

The Origin of the Name of Wellesley,

AND THE EARLY CONNECTION OF

THE FAMILY WITH WELLS.

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AS a citizen of Wells, it is natural I should feel an interest in endeavouring to direct attention to the circumstances which make it probable that the early ancestors of that great man, the late Duke of Wellington, were closely connected by property and residence with the locality in which I live, and that the name they bare took its origin from a beautiful and picturesque spot within the bounds of St. Cuthbert's parish, about one mile and a half from the Cathedral. The Duke himself must have held such an opinion. This is confirmed by the fact of his adopting for his first title of nobility,—“Baron Douro, of *Wellesley*, in the county of Somerset, and Viscount Wellington, of Talavera, and of Wellington, in the same county.”

That a family, bearing the name of Wellesley, or Wellesleigh, lived there, is, to my mind, as certain as that I am now speaking ; and further, that the acquisition of this name in the manner I have suggested is, I think, equally

unquestionable. The manor held by this ancient family is known by the appellation of "Wellesley" to this day, and there is undoubted evidence that it was called the same nearly 800 years ago, as it is expressly mentioned in the charter of Edward the Confessor to the Church of Wells, in 1065. The origin of this name may easily be traced to the peculiar features and state of the locality in which the property is situate. It is well known that there are numerous places, the names of which terminate with the word *Ley* or *Leigh*. Wherever this is the case, it implies an open field or large pasture. Welles-Ley, or Welles-Leigh, then, was a large open field, or pasture, near Wells. There is no specific notice of the Manor of Wellesley in the Norman survey, but it is certain that within a few years after that great and important work had been completed, the family to which I allude had become resident there. I do not intend to discuss the point as to the precise time, or under what circumstances the estates were acquired by this family. My more immediate object is to show the early connexion of the Wellesleys with this neighbourhood, and that it is to the circumstance of their coming and locating themselves here, they obtained their name. I believe I am right in saying that no earlier instance is known in which the name has been found elsewhere, nor has there been, to my knowledge, any attempt to assign a better reason for its origin, than that I now venture to assert. It is said that Avenant de Wellesley was the first of the family who obtained lands in Somerset, which he had by a grant from Henry I. (A.D. 1104), with the Serjeanty of the Bailiwick of East Perrott. It is also said that one of the family (A.D. 1172) accompanied Henry II. to Ireland, as standard bearer, and had large grants of land there, as a reward for his

services. It is further said that Henry, grandson of Avenant de Wellesley, had a confirmation of the Grand Serjeanty of East Perrott, from Henry III., and that he had a son, William, who died in the 37th year of Henry's reign, leaving, by Agnes his wife, a son, Thomas de Wellesley, who died at a great age, leaving a son, Philip de Wellesley, who, 6th Edward III., (A.D., 1332), in a great law suit with Adam de Sodbury, Abbot of Glastonbury, successfully resisted the haughty Abbot's claim to exemption from the Grand Serjeanty, and in proof of his title produced the original grant by Henry I., with the subsequent confirmation of it by Henry III. The earliest authentic record which has come under my notice of the name occurring in connexion with Wells, is that of *Walerand de Wellesleigh*, who was one of the witnesses mentioned in the charter granted to the city by Reginald Fitz-Jocelyn, Bishop of Bath and Wells. The original charter is among the important records belonging to the Corporation of Wells, and is the earliest document of the kind possessed by that body. It bears no date (by no means unusual at that early period), but it must have been granted between the years 1174, when Bishop Reginald succeeded to the see, and 1191, when he had the Archbishopric of Canterbury, forced upon him, though he lived scarcely a month to enjoy that high dignity.

There are numerous other evidences in the Wells city records, of the connexion of the Wellesleys with Wells. Among others, I quote the following original documents:—

10, Edward II. (A.D. 1317.)—Grant of a tenement in Grope . . . Lane, in Wells, from William le Bourne, Canon of Wells, to Thomas le Devenysh.

