

Stavordale Priory,

(Canons of the order of St. Augustine, and the regulation of St. Victor).

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NEITHER the name of the founder nor the exact date of the foundation are known. Bishop Drovensford, in 1310, admitted Walter de Eton to be Prior after an election by *congé d'élire* of the Patron, Richard Lovel, a simpler process being adopted on account of the poverty of the house (S. R. S. I, 30). The post-conquestual religious houses in the county were nearly all founded by the great families in the twelfth century, and the Lovel family, lords of Castle Cary, would doubtless fall in with the fashion of the times. Another reason for an early date is the absence of any reference to the foundation in the voluminous records of the thirteenth century. Ralph Lovel died before 1159, leaving for heir his brother Henry, who managed to live through the troublous reigns of Henry II and Richard I, and died in 1199. His elder son, Ralph, died childless in 1207, and his younger son, Henry, in 1218, leaving a son, Richard, who lived to 1254. It is highly probable that the elder Henry Lovel was the founder.

The earliest reference to the Priory is among the *Pedes Finium* of 1243 (27 Hen. III, No. 58; S.R.S. VI, 114). It records a gift by Roger Tyrel and Sarra his wife of two virgates of land in Saldeford (now Shalford, in Charlton Musgrove) to the Priory, and in return for this gift in frankalmoign the Prior received Roger and Sarra and the heirs of Sarra into all bene-

fits and orisons in his church for ever. At the great assize held in the same year at Ilchester, Baldwin Lengleis and Alice, his wife, brought an action against the Prior to recover lands in Cleyhenger, as being the property of Alice's sister, Christina de Cleyhengre, at the time of her death. But the Prior was able to prove a gift from Christina made six weeks before her death (S.R.S. XI, Nos. 433, 701). The Priory was therefore, so to say, a going concern by the middle of the thirteenth century. The Canons, in 1263, purchased Churchesham (now Cuddlesome) by means of a donation of forty marcs from John de Axebridge, sub-dean of Wells, and in return they agreed to pay the donor an annuity of thirty shillings, and after his death to continue to pay it to the Dean and Chapter of Wells for masses at the altar of St. Mary Magdalene (*Wells Cathedral MSS.*, 72). Appended to this deed is a perfect specimen of the conventual seal, with the full length figure of S. James of Compostella, the patron saint of the Priory. Illustration in Hoare's *Monastic Remains*, and (from an imperfect specimen) in *Proceedings* VII, i, 18.

Soon after this date the ancient family of Huscarl of Eastrip seem to have commended themselves and their ancestral property to the Prior, as in the Perambulation of Selwood Forest in 1298, he is entered as the owner (*Proceedings* XXXVII, ii, 80). In 1287 there was a dispute between the Priory and Robert de Mandeville concerning their title to the advowson of Buckhorn Weston (*Hist. Notes on South Somerset*, by J. Batten, pp. 124, 125); a later Robert of that family obtained leave, in 1345, to give a rent of six shillings and eightpence from his land at Weston to the Priory, to sustain a chaplain to celebrate in the chapel of St. Andrew, at Marsh (near Wincanton), and to keep a taper burning before the altar of St. Mary, in the said Priory (*Pat. Rolls*, 19 Ed. III, Vol. VII, 11.)

In 1350, Richard Lovel, the last male representative of the Barons of Castle Cary, obtained leave to give lands in Priestleigh, in the parish of Doultling (*Inq. ad quod damn.*, 24 Ed.

III, 10). He died the next year ; his only son James, by his wife Muriel, daughter and heiress of John de Soulis of Scotland (*Pat. Rolls*, 14 Ed. II, p. 535), had died in 1342, having had issue, Richard who died young, and a daughter Muriel who succeeded to her grandfather's large estates.

The heiress was already wife of Sir Nicholas St. Maur, a family of good position and possessions in Somerset and Wilts, in which county his elder brother, Sir Thomas St. Maur, founded a Priory of Gilbertines at Poulton. They were the sons of Sir Nicholas St. Maur, who also owned Newton, co. Northumberland. After his death in 1318, a jury of that remote district did not know whom to name as his heir, because he was *in partibus australibus* (*New Hist. of Northumberland*, II, 84). Nicholas and Muriel were both dead by 1361, leaving two sons, Nicholas died young, and Sir Richard who made proof of his age in 1377 (*Inq.* 50 Ed. III, 1st nos. 96). He married Ela, daughter and co-heiress of Sir John St. Loe. The "new chapel of the priory of Staverdall" received his body in 1400 ; and his widow in her will, made 28th November, 1409, directed that she should be buried by his side, and that 4000 masses should be said within one month of her decease (S.R.S. XIX, 309).

