

THE FAMILY OF CLARE.

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It is now more than twelve years since I wrote for the *Dictionary of National Biography* five articles on the house of Clare, one of them dealing with the family as a whole, and four others with members of the house who flourished in the Norman period. Having, since then, further studied its early ramifications, I propose to touch on certain points to which I have given special attention in the history of "a house which played," to quote Mr. Freeman's words, "so great a part alike in England, Wales and Ireland."

A Suffolk Congress of the Institute is an eminently suitable occasion on which to deal with the family of Clare, which derived its name from the great stronghold that the Institute is about to visit, and the founder of which obtained in Suffolk so vast a fief at the Conquest. And here I may observe that this fief was the source of one of three "Honours" prominent in Suffolk history. Three of the leading followers of the Conqueror, Richard de Clare, William Malet, and Hugh de Montfort, obtained between them in Suffolk, according to Dugdale's estimate, some 350 "lordships," and each of them had for the "caput" of his fief, I would point out, a moated mound, from which these fiefs became known as the "Honours" of Clare, of Eye, and of Haughley. Eye and Haughley were forfeited to the Crown, and Clare passed to it by descent. "The Honour of Clare" now forms part of the Duchy of Lancaster,¹ but its separate existence is still, I believe, recognised by a court of the Honour of Clare held by an officer of its own.

As is known to most of you, the Suffolk stronghold, whatever was the origin of its own name, has originated,

¹ In 4 & 5 Philip and Mary (1558) an Act of Parliament united to the Duchy "all that Honour, Lordship, or Manor of Clare in our county of Suffolk," &c.

not only that of its lords, but several others as well. The Royal Dukedom of Clarence, county Clare in Ireland, Clare College at Cambridge and Clarenceux King of Arms all derive their names from the same source. In the case of County Clare there has indeed been a question. In "Clarence, the origin and bearers of the title," the Rev. Thomas Parkinson derived the name of county Clare from Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, better known as "Strongbow."¹ But Mr. J. Donaldson had long before suggested that it was really named after Thomas de Clare, a younger brother of the head of the house, who obtained, in some way, the land of Thomond about 1267.² It may be useful to note that Thomond was granted him in tail, to hold by the service of ten knights, January 26th, 1276.

It should be hardly necessary to dwell on the greatness attained by the Clares. But some of the sidelights thrown on that greatness by sundry scattered passages may now be quoted. Richard, the founder of the family in England, married Rohese, daughter of Walter Giffard the elder, in whose right his descendants inherited a moiety of the Giffard fief. The alliance of these two families is referred to by the Ely writer when he speaks of their son, Richard, his abbot, as

"parentum undique grege vallatus, quorum familiam ex Ricardis et Gifardis constare tota Anglia et novit et sensit. Ricardi enim et Gifardi, duo scilicet ex propinquo venientes familiæ, virtutis fama et generis copia illustres effecerat nateles suos, et quoscunque nobilium conventus se ageret illorum pompa, terribili multitudine ferebatur."

It is important to observe that the Clares are here called "Ricardi," as they are in another passage,³ after the founder of their house. A similiar allusion is made by the Colchester Abbey writer when he says that Eudo Dapifer, a son-in-law of this Richard, was spared by the King for the sake of his wife's family, "erat enim haec de genere nobilissimo Normannorum, filia scilicet Ricardi, qui fuit filius Gilberti comitis duxitque Rohaisam uxorem," etc.⁴ Moreover, he alleges that on Eudo's death,

¹ Paper originally read at Clare before Essex and Suffolk Archæological Societies, August, 1868, and published long afterwards in *Antiquary*, V, 60-65.

² The Duchy of Clarence, County of Clare, and Clarenceux King of

Arms," read December 14th, 1848 (*Bury and West Suffolk Archæological Institute's Proceedings*, I, 5-6).

³ See *Feudal England*, p. 469.

⁴ *Ibid.*

there was an idea, among his widow's brothers, of strengthening their position by marrying her to Henry the First, then a widower. I am still working out the history of this mighty house in the Norman period, especially its connection with the conquest of Wales. When I have finished doing so, I expect to find that they owed to Henry I an immense accession of wealth and consequently of power.

