



The History of Bisham Abbey.

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THE Manor of Bisham was granted by William the Conqueror to Henry de Ferrars. From an entry in Domesday book it appears there was a Church, and, amongst other things, some acres of vines. Please observe that there were at one time two Churches—the Abbey and the Parish Church. Henry de Ferrars' grandson Robert settled the Manor, in the reign of Stephen, upon a Preceptory of Templars which he founded. Hence the name of the Temple property. It has been supposed the Templars alienated the Bisham Manor before their suppression in 1312, but this is doubtful. Probably the property was transferred to the Knights of St. John, or Hospitallers, under the papal bull 1312—9,000 manors in Europe were so transferred. The list of Vicars shows that Johannes de est Claydon was instituted August, 1314, as Vicar of Bisham on the presentation of the Prior of Hospitallers of St. John in England. The tenancy of these knights, if any, was of short duration, as the Manor was held by Thomas Earl of Lancaster and others, and was granted by Edward III. in 1336 to William de Montague, Earl of Salisbury (hence the old name of Bisham Montagu), who founded on the site of the old Preceptory a Monastery of Canons regular of the Order of St. Augustine. This Order lived under one roof, having a common dormitory and refectory, and had about 200 houses in England at the time of the Reformation. The Dominicans were a branch of this Order.

I am not in possession of a List of the Priors of Bisham, but the last Prior was William Barlow, who became Bishop of St. Asaph's, and then moved to St. David's, Bath, Wells and Chichester. He married after the Reformation, and had five daughters, all of whom married bishops. It is said of another prior (name unknown) that he was a squire of William Earl of Salisbury. The

Earl going to the Holy Land came to Bisham to take leave—his daughter, a nun at Marlow, met him there. The squire, who was in love with her, persuaded her to elope with him and they escaped in a boat, but were caught. He was shut up in the Abbey Tower and tried to escape by a rope, but the rope broke and, being too much injured to perform military duties, he became a monk at Bisham and ultimately Prior. Some years ago there was a settlement of part of the dining room wall ; this wall had been built over a coffin the sides of which gave way : in the coffin keys were found—a proof of a prior having been buried in it—and it has been supposed that the military monk was this prior. The coffin lid and keys remain here.

A brass commemorating the foundation of William de Montagu's priory (which he endowed with £281 a year) is in the church at Denchworth. The words are :—"Edward Roy d'Angleterre qui fist le siege devant la cité de Berwyke et cōquys la bataille illeoyes et la dite cité la veille Sainte Margerete MCCCXXXIII. Mist cette pere à la requeste Sire William de Montagu foundour de ceste Mesoun." This brass seems to have been sold for old metal when the Abbey was dismantled in 1539, and to have been bought by William Hyde, owner of the chief manor at Denchworth, who used it as a monument for himself and wife, placing a Latin inscription on the reverse side and embedding the brass in the stone of his vault with the Bisham inscription downwards. At the restoration of Denchworth Church about 1870 the brass was moved and the inscription was discovered.

During the duration of this foundation the Priory enjoyed the patronage of the Salisbury family, many of whom were buried in the Abbey or Priory Church. The most notable was Thomas, Earl of Salisbury, who was killed by a cannon ball at the siege of Orleans in 1428, and whose body was buried at Bisham with great magnificence. Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the Kingmaker, and John, Marquis of Montagu, who fell in the battle of Barnet, 1471, were also interred in the Church ; so was Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick (son of George, Duke of Clarence), who was beheaded in 1499 on a charge of attempting to escape from the Tower. It is reported that the monuments of the distinguished persons buried here were removed from the Church when it was pulled down to the Abbey hall, but none of them have existed in the Vansittart time. Mr. Vansittart's mother remembered tombstones lying flat in the hall, but these could not have been the monuments of these distinguished

persons. It is said the monuments to the Kingmaker and Lord Montagu, who died at the battle of Barnet, were in the hall till the middle of the 18th century, and were removed when the screen was erected.

The connection of the Salisbury family with Bisham continued till the dissolution of that monastic establishment. The present Abbey was then a country house of the Countess of Salisbury (daughter of the Duke of Clarence), who was executed by Henry VIII. in 1541 on a charge of treason, her innocence of which she maintained to the last, being held down by main force on the scaffold. Her goods and lands were confiscated to the Crown. The monks were then living in other buildings close by, but I do not know when these were built or when the monks were shifted into them. The Prior and Convent of Bisham surrendered their lands, etc., to Henry in 1536. The monks are said to have been very poor, but possibly some moveable goods and chattels preceded them into exile. Henry refounded the establishment in the following year as a Benedictine Abbey with an Abbot (who had the privilege of wearing a mitre) and 13 monks, endowing it with lands of other dissolved monastic establishments to the value of £661 14s. 9d. a year, but it was dissolved in 1539.

