

ART. X.—*A note on the early history of the Priory of Carlisle.* By H. S. OFFLER, M.A.

Read at Penrith, July 9th, 1965.

THE evidence for the early history of the priory in Carlisle has been thoroughly sifted by local scholars. It is so scanty that even a scrap of additional material may be worth noting. This consists of a short entry in an unpublished chronicle, a "*Liber de gestis Anglorum*" composed substantially of extracts from the Durham *Historia Regum* and the *Historia XXV Annorum* of John of Hexham in some Scottish monastery during the last quarter of the 12th century. Since 1899 the manuscript has been in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, and is numbered nouv. acq. lat. 692. On fo. 39 we read *Anno .M.c.ii. fundata est domus Karleoli*: "In the year 1102 a house [of religion] was founded at Carlisle." The main text of the chronicle at this point jumps from 1100 to 1105; the words quoted have been neatly added to complete a line at the end of the entry for 1100. They are not in the text hand, but do not appear much later than the text, and can be assigned with fair confidence to the end of the 12th century.

This seems by nearly a century the earliest chronicle notice of a post-Conquest religious foundation at Carlisle. In two manuscripts coming from the second half of the 14th century — British Museum, Cotton Claudius D.VII (the *Lanercost Chronicle*), and the Ingilby manuscript of the *Anonimale Chronicle* of St Mary's, York, edited by Professor Galbraith — are to be found entries almost identical with each other concerning the early history of Carlisle Priory.¹ Since it is highly probable that the entries

¹ The passage is found in Claudius D. VII as an addition at the foot of fo. 58; printed by Canon J. Wilson in his introduction to Sir Herbert Maxwell's translation of the *Chronicle of Lanercost* (1913) pp. xiv-xv. Ingilby MS. fo. 2, printed by V. H. Galbraith, *The Anonimale Chronicle* (Manchester, 1927), pp. xlvi-vii.

in these two manuscripts were drawn from a single source, the early lost part of the chronicle of Richard of Durham, who was at work between c. 1280 and 1297,² the tradition they represent can be carried back at least to the late 13th century. There seems little doubt that a similar though more concise statement in the 15th-century *Scotichronicon* was taken by Abbot Bower from the same line of tradition.³

Here we have a much more circumstantial account of the priory's foundation than the Paris manuscript affords. It goes thus: In 1101 or 1102 King Henry I, as the result of the activity and counsel of his queen, Matilda, set up a body of regular canons in the church of Carlisle. A certain priest named Walter who had come to England at the conquest with William the Bastard received from King William as his reward for arduous services the church of Carlisle, many other churches and a number of neighbouring vills. He founded the church of St Mary of Carlisle, and died not long afterwards. King Henry gave his lands and possessions to the canons regular, and made Adelwald, prior of Nostell, their first prior.⁴

Some, but by no means all, of this 13th-century tradition finds support in the record sources. A return of 1212, preserved in the Book of Fees, stated that Henry I gave to Walter his chaplain Lynstock and Carleton for an annual cornage of 37s. 4d., and that later Walter, at the desire and with the permission of the king, took the religious habit in the priory of St Mary of Carlisle and gave all this land to the priory.⁵ A royal charter for which the editors of the *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* suggest a date between May and August

² Galbraith, pp. xlvii-viii; cf. A. G. Little, "The authorship of the Lanercost Chronicle", *Franciscan Papers, Lists and Documents* (Manchester, 1943), 48.

³ v 39, ed. Goodall (1759), i 289.

⁴ Claudius gives the date 1102; Ingilby, 1101. The latter does not give Walter's name, nor call Adelwald the first prior of the canons of Carlisle. Canon Wilson's reading, *Henricus [episcopatum]*, from Claudius should presumably be amended to *Hic ecclesiam*, as in Ingilby.

⁵ *Book of Fees* i 199.

1127 does indeed grant in alms and quit of cornage to God, St Mary and the canons of Carlisle all the churches and land which Walter the priest had possessed (*que fuit Walteri presbiteri*)⁶; on the Pipe Roll for 31 Henry I the canons appear relieved of 37s. 4d. for cornage, which it is safe to identify as Walter's annual render for Lynstock and Carleton. But this evidence, while it points to Walter the priest or chaplain as a benefactor of the regular canons of Carlisle, suggests that he became so pretty late in Henry I's reign rather than at the beginning of the century, and Henry's other known grant to the canons also belongs to the 1120's.⁷

Such considerations, together with inferences drawn from the history in general of the establishment of the Austin canons in England and of Henry's I's dealings with them, have caused scholars in modern times to conclude that the Augustinian priory which was afterwards to form the cathedral chapter of Carlisle was founded not in 1101/2, as the 13th-century tradition would have it, but as a consequence of Henry I's visit to Carlisle in 1122.⁸

The evidence of the Paris manuscript does not invalidate this conclusion, which I do not wish to contest. But it does strengthen the case for treating seriously the suggestion that before the Austin canons were established at Carlisle there was an older foundation, dating back to 1101 or 1102, for a religious community of some unspecified kind — a possibility not absolutely neglected nor denied by modern scholars, but to which some have been reluctant to attach much weight.⁹

⁶ *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* ii, ed. C. Johnson and H. A. Cronne (1956), no. 1491.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 1431, for which the editors suggest the date October 1125.