Under Henry II we have another interesting glimpse of their position in Fitz-Stephen's remark that "nearly all the nobles of England were related to the Earl of Clare, whose sister, the most beautiful woman in England, had long been desired by the King."¹ The death of William, Earl of Gloucester, in 1173, led to a vast increase of their estates and the eventual acquisition of his title; and "from this time the house of Clare became the acknowledged head of the baronage."² Gilbert de Clare, "The Red Earl," became the son-in-law of Edward I and the greatest subject in the kingdom. It is worthy of remark, that in what is known as "the Parliamentary Roll of Arms," assigned to 1307,³ the Earl's coat immediately follows that of the Sovereign himself. But the house was greatest on the eve of its end; Gilbert, the Red Earl's successor, fell on the field of Bannockburn (1314), the last of the Earls of his house.

Apart from the usual sources of genealogical confusion, the family history of the Clares has been rendered specially difficult by their habit, born perhaps of pride, of deeming superfluous any suffix, and styling themselves only "Richard son of Gilbert," "Gilbert son of Richard," and so forth. As I wrote in the *Dictionary of National Biography* :—

"Dugdale is perhaps the chief offender, but, as Mr. Planché rightly observed, the pedigree of the Clares as set down by the genealogists, both ancient and modern, bristles with errors, contradictions, and unauthorised assertions. His own paper (*Journal Archæological Ass.* XXVI, 150 et seq.⁴) so far as it goes is probably the best, that of Mr. Clark on 'The Lords of Morgan' (*Archæol. Journal*, XXXV, 325) being, though later, more erroneous."

Count Gilbert of Brionne, the ancestor of all the Clares, was the son of Godfrey, a natural son of Richard the Fear-

¹ *Becket Memorials*, III, 43.

² *Archæological Journal*, XXXV, 337.

³ Edited by Mr. Oswald Barron.

⁴ See also his papers in *The Conqueror and his Companions*.

less, Duke of Normandy. Count Gilbert, one of the guardians of Duke William when a child, was murdered by Ralph de Wacy in the year 1040, whereupon his two sons, Richard and Baldwin, fled to Flanders. Returning to Normandy in later years, they received fiefs from William, Richard obtaining Orbec and Bienfaite¹ (Calvados) while Baldwin had Meulles² (Calvados) and Le Sap (Orne). From these possessions the two brothers were known respectively as Richard de "Benefacta" (Bienfaite) and Baldwin de "Molis" (Meulles) in addition to the names they derived from their parentage and from their seats in England. Moreover, when the Suffolk Domesday shows us a Roger "de Orhec" holding under Richard at Bricett (II, 393b), we need not hesitate to say that he must have derived his name from that Orbec in Normandy which, we have seen, was held by his lord, Richard.

Before we pass from Normandy, it is necessary to insist on the close connection between all the Clares and the famous Abbey of Bec Hellouin, "the most renowned school of the learning of the time," and one which "gave," in Mr. Freeman's words, "three Primates to the throne of St. Augustine." Founded (1034-1037) by Herlwin, a vassal of Count Gilbert of Brionne, with the help and favour of the Count himself, it was claimed by the latter's great-grandson, the first Earl of Pembroke, as under the special protection of his family and as having been founded by his ancestors.³

It is difficult to give any conception of the errors and confusion, on the Clares and their branches, in Dugdale's *Baronage*; and, in some respects, later writers have increased rather than lessened it. Instead therefore, of attempting a general pedigree of the family, I propose, as a more useful undertaking, to mention some of the leading errors against which antiquaries have to be warned and some of the new points established by my own researches.⁴

I have shown in my chart pedigree of the family how closely its successive generations identified themselves with Bec, but I may here observe that as Richard the first lord

¹ Now Orbec-en-Auge and St. Martin-de-Bienfaite.

² Between Orbec and Le Sap.

³ Cott. MS., Faust. A. IV, fo. 73.

⁴ A chart pedigree of the family, for three generations from the Conquest, will be found in my *Feudal England*, facing p. 472.

of Clare founded St. Neot's Priory as a cell to the abbey of Bec, so Gilbert, its second lord, bestowed on the abbey the collegiate church of St. John, with its prebends, which his English predecessors had endowed at Clare itself.

