

THE MONASTERIES OF SHROPSHIRE: THEIR ORIGIN AND
FOUNDERS.—HAUGHMOND ABBEY.

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IN entering upon this subject, we are at once beset by a variety of previous statements, which, as being discordant with each other, must involve some degree of error. To detect that error shall be our first concern.

The first statement which I shall cite upon the matter is embodied in the Abbey Register.¹ It has been printed in the Monasticon,² but with much verbal and grammatical incorrectness. This is not chargeable on the original, which runs as follows :—

*Fundata est Abbathia de Haghmon anno domini millesimo centesimo et in anno ultimo regni Regis Willielmi Rufi et anno regni Regis Henrici primi primo, per Willielmum filium Alani, ut patet in pluribus, et specialiter in duobus Bullis sub plumbo Alexandri Papæ Tercii vocantis eum Fundatorem predicti loci.*³

This document then asserts Haughmond Abbey to have been founded in 1100, and William Fitz-Alan to have been its founder. It alludes to much unspecified evidence of the fact, or facts (for it is ambiguously worded), and particularly cites two Bulls of Pope Alexander III. in support thereof. Now we happen to know something of Pope Alexander's two Bulls to Haughmond. One, dated apparently in 1172, is of "Privileges." It is preserved in the Register⁴ in all its essential parts, and says not a word about the founder or

¹ Chartulary of Haughmond Abbey (in possession of Andrew W. Corbet, of Sundorn, Esq.), fol. 76. This Chartulary is the same with that which Tanner speaks of as, in 1653, in possession of Dame Margaret Barker. The Harleian MS., No. 446, which once belonged to Peter le Neve, is a fragment (less than a quarter) of a very fine original Chartulary. A few of the lost contents of this seem to

be transcribed or rather abridged in Harleian MSS., 2188 and 3868.

² Monasticon, vi., 108, No. I.

³ The words "de sede et loco abbathiæ ibidem," which in the Monasticon are added to this sentence as if part thereof, form in the Chartulary the title of the succeeding document.

⁴ Monasticon, vi., 112, No. XII.

date of foundation, nor indeed is it a document of the class which would be likely to contain such allusions.

The other Bull also exists in the shape of a full and apparently accurate transcript.⁵ It is dated at Tusculanum, May 14, 1172. It is a confirmation of "grants" to the Abbey. It distinctly indicates William Fitz-Alan as the founder thereof, but says nothing about the date of foundation. In short, a matter so irrelevant and discursive can hardly be conceived to have crept into a Papal Bull of any kind. We therefore have no other authority for dating the foundation of Haughmond in 1100, than the assertion of that Abbot or Canon of the house who wrote the above extract at least 72 years after the event he affects to describe (otherwise he could not quote the bulls of 1172).⁶

Any one acquainted with those monastic documents, usually entitled "*De Fundatione*," or "*Historia Fundationis*," will know that they are not to be received without caution. The antiquity of a house was a matter of pride as well as of advantage. It was therefore seldom underrated by any member of the house concerned.

We have external evidence which is very strong against this alleged date of foundation. William Fitz-Alan, the undoubted founder, was, as we learn from Ordericus, but a youth in 1138, and therefore not born so early as 1100. Also, there were no Canons-regular of St. Augustine, such as were those of Haughmond, introduced into England, till 1105 at the earliest.⁷

A second date has been assigned for this foundation under the following circumstances; in the year 1253 a Shropshire jury had been empanelled to try an issue as to the right of patronage over this house. Their return, made to the Courts at Westminster, in Michaelmas Term of that year, remains on the Plea-Rolls, and a seeming copy thereof is given in the Abbey Register. The latter amplifies the information contained in the Plea-Rolls. Part of the verdict as recorded in the legal document is, "*Dicta Abbacia est de feodo Johannis*

⁵ Harl. MS. 3868, fol. 11.

⁶ The extract is written in red ink throughout, and is therefore the work of the Rubricator of the Chartulary. All documents professing to be copied from original deeds stand in black ink. The Chartulary was probably written as late as the reign of Henry VII.; but I have

allowed in the text for a possibility that the writer got his information from some older source.

