

Notes on the Chartularies of Bath Priory.

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THE chief event of the year to our Society, since the last meeting, has been the publication by the Somerset Record Society of the two Chartularies of the Priory of Bath, "the monastery of St. Peter set at Bathonia, where, from the hot springs pleasant baths are drawn," "monasterium Sti Petri quod situm est in Bathonia, ubi termæ amenæ calidis e fontibus dirivantur."

It is a very valuable contribution to the history of this diocese and county, edited by an accurate and accomplished scholar, thoroughly well informed on all details of county history—the Rev. W. Hunt—well known as the secretary of the Society in its palmy days, when F. H. Dickinson, E. A. Freeman, J. R. Green, Bishop Clifford (to mention only some of those who have passed away), were regular contributors to our *Proceedings*. His notes attest the minute care and skill with which he has edited and illustrated the text of the chartularies, so as to throw light and life into their dry details. The result is a record of the contemporary annals of a famous Benedictine house, one of the greatest landed corporations in the county in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, drawn from two original manuscripts.

One of these manuscripts belongs to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.¹ It consists of seventy-six charters, thirty in Anglo-Saxon already published from other texts in Kemble, "Codex Diplomaticus," and in Birch, "Cartularium Saxonicum": the rest in Latin, and for the most part as yet unedited.

The other chartulary is in the possession of the Society of Lincoln's Inn. It consists of nine hundred and forty-three charters, embracing a period from 1100 to 1357-8, but with an unfortunate blank in the records of the years between 1284 and 1329.

It is interesting to trace through the charters, by the help of copious notes, well-known names of places and families in the county in their earliest existence, and in connection with the convent as a landed corporation; while, at the same time, side lights are thrown upon the contemporary history of the diocese.

So, for instance, we trace the dates and mode of acquisition by the monastery of possessions, in the neighbourhood of Bath, at Bathford, Bathampton, Lyncombe, South Stoke, Weston, Charlecombe, and of more distant possessions at Dunster, Dogmersfield in Hants, Tiddenham, Cold Ashton, and Olverston in Gloucester, Keyhaven and its saltmarshes, "salinas," near Lymington on the Solent; Bampton in Devon, Irish estates at Cork and Waterford.

The names of *families*, prominent at the time, come before us as benefactors or tenants of the house; *e.g.*, the *Mohuns*, who attached to Bath the priory of St. George at Dunster; the *Hosats*, or *Husees*, who held the manor of Charlecombe by the yearly rent of fifty salmon, commuted, in 1244, to forty salmon and two pounds of pepper. The *Kannings*² appear, from time to time, at the end of the twelfth century, and one of the family held the office of precentor in 1337. Roger de Sancto Laudo, from St. Lo, in Normandy, was founder of the

(1). Transcribed at Mr. Hunt's personal cost.

(2). *Kannings* ii, § 83, 4, 6, 7; § 767.

family at Newton St. Lo. Walter de Anno, prior 1264, was one of a local family, whose name is preserved in Compton Dan(d)o.

There are other names common to both Bath and Wells: the Buttons, or Bittons, from Bitton, in the Avon valley, who threw in their lot rather with the secular church of Wells; Lechlade;¹ Gurney, from Gournai, in Normandy; Rodney, Norreis.² These names, taken almost at random, occur in different interesting relations to the great house at Bath.

The entries in the chartulary do not reach beyond the year 1359, and they do not touch in detail on any historical event earlier than the union of the abbacy to the see, under bishop John of Tours, by civil and ecclesiastic authority. Under Lanfranc's influence and the centralising Norman system, the seats of English bishops were transferred from old local and tribal centres to more populous towns. John of Tours, in 1088, coming from that famous and stately city on the banks of the Loire, with the shrine of St. Martin and the abbey of Marmoutier on either bank, thought scorn of "the ignorant canons" whom he found at the little Saxon church of St. Andrew in Wells. He preferred, as we must admit, with good reason, your city, with its hot mineral springs, in so fair a site between two main roads and a navigable river, girt about by its coronal of hills, and with natural advantages which had made it the seat of Roman and Saxon civilisation; where, little more than a century before, 973, Edgar, conqueror of Danish and Celtic districts of England, had been crowned by two archbishops, Dunstan and Oswald, and the abbey church of St. Peter was made the scene of the completion of the unity of England.

Wells was deserted by the bishop, and its church sank to

(1). R. de Lechlade, ii, 16, 17, 29, 35, 45, 52-3-4, 5, cf. Wells Registers. Ralph de Lechlade was canon in 1206, and then dean of Wells in 1217-1223.