The King then granted the Manor and Abbey house to Anne of Cleves, who exchanged with Sir Philip Hoby, and a grant (that is, a sale in fee farm) was made in 1553 to Sir Philip Hoby of the late monastery, including the lands, houses, woods, tithes, fisheries and appurtenances known as Warderobes and Barkefordes (or Bekfordes) and the advowson of the Vicarage of Bisham Church. A grant was also made of all that capital messuage formerly parcel of the possessions of Margaret, late Countess of Salisbury, of high treason convicted; and all edifices, orchards, gardens, and other commodities to the same capital messuage belonging or adjacent. To hold all these in as ample a manner as any Abbott or Prior or Convent of the late Monastery, or any Countess of Salisbury, or the Lady Anne of Cleves.

Some of the Hobys were rather remarkable personages. The family is regarded by some as nouveaux riches, but by other accounts it was descended from Welsh princes. Certainly there is what Mr. Powell calls the "elaborate heraldic display which adorns the Hoby chapel in Bisham Church." The eldest of the Hoby family was William, who lived till 103 at Hailes (the well-known place in Gloucestershire). Sir Philip Hoby, of Bisham, was born in

1505, and came to Court under the auspices of the Earl of Worcester. In 1538 he was entrusted with important diplomatic work. He was made Privy Councillor by Edward VI., and in 1548 was appointed Ambassador at the Court of Charles V. In this reign he went to Paris with the Marquis of Northampton to treat for the marriage of the King with Henry II.'s daughter Elizabeth, and he and his gentlemen made a brave show. He is said to have been the last Papal Legate to the Pope. He strongly sympathised with the Reformation, but even in Mary's reign he was employed in missions. He began the new buildings at Bisham, but died Whit Sunday, 29th May, 1558, and left his Manor to Sir Thomas, his brother (whose diary, with papers about the Abbey, was published in 1902 for the Historical Society, edited by Mr. Edgar Powell).

Sir Thomas, who was 25 years younger than Sir Philip, went to Cambridge to study at the age of 15; then resided at Strasburg as the guest of Martin Bucer to study classics and theology, and then travelled in Italy. In 1550 he was introduced to Court life and went to Paris in 1551 in the train of the Marquis of Northampton. In 1552 and 1553 he was in Paris working on the translation of Castiglione's book the "*Courtyer*"—this work attained great success running through four editions in the reign of Elizabeth. In 1553 he rejoined his brother Philip at Brussels. Roger Ascham formed a high opinion of him as a *juvenis præclare*, who in his official duties "*opportune, diligenter, considerate et tacite se gerit.*" In 1558 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke of Gidea Hall in Essex. From 1558 he was much engaged with the new buildings at Bisham. In March, 1566 he was knighted and appointed Ambassador at the Court of St. James. In July of the same year he died at Paris; he was buried at Bisham 2 Sept.

Lady Hoby his wife (well known as the Bisham ghost) was a lady of great character and much learning, versed in Latin, Greek and French. She was a sister of Lady Bacon and Lady Cecil, and it is said that the Princess Elizabeth was in her charge and that of Sir Thomas for two years during Mary's reign. Lady Hoby had two sons and two daughters by the marriage with Sir Thomas—her eldest son, Sir Edward attained eminence as a writer and diplomatist. Her second marriage was with John, Lord Russell, second son of the Earl of Bedford. Her son by this marriage died young, but one of her daughters married the Earl of Worcester. She buried both husbands with great magnificence, and erected to the memory of Sir Thomas and Sir Philip a stately monument in a chapel added

for the purpose to Bisham Church. She wrote an epitaph on Sir Thomas ending :—"Tu Deus aut similem Thomas mihi redde maritum. Aut reddant Thomæ me mea fata viro. Give me O God a husband like unto Thomas, or else restore me to Thomas." She was careful about her own funeral. In a letter to the Garter King of Arms she asked what number of mourners were due to her calling, what number of waiting women, pages, gentlemen ushers, Lords and gentlemen, etc. She concludes : Good Mr. Garter, do it exactly, for I find fore warnings that lead me to provide a pick-axe. There is a splendid monument to her in Bisham Church, and a memorial window. So much has been written about the blotted copy book, on account of which Lady Russell is said to have flogged one of her sons to death, that you may like to hear the statement made by Mr. George Vansittart's mother—her memo. is undated, but Murray states the discovery was in 1840. The corner of the dining room wall having given way, owing to alterations in the windows, part of the floor was taken up to get at the foundations. Between the joists were found quantities of rubbish, old papers and copy books, sufficient to fill two clothes baskets. Mrs. Vansittart visited the house the day after the discovery and looked over the copy books, which were all signed by various members of the Hoby family and corrected by Lady Russell. In one, "of William Hoby, "I think, every leaf had some blot. I wanted to take two or three "away with me that day, but Mrs. East wished to keep them all till "Admiral Henry Vansittart had examined them. When I asked "for them, all were missing, they suddenly had disappeared, supposed "to be sold by the workmen."

In my opinion there is no proof that Lady Hoby illtreated her son, but time prevents my attempting her vindication.

(To be continued.)

AN OLD RELIC IN WALLINGFORD.—In a room of the older part of the Red Lion Inn at Wallingford thirteen layers of paper were lately removed from the ceiling, and the plaster was found to be covered with a variety of figures in black, evidently traced with the smoke of a lamp or candle. They include a large number of pairs of initial letters, presumably of persons' names, with some rudely sketched devices, one being apparently an anchor, and the date 1662.—J.E.F.