14, Edward II. (A.D. 1320.)—Grant by Walter de Bristleton, chaplain, John Atte Churchstyle, of Wells,

- and Hugh le Barbur, executors of William de Shepton, to Robert Furnel, and Juliana his wife, of a tenement in St. Cuthbert-street, in Wells.
- 17, Edward II. A.D. 1324.)—Grant by William de Bathonia, Rector of Bagborough, Somerset, of a tenement in Southover, in Wells.
- 17, Edward II. (A.D. 1324.)—Grant by William Gyleman, Burgess of Wells, to Gilbert le Bowtard, son of Gilbert de Batcombe, of a messuage in High-street, in Wells.
- 18, Edward II. (A.D. 1325.)—Grant of premises in Wells, by Thomas Squyrell, son and heir of Richard Squyrell, late Burgess of Wells, to Peter le Boytoyre.
- 2, Edward III. (A.D. 1328.)—Grant by John de Merke, of Wells, to Adam de Chelworth, of land in the Western Field, in Wells, behind "Toukerstrete," (now Tucker-street.)
- 4, Edward III. (A.D. 1330.)—Grant of a tenement in "Wetelane," (now Broad-street,) in Wells, by Edmund, son of John le Chamberleyne, of "Wokyhole," to Thomas de Testwode.
- 6, Edward III. (A.D. 1332.)—Assignment of a rent of 8s., payable out of a messuage in High-street, in Wells, by Robert Noreys late Burgess of Wells, to Walter de Hulle, clerk.

In each of these deeds, the name of Edmund de Welleslegh occurs as one of the witnesses ; and in another deed of 21, Edward III., relating to a tenement in a lane called Isaackes Mead, in Wells, it is said to abut on a tenement of the same Edmund de Welleslegh. I could quote numerous other instances from the records in the custody of the Corporation of Wells, in which the name of this Edmund de Welleslegh occurs as a witness, among others who were undoubtedly then resident in or near Wells :—

such as Roger de Midelton (or Milton), William Atte Water, Thomas de Wodeford, Walter de Rodeney, John de Garslade, Thomas le Tannere, &c. The following translation from the original Latin will be interesting to those who are not acquainted with the ancient mode of conveying lands by deed, and afford the strongest evidence of the fact of the early connection of the Wellesleys with Wells. This document relates to a messuage and land at Dinder, about two miles from Wells, and about one mile from the Wellesley Manor House :—

“ TO ALL TO WHOSE NOTICE this present writing shall come, WALTER LE FLEMING, Lord of Dynder, eternal health in the Lord. Know all ye that I have released and quit claim for me and my heirs or assigns to Elias at Wytheeye, and Isabella his wife, All the right and claim which I have, or in anywise could have, in one fardel of land, with a messuage, meadow, and croft to the same appertaining, in the vill of Dynder ; which fardel of land with the said appurtenances Richard Southovere, father of the said Elias, formerly held of me, and he the said Elias after the decease of his father, in like manner held of me for his life. To have and hold the said fardel of land, with the messuage, meadow, croft, and all other its appurtenances, to the said Elias and Isabella his wife, and their heirs or assigns freely, peacefully by hereditary right for ever ; paying therefore yearly to me and my heirs or assigns one penny on the feast of the Nativity of the Lord, for wards, reliefs, marriages, suits of court, customs, heriots, aids, and all other exactions and secular demands to me and my heirs or assigns in anywise appertaining. And moreover I the said Walter and my heirs or assigns all the foresaid tenement, with all its appurtenances as aforesaid, to the aforesaid Elias and Isabella his wife and

their heirs or assigns against all mortals, will warrant acquit and for ever defend. In witness thereof I have confirmed this present writing by the impression of my seal. These for witnesses, Lord *Thomas of Welleslye*, John of Garslade, *Robert of Welleslye*, William Visouthewode, of Evercrych, Gilbert le Frye, of Chestblade, Robert of Ashwik, Adam of Graveston, and others. Given at Dynder on the morrow of S. Edmund the Archbishop, in the year of grace, one thousand, two hundred and ninety eight, and in the twenty sixth year of the reign of King Edward."