(2). Norreis, the name of a master mason at Wells in bishop Jocelin's time, ii, § 88.

the level of a collegiate church, belonging to the bishop. The bishop's seat was set up in the church of Bath, now styled "the mother church of the episcopate of Somerset" in charters of William and Henry, confirmed later by Hadrian IV, the English pope Nicolas Brakespeare, in 1156. The abbey was granted to the see by charter of William, and the city of Bath passed into the hands of the bishop by purchase. The bishop became the abbot, and the resident head of the convent was a prior, who was subordinate to the bishop as his lord; and until 1261 the appointment of the prior rested with the bishop.

Bishop John's reign was "the Augustan age" of ecclesiastical Bath. Fresh from great works which had been going on at Tours, the bishop found here a noble site, and a great object of ambition before him, to rebuild his church of Bath in the Norman style, and to emulate the great works going on about this time at Durham and in the chief churches of England. For nearly twenty years he impoverished the monks, as he had impoverished the canons of Wells, and used their revenues to build the great Norman church, (of which the present abbey church of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries occupies no more than the site of the nave,) and the palace extending westward over the buried ruins of Roman baths, and the hot springs bubbling below the ruins.¹ A charter (i, § 53), A.D. 1106, at the close of his episcopate, recites how he had laboured and brought to pass that "the head of the whole episcopate of Somerset should be in the church of St. Peter at Bath." "To that blessed Apostle and to the monks serving him I have restored the lands which I had unjustly for a time held in my hand." And he goes on to make donations, by way of restitution, of other lands which he had bought, *viz.*, five hides in Weston,

(1). The site of some part of the palace, called "the Bishop's bower within the walls," and supposed to be on the site of the present "Pump Room," was let to the prior by Bishop Ralph, in 1338 (ii, § 732.)

Claverton, Dogmersfield, Easton and Wolley, and Arnewood by the sea.¹

For more than one hundred years the priory was in a state of great prosperity. But, notwithstanding the attractions of Bath, the bishops through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Robert, Reginald, Savaric, Jocelin, turned back to the rustic village of Wells and built up the church, its fabric and constitution, until Wells became, by degrees, more and more the centre of business for the diocese, practically the chief seat of the bishop, the "sedes præsulea," and mother church of the diocese. The bishops found themselves more free in a chapter of secular canons, and more in touch with the provincial landowners; and under the prebendal constitution of bishop Robert there were reciprocal relations between the country districts and the cathedral church, through the tenure of prebendal estates by the canons. The dean and chapter, with increased emoluments, rose in importance as the council of the bishop, and stalls became objects of cupidity to kings' courtiers and Roman ecclesiastics. At the time of Jocelin's death, the dean was a Roman, son of one of the pope's bodyguard; and among the canons were Walter de Gray, Archbishop of York, regent in the king's absence, and John Mansel, the king's first secretary.

The relation of the two seats of the bishopric had been more or less defined during the episcopates of Robert and Reginald; it was sanctioned and confirmed by papal authority, and acted out at the election of Bishop Jocelin in 1206.

The bishop had his two chapters, the prior and convent of Bath, and the dean and chapter of Wells, by whom the election was to be made, and all acts of legislation were to be confirmed.

The two chapters were to have an equal voice in the election of the bishop. The prior of Bath was to declare the election; the bishop was to be enthroned in each of the two churches,

(1). Arnewood, identified by Mr. Hunt on the Hampshire coast, between Hordle cliff and the salt marshes of Keyhaven.

but in Bath first; and he was to continue to bear the title of bishop of Bath.¹ The original documents of the election of bishop Jocelin, according to this concordat, exist in the chapter library at Wells. Among them is the instrument of election by the prior and convent, containing the names and signatures of prior Robert and forty-one names of brethren of the house with their offices, and attestations made by crosses in varying characters, and sometimes with shaky hands. The Wells letter of election is the same, *mutatis mutandis*, signed by the dean and fifty-five canons, and others.

Jocelin is called in the Bath form, "a clerk of our church of Bath and canon of Wells."

An interesting fact in Jocelin's life is brought out in the chartulary, that the prior of Bath gave him his title to orders. There is a charter from Robert the prior, attested by Hugh, archdeacon of Wells, giving Jocelin an annuity of 100 shillings until he should be provided with a benefice, and promising him the first church vacant in the gift of the priory, with certain reservations. This is followed soon after by the appointment of Jocelin to the church of Dogmersfield.²

In his long episcopate of thirty-six years, Jocelin devoted himself to Wells, though living all the time in harmony with the chapter of Bath. It must have been apparent to Bath that the church of Wells was becoming the more important diocesan centre, and that their place as "*sedes præsulea*" was practically slipping from them.

The fatal blow at this primacy of Bath was struck when Bishop Jocelin, at his death, left his body to be buried in the church of Wells, and the tradition of a hundred and thirty-four

(1). Wells MS., R. i, f. 56. Document is printed in Bath Chartulary ii, f. 64. Introduction, p. li.

