



## Historic Houses.

---

### DONNINGTON CASTLE AND ITS ANCIENT LORDS.

*By F. N. Macnamara, M.D.*

*(Continued from page 60.)*

Then, during the King's possession of Donnington, followed the dissolution of the Priory; on the 30th Nov. 1538, the Prior and brethren surrendered the house and all its possessions to John London, for the King's use. The surrender is signed by Henry Whete, minister, and Richard Ungull, a brother. The minister it is said is extremely aged, and to him is assigned a pension of £6 13s. 4d., and to Richard Ungull, Priest and Brother, a pension of £4 a year. John Williams, who makes the report to John London, adds, "at the Crutched Friars, Newbury, was nothing but a poor chalice, the lands worth £22 a year, the goods not worth £6, the minister rewarded," but, he adds, "ye schall se me mak yow a praty bank by that tyme I cam next uppe." Such were the petty agents employed to despoil the Church, and such the spirit in which they worked for their employers. The disposition of the Priory lands is given in full in the records of the Augmentation Office; Edward Fetyplace seems to have secured the best of them. On Henry's death the ownership of Donnington passed to his son Edward VI., who stayed at the castle on the 10th and 11th September 1552. Edward gave the manor and castle to his half-sister the Princess Elizabeth, who when she had become Queen visited Donnington during one of her progresses and great were the preparations made for her reception. These are narrated in "the pay book for the Queen's progress during three months ending\* 25th September, 1568." Carpenters were occupied in planking the bridge into the Castle, mending the chamber floures, lyming the windows, washing the greate leade pipes, and making and repaying of the dores, making shedes for the kitchen and offices, and tables, formes and trussels, each receiving as wages twelve pence per day for from 23 to 28 days. Tyllers were employed in tyllinge of all the offices and

---

\* Rawlinson M.S., A. 195c, fol. 268b, Bodleian Library.

lozenges, mending walls and sellings of the castell, at eleven pence per day. Common laborers to assist were paid seven pence per day, and a clerk to oversee the workmen and to take note of receipt of provisions received twelve pence per day. Planks, tymbers, pipes, nayles, tylpins, lead, sowder, locks, brikes, lyme, payles, were amongst the provisions. Carriage for ironwork, &c., from Reading was paid for at the rate of  $7/4$  the load. Thirty-three loads of lyme, poles, &c., from Greenham, twelve pence the load. Eight great ankers, eight boltes, 23 stirrups of iron for fastening of the princypal beams of the castell, all weighing iij cwt. were charged for carriage four pence the pound weight from Reading. New glass for a window in the hall cost six pence the foote. Brikes were charged seven shillings the 1,000. Each page of the book bears the original signatures of John Stockett, surveyor, T. Fowler, comptroller, Humfre Lovell, mason and John Colbrand, carpenter. The total cost of the repairs was over £100, a large sum in the year 1568.

Some years later the castle appears to have been used as a prison for recusants, though as the recusants in question were from Ely and the eastern counties, it is a little doubtful whether the castle to which they were committed was not that of Donnington in Leicestershire.

The castle and manor remained in the possession of the Crown until the Queen, on account of his great services, conferred it upon Charles Baron Howard, of Effingham, who commanded against the Armada in 1588, and was in 1596 created Earl of Nottingham. In the patent roll of the 42nd Elizabeth (pt. 19) is a deed of considerable length which recites the services of the Earl, and the particulars of the gift made to him by the Queen. It included the Donnington estate, the manors with appurtenances of Pesemore, Winterbourne Mayne, Winterboure Danvers, and Lekhampstead, and houses and lands elsewhere. The Earl had license to convey the whole to his servants Nicholas Zouche and Thomas Ware, but this, as events proved, only that they might carry out the Earl's private arrangements regarding the disposal of the property. However, in the meantime Zouche and his wife went to live at Donnington Castle, and in October of the following year a writ was sent to the Sheriff of Berks (Add. Charter 24915, B.M.) to summon them to Westminster to show cause why they had not carried out the agreement entered into with the Earl. Finally, in the Patent Roll of the 44th Elizabeth (pt. 6, M. 28), is a deed settling the reversion of the estates and the control of the Hospital at Donnington upon the three sons of the

Earl's son, William Howard; but these sons died childless, and the estate devolved upon their sister Elizabeth, married to John Lord Mordaunt.