To return to the fortunes of the Priory. In 1374, Bishop Harewell gave permission to the Priory, which had before this appropriated the great tithes of Wincanton parish, to save the salary of a resident vicar by allotting the duty among the canons, the canon undertaking the work to have the scriptural stipend of one penny a day. The deed of Union (*Wells Cath. MSS.*, 172) gives the interesting information that there were eight canons. One was to celebrate daily a mass *pro defunctis* in the choir of the Priory, in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin, and of SS. Peter and Paul, and S. James (Patron Saint of the Priory), under the 'campanile,' for divers persons named, from the late Queen Philippa downwards, including the Bishop and several members of the Stourton family, but strangely enough omitting all reference to the

families of Lovel and St. Maur. In the *Calendar of Ancient Deeds* is a conveyance (C.3694) dated 1382, whereby Robert the Prior and the canons in the chapter house, grant a lease for three lives of parcels of land in Wincanton, part being by the cross of Suddon.

In spite of the endowment, somewhat meagre, and of the various increments noted above, in the fifteenth century the priory buildings fell into decay. The reconstruction however was not carried out by Alice, posthumous daughter and heiress of Richard St. Maur, ob. 1409, who had married William Lord Zouche of Harringworth, before 1428, when her husband presented to North Barrow, but by John Stourton of Preston Plucknett, uncle of the first Lord Stourton. He died before the works were finished, but left due directions in his will, dated 10 November, 1438, and proved 27 January, 1439 (S. R. S. xvi, 143).

“I bequeath my body to holy burial in the church of Staverdale. Item, I will that my body shall be carried thither (from Preston) in my best waggon, and that the waggon and oxen shall remain to the said house for a memorial of my soul. I will that the church of Staverdale and the cloister there, shall be completed in all things, as well in glazing the windows as in other buildings to be done, and that the expenses and costs thereof shall be borne by my executors. I will that the images¹ carried thither by me shall be ordained and placed in the middle of the choir of the said church, between the stalls there, and that underneath shall be made a certain tomb ordained and walled, for the bodies of me and my wife to be placed therein reasonably and honestly after our death, with one closet of iron bars around the said tomb; and that the reading desk shall be at the head of the said tomb. I will that the aforesaid church shall be throughout honestly paved with ‘Tyle’ of my arms and the arms of my mother.”

1. Recumbent figures of testator and wife. He left instructions for a similar tomb for the memorial of John Keynes and his wife at Dowlish Wake.

The rebuilding was completed in 1443, when Bishop Stafford commissioned his suffragan "to dedicate the nave of the conventual church of Staverdale with the choir and chancel, which John de Stourton, while yet alive, had caused to be rebuilt at his own cost, and to concede to him the right of sepulture in the said church;" (quoted in Bishop Hobhouse's paper on Stavordale, in first report of Wincanton Field Club). The testator also left to the Priory three parts of the manor of Thorn Coffin, with the advowson of the church; and his executors obtained royal license for the gift in 1442.

In 1452, Bishop Beckington authorised a "Quæstor" to gather alms throughout the Diocese on behalf of the Priory, giving him a letter of commendation addressed to the incumbents, and to the faithful.

Soon after the beginning of the sixteenth century, we find the fortunes of the Priory again united with the family of Zouche, both on the down grade. John Lord Zouche, born in 1460, grandson of Alice St. Maur, fought on the losing side at Bosworth field, was attainted and deprived of all his property. The attainder was reversed on 11 July, 1486, and an annuity of £40 allotted to him, with an equal sum to Jane his wife, "towards the sustentacion of her and her children." He also recovered some fragments of property, as he disposes in his will of the manor of Cole and Pitcombe, and of Little Houghton and Clipsham in Northants. It is generally stated that he lived a retired life at Marsh Court; but latterly he had certainly settled at Stavordale. In the terms of his will (made 8th October, 1525, proved 20th March, 1526; S. R. S. XIX, 241), "I give and bequethe all my right title and interest and terme of and in my logging and other ground thereto adjoining within the Priory of Staverdale, to Sir John Fitzjames, knight, Chief Baron, and his assigns; provided always that in anywise the said Sir John shall not suffer my sonne Sir John Zouche to occupie ni abide in the same." He further directed that his body should be buried within the Priory of

Stavordale, "in the chapel of the chantry of Jesus there, by me ordeyned and founded." A codicil to the will gives elaborate directions for the endowment of this chantry for two priests out of the rents of Pitcombe and Cole.