⁷ Their first houses seem to have been at Colchester, founded in 1105,—Christ Church, London, founded about 1108,—and Nostell, Yorkshire, founded about 1114. See *Monasticon*, vi., 37.

fili Alani et a predecessoribus suis fundata." To which words the Register adds, "anno xxxvii Regis Henrici Secundi."⁸ Henry II. did not, however, live to enter on his 36th regnal year. This inaccuracy is not, I imagine, to be explained by charging it on a false chronology of the jurors, who probably did not make any date part of their verdict. It rather belongs to the transcriber of the chartulary, who has assigned the year in which the trial was taken (viz. 37 Henry II.) to the foundation of the Abbey, and so incorporated it in the supposed verdict, altering, however, the name of the King to suit his own ideas.

The third date assigned for the foundation of Haughmond is 1110,⁹ which may be possible, so far as that about that time Augustine Canons were settling in England, but is inconsistent with the known era of the founder.

We may now dismiss all previous statements on this subject, and investigate the question of date on other evidence.

The mistakes which have given to Haughmond Abbey a too high degree of antiquity, may possibly be connected with a circumstance which Leland heard and recorded, viz., that there had been an Hermitage and Chapel there previous to the erection of the Abbey.¹

The Chartulary contains no Charter of Foundation by which we may estimate the date when the abbey was begun. The document purporting to be a Foundation-Charter is in fact nothing of the kind, but, as I shall presently show, belongs to a much later period. The next object of search must therefore be the earliest deed which the charter contains. This, when found, though it may say nothing about foundation, will probably belong to the period immediately succeeding that event. The deed then which I fix upon hypothetically, as the oldest in the Chartulary, is one whereby William Fitz-Alan gives to "the Church of St. John the Evangelist at Haghmon the fishery of Upton, which is upon Severn, and the man and land pertaining thereto, free and quit of all service, for the maintenance (victum) of Fulco

⁸ Compare *Monasticon* vi., 111, No. VIII., and *Abbreviatio Placitorum*, page 129.

⁹ Tanner assigns this date on the evidence of a MS. chronicle, formerly in possession of Thomas White, Bishop of Peterborough (1685-1690).

¹ *Itinerary*, vol. viii., fol. 113 a. Leland

also gives 1101 as the date of the Abbey, and William Fitz-Alan as the founder. He says also that William Fitz-Alan and his wife were buried at Haughmond. If the founder is hereby meant (and Leland's words can only be so taken) it is a mistake. He was buried at Shrewsbury Abbey.

the Prior and all his brethren living in the aforesaid church, in right perpetual, so long as faithful brethren shall serve God in the same church. Witnesses, Walter, his (the grantor's) brother, and Christiana, his (the grantor's) wife."²

Now this deed exhibits, I think, the church of Haughmond as a Priory, and so in an intermediate state between the previous hermitage and the subsequent Abbey. As no other charter to Haughmond has so obvious an appearance of being a grant to a Priory, we have thus far justified our selection of this as the earliest of its charters.

The difficulty of dating this charter is not so great as its very brief testing-clause would promise. The grantor was a "youth,"³ and became an exile from Shropshire in 1138. He is not heard of at any earlier period than the close of Henry I.'s, or beginning of Stephen's reign. To that period (1130—8) I therefore assign the deed. With this agrees all that can be ascertained of the two witnesses; e.g., Walter Fitz-Alan had no feoffment in his brother's barony till after 1135. In 1141 he appears as an active partisan of the Empress. He died in 1177. Christiana, the wife of William Fitz-Alan, was a niece of the Earl of Gloucester. The latter was the eldest of Henry I.'s illegitimate children. It is not probable that he should have had a marriageable niece much before 1135. At the same time Fitz-Alan must have been married at least as early as 1136, for in August, 1138, he was father of more than one child by this wife, of whom we are speaking.

