in the 13th century, when, as "Seigneurs de Molay," they were benefactors to the Abbey of Ardenne.

Although the surname of Bacon is not met with in Domesday book, we find the vill of Baconsthorp included in the survey of Norfolk. Torstinus held it under Earl Alan, and, as it was long afterwards the property and seat of the Bacon family, it is reasonable to suppose that it derived its distinctive appellation from being the *thorp* of an owner of the name of Bacon (thus distinguished from the many other *thorps* in the same county), and that Bacon was in fact the surname of *Torstinus*. It belonged to Chetilbern in King Edward's time.

We cannot connect *Torstinus* with the subsequent pedigree, but from the time of King Henry II, the descent of the manor of Baconsthorp in the family of Bacon has been satisfactorily traced.

Roger Bacon who flourished in that reign was a man of some distinction, for he was one of the witnesses to the charter of convention between King Henry II and William King of Scotland, 10th August, 1174 (20th Henry II), after William had been taken prisoner at Alnwick. In 5th Richard I he was sued for depriving Silvester Fitz Simon of a freehold in Thorp (Baconsthorp) in Norfolk, and was amerced. He was again amerced in Norfolk in 4th and 5th Richard I. He joined the barons in rebellion against King John, and in the 13th year of that king's reign he paid a fine to be released from prison. In 17th John he received a pardon, and gave Roger, his nephew (*nepos*) as a hostage.

There can, I think, be very little doubt that this was the same person as Roger Bacon to whom William, son of John de Harp-tree ("Epetreu"), in or before 12th Henry II (1166), had given two-thirds of a knight's fee in Somersetshire, as a marriage por-

tion with his daughter ;<sup>2</sup> and who, in 22nd Henry II, owed 40s. for a default in Somerset. In the following year he accounted at the exchequer for 20s. for an amercement in the same county. Thus a migration of Bacons from Norfolk to Somersetshire seems to be accounted for, and it is most probable that Roger Bacon and his wife gave this Somersetshire manor to a younger son. It is much to be lamented that the *Liber Niger* does not, except in very rare instances, give the names of the knights' fees which were held by the several sub-tenants, and I have hitherto been unable to ascertain where the one which was given to Roger Bacon was situated. I find, however, that a Roger Bacon, in 10th Henry III (1226), was concerned in a suit against William de Barford and Robert Burnel, relating to half a knight's fee in Warford and Bere, in the county of Somerset ; and, in 27th Henry III, John Bacon was querent in a fine with Richard Bigot, relating to half a virgate of land in Merston. These two persons were most probably related to the philosopher. Roger Bacon of Baconsthorp had two sons, Robert and Roger, and the Roger of 1226 may have been one of them. He was probably the same who is found living in Norfolk, 12th Henry III. In 9th Henry III, Roger Bacon was in the king's service in Ireland, and was acquitted of one year's interest for money due to the Jews.

The Christian name, Roger, continued to be frequently adopted by the Bacons of Baconsthorp ; and Roger Bacon held lands in Dalling, Norfolk, 3rd Edward I. Thomas Bacon of Baconsthorp, his son and heir, obtained pardon as an adherent of the Earl of Lancaster, and as one of those who had been concerned in the death of Piers Gaveston, 7th Edward II. Thomas Bacon, son of Sir Roger Bacon, was a Justice of the Common Pleas, 1329, and of the King's Bench in 1332. The

(2). *Liber Niger Scaccarii*, sub Dorset. The barony of William de Epetreu is placed under the heading of Dorset, but I think it is clear that the two or three last returns under that heading, of which this is one, should have been placed under Somerset, which immediately follows in the MS. The copying clerk seems to have carried on the heading "Dorset" a page too far.

family continued to own the manor of Baconsthorp till the death of Thomas Bacon, the last heir male, in 1485, when it fell to his two daughters and coheirs, Elizabeth, wife of John Glemham, of Glemham Hall, Suffolk, and Ann, wife of Robert Garneys, of Kenton Hall, in the same county.

The descent of the celebrated Lord Chancellor Bacon has been traced from Robert Bacon, one of the sons of Roger Bacon of Baconsthorp, who was living in the reign of King John; and though his pedigree has not been as accurately made out as could be wished, I think there can be no doubt that all these Bacons sprang from a common ancestor.

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