




Early Charters and Documents relating to the Church and Manor of Bisham, Berks.

By Mr. Nathaniel Hone.

 COMPARATIVELY few particulars of the early foundation of a Preceptory of the Knights Templars at Bisham have come down to us. Dugdale in the *Monasticon* prints, in an abridged form, the Charter of King Stephen confirming the grant of the Manor, and Bishop Tanner in his *Notitia* dismisses the subject with the cursory notice, "Robert de Ferrieres temp. Stephen gave the Manor of Bustleham to the Templars, who, therefore, made here a preceptory for the Knights of that Order." It is therefore all the more interesting to meet with a fine folio MS. in the Cottonian Library (Nero C. IX.) which gives the Charter of Stephen, and other documents illustrating the connection of the Templars with the Church and Manor, which as far as the present writer is aware (with the exception of Charter above mentioned), have not hitherto appeared in print. It appears to be a Register of the Charters and Muniments of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem in England, among which are many copies of earlier deeds relating to the possessions of the Knights Templars, to the greater part of whose property, at the Suppression of the Order the Knights of St. John succeeded. The following are translations of these documents :—

CHARTER OF KING STEPHEN.

Stephen, by the grace of God, King of England to the Archbishops, and Bishops, Abbots, Justiciaries, Earls, Barons, Sheriffs, and Ministers, and to all his faithful people French and English, greeting. Know ye that I have given, granted, and confirmed, that grant which Earl Robert de Ferrars made to God and Blessed Mary,

and to the poor brethren of the Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem, of the Manor of Bistelesham in perpetual alms. Wherefore I will and command that the brethren of the Temple aforesaid may hold and for ever possess the Manor aforesaid, free from all secular exactions, well and in peace, freely and quietly, and honourably, in eleemosinary right, in church, in wood, in plain, in meadows and pastures, in lands and mills, in ways and paths, and in all things and places, with all liberties and free customs, to the said Manor appertaining, as the aforesaid Earl Robert gave, granted, and by his charter confirmed to them. The witnesses of this grant and confirmation are Walter, Bishop of Chichester, Richard de Lucy, Roger, Earl of Clare, Richard "de Camull," William de Ferrars, and Baldrick "de Sigillo." At Woodstock.

This is followed by a Confirmation of the same grant by Henry II.

Henry, by the grace of God, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Earl of Anjou, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Earls, Barons, Justiciaries, Sheriffs, Ministers, and all his faithful people, French and English of all England, greeting. Know ye that I have given and, by this my present charter, have confirmed to Brother Osto and other Knights of the Temple, the Manor of Bustelesham and XL. acres of assart* land, and the mills and fisheries of the said Manor in free and perpetual alms. Wherefore I will and firmly command that the said Brother Osto and other Knights of the Temple may have and hold the said Manor and things aforesaid, with all their appurtenances, well and in peace, freely and honorably, wholly and fully, in wood and in plain, in meadows and pastures, in lands and mills, in fisheries and vineries, in ways and paths, and in all other places, with all their liberties and free customs. And know ye that he, the aforesaid Osto, and the other Knights Templars and all their affairs are in my custody and protection, R., Archbishop of York, R. Lincoln, Hugh Durham, Bishops, Richard de Lucy, R. de St. Valery, being witnesses. At Woodstock.

The next document headed "*Compositio vicariæ ibiden*" is evidently a transcript from the Episcopal Registers at Salisbury.

To all to whom it may concern who shall see these present letters, Roger, by divine permission, Bishop of Salisbury, Health eternal in the Lord. Be it known to all of you by these presents that as

* Forest Land brought into cultivation.

well in our visitation of the Archdeaconry of Berks, as at other times, we have been credibly informed that the Master and Brethren of the sometime military Order of the Temple holding the Church of Bustelesham in our diocese to their proper use, were accustomed to pay annually to the perpetual Vicar of the said Church one annual pension of five marks, and one bushel of corn, as to the said Vicar of the same Church in the name of his vicarage was due from ancient times ; and that after the suppression of the said Order, the Wardens of the said Church and the issues therefrom, paid the aforesaid pension to the said Vicar till the feast of St. Michael last past. In testimony whereof we have caused our seal to be affixed to these presents. Given at Sonnyng XVII., Kal. July, Anno Dom. One thousand CCC and twenty-one, and in the sixth year of our Consecration.