It will be seen that two of the Wellesley family are expressly mentioned as witnesses in this deed, and there cannot be much doubt that these persons (Thomas de Wellesley, and Robert de Wellesley,) were then resident at Wellesley. For the information of those not conversant with such matters, I may mention, by way of note, that in early times, deeds were not signed as at present ; it was customary then merely to *seal* and perfect the deed in the presence of divers persons known to the parties interested, and resident in, or acquainted with the locality to which the document related ; and these witnesses were mentioned by name in the deed. As an instance of this custom I may quote the charter of Bishop Reginald Fitz Jocelyn, before referred to, in which there are no less than thirty-two witnesses named, with the additional words, "and many others."

And now permit me shortly to trace the descent of the Wellesley estates in this neighbourhood, from the original possessors to the present time. For these particulars, I am chiefly indebted to *Collinson* and *Burke*. It is probable that nearly, if not all, the lands within the present boundaries of the Wells parishes, at the Conquest, belonged to

the Church of Wells. The enormous possessions of the See, as set forth in Domesday, lead to this conclusion. In what way, or under what circumstances, the Wellesleys first became landowners here, I have no certain means of deciding ; but the first recorded instance shows that what they did own was then held under the church. Collinson tells us that William de Welleslegh, 37, Henry III. (A.D. 1253), held three parts of a hide of land in Welleslegh under the Bishop, by the Grand Serjeanty of the Hundred of Wells Forum ; besides other lands in Littleton of Wm. de Button; and, from the same authority, we learn that Philip de Walleslegh, 22nd Edward III. (A.D. 1347), held lands in Welleslegh and Dulcot (an adjoining hamlet) by the Serjeanty of the Hundred of East Perrett. That Walerand de Welleslegh (whose name occurs in the charter of Bishop Reginald, already quoted) had lands here, is confirmed by the fact that, in 1492, John Stourton (who had intermarried with one of the Wellesley's descendants, and then resided in Wells) is recorded as holding half a Knight's fee in Welleslegh and East Wall (now East Wells, or St. Thomas-street), which Walerand de Welleslegh formerly held. (I ought to explain that Grand Serjeanty was a feudal service of the most honourable kind, as it could only be rendered to the King himself, and not to any inferior Lord or Baron. This service was not always the same. In the case of the Wellesleys the service they rendered was that of bearing the King's standard in his wars.) About, or soon after, the end of the 14th century, the name of Wellesley, as landowners in Wells, disappeared, the last of them being the Philip de Welleslegh before mentioned. This Philip de Welleslegh died, leaving Elizabeth, his daughter and heiress. She married William Bannister, Esq., and died seized of the Wellesley

estates, 19th Richard II. (A.D. 1395), leaving by her husband, one daughter only. This lady, whose name was Joan, married twice. By her first husband, Robert de Alfoxton, she had no issue. Her second husband was Sir John Hill, Knt., the head of the great family of that name, settled at Spaxton, in this county, to whom the Wellesley estates passed. There is some confusion in names, as well as dates, in Collinson's accounts of the manors, advowsons, and lands held by the Hills, which I cannot reconcile, so as to trace their earlier descent in a direct line. With the beginning of the 15th century they become better known. Robert Hill, Sheriff of Somerset and Dorset in 1422, who, according to Collinson (vol. ii., 457), was the son and heir to Sir John Hill, died, leaving by Isabel his wife, (daughter of Sir Thomas Fitchet), John, his son and heir. This John Hill, 13th Henry 6th (A.D. 1435), is recorded as possessor of the family estates, as well as of the office of bailiff of the Bailiwick of the Hundred of Wells Forum, and Crier of the county of Somerset, which he held of John, Bishop of Bath and Wells, in common socage. He died, leaving by Cicely his wife, John, his son and heir, who also died leaving a son of the same name, who married Margaret, daughter of Sir Walter Rodney, Knt., and died 34, Henry VI., leaving issue one daughter only, Genovesa, as his heiress. This Genovesa married Sir William Say, Knt., and having died without issue, the estates reverted to Elizabeth, sister and heiress of the last-named John Hill, and aunt of the said Lady Genovesa Say. This Elizabeth married John Cheyney, Esq., of Pinhoe, Devon, and left issue, John Cheyney, her son and heir. He died, leaving by Alice his wife, four daughters only, his co-heiresses; one of whom, Elizabeth, married Edward Waldegrave, second son of Sir Thomas Waldegrave. The