The two sons of the murdered Count received in England vast possessions at the hands of the Conquering Duke. Baldwin was made Sheriff of Devon and obtained a great fief in that county, where his headquarters were at Exeter itself. He was known in consequence as Baldwin the Sheriff or Baldwin of Exeter, as well as Baldwin de Meulles, or Baldwin the son of Count Gilbert. Of his three sons, who, like himself, were all benefactors to Bec, Robert held Brionne, in 1090, against the Duke of Normandy, while William and Richard succeeded in turn to the shrievalty of Devonshire and their father's fief. Here the important point to notice is that Richard was totally distinct from Richard de Reviens (father of the first Earl of Devon), with whom he is so persistently confused, but who died thirty years earlier than he did.

I hasten to pass to Count Gilbert's other son, Richard, styled once in the Suffolk Domesday (II, 448a) Richard "de Clare," but more usually Richard de Tonbridge or Richard the son of Count Gilbert. Here in Suffolk he obtained the lands of two great owners under Edward the Confessor, namely Wisgar the son of Ælfric of Clare and Phin, known as Phin the Dane. Both of these had held property in Ipswich itself, which duly passed to Richard.¹ As we have seen, he married Rohese, daughter of Walter Giffard, and their daughter Rohese (for the name was kept up in the family) married Eudo Dapifer, founder of Colchester Abbey. I cannot refrain from pointing out that the handsome treatise published in connection with the town hall now being built at Colchester bestows on her the truly delightful name "Rhodesia." This "up to date" version is worthy of that enterprising borough which has revived its imaginary "Portreeve" by a special Act of Parliament. Those who are familiar with Mr. Planché's work can imagine how that bold punster would have styled this delightful name the invention of a *chartered* libertine.

Richard left many children, of whom Gilbert suc-

¹ Domesday, II, 392b, 393a.

ceeded to his English fiefs, and Roger to Orbec in Normandy, while Walter and Robert obtained, I hold, fresh fiefs from Henry I. I was the first to discover that one of the daughters, Adeliz, married the famous Walter Tirel, who held, under her father Richard, the manor of Langham, Essex, on the Suffolk border.¹

Gilbert, the second lord of Clare, had, like his father, several children, of whom the eldest, Richard his heir, is persistently said to have been made the first Earl of Hertford. But although this is the view adopted in *The Lords' Reports on the Dignity of a Peer*, it is, I have shown, absolutely wrong.² Another son, Baldwin de Clare, Stephen's spokesman at the Battle of Lincoln, was, I have shown,³ ancestor, through an heiress, of the Lords Wake, Dugdale being here again hopelessly wrong. Another of his grievous errors on the Clares has been exposed by me in a paper on the abbey of Stratford Langthorne,⁴ where I have shown that its founder, William de Montfichet, married Margaret, a daughter of Gilbert, the second lord of Clare, by whom he was father of Gilbert de Montfichet living under Henry II. Now Fantosme, in his poem on the great revolt against that monarch, writes, speaking of London :—

Gilebert de Munfichet sun chastel ad fermé
E dit qui les Clarreaus⁵ vers lui sont alié.⁶

Castle Munfichet was, we know, a bulwark of the city on the west, and "Clarreaus," which the Rolls editor does not attempt to explain, is, in my view, an allusion to Gilbert's cousins, the Clares, a branch of whom, we shall find, held the adjoining stronghold known as Baynard Castle. But I must first deal with another branch.

The most famous of the younger branches of the great house of Clare was that which was founded by Gilbert, a younger son of Gilbert, the second lord of Clare. This younger Gilbert, we are told by the continuator of William of Jumièges, inherited the lands of his paternal uncles

¹ See my paper on Walter Tirel and his wife (*Feudal England*, pp. 468-479, 575).

² See my *Geoffrey de Mandeville*, pp. 39-40, and *The Complete Peerage*, II, 267.

³ See my *Feudal England*, p. 474.

⁴ *Essex Arch. Soc. (N.S.)* V, 141.

⁵ "Clarels," in another reading.

⁶ Rolls edition, p. 338.

Walter and Roger, younger sons of Richard, first lord of Clare.

He obtained the Earldom of Pembroke *temp.* Stephen, as did his nephew and namesake the Earldom of Hertford. As heir to his uncle Walter, the founder of Tintern Abbey, he became the lord of Gwent in South Wales. And this leads me to make a striking and, so far as I know, a novel suggestion. This Gilbert's son Richard, who succeeded him as Earl of Pembroke, has long been familiarly known to all the world as "Strongbow." It has been held, however, that this name was one of later invention, nor indeed is it found, we learn, in any contemporary authority. But the singular thing is that, although hardly known, Richard's father Gilbert is also styled "Strongbow." A charter of Richard's grandson and heir, granted within fifty years of his death, distinctly applies the name "Strongbow" both to Richard and his father, and my friend Sir James Ramsay has called my attention to the fact that the chronicle of Melrose similarly speaks of them both as "Strongbow" not long after their time.¹ Now Gilbert, we have seen, was lord of Gwent, and although no one, I believe, has thought of putting, in homely phrase, "two and two together," it is a striking fact that the men of Gwent were famous above all others for the strength of their mighty bows.