⁸ J. E. Prescott's discussion in *The Register of Wetheral*, appendix B, 478 ff. is still fundamental. Cf. J. Wilson in *VCH Cumberland* ii 7 ff and 131; J. C. Dickinson, "The origins of the cathedral of Carlisle", *CW2* xlv 134 ff.; *id.*, *The Origins of the Austin Canons* (1950) 245 ff.

⁹ Cf. Dickinson, "Origins", 136, n. *. Dr D. Nicholl, *Thurstan, archbishop of York* (York, 1964) 147 and n. 143, allows the possibility of an earlier religious community at Carlisle, though by a slip he puts the beginning of this community, on the evidence of the Ingilby MS., in 1100 instead of 1101.

When a Carlisle jury in 1278-9 alleged that a house of religion had been founded there about 180 years before, it was wrong if it meant the Augustinian priory, but perhaps not far off the mark if it was referring to an earlier house.¹⁰ The Paris manuscript does not name the founder of this house, but in the light of Henry I's charter of 1127 and the entry in the Book of Fees it would be difficult to reject the Lanercost tradition that he was Walter the priest or chaplain: a tradition repeated (rather than confirmed) by such later witnesses as a note in the lost register of Bishop Strickland (1400-1419) and John Leland in the 16th century.¹¹

If we accept a foundation by Walter of some sort of conventual religious establishment at Carlisle in 1101/2, had Henry I anything to do with it, as the jurors of 1278-9 asserted and the 13th-century chronicle tradition seems in a rather muddled fashion to suggest? This has been rejected as improbable, on the grounds, *inter alia*, that at this time Henry was "far too much occupied in the southern part of his kingdom to trouble himself about the ecclesiastical affairs of a northern border town, which ten years before had been for two centuries an uninhabited heap of ruins."¹² It seems worth remarking that Richard of Durham, as reflected in the Lanercost and Ingilby manuscripts, and, presumably following him, Bower in the *Scotichronicon* have the king acting at the instigation of Queen Matilda. Since she died in 1118 this can hardly refer to the Augustinian priory founded in or after 1122. Possibly, of course, her name was dragged in by this line of tradition quite gratuitously: in the hope, for example, of gaining the benevolence of the Scots, to whose ruling-house she belonged. But we do not know at what date Henry granted Lynstock and Carleton to Walter; it may have been quite early in the reign — as early, e.g. as he granted to his chaplain Richard d'Orval four of

¹⁰ Cumberland Assize Roll 132, m. 32, quoted *VCH Cumberland* ii 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, ii 8, n. 1; John Leland, *Collectanea* i (ed. alt., 1774) 120-121.

¹² Prescott, 482; cf. Dickinson, *Austin Canons*, 246; "Origins" 136.

the six Northumbrian churches which later went to increase the endowments of the Austin canons at Carlisle.¹³ If so, Henry's grant to Walter may have represented a benefaction to the latter's foundation. However this may be, a *priori* argument against any early action on Henry's part based on his alleged lack of interest in the north at this time is unconvincing. There are, on the contrary, indications that his accession in 1100 precipitated an important change in the ecclesiastical administration of the far north-west. For a few years after William Rufus's seizure of Carlisle and its district in 1092 it seems to have been intended that this new acquisition should be subjected to the ecclesiastical authority of St Cuthbert's see, which had connexions with this area going back to the 7th century.¹⁴ Between 1092 and 1095 a royal writ ordered W. son of Thierry and all the king's lieges of Carlisle and all who abode beyond the Lowther to accept the spiritual jurisdiction of the Bishop of Durham and his archdeacon; Archbishop Thomas I of York reinforced this order with his metropolitan authority.¹⁵

During the vacancy of the see of Durham between 1096 and 1099 another royal writ ordered the sheriff and barons of Carlisle to obey the archdeacon of Durham in all spiritual matters as in the time of Bishop William (of St Calais).¹⁶ We shall never know what part, if any, in formulating these orders was played by Rufus's right-hand man, Ranulf Flambard, who himself became Bishop of Durham in June 1099. But we do know that one of Henry I's first actions after his accession in August 1100 was to disgrace and imprison Flambard, and that during Flambard's subsequent exile Durham's claims to

¹³ *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum* ii, no. 572, with 1102 as a possible date.

¹⁴ Cf. Sir Edmund Craster, "The patrimony of St Cuthbert", *Eng. Hist. Rev.* lxx (1954) 181.

¹⁵ Dugdale, *Monasticon* (1817), i 241, no. vi; Craster, "A contemporary record of the pontificate of Ranulf Flambard", *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, vii (1930) 38.

¹⁶ *Monasticon* i 241, no. vii.

jurisdiction over Carlisle were lost for good and all.¹⁷ Into the sphere thus left vacant stepped York, with the Bishop of Glasgow attempting to intervene from the north, until the setting up of the see of Carlisle in 1133. It seems clear that at the beginning of his reign, round about the year 1101/2, Henry I had indeed good reasons to interest himself in ecclesiastical arrangements in the Carlisle area. There might be calculable profits for him in supporting the foundation in Carlisle of a house of religion by a locally influential royal chaplain. But this can be no more than conjecture, based on a tradition a century younger than the laconic but quite definite entry in the Paris manuscript.

¹⁷ Symeon of Durham, *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiae, cont. prima*, ed. T. Arnold (Rolls Series, 1882), 139.