This is followed by another deed "De eadem Compositione" of similar import of Robert, Bishop of Salisbury, who, "having inspected the Register of Roger, of good memory, sometime Bishop of Salisbury, our predecessor," confirms the above. Dated also at Sonning, 1st Sept., 1370.

CHARTER OF THE MASTER OF THE TEMPLE OF HALF A HIDE IN BUSTELESHAM.

To all the faithful of Christ, present and to come, Brother Aumeric de St. Maur, of the Military Order of the Temple in England, the humble minister, greeting. Know ye that We, with the common counsel and assent of our Chapter, have granted and by this our Charter have confirmed, to Henry Fitz William, of Bustelesham, and his heirs half a hide of land, with the appurtenances, in the vill of Bustelesham, which William, his father, held in the same vill. To have and to hold to him and his heirs, freely and quietly, with all liberties to the same land appertaining. Paying therefrom annually to the house of the Temple twelve shillings for all services and exactions at two terms, to wit, at the feast of St. Michael six shillings and on the Annunciation of Blessed Mary six shillings. We have granted also to the said Henry and his heirs that they and their men, tenants of their's, may have their hogs in our wood which is called Suthyde free of pannage. These being witnesses : Brother Thomas, chaplain, Brother Geoffrey de Waleco, Brother Roger Glem, Brother Herbert, Brother Auberic, Brother Vincent, Brother William de Matunvill, Brother William de Berneyd, the Preceptory of London and all the Chapter, Sir

Hugh Fitz Richard, Bartholomew, his son, and William Tholy, of Bistlehem, Richard, son of Godfrey, Ralph, of Hambleden, and many others.

Other deeds follow, but, as not bearing on the connection of the Templars with Bisham, they may be reserved for a future notice. This section of the MS. closes with an extract from an Assize Roll of 12, Edward I.

Pleas "de Juratis et Assisis" and of "Quo Waranto," taken before Solomon de Rochester, Richard de Boillund, and Geoffrey de Pycheford, Justices Itinerant of the Lord King at Wyndsor, in the County of Berks, within the Octave of St. Michael, in the 12th year of the reign of King Edward, son of King Henry.

The Hundred of Cookham comes by xii Jurors. The Jurors present that one Hemyng de Biggefirth was a tenant of the lord King John, grandfather of the lord King that now is, of ancient demesne of the Crown, and made suit and custom to the aforesaid King. And a certain Elias de Bremble, then Bailiff of Cookham, alienated the aforesaid tenement suit and customs into the hands of the Templars of Bustleham, who hold the same to this day. And the Master of the Military Order of the Temple now comes by his Attorney and says that he finds that his church was seized of the said tenement, and prays judgment if he may, without writ, answer thereupon. And the Jurors testify to the same. Therefore it was told W. de Gyselham that the lord King may have a writ, &c.

William de Ffrannceys and Hugh de Hillebrok, Jurors, do not come to the Inquisition. Therefore they are in americiament. The said Jurors present that Robert de Sottesbrok held the Manor of Sottesbrok in chief of the lord King by the service of one Knight's fee. And the said Robert sold therefrom to the Prior of Hurley one virgate of land, worth per ann. half a mark. And likewise he sold therefrom to the Master of the Military Order of the Temple in England, of Bustleham, one virgate of land, worth per ann. half a mark, by which the lord King lost the custody of marriage and other things which by chance might accrue therefrom to the lord King. And the Master of the Military Order of the Temple at Bustleham does not come. Therefore the aforesaid land which he holds is taken into the hands of the lord King until, &c.