

A PURBECK MARBLE EFFIGY OF AN ABBOT OF RAMSEY
OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

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During the early part of 1914, whilst motoring through Huntingdonshire, I was driven, by stress of weather, to take shelter in a wayside inn, where, passing through the yard, my attention was drawn to a large mass of carved stonework, which was apparently acting as a mounting-block. This, on closer inspection, proved to be the lower part of an important ecclesiastical effigy, the past history of which, so far as I am able to gather, was as follows.

In the year 1870, Mr. Woods, the then owner of the old windmill at Little Stukeley, discovered this fragment under his mill, which he then presented to a friend, Mr. Thomson, of Alconbury, in whose possession it remained till his death which occurred some years ago, when it was sold by auction and was removed to the inn from whence I obtained it.

The village of Little Stukeley lies about eight miles from Ramsey abbey, with which it is connected by road, and it was probably removed thither subsequent to the dissolution of the abbey, 1539, and used as material for the foundations of the mill, then in process of erection.

The monument may be thus described. Executed in Purbeck marble, is the lower third of a recumbent ecclesiastical effigy, wearing a chasuble and an alb, and upon the feet caligae, which rest upon two couchant rams, placed vis-à-vis. On either side of, and facing the central figure, are small seated forms of ecclesiastics, wearing respectively dalmatic and tunicle, reading from books, which they hold open in both hands and rest upon their knees, which figures doubtless represent a deacon and sub-deacon, reading the gospel and epistle. Behind and to the outer side of the smaller figures are the moulded bases of the shafts which supported the canopy, which originally surmounted the central figure. The fragment which survives measures 12 inches in thickness and



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26 inches in length, whilst its dimensions in breadth at the upper and lower ends are $29\frac{1}{2}$ and 27 inches respectively.

It would be a matter of considerable interest if we were able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion as to who may be represented by this monument, and there are several points which may perhaps assist us in determining this. As previously remarked, we have at the foot of the central figure two rams, which I venture to suggest form the rebus of Ramsey abbey,¹ the most important ecclesiastical foundation in the county of Huntingdon and, as a mitred abbey, one of the foremost in England, prior to the Reformation.

It would appear, therefore, that we have here the monument of an abbot of Ramsey, of about the middle of the thirteenth century, to which date I would attribute this carving, bearing in mind the close resemblance which exists between it and the effigy of king John at Worcester, which Prof. Prior has allocated to the year 1240. In the case of each of these monuments the style of carving is almost identical, and in each the main figure has two ecclesiastical attendants, in that of the king, bishops, placed at his head, in that of the abbot, seated below his knees, this latter position being in England at this period, so far as I am aware, a unique feature.

This monument, which when complete would measure about seven and a half feet in length, by two feet three inches at the foot and three feet in width at the top, would represent an abbot of Ramsey, beneath an elaborate canopy, and, since there are no remains of a crosier, we may reasonably conclude that he bore in his left hand a book, whilst with his right hand he bestowed his benediction.

If our conclusions are correct, this monument must commemorate Ralph, abbot of Ramsey, who was elected to that position 1231. Two somewhat similar effigies, viz. those of Evrard de Fouilloy, ob. 1222, and Geoffroy d'Eu, ob. 1236, in bronze, are preserved in Amiens cathedral.

Subsequent to the death of Hugh de Sulgrave, abbot of Ramsey, permission to elect his successor was granted by

¹ Derivation of Ramsey. 'Igitur Ramesia congrue satis dici potest a duobus nominibus Anglicis, *ram*, quod est aries, et *eie*, quod

insulam sonat, ut inde composito nomine Ramesia quasi "insula arietis" nominetur.' —*Historia Ramesiensis*, cap. ii.

Henry III, July 12, 1231,¹ and ten days later the election of abbot Ralph received the assent of the king.² Some years subsequent to his election, 1234, abbot Ralph had the privilege of entertaining Henry III and his queen at the abbey, February 25–27 inclusive.³

In 1236 Henry appointed abbot Ralph justice in eyre for the counties of Beds. and Bucks.⁴ and in 1238 and 1240 we find this abbot the recipient of further marks of royal favour, gifts of deer being made to him.⁵ His next appointment was in 1239, at which date he was made justice at Norwich,⁶ whilst in 1250 he was made justice at Lincoln.⁷ In 1251 the bishop of Lincoln visited Ramsey abbey among other foundations in his diocese.⁸

Abbot Ralph died August 14, 1253, after ruling his abbey for twenty-two years,⁹ and in the absence of any

¹ Prior et conventus Rameseiae per fratres Rogerum, elemosinarium, et Lucam, praecentorem suum, qui nuntiaverunt domino regi decessum fratris Hugonis, quondam abbatis sui, habent licentiam elegendi sibi abbatem alium.

Teste Rege, apud Oxoniam, duodecimo die Julii. Patent Roll, 15 Henry III, m. 1.

² Rex electioni factae de fratre Rannulpho, priore (Rameseiae), in abbatem Ramesciae, regium adhibuit assensum et favorem.

Et hoc significat rex Hugoni, Lincolnensi episcopo, rogans, quod id quod suum est (in hac parte exequatur.