With the Earl of Nottingham Donnington Castle became a favourite residence, while as patron of the hospital he interested himself very generously in its affairs. He rebuilt the house about the year 1618, and assisted by Richard James, then master, drew up and put in force\* a code of statutes and ordinances, dated 4 March, 16 James i, for the government of the foundation. The Earl died in December, 1624, and was buried in Reigate Church.

The next master of Donnington was John Lord Mordaunt, created in 1627-28 Earl of Peterborough. His wife Elizabeth is said to have been a woman of extraordinary beauty and a most zealous republican. The Earl was colonel of foot, and in 1641 general of the Ordnance, of the Parliamentary army. Probably as early as the year 1632 he may have foreseen the troubles that were at hand, and in anticipation of them determined to sell the estates in Berkshire and Oxfordshire which his wife had brought to him. Berks fine of Trinity Term, 8 Charles i, records the sale† of Donnington Manor, Castle and Park, by the Earl and his wife to William Lane and John Hardy, while the two following fines record the sale by the Earl of the Winterbourne Danvers and Lekhampstead manors.

With the sale of Donnington Castle by Lord Peterborough ends the story of its ancient owners. At the time of the siege in 1644 the castle belonged to the Packer family, and it remains in the possession of their descendants; I am unable to say whether the Packers bought the estate from Lane and Hardy to whom Lord Peterborough sold it. John Chamberlayne, 3rd son of Bryan Chamberlayne of Newbury was living in the castle in the years 1623-27 and subsequently,‡ but at any rate till the year 1632 he lived there only as a tenant. The Winchcombe family have also been spoken of as owners of the castle, but this apparently from a misreading of the P.M. Inquisition (No. 6 of 19, Charles i, p. i) of Henry Winchcombe, Esq., who died in April, 1642, and as the inquisition shows was not lord of Donnington, but held premises in

---

\* Printed in the Bib., Topograph., Brittan., vol. iv., p. 37.

† Berks fine 12 of Mich. Term 5 Charles j. is a deed of sale of the Donnington Castle estate to Ed. Guildford and Thomas Jennings. Apparently this sale was not completed.

‡ Ashmole M.S. 852, and Lay Subsidy Roll of 3 Charles i.

Newbury of the lord as of his manor of Donnington; the name of the lord is not stated.

There is just one other record of an owner of Donnington Castle which I shall mention, as it is curious not only in its details, but also in the fact of its not having found a place amongst any public records; it is D 1480 of the Rawlinson MSS. in the Bodleian Library. The document in question is headed "Accounts of receipts and disbursements at Donnington from September 1706 to December 1709, made for the use of my master, Robert Packer Esq." The writer was evidently a butler or house steward, and many of the entries in the account are quaint. The first runs, "to the minister for a sermon £1," and this entry is two or three times repeated. We may presume the sermons were such as entirely fell in with the squire's religious and political convictions. There must have been a young family at the hall, for Nurse Dickson is mentioned, and her wages are eight pounds a year. And as a good old country gentleman Mr. Packer had a porter at his gate, and the porter wore a wig, for which the butler paid in London 12s. Also he bought in London six pair of livery stockings, for which he paid £1 7s., and for a pair of silk stockings he paid 18s. The journey to town by coach cost 9s., and the charges by the road were 6s. In town the butler had a dinner, a pint of wine, bread and veal stakes (sic.), for which he paid 1s. 11d., and he bought a dozen cream tarts for 1s. 6d. Probably he ate all the tarts at a sitting, for he paid 2s. for surfeit water. Also he paid 1s. for a bottle of Hungary water, 1s. 6d. for milk and cinnamon water, 2d. for half a pint of aqua mirabilis, and 12s. 6d. for a tincture. For half a pound of sugar he paid 7d., and for half a pound of Bohea tea 12s. 6d.