family estates were probably divided between the sisters. The lands in Wells, including the Manor of Wellesley, and Wellesley Farm, besides other manors and estates in the county, came to Edward Waldegrave, in right of his wife. This Edward Waldegrave died in 1501, leaving John Waldegrave, his son and heir; and he dying 6th October, 1543, was succeeded by his son, Sir Edward Waldegrave, Knt., M.P. for Somerset in 1554, who obtained from Queen Mary, in the first year of her reign, a grant of the manor and lordship of Chewton Mendip (then vested in the Crown by the attainder of the Duke of Suffolk), and died in 1561. He left two sons and three daughters. The eldest son was Charles Waldegrave, who married Jeronyma, daughter of Sir Henry Jerninham, Knt., by whom he had Edward, his eldest son and heir, and two daughters. Edward Waldegrave received the honour of knighthood in 1607; and for his great services in the civil war he was, in 1643, created a baronet by Charles I. He married Eleanor, daughter of Sir Thomas Lovel, Knt., and was father of Sir Henry Waldegrave, Bart., who by his first wife, Ann, daughter of Edward Paston, Esq., had seven sons and four daughters, and by his second wife six sons and six daughters, making in all three-and-twenty children. He died October 10th, 1658, and was succeeded by his eldest son and heir, Sir Charles Waldegrave, Bart., whose eldest son and heir was Sir Henry Waldegrave, who, January 20th, 1685-6, was created by James II. Baron Waldegrave of Chewton in the county of Somerset. He married Henrietta, natural daughter of King James by Mrs. Arabella Churchill, and at the Revolution retired to France, and died in 1689. He left two sons and a daughter. James, his eldest son and heir, was a firm supporter of the House of Hanover, and served George I. and II.

as ambassador to several foreign courts, and on the 12th September, 1729, was created Viscount Chewton and Earl Waldegrave. By Mary daughter of Sir John Webb, Bart., he had three sons and one daughter. He was succeeded by James, his son, who died 28th April, 1763, having married Maria daughter of Sir Edward Walpole, and had by her three daughters, but no son. He was succeeded in his title and estates by John his only surviving brother, who, by Elizabeth daughter of Earl Gower, had three sons and four daughters. George, Earl Waldegrave, succeeded to the title and estates of his father, and, by deed dated 9th May, 1784, conveyed Wellesley Manor and farm, with the lands usually held therewith, and the tolls of the fairs and markets within the Hundred of Wells Forum (formerly leased to Avis Cannington), to the late Clement Tudway, Esq., M.P. for Wells, and the same manor and lands are now held by the trustees of the late R. C. Tudway, Esq., M.P., deceased. The conveyance was made subject to certain ancient liabilities, viz :—To repair one arch of Dulcot Bridge, and to the payment of 4s. 2d. to the Bishop, 3s. to the Dean and Chapter, 2s. to the Vicars Choral of Wells, and 7½d. to the Lord of the Manor of Dulcot. Before this other considerable portions of the great Wellesley estates had been sold, including a farm at Woodford, to the late Peter Sherston, Esq., in 1752, and the reversion in fee of Haydon Farm to Dr. Samuel Creswicke, Dean of Wells, in 1748, that farm being then on lease for lives granted by Lord Waldegrave in 1719, to Richard Comes, Esq., of Wells. Wellesley Farm had been for a long series of years also granted out on lease for lives, the last of such leases being made in 1766 to John Haynes, of Wells, who also sold his interest to Mr. C. Tudway.