It is most likely that Lord Zouche had occupied, in the absence of any more suitable tenants, the domestic buildings of the Priory. A small portion, at present serving as stable with store room above, is still standing.

Although the property of the Priory should have sufficed for eight celibates, it is well known that the finances of the smaller monasteries and nunneries were beyond repair at this period. Muchelney affords a similar spectacle. Very few houses had even half their proper complement of inmates. All classes felt that the present system could not last much longer, and Bishop Foxe's preference for the foundation of a college rather than a monastery at Oxford, hardly required the stimulus of Bishop Oldham's prophetic warning that they might live to see the end and fall of monasticism. It may hardly be doubted that Lord Zouche's residence at Stavordale, taken with his grandson's letter (given below), indicates a scheme, firstly for getting rid of the canons, which was successful, and then for re-endowing the family with the Priory lands, which failed.

In 1524 William Grendon, a canon of the Priory at Taunton, was elected Prior, presumably on the *congé d'élire* of Lord Zouche, then alive. In 1533 Letters Patent were issued, dated 9th April (Pat. 24 Hen. VIII, p. 2, m(31) 5), granting permission to Grendon to transfer all the property, etc., of the Priory to William Yorke, Prior of Taunton, and his Convent for ever; "also of his abundant grace, the king gave the advowson of Wincanton church, though held of himself *in capite*, without fine or fee, great or small."¹

The domestic buildings and demesne lands were leased to

1. In view of the subsequent proceedings of the generous donor, one is irresistibly reminded of the "no preliminary fees of any description," in a certain class of advertisements and circulars.

Nicholas Fitzjames, for £5 per annum (Bishop Hobhouse's paper, as above). Nicholas was cousin and heir of Sir John Fitzjames, at that date Chief Justice of K.B. ; and the lease may have been made to carry out the provisions of Lord Zouche's will. John Lord Zouche lived until 1551, but the "logging" at Stavordale seems to have been occupied by his son Richard.

The visitation of the lesser houses took place in the Autumn of 1535, and the Act for their suppression passed through Parliament towards the end of February, 1535-6. Richard Zouche evidently considered that the time was come, and he addressed the following letter to Cromwell. *Archbold*, p. 55, gives the date as about February, 1535-6 ; MSS. Cotton, Cleop. E. IV., G. X. 390.

"Sure plesyt yor goode mastichipe to underston y^t wer I dewlle ys a pore pryery A fundacion off my nawynsetres wyche ys my lord my fatheres ynerytens ande myne And be the reson off a lowyde pryor w^t was ther whyche was a schanon off Tawnton a for browytt hytt to be a sell unto Tawnton. Ande now his hytt Dystryde and ther ys but to chanons wyche be off no goode luyng Ande yt ys gret petty the pore howyse scholde be so yll yntretyde werfor yff ytt may plese yo^r goode masterchype to be so goode master to me to gett me the pore howse wyche ys callyde Staverdell I wer bownde to pray for yo^r masterchyp. And also I schal bere yo^r my harty seruys nexte the kynge ys gras and be at yo^r commayndment be the gras off Gode he euer preserue yo^r goode masterchype yo^r howyne pore seruantt ande bedman

Rycharde Zouche."

However Stavordale as annexed to Taunton Priory was respite for three years ; the surrender is dated 12th February, 1538-9, and then it remained in the king's hand for more than four years. An entry in the Charlton Musgrove registers, under date 22nd February, 1538-9, and the wording of the Chantry certificate of 1548, "the chapel of the Chantry being

scituate within the saide lord Zouche's house at Stavordale ;" show that Richard Zouche was still holding on, but to little purpose.