In his *History of the Art of War* Mr. Charles Oman writes:—

"The men of South Wales were the most skilled of all the inhabitants of Britain in archery, and drew the longest and the strongest bows" (p. 400).

Giraldus Cambrensis, as he observes,

"describes the bows of Gwent as astonishingly stiff, large, and strong" (p. 559).²

Now, in the paper I contributed to the *Journal* of the Institute on "the introduction of armorial bearings into England," I gave an illustration of the startling seal of this Earl Gilbert,³ in which he holds in his right hand a

¹ "Richardus comes de Penbroc, filius Giliberti comitis Stranboue" (*Chron. de Mailros*, p. 82). Richard is also called "Strangbo," Sir James points out to me, by the *Annals of Loch Ce*.

² The interesting passage in *Itin. Camb.*, p. 54, should be studied for this.

³ *Arch. Journ.*, LI, 45.

weapon which is clearly a formidable arrow, some six feet in length! Is it not possible, nay probable, that this design is really an allusion to the name of Strongbow which, as we have seen, this Earl Gilbert bore, and that it displays in an exaggerated form that arrow used by the men of Gwent which excited the wonder of Giraldus? We have here, if so, the first glimpse—for Earl Gilbert died in 1148—of that fearful weapon which proved its power and revolutionised warfare two centuries later, on the fatal field of Crécy.

I have two more points to note before we leave this Earl Gilbert. In my *Studies on the Red Book of the Exchequer*¹ (p. 7) I have quoted from the Lewes Cartulary (Cott. MS. Vesp. F. XV., fo. 73) a charter which confirms his connection with Pevensey, alluded to in the *Gesta Stephani*, by showing him in possession of its rape. The other point is the demonstration in my newly-published *Commune of London*² that he did not, as alleged, obtain the office of "Marshal of England" and transmit it to his heirs.

In this connection I may mention that I have shown in the same work (pp. 309–310) that the earl's son and successor Richard did not, though the fact has been styled "certain," have a son Walter, whose existence has been evolved only from the garbled text of a charter. This correction is of some consequence in view of the romantic story of his alleged son's death, and the well-known monument assigned to him.

Oddly enough, a daughter of the first and sister of the second Earl of Pembroke married the head of the house, Gilbert, Earl of Hertford, whose son Richard succeeded (1245) in her right to vast estates in England and Ireland.

We may now turn to the cadet branch founded by Robert, a younger son of Richard, first lord of Clare. This Robert was granted the fief forfeited by the Baynards, including Dunmow, Essex, famous for its "fitch," and great estates in Norfolk and Suffolk. Mr. Eyton questioned the accepted view that this Robert was the founder of the baronial house of Fitz-Walter on the ground of chronological difficulties.³ But in spite of

¹ Privately printed 1898.

² Constable and Co., 1899.

³ Add. MSS. 31, 938, fo. 98.

their undoubted difficulties, I have worked out the pedigree of the house, and shown that the descent is true.¹

The Fitz-Walters held a peculiar position in connection with their stronghold of Castle Baynard on the walls of London, namely that of banner-bearer and leader of the City's forces, and I have already suggested that they were the "Clarreaus" of Fantosme. I have lately noted the interesting fact that the tenants of their fief, formerly Baynard's, owed castle ward to the said Castle Baynard.

As Dugdale was wrong on the founder of their house, so was he wrong on the lords of Daventry, who descended from one of their younger sons.² It is interesting to note that while the Clare earls ended in 1314, the Lords Fitz-Walter continued to flourish in the male line down to 1432. Their cadets, the lords of Daventry, had ended with a last male in 1380, and, although they themselves had thrown off a younger branch, this ended with the death of John Fawsley, of Fawsley, in 1392, childless. His name may remind us that even as we saw, before the Conquest, in Normandy, the acquisition of a fresh lordship would give the house a fresh name, it did so still as late as the fourteenth century; so that genealogists may yet discover, however small the chance may be, a male descendant of the race of Clare.