And now, before concluding this paper, let us very briefly recur to the assumed connection of Geoffrey Chaucer with Donnington Castle which has contributed so largely to its fame. Godwin\* has marshalled the evidence, and it is very forcible, that Chaucer lived for a time, during the latter part of his life, at Donnington Castle, but he does not know how to account for Chaucer's presence there, and he invents the story, one in which he is followed by Lysons and other authors who have touched the subject, that either the Poet's patron, the Duke of Lancaster, or his son Thomas Chaucer, bought the Castle and gave it to him as a residence. But the mere legendary character of this story is proved by our knowledge that the

---

\* *Life of Chaucer*, 2nd Edition, vol. iv. p. 93.

Castle was in possession of the Abburbury family for fourteen years after the death of the Poet. And yet unless Geoffrey Chaucer lived for a time at Donnington one fails to see how it came about that his name was associated with it, for there is truly nothing in the circumstances of the connection of the Chaucer family with the possession of the castle, which can have originated the belief in Geoffrey's sojourn there. His son—assuming that Thomas Chaucer was his son—did not buy the estate till the year 1415, he never himself lived there, and in fact immediately after the purchase of the estate conveyed it to his daughter, the wife of Sir John Phelipp.

Can, then, any other theory be suggested which will plausibly account for the connection of Chaucer's name with Donnington? We think so, and that it may be founded upon the life-long association of Geoffrey Chaucer and Sir Richard Abburbury. Both saw service in the wars of the later years of Edward III., both occupied for many years the same position in the household of Richard II. and his Queen, both were attached to the Lancastrian faction, and both about the same time and for the same political reasons fell into disgrace, and were banished from Court. Moreover, as recent biographies show there are breaks\* in Chaucer's life during which nothing is known of his pursuits, employment or residence. Such breaks are those from 1386 to 1389, and from 1395 to the end of his life in the year 1400. It is known that during both these periods Chaucer suffered much pecuniary discomfort and often distress, while it is believed that the greatest of his poems, the *Canterbury Tales*, was begun during 1386 or 1387. Now what more likely than that Sir Richard Abburbury a wealthy country gentleman, proud of his newly built castle and beautiful domain, offered an asylum to, and gladly welcomed at Donnington his lifelong comrade and friend, and that there, amongst the glades of the well wooded park, and the holts and heath which then as now stretched away from Donnington to Winterbourne, Chaucer wrote the great poem of which the opening lines are indeed redolent of country life :

“Whan that Aprille with his schowres swote,  
The drought of Marche hath perced to the rote,  
And bathud every veyne in swiche licour,  
Of whiche vertue engendred is the flour;  
When Zephirus, eek, with his swete brethe,  
Enspired hath in every holte and heth,  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne,  
Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,  
And smale fowles maken melodye,  
That slepen at the night with open yhe.”

---

\* See Chaucer in Dicty. of Natl. Biography.

While on the road beneath Donnington Hill, the poet may have viewed many a pilgrim band wending its way from the west country shires to Canterbury. And so, using Godwin's words, "We may indulge our veneration for Donnington Castle, and walk amongst its ruins, tracing the footsteps of the poet, without danger of subjecting ourselves to the empire of a delusion."

---

ERRATUM.—At p. 52, line 3, read 1161 instead 1611; p. 57, line 11 from the bottom misplaced, it should be inserted between "year" and "Chaucer" in the following line; p. 58, read 1247 instead of 1227.

---

## Oxfordshire Church Goods.

*By Nathaniel Hone.*

*(Continued from page 53, Vol. 3.)*

---

### HUNDRED OF LANGTREE.\*

#### CROWMERSHE GYFFORD.

Inprimis, one Chalice of Silver; Item ij paier of vestmentes, cn whit and the other grene and rede; Itm ij copes, one whit silke, the other blew; Itm iiij auter clothes; Itm iij Corperases w<sup>t</sup> ther casses; Itm one crose of latten and one surples; Itm one pixe of brasse; Itm one Senser of brasse; Itm ij belles in the Steple; Itm ij Candylstickes.

Richard Bristow.

#### NORTH STOKE.

Inprimis, one chales of sylver; It. a coope of sattyn of brydges; It. ij vestementes one of blewe velvat and the other of tawnye sylke; It. a crose of lattyn; It. a small sacryng bell; It. a hand-bell; It. iij belles in y<sup>e</sup> stepulle.

#### GORYNG.

Inprimis, a pyxe, a paxe and a crose of Copper and gylt; Itm

---

\* Church Goods 6 Ed. vj. Bdle. 7/160.