The farm of Stavordale appears among the Particulars of Grant by way of exchange, to John, sixteenth Earl of Oxford, Lord High Chamberlain, dated 23rd October, 1543 ; with a certificate of the view and the measure of the wood, dated 13th June, 1543 (Hugo, *Proceedings* IX, ii, 125 ; *Archbold*, p. 215).¹ Sir Thomas Arundell and Richard Zouche did secure divers other lands at Stavordale (Origin. 36 Hen. VIII, 7 pars., rot. 91). William Lord Stourton made a successful "Request to purchase" rents and farms in Wincanton, Barrow, and Roundhill, with the farm of the rectory of Wincanton (Inq. p.m. Charles Lord Stourton, 3 and 4 Phil. and Mary, 108, 111). And so the spoil was divided.

Richard Lord Zouche only survived John Lord Zouche for about one year. His will, made 17th July, 1552, was proved at Wells, and in the official index he is described as of Stavordale. The only property mentioned is the manor of North Molton, co. Devon. A couple of entries among the baptisms in 1561 and 1564 in the Charlton Musgrove registers show that the family still remained in the parish ; and it is quite likely that the modern surname of Such designates "Founder's kin" of Stavordale Priory.

Edward, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, who died in 1604, "seemed to take a delight in selling every acre of his land at ruinously low prices." (*Dict. Nat. Biog.* LVIII, 227a). In 1785 Stavordale was sold by Dr. Burford of Banbury (Hoare, p. 124), to Sir Richard Hoare. In 1892 Sir Henry Hoare sold it to the Rev. R. L. M. Leir, of Charlton Musgrove, who has just parted with it to Mr. F. G. Sage, of Claygate, Surrey.

1. They are printed in full in Hoare's *Monastic Remains*, pp. 112-3. *Firma capitalis mansionis ibidem*, but no reference to the church. Qu.—Was it already converted into a dwelling-house ?

The available evidence seems to show that the domestic buildings, as was so often the case, were first utilized by the new owner. At the same time the almost perfect state of the walls and timber roofs of nave and chancel, prove that the church must have been secularised at a very early date. The alterations in the side windows of the chancel appear to have been introduced at a time when all tradition of Tudor labels and mouldings, which lingered long in the district, had died away. The exact date can only be settled by the careful examination of an expert. Of all the monastic churches in the county, only those at Stavordale and Woodspring survive, the latter deprived of its chancel. The tottering arches of Glastonbury Abbey will, ere long, sink under the grassy mounds which mark the graves of its brethren :

Nor you, ye proud, impute to *these* the fault :
If memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long drawn isle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swelled the note of praise.

APPENDIX.

CORRECTED LIST OF PRIORS.

- (1249) Walter, called to warrant by Richard Lovel, *Ped. Fin.* 33 H. III, 28.
- (1254) Robert, *Ped. Fin.* 38 H. III, 142; in 1263 makes agreement with John de Axbridge. Certainly distinct from
Robert de Charleton, on whose death
- 1310 Walter de Eton was elected (*Drok. Reg.*, 8 Mar., 1309-10). He resigned, and
- 1322 William de Nymsfield was elected (*Drok. Reg.*, 20 July, 1322). He died, and
- 1333 Henry de Nymsfield was elected (*Salopia Reg.*, 24 July, 1333).
John Bodman having died,
- 1361 John de Wincanton was elected (*Salopia Reg.*, 3 Nov., 1361).
- (1382) Robert (*Calendar of Ancient Deeds*, C. 3694).
- (1409) Oliver, mentioned in the will of Ela Lady St. Maur (*S. R. S.* XIX, 310).
- 1418 John Penne, Oct. 29, *Bubw. Reg.*, 150.
- 1440 William Poyntington, election confirmed 5 Nov. (*Harl. MSS.* 6965).
- (1501) John Selke; his name occurs in Episcopal registers (*Harl. MSS.* 6965).
- 1502 Andrew Grey, election confirmed 22 Sept., *Reg. King.*
- 1508 John Legge. He resigned, and
- 1513 Richard Creed, canon of Bruton, was appointed 11 August.
1524. William Grendon, canon of Taunton, was appointed. Priory annexed to Taunton, 9th April, 1533.
Surrender, 12th Feb., 1538-9.