(2). ii, f. 64, 65, 66. The advowson of Dogmersfield belonged to the convent; the manor, by gift of the king, to the bishop. Afterwards, when Jocelin was bishop, the convent made over the advowson also to the bishop. Dogmersfield was always one of the chief manors of the bishops, and the manor house their frequent residence.

years that the church of Bath was to be the only burial place of the bishops of the see was now invaded. Then the convent thought it time to make a bold attempt to recover their position by securing the election of a bishop who would be their sole appointment, and in consequence, as they might hope, devoted to their interests.

The story of the war between Bath and Wells has been told, as it is related in the registers of the church of Wells.¹ It is told again now in the chartularies of the priory of Bath, with a judicial summing up on the whole controversy in the "Introduction" by the editor.²

The only objection the Wells advocate might take to the summing up is, that there is no documentary evidence that "the Wells chapter showed a perfect readiness to carry out the royal wishes in accepting his nominee." The king had granted to the Wells chapter the *cong e d' lire*, unaccompanied by any recommendation of the person to be chosen. The chapter, in response, absolutely but respectfully declined to exercise their license to elect while their appeal to Rome against the claim of Bath to be sole elector was pending. It was their policy to fight the battle on this point, and at Rome. As soon as Pope Innocent IV. was elected he gave the wise and equitable decision, by which the question in conflict was at once and satisfactorily settled, and for ever. The vacancy in the see was filled up by the appointment of the nominee of the Bath chapter as a fit and proper person; but the justice of the contention on the part of Wells was established by the decree that henceforth the chapters of Bath and Wells should have equal rights in the election of the bishop, and that "Bath and Wells" should be the title of the see. So

"h ec certamina tanta
Pulveris exigui jactu compressa quiescunt."

(1). "Chapters in the Early History of the Church of Wells," by Rev. C. M. Church; chap. v.

(2). p. lviii.

The Bath chapter carried their candidate, who did credit to their choice; but they had won a Cadmeian victory, by which the seeds of disaster were sown in the debts incurred. Both parties suffered dearly by the expenses of deputations, proctors, agents, patrons, at the courts of king and pope. At Wells works were crippled by "intolerable debts" for some years; but the chapter of Wells had a large constituency in the diocese to whom to appeal, and the staff of the cathedral showed much generosity in bearing the burdens of bishops, as well as their own, by their own gifts and self-sacrifices.¹

The chartulary supplies notices of the debts and expenses now incurred by Bath, which continued to weigh down the convent in the later years of the thirteenth century and through the next half century.

The sums borrowed in and about the time of the contest, at first comparatively small, ten, twenty, or a hundred marks, have swelled to enormous sums in the next one hundred years. In 1334, £600 is owing to a citizen and vintner of London, John of Doxenforde; £260 to Nicolas de Devenysch, citizen of Winchester; and £240 to John de Oxonia, also vintner of London (paid in 1344); and £800 to Sir William de la Pole.² There are arrears due to the Sheriff of Somerset from the farm of Berton. £1350 is owing to the firm of Bartolomei of Lucca, no doubt on other bills than for Lucca oil. In 1343, receipt is given for £184, in full payment of all the debt which the prior owed to these Lucchesi "by virtue of an assignment of the Lord the King."³

In one of the last charters of the date of 1347, among the pleas in "Hilary term, 20 Edw. iii, the prior and Convent are attached to answer William de la Pole for debt of £800 which the said prior by his bond dated the morrow of St.

(1). *e.g.*, ii, § 177; cf. Wells R. i, f. 86-7.

(2). ii, § 850, 853, 848, 823, 852.

(3). ii, § 849.

Martin, 1341, bound himself to pay. Judgment and damages were given for William de la Pole."¹

One item in the expenses of the house is dwelt upon in considerable detail in the "Introduction,"² the system of granting corrodies, or grants of maintenance, to pensioners in or out of the house.

The king seems to have frequently exercised his power in nominating persons for these corrodies, just as he appointed to stalls at Wells, by influences which neither of the chapters were always strong enough to resist. In one case at Bath, Edward the third tried to enforce a right to appoint to a corrody in the priory, but he met with respectful opposition which proved successful. The king submitted his claim to the judgment of a jury of the county; they pronounced a verdict against the king, and he withdrew his claim. This act of royal justice is made more interesting to us because the subject of the king's nomination was a person of note in the history of the diocese, no less than the architect of the works in the cathedral church of Wells during dean Godley's time. According to the Wells Registers in 1329,³ William Joye, "master of the fabric," received from the dean and chapter a pension for life of thirty shillings and sixpence, in addition to a previous pension of forty shillings, with retention of his services as surveyor of all the building going on in the church. It is probable that he was employed also by the king in some of his works about the same time. In 1337, six years later, one William Joye, (we assume the same man,) was recommended by the king to succeed a king's pensioner, John of Windsor, who had died at Bath in corrody of the priory. The convent ventured to demur to the king's right to fill up the vacancy and keep a pensioner perpetually on the house, on any plea of fundatorial right.