There is another very early grant by William Fitz-Alan to Haughmond. It does not speak of the church either as a priory or an abbey, but I cannot help looking on this charter as nearly coeval with the last. "William Fitz-Alan with his wife, Dame Christiana, give to God and to the Church of St. John of Hamon, and to the Canons there serving God, two carucates of their own demesne (*de proprio nostro fundo*) of Hales" (Sheriff Hales): they give the same "for support of the Canons' necessities, in perpetual alms, for the remission of the grantors' sins and the souls' redemption of their parents and ancestors, and specially for the soul of their son Alan, whose body they had bestowed in burial there" (at Haughmond).⁴

² Chartulary, fol. 168, tit. Preston.

³ Ordericus calls him so, but the expression must be construed with some

latitude. Fitz-Alan was upwards of thirty years of age in 1138.

⁴ Chartulary, fol. 53. The land given

The next charter which I shall cite is one of which the date can be proved within a year, almost within a month, but it does not inform us whether Haughmond was as yet an abbey, or only a priory.

"Matilda the Empress, daughter of King Henry, and Lady of the English, addressing the Bishop of Chester and others, informs them that she has given to God and to Saint John the Evangelist of Haghmon, and to the Canons Regular there serving God, three carucates of land in Walecote, with the men and all things belonging, with soch, and sach, and thol, and infangetheof, for the remisssion of her sins. This charter is attested by David King of Scots, R. (Robert) Bishop of London, A. (Alexander) Bishop of Lincoln, W. (William) the Chancellor, R. (Richard) de Belmes Archdeacon (of Middlesex), Rainald Earl of Cornwall, W. (William) Fitz-Alan, and W. (Walter) his brother, and Alan de Dunstonvill. At Oxenford."⁵ This Deed passed in June or July, 1141,⁶ and so during Stephen's imprisonment and the temporary ascendancy of the Empress.

Another grant of the Empress to Haughmond I can say little of. It was of Walcot Mill, and was attested by Robert Fitz Heldeber, Walter Fitz-Alan and Nigel de Brac. The infamy of the first witness happens to furnish us with the proximate date of this charter. It must have passed before 1144, when Robert Fitz-Hildebrand, having betrayed the interests of the Empress to Stephen and the Bishop of Winchester, and being tainted with the further crimes of adultery and sacrilege, expired by the same horrible death which is recorded as the judgment of Heaven on Herod Agrippa.

was Cutteston, then a member of Sheriff Hales. The forms of expression used in this Charter are more antiquated than in many other deeds of William Fitz-Alan. Two of the witnesses, viz., Roger Fitz-Siward, and Gluric the priest (Sacerdos), do not appear in any other or presumptively later deed hitherto seen by me. The other witnesses are John le Strange and Marescote, whose feoffments in Shropshire, were later than 1135. Marescote, unless this deed be the exception, does not appear till after Fitz-Alan's restoration in 1155. John le Strange held, however, a fee in Norfolk under Fitz-Alan, which was apparently of old feoffment, i.e. granted to him or his ancestors before 1135. However, the early history of the Stranges is itself too

great a problem to allow of its yielding any facts for the clearance of other difficulties. I would only advise enquirers to suspect former statements on that subject — Dugdale's especially.

⁵ Chartulary, fol. 220, collated with Harl. MS. 2188, fol. 123.

⁶ Robert de Sigillo, Bishop of London, was so appointed by the Empress in June, 1141, when she visited the Metropolis. From London she and King David went to Oxford, thence to Gloucestershire, and back to Oxford, where they are known to have been on July 25. On August 2nd, they had invested Winchester. Thence, after their disastrous defeat, King David fled to Scotland. He never saw his niece afterwards.