Teste) rege, apud Herefordiam, vicesimo secundo die Julii. Patent Roll, 15 Henry III, m. 1.

³ Henry's visit to Ramsey is proved by several documents signed at that place (Close Roll, 18 Henry III, m. 29).

⁴ 1236. 'Henricus Dei gratia, &c. abbati de Ramesey salutem.

Sciatis quod constituimus vos justitiarum nostrum ad itinerandum ad omnia placita nostra cum dilectis et fidelibus nostris Roberto de Lexintone, Olivero de Vallibus, et Johanne de Hulecote, in comitatibus Bedford et Bucks etc. Teste meipso apud Mortelake quarto die Maii, anno regni nostri vicesimo.'

⁵ 1238. De damis datis—'et abbati de Rames' ij damos in Shappel.'

1240. De damis datis—Mandatum est Waltero de Deneford quod in foresta de Wauberge extra hayam faciatis (sic) habere abbati Rames' duos damos ad festum suum de Sancto Benedicto, de dono nostro. Teste rege apud Westmonasterium, ij die Junii (sic for Julii).

⁶ This appointment failed to meet with the approval of Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln, who, considering it contrary to canon law, wrote to the archbishop of Canterbury, that the king should be desired to rescind it.

⁷ 1250. March 12. Commission to the abbot of Ramesey, appointing him as justice, with others to hold and determine common pleas of the county of Lincoln to meet on Monday the morrow of the close of Easter at Lincoln. Patent Roll, 34 Henry III, m. 6.

⁸ 1251. 'Cum enim inter caetera ad Ramesiam pervenisset, stipatus saecularibus, in dormitorio lectos monachorum in propria persona perscrutando, omnia circuit, universa revolvit, et si quid communium inveniret, demoliebatur, et quasi effractorius scrinia dissipans, ciphos, quos invenit circulis vel pedibus redimitos, comminuit conculcatos, quos, si circumspicius fecisset, posset pauperibus integros erogasse.' Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Luard, vol. v, p. 226.

⁹ 1253. 'In vigilia vero Assumptionis obiit venerabilis abbas Rannulphus, Rameseye, domum suam bonis tam spiritualibus quam temporalibus abundantem, tempore tunc messis regalibus relinquens diripiendam,' Matthew Paris, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. Madden, vol. iii, p. 144.

Also, 'In vigilia Assumptionis obiit venerabilis vir Rannulphus abbas Rameseiae, domum suam et gregem tam in spiritualibus quam temporalibus relinquens abundantem.' Ibid, p. 329.

'Rannulphus, prior Rameseiae.

Factus est abbas anno millesimo ducentesimo tricesimo primo.



SEAL OF RALPH, ABBOT OF RAMSEY, 1231-1253.

information to the contrary I think we may not unreasonably conclude that he was buried in his own abbey church.

Some confirmation as to this monument being that of abbot Ralph may be obtained from the consideration of his seal, an example of which occurs in the collection of seals in the British Museum, no. 3871, the design of which is as follows: Obv.:—A standing figure of abbot Ralph, clothed in an alb and chasuble, holding in his left hand a closed book, whilst with his right hand he sustains his crosier, held by the pendant infula. He stands upon an architectural base, and beneath is a trefoil-headed niche, in which, surrounded by water, are two rams, vis-à-vis, the rebus of the abbey. The background of the seal is richly diapered with a trellis pattern, roses occurring at the intersections and crescents within each lozenge-shaped space. Upon this diaper, there are, at the shoulders and knees of the central figure, four lozenge-shaped spaces, each of which would contain the emblem of an evangelist, that of St. Luke, an ox, at the left knee, alone remaining. In addition to these, on either side, between the evangelists, were large cusped spaces, each of which probably contained the head of a monk, such as we find on the seal of Simon de Luton, abbot of St. Edmund's, 1257–1279.¹ Round the seal was the legend, SIGILLVM RADVLPHI DEI GRATIA ABBATIS RAMESE. Rev.:—The smaller counter-seal, which is in poor condition, depicts the Annunciation, beneath which, within a trefoil niche, is a kneeling figure of the abbot. Round the design is † AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA DOMINVS TECVM.

Et tertio anno elapso venit Henricus rex Angliae, primus omnium regum Angliae. cum regina Angliae, apud Ramesiam, scilicet, die Sancti Matthiae Apostoli, et fecit se muniri, manens ibi per quatuor dies, Et septimo anno hujus abbatis dedicata est ecclesia Sancti Iwonis.

Et anno suo octavo idem abbas factus est iudiciarius apud Norwicum.

Item hujus tempore celebratum est concilium Lugdunense per Innocentium quartum, anno millesimo (ducentesimo) quadragesimo quinto.

Iste fuit abbas viginti et duobus annis.
Cartularium monasterii de Ramesia, anno 1231.

Cotton MS. Vesp. A. xviii, f. 113 b. Nomina abbatum monasterii de Ramsey.

'Ranulphus, abbas. Iste pacificavit Overam, et multa bona in cappis et in albis et in aliis ornamentis contulit ecclesiae nostrae, et bene rexit ecclesiam suam, et assignavit conventui singulis annis de Gidding xx libras. Stetit per xxii annos.'

¹ Catalogue of Seals in the British Museum, no. 2804.