

" HAYMESOKNE " IN COLCHESTER.

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THE foregoing paper is one of great interest to Colcestrians, and having made certain notes bearing on its subject matter from the Cartulary of St. John's Abbey,¹ I am encouraged to print them at Dr. Round's suggestion. The cartulary contains so much information as to people of position in the vicinity of Colchester, and in other places connected with the abbey, that one feels how much more valuable it would have been with a good *index nominum*, in addition to its very satisfactory *index locorum*.

With regard to the earliest tenant of the Haymesokne, as Morant² says it was styled, I doubt if it is safe to attempt any identification of William, father of Benedict, whose name stands first on the pedigree—certainly his predecessor must remain unknown.

There are, indeed, several Williams among the witnesses to the earlier charters, of whom William fil Brun³ is the earliest. Adam, Nicholas, and Gilbert,⁴ the sons of Brun, were prominent burgesses in the middle of the twelfth century, charged in 1173 with reparations to the town walls. It would, perhaps, be too far fetched to see in Brun the dispossessed owner of manors in Lawling and Tolleshunt, recorded in Domesday.⁵

William fil. Brun was, however, certainly contemporaneous with Benedict, so it is quite possible that it was to him that Bishop Richard de Bealmes granted the soke before 1128, the year of his death.

A charter of Hamo de St. Clare, in which also this name occurs, is dated 1137, and is very close in position to another charter, granted by Hubert de St. Clare, Hamo's son, in which the name of William the chaplain (*capellanus*) occurs, in conjunction with some of the witnesses of the former deed. This was earlier than 1154, as the donation of Lexden mill made therein was confirmed by King Stephen. William the clerk (*clericus*) occurs a little further on, in

¹ *Cartularium Monasterii S. Johannis Baptiste de Colecestria*, Roxburgh Club, 1897 (privately printed).

² Appendix to Book I. p. 32.

³ *Op. tit.* 156.

* Madox, *History Of the Exchequer*, p. 387.

⁵ *V.C.H. Essex*, vol. i. 491, 530.

connection with a grant at Wivenhoe. In a further charter¹ we find William's three brothers, Gilbert, Adam, and Nicholas, attesting a charter which records the gift of Catsfield, made by William "quando ipse susceptus est ad monachum."

This charter, with its reference to *burgagio Colcestrie*, and its attestation by Thomas (rural) dean of Colchester, is interesting, as indicating the antiquity of our municipal and ecclesiastical institutions. Somewhat later we have Willelmus clericus, nepos domini Willelmi de Lanualei, otherwise William de Lanvallei, the clerk, but he can hardly be the same person, though he is associated with the locality through the grant of a messuage and garden at the Balkerne.

When we leave William, and turn to his son and heir, Benedict, we are on firmer ground, though, curiously enough, we have few direct references to him. The most interesting of these is that to which I drew attention some eighteen years ago, in a paper on the Cartulary.² This is a charter of Hamo de St. Clare, of whom we hear nothing later than 1147, attested, among others, by Walter Hanig and Benedict, *prepositi Colcestrie*, i.e., bailiffs of Colchester.

With the possible exception of Lewin and Godwin, each styled "consilio" in Domesday, this is our earliest notice of local rulers, and it is interesting to be able to give one of them a local habitation as well as a name. This is practically his only appearance in history, for the few other cases in which his name occurs it is as Benedict of Colchester, the father of William the clerk, and of Reginald and Geoffrey his brothers.³

A charter⁴ of the time of the Welsh abbot, Walter, gives us, among the local witnesses, William *clericus*, and as this may be as late as 1182, it possibly refers to William, son of Benedict, the defendant in the celebrated suit of 1206.

About this last date we get an interesting notice of "Willelmus persona ecclesie Sancte Marie,"⁵ which, at any rate, suggests that he was an early prototype of a 'squarson'—lord of the soke, rector and would-be patron of the church. May we venture to carry the conjecture a step further, and to see in Radulf, son of William the priest, a bailiff, towards the close of the reign of Henry III., yet another generation of the family playing a prominent part in his native town? As a son of the manse he would be kept in company by a son of Thomas the dean, and many another

¹ *Op. cit.* 190.

² "Colchester in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," *Trans. Essex Arch. Soc.* vol vii., p. 119.

³ *Op. cit.* 307, 308. * *Op. cit.* 174. † *Op. cit.* 305.

fruit of those quasi-matrimonial unions, then so customary, sanctioned by public opinion and connived at by the ecclesiastical authorities.

Dr. Round's suggestion that we may see in the property held at the present day by the Grammar School the 'capital message' of the soke can only be verified if we move its boundary some distance northward, but there are some considerations which may be held to justify this. The rectory grounds, which surely were always part of the bishop's soke, extend northward as far as the roadway to the Balkerne gate. Now this roadway originally ran as a continuation of High Street, and the boundary line between the parishes of St. Mary and St. Peter starts from the middle of High Street and runs through the centre of the gateway. It is, therefore, possible that this was originally St. Mary's lane, and would give the whole of the west side of Head Street to the soke, with well-defined boundaries.¹ Whenever the Balkerne gateway was disused, it is obvious the roadway was existing in the late days of the Saxon monarchy, when the earlier parishes were divided.

It is, however, almost certain that the St. Mary Lane of 1206 is the present Church Street North, so that in that case we must look for the capital message elsewhere. In 1516² Sir John de Vere purchased "Head House," which from its situation was probably situated where Messrs. Sexton & Grimwade's offices now are, from a wealthy clothmaker's heiress. In the eighteenth century it was known as "Colchester House," and its frontage suggests that it has always been one of the principal residences in the town. Possibly, however, another purchase of Sir John de Vere's, a day later, on 22nd September, 1516, of a residence belonging to Richard Anthony, M.P. for Colchester, which stood on the site of the house and grounds, to the east of St. Mary's churchyard, long occupied by the Inglis family, may indicate the sometime demense mansion of the Lord Bishop of London.

Be that as it may, the soke has a close connection, as Morant shows, with prominent Colcestrians.

In 1317 it belonged to John de Colchester, rector of Tendring, the munificent founder of a chantry, and a century later to Thomas Fraunceys, bailiff and M.P. for Colchester, while its last appearance is in the reign of Henry VIII., as noted above.

Another notable benefactor of the town, Joseph Elianore, M.P.

¹ The whole area would be about 81/4 acres, almost bisected by the lane, which corresponds somewhat to the Domesday entry, *i.e.*, the 14 houses *plus* 4 acres.

² Benham *Colchester Red Paper Book*, p. 76.

and bailiff, who founded a richly endowed chantry in the chapel of St. Thomas the Martyr in St. Mary's church, owned the land between the rectory grounds and Head Street in 1349. He deserves commemoration among the pious benefactors of the Grammar School, which derives part of its endowment from the large house facing High Street, now occupied by Messrs. Stead & Simpson and Messrs. Oliver & Parker—in Morant's clay styled the "Old Three Crowns Inn."

It is a not infrequent custom nowadays to chronicle links with the past. Benedict, the bailiff, may well have formed the connecting link through whom memories of the Norman conquest filtered on to his grandson, who possibly saw the calling of the first English parliament. Just as at the present day, three lives may carry us back to Queen Anne, so in the thirteenth century, for those at any rate who were in touch with the monastic chroniclers, as Benedict and his companions and their grand-children may have been, Domesday and the anarchy under Stephen, the crusades and the loss of Normandy, the great Charter, the coming of the Friars, and the calling of Parliament indicate changes as important in the political, religious and social life of the people as any that have marked the last two centuries.