Portions of the Wellesley estates were retained, or rather the possession of them resumed, by the Bishops of Bath and Wells, and were so held in the time of Bishop Ralph, of Shrewsbury, who obtained the see in 1329, and died in 1363. He was a great benefactor to the vicars choral of the cathedral, by building a close or college for their residence, and liberally endowing them with divers lands and rents. Among other gifts he granted them part of the church estate at Wellesley, Dulcot, the city of Wells, and other places, for which he obtained the King's license. This property acquired the usual attributes of a manor, and was, and is now, called the "Manor of Wells, Wellesley, and Dulcot." Speaking of the vicars choral reminds me that in a list of benefactors to that body, the name of William Beld occurs as the giver of a "cista" or chest, to the "Altar de Wellesley," in the Cathedral. I can give no particulars connected with the Wellesley altar, though I have not much doubt it had some connection with the gift of Bishop Ralph to the vicars. I have before adverted to the fact that the Wellesleys held lands in Littleton A.D. 1253. As a corroboration of that statement I may mention that the Manor of Littleton continued to be held by the Wellesleys and their descendants, and came down in the same manner as the Wellesley estates here, to the Waldegraves, until 1714, in which year the manor was sold, by James Lord Waldegrave, to John Strode. The Manor of Radstock, now one of the richest coal districts in this county, was possessed by Phillip de Wellesleigh in the 13th Edward III, and from him this valuable property descended to the late Lord Waldegrave, with other Wellesley estates, and is held by his widow, the Countess Waldegrave, at the present time. The office of bailiff, of the Bailiwick of the Hundred of Wells Forum,

continued vested in the same persons who for the time being were owners of the Manor of Wellesley, and it is certain that the office belonged to Lord Waldegrave in 1705, when his trustees granted a lease of "the office of bayliff of the baylywick of the Hundred of Wells Forum with all perquisites thereto belonging," to Avis Cannington, for three lives; and in 1778 it is enumerated among Lord Waldegrave's possessions, and said to be of the annual value of £6. In 1779, the Corporation of Wells purchased of the Bishop of Bath and Wells, the offices of bailiff of the Bailiwick, and clerk of the market of the City of Wells, and this transaction was legalised by an Act of Parliament. In this Act, it is stated that "Earl Waldegrave claimed a certain Bailiwick within the Hundred of Wells Forum," and it appears the matter had caused disputes as to the rights of the Bishop and Lord Waldegrave. The claims set up by the latter were probably, from the insignificant value of the "Bailiwick," abandoned, as nothing has been heard of these claims for many years.

I think I have said enough to show there is something more than mere probability in that for which I contend viz., that the name of Wellesley had its origin from the Wells hamlet of Wellesley, which was certainly known as WELLESLEY within a few years after the Conquest, and by the same name it has continued to be called to this day. I fully feel my inability to do justice to such a matter, which carries with it almost a national interest. My intention has been more to *invite the attention of others* than to produce a perfect statement of facts myself. Subjects like these seem unimportant in themselves, yet the investigating them must afford a degree of pleasure to those who, like myself, think it a high honour to the place

of my residence in connecting it, in so remarkable a manner, with that great military commander, the hero of a hundred fights, the victor of Waterloo, whose name and memory will be regarded with reverence, admiration, and gratitude, as long as those attributes, for which the English nation is so eminently distinguished—national honour, national independence, and national freedom—are duly appreciated and valued.

NOTE.—The Rev. J. Graves, in a letter to the Secretaries, observes, that he thinks “it is morally certain that the Irish Wellesleys descended from the stock of the Wellesleys of Wellesley. The first of the name settled early in the 13th century in Ireland, was Walleran de Wellesley, and the Manor of Drugin in the county of Meath, was held of the King, as of his Castle of Trim, by grand sergeanty service of bearing the King’s standard. From this Walleran or Valerian this office of standard bearer of Ireland descended to the Marquis of Wellesley, who at the Coronation of Geo. IV. was allowed his right and precedence as Hereditary Standard Bearer of Ireland. The traditions of the Irish family always point to Wellesley in Somersetshire as their original; and the fact that the English de Wellesleys were standard bearers of England, has a pointed bearing on the question.” [EDITOR.]