(1). ii, § 938.

(2). p. xxiii.

(3). R. i, f. 179-181.

The story is told from the chartulary¹ how the king bade the Chancellor, archbishop Stratford "ascertain the truth by legal process by the sworn testimony of a Somerset jury; how a commission was issued to three judges, two of them members of Somerset families, to hear the case. The "inquisition" was held at Bath by a jury of twelve men; the convent produced the charter of Henry I., given in the year 1111, and the jury declared that the convent held their priory under that charter free of service to the king, and that no king had ever claimed any rights to appoint to a corrody. John of Windsor had been given his corrody only by favour of the convent, and by their free will.

So the king for this time withdrew his claim, yielded to the convent, and issued a writ to William Joye commanding him not to trouble the prior and convent for sustenance.²

It is to be hoped that the king or bishop Ralph found some other provision than an "Almshouse" at Bath priory for the master mason, who had (as we should like to think) built the lady chapel of the church of Wells under dean Godley, and some other parts of the eastern end of the church, under Bishop Ralph, before his death.

Happily, as Mr. Hunt bids us remember, the heavy bonds appearing in the chartulary by which the convent was indebted, must not be always taken as representing equivalent debts, for it was the custom to secure debts by bonds for much larger amounts. Still, even so the debts of the convent must have been enormous. The "Black Death" which fell upon the diocese in 1348-9, and which reduced the number of the brethren to fifteen and a prior, must have added greatly to the distress of the house.

Though these charters afford information chiefly with respect to the financial condition and general business of the

(1). Introduction, p. xxviii. ii, 725.

(2). ii, 729. Leicester, Oct. 1, 10 Edw. III.

priory, we must not imagine that these things took up all the time and attention of the monks.

It would be foolish and unfair to suppose that because the charters tell us little about devotional usages, or their charities or studies, the monks did nothing for the poor, or spent their time in nothing but worldly business. Prayer and alms-giving were not neglected.

We turn from these signs of financial distress to charters which tell of union for mutual prayer and intercession with other houses, not only Benedictine, but also Cluniac and Cistercian. Sixteen monasteries, Canterbury, Chertsey, Rochester, Glastonbury, Winchcombe, Tewkesbury, Gloucester, Malmesbury, the Cistercian houses at Farleigh and Dene in Gloucester, Bruton, Hereford, the Wilton and Whewell nunneries, the Cluniac house of St. Pancras, Lewes, from whence came Bishop Robert I; St. Stephen's of Caen, founded by the Conqueror; Bradenstoke, an Augustinian priory near Dauntsey in Wiltshire, had interchange of offices of intercession with Bath priory.

In other charters we have an inventory of the valuables and gifts granted to the house by benefactors, bishops and laymen, who are commemorated on anniversary days; and on each day (more than thirty in the year) the services of the church were brightened by special acts of commemoration, and more generous diet was given in the refectory, and bounties of alms or victuals were distributed to one hundred poor. This formula is the cheery close to each recital in the roll of benefactors; "*Cujus anniversaria dies in alba solempniter celebretur, et mensa fratrum copiosius procuretur, et centum pauperes reficiantur.*"

These, and such like original chronicles, scanty and disappointing as they often are, help us to a more fair and accurate knowledge of the truth as to these important twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as being neither ages of faith and devotion in which all was holy and beautiful and deserving of our respect

and admiration, nor were they times only of ignorance and sloth and corruption and superstition, deserving the pity and contempt of these so-called "enlightened days."

In these chartularies of Bath Priory we see some of the commonplace everyday sides of conventual life, when worldliness and self-seeking were setting in, which in the fifteenth century led to bishop Oliver King's Injunctions and his attempted but unavailing reformation, and ultimately to the downfall of this and kindred monastic institutions in the great storm of the sixteenth century.

In 1500, after his visitation, Bishop Oliver King reports that he found the fabric in ruins, "funditus dirutam," through long neglect, "per incuriam multorum priorum," and the revenues idly spent. It was useless to seek for outside help until the brethren spent less upon themselves, and he proceeded to cut down the allowances which the monks had made to their officers and themselves, and so to form a fabric fund.

No sympathy for the undeserving sufferers, no glorification of "martyrs," no hatred for the agents in the spoliation of the monasteries, can make us forget that these great institutions had been undermined by the hands of their own children, and they fell by their own faults to be the prey of the spoiler.

"Mole ruunt sua."