There was a charter of King Stephen to Haughmond, in which, addressing the Bishop of Chester, he gives three carucates and the mill of Walcote, as if his own original gift, and without any reference to the Empress' previous charters.⁷ This was the usual course pursued by these great antagonists. It is again to be noted in this charter, that the grantees are described only as the "Canons Regular of Haghmon." Another early grant to Haughmond is by Walcheline de Maminot, a noted partisan of the Empress, and who early in Stephen's reign succeeded, in what way is not known, to a share of the Shropshire Barony of the Peverels. This charter is to the "Church of St. John of Haghmon," to which it conveys the Mill of Bradeforde,⁸ then involved in the Manor of High Ercall. It is attested by Roger Fitz Warm and Fulk, his brother, whom I believe to have been tenants of the Peverels at Whittington. This deed passed before the year 1147, as we know from the concurrent act of William Peverel of Dover, at that time a Coparcener in the Peverel estates. William Peverell's grant, the original of which still exists,⁹ is verbally to "St. John and the Canons of Haiman." Its date, as well as the date of Walcheline Maminot's deed (to which it refers), is fixed as in or before 1147, for William Peverel went on the crusade of that year, and perished therein.

"Henry, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Earl of Anjou," confirmed his mother's donation to Haughmond, according to her charter. The prince was at Leicester, and William Fitz-Alan attests his Deed.¹ It can be dated almost to a day, and so is not only a fact for history, but a monument of Fitz-Alan's constancy. The prince attained the titles which he uses in 1151 and 1152. On January 6, 1153, he landed in England to fight for his crown. He was at Leicester on June 7, at Warwick on June 12, and on August 18 entered on that pacification with Stephen which at length ended in his leaving England about Easter 1154. In eight months he returned, not however as Duke of Normandy only, but as Stephen's successor on the throne.

In 1155, the Haughmond Chartulary supplies us with

⁷ Chartulary, fol. 221. Stephen calls Walcote a member of *his* manor of Welinton.

⁸ Chartulary, fol. 39.

⁹ In possession of Mr. George Morris

of Shrewsbury. It is printed in the *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica*, vol. v., p. 175.

¹ Chartulary, fol. 220 b.

another interesting circumstance and its date. In the beginning of July a great council of the nation had been summoned to Bridgnorth to settle the terms of the king's peace with Hugh de Mortimer, hitherto in rebellion. William Fitz-Alan now no longer an exile, had restitution of his lands and honours from the king. On the 25th of July, the day on which he took the homage of his tenants at Bridgnorth, and in presence of a great concourse of barons and knights, Fitz-Alan gave the church of Wroxeter to the Abbot and Canons of Hageman in perpetual alms, for the well-being of the Lord the King, and the souls' health of himself, his ancestors and successors.²

At Michaelmas, 1156, the same William Fitz-Alan, as Sheriff of Shropshire, discharges his account of the *ferm* of the king's demesnes of a sum of 3*l.* 11*d.* 4*s.* It was for "land given to the *Abbot* of Hageman;"³ and we know from later records that this sum represented the annual revenue arising from those grants in Walcote which the Empress had made long before.

Between his restoration and his death, which happened about Easter, 1160, William Fitz-Alan made and encouraged various other grants to Haughmond Abbey. He gave them land at Downton, Marscot, his tenant there, acceding, and also Isabel (Fitz-Alan's wife) to whose dowry the premises belonged. He gave them the Mill of Upton, with half a virgate of land, and the islands belonging thereto, which grant only appears on the chartulary as if originally made by his son, which it was not.

He gave them the land of Piperinges (in Sussex) with a right of such common-pasture in the neighbouring vill of Stokes, as had been enjoyed by Avelina, his mother. This grant he made while Ingenulf was Abbot of Haughmond, and before he (Fitz-Alan) had enfeoffed his brother Walter

² Some of these particulars are taken from two curious certificates of John le Strange and Roger de Powis, who (perhaps in consequence of some question as to the Abbot's title to Wroxeter Church) were called upon to state their recollection of the grant, some years, apparently, after the grantor's death. The original of Roger de Powis's certificate is in the possession of Mr. George Morris of Shrewsbury.

The grant by William Fitz-Alan, as preserved in the Chartulary, is a most

curious document, but too long for insertion here. I should state, however, that he gives Wroxeter Church to his Canons (Canonicis meis de Haghmon) "to increase their number, so that they may thenceforth have a full convent." He also stipulates certain conditions which the "Abbot of Haghmon" is to observe. Here, therefore, we have not only the first assurance of Haughmond having become an Abbey, but also a specific assertion of its previous lowly condition.