And now I turn to Clare Castle. In what I have written on the moated mounds, especially in a paper on "the Honour of Ongar,"³ I have endeavoured to investigate the *status* of their sites on the eve of the Conquest, as bearing on the question of their origin. Mr. Clark jumped, somewhat rashly, at the conclusion that, even before the Conquest, these sites could be identified as the *capita* of great estates. But in many cases this was not so, and in these cases the presumption is that the mound was only raised when the site became such *caput*, that is, after the Conquest. At Clare, however, it is quite possible that we have a case in Mr. Clark's favour. "The great mound at Clare," he writes (I, 22), "was the fortified seat of Earl Aluric, who held an enormous estate in

¹ *Feudal England*, pp. 475, 575, and *Essex Archaeological Transactions* (N.S.) VII, 329.

² *Essex Arch. Trans.*, *ut supra*.

³ *Essex Arch. Trans.* [N.S.], VII, 143-4.

that district." Other writers similarly speak of its English lord as "Earl Aluric," but I do not know of any ground for assigning him that title. Ælfric, for such would be his real name, was a great Suffolk thegn, founder under Edward the Confessor of the collegiate church of St. John at Clare. On this foundation he bestowed the manor; and it seems to me that, although possible, it is hardly likely that he gave the church what Mr. Clark styles his own "fortified seat." Nor, indeed, is there any evidence that it was his "fortified seat" beyond Mr. Clark's assumption to that effect.

Ælfric, who was the son of a Wisgar, was succeeded also by a son of that name, who held his estates at the time of the Conquest, and whom King William, we may gather from Domesday, did not at first dispossess. His lands, however, were, during the reign, bestowed on Richard the son of Gilbert, founder of the house of Clare.

This Richard is shown us by Domesday as in possession of Clare itself, which the King had taken from the clerks of Ælfric's foundation. It is entered at the head of his Suffolk estates, and we learn from Domesday that he had there a vineyard. In my paper on "Essex Vineyards in Domesday" I have argued that the mention of a vineyard implies the residence of a Norman lord; and the inference that Richard resided at Clare is confirmed by the fact that his son Godfrey was there buried, as we learn from the local cartulary.

In considering the question whether it was Richard who first raised the mound at Clare, it must be remembered that, although in Suffolk he was known, from his stronghold, as Richard de Clare, in Kent he is styled by Domesday Richard "de Tonebridge." Is it not then desirable to compare the ground plan of Tunbridge Castle, his Kentish stronghold, with that of the castle at Clare? In both there is a moated mound on the *enceinte*; in both it is about the same circumference; in both the ground-plan appears, roughly, to consist of two quasi-rectangular enclosures, forming an inner and an outer ward, which appear to communicate with one another in much the same way. I have not had the opportunity of studying

¹ *Essex Arch. Trans.* (N.S.) VII, 249, *et seq.*

either the sites themselves or accurate ground-plans of them, but if there should prove to be any real resemblance of design, it would afford evidence of the highest value in favour of the Norman design of both these strongholds, an origin which I, in opposition to Mr. Clark, have claimed for some of the moated mounds.

Before leaving Clare itself, I would allude to the charters of Stoke Priory. There are printed in the Appendix to the new *Monasticon* two lengthy and important charters of confirmation to this house, which I have seen assigned to Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Archæologists should be warned that in several cases, within my own experience, charters of "T" Archbishop of Canterbury have been wrongly assigned to the famous Becket, when really granted by his predecessor, Theobald. In this case I should have recognised the charters as granted by Theobald, not by Thomas; but what gives them a special interest is that Becket himself is a witness to the first of the two, disguised as "Thomas clericus de Lond."¹ It is well known that, when a clerk in the household of Archbishop Theobald, Becket was styled "Thomas of London," and the witness, therefore, it should be noted, though styled "Thomas clericus de Lond.," was really "Thomas of London," clerk.

Of the heraldry of Clare I need only say that I discussed their coat in the *Journal* of the Institute a few years ago, and claimed its occurrence on a seal, in the time of Stephen, as probably the earliest authentic occurrence of armorial bearings in England.²

¹ *Mon. Ang.*, Vol. VI, p. 1660.

² *Arch. Journ.*, II, 44-48.