³ Rot. Pip., 2 Hen. II. Salop.

in Stokes. He gave them the church of Stokes with consent of his wife, Isabella.

He gave them half a salt-pit in South-Wich (Cheshire), a grant afterwards, it would seem, increased by his son, but again without reference to the previous gift of the father.

He further encouraged and confirmed several grants of his tenants, viz., of Hamole Strange in Naginton; of Gilbert de Hadnall in Hardwick; of Osbert de Hopton and others in Hopley; of Alan Fitz Oliver and others in Sundorn, and of Roger Fitz Hunald in Ree.⁴

I have said that William Fitz-Alan died about Easter, 1160. By his first wife, Christiana, he left no surviving male issue, but by his second wife, Isabel de Say, Baroness of Clun, whom he seems to have married about 1153-4, he left a son, William, an infant, whose minority seems to have expired about June, 1175.

It was during this minority that King Henry II., at request of Alured, Abbot of Haughmond, who seems to have sometime been the king's tutor,⁵ granted to William Fitz-Alan and his heirs, custody of the abbey and its possessions in all future vacancies; and this notwithstanding any grants which had been, or might be made, by the king or his heirs to the said abbey.⁶

This was in effect a cession of the right of patronage by the king to the youthful heir of the founder of Haughmond. The Deed passed unquestionably either between 1163 and 1166, or else in 1170.⁷ The favour thus granted at petition of Abbot Alured, rather than of Fitz-Alan, is curiously consistent with the known minority of the latter.

Another charter remains on the abbey register, which requires a few remarks, inasmuch as its expressions are such as to render it easily mistaken for the Foundation Charter. It is entitled, "*De Sede et Loco Abbathie ibidem*," and, in fact, conveys the site and precinct of the church,

⁴ Chartulary, *passim*: and Harl. MS. 2188, fol. 123.

⁵ *Ad preces Aluredi Abbatis de Haghmon, nutricii mei.*

⁶ Monasticon, vi., 108, III.

⁷ The Deed passed at Woodstock and purports to have been tested by Geoffrey, "Archbishop of Canterbury" (a person who never existed) and Richard de Camville. The first witness, whose title I have seen similarly misrepresented elsewhere, was Geoffrey Ridel, *Archdeacon* of Can-

terbury, so appointed in 1163, and who was elected Bishop of Ely in 1173.

A grant of land which the King made coterminously to Haghmond has the two witnesses rightly described (Chartulary, fol. 132). It also is dated at Woodstock, and it received the Papal Confirmation in May, 1172. These facts, when combined with the known movements of the King, limit the date of both deeds as stated in the text.

with all appurtenances, to the canons.^s This is done without any reference to a previous grant thereof. The charter is, however, by the second William Fitz-Alan, and so is really only a charter of confirmation. I could quote several other charters of the same baron, which have similar delusive appearance, but avoiding a matter of such detail, I will merely say that this deed passed positively between the years 1175 and 1196, probably towards the close of that period.

Summarily then we conclude the Augustine House of Haughmond to have been founded as a priory between 1130 and 1138, to have grown into an abbey in or before 1155, and that its founder in all respects was the first William Fitz-Alan; that its other benefactors, during the life of the founder, were the Empress Matilda, King Henry II., Walcheline Maminot, William Peverel of Dover, and several of the founder's tenants. We need not include Stephen, whose grant was either an act of usurpation, or a piece of mimic piety; but we must add the names of Randolph de Gernons, Earl of Chester, who was poisoned by the partisans of Stephen in December, 1153, and of Walter Durdent, Bishop of Chester, who died in 1159.

The foundation of Haughmond was therefore associated with a distinct political creed, for those whom I have named were, for the most part, either the representatives or champions of that cause of legitimacy which was at issue during the twenty years that followed the death of Henry I. All or nearly all were sufferers either from the eminence of their position, or the greater loftiness of their principles. Thus out of calamities such as Shropshire has never again experienced, were elicited at least two beneficial results—the increase of its religious establishments, and the triumph of those hereditary rights which it has ever since venerated as divine.

^s Printed *Monasticon*, vi., 108, No. II.