

ART. XIV.—*On the date of the foundation of Furness Abbey.* By S. B. GAYTHORPE, F.R.A.S.

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THE celebrations in July, 1927, of the eight-hundredth anniversary of Furness Abbey have served as a reminder that, though the month and year of its foundation are known, there is—owing to an unfortunate discrepancy in the Abbey records—still an element of doubt as to the precise day. The point is not, perhaps, of great importance, and for that reason, doubtless, has hitherto been ignored, or but barely mentioned, by historians; but for the sake of accuracy it would be interesting, if possible, to have the difficulty cleared up. The present paper is an attempt to set forth the various evidences as to date; to suggest a line of interpretation by which they may be harmonized; and lastly, to find the day in the present calendar that most nearly corresponds to the date thus determined.

The one authority for the three principal statements is the Furness Coucher Book, which, it may be useful to recall, was compiled during the abbacy of William de Dalton (elected 1405) and completed in the year 1412 by the scribe, John Stell. The latter seems to have been a man of considerable ability as an artist and a penman, even if as a copyist he was not impeccable. By a contemporary monk of Furness, Richard Esk, he is commemorated for his use of a silver pen, with which, and not with "the quill of any bird," the Coucher Book was written. Stell may, perhaps, be identified with "John, a monk of Furness," whose name appears in the Computus for the years 1399, 1400, of John Fayt, Bursar of University

College, Oxford, among the number of those, who, not being Fellows, inhabited rooms in the College, one of which he held at a rent of 13s. 4d. (*Hist. MSS. Comm., 5th Rep.*, p. 478).

The first statement as to the date of the foundation occurs on the first of the parchment folios of the Coucher Book, and the passage, as printed by the Chetham Society (Vol. IX, N.S., p. 8) is as follows:—

Anno D'ni Millesimo c^{mo} xxvii^{mo}, nonas Julii, a Fundatione *Cistercii* A^o xx^o nono, a Fundatione vero *Savignei* A^o xv^o, et Pontificatus *Honorii Papæ* secundi A^o ii^o], regni autem *Regis Henrici* primi post conquestum *Angliæ* A^o vicesimo sexto, Fundatum est *Monasterium Furnesii* per nobilem Virum *Stephanum, Comitem Moretonii et Bolonii*, in loco Vallis qui tunc *Bekansguyll* vocabatur. Sed, ut in libello quodam veteri et de vetusta littera scripto reperi, ipsum Monasterium prius fundatum erat in *Aundyrnes* in loco qui dicitur *Tulket*, A^o D'ni Millesimo cxxiii^o, iiii^o nonas Julii, et ibi situm tenuit per iii annos et iii dies antequam ubi nunc est fundaretur.

From this last sentence it would appear that the original MS. authority was that for the date of the foundation at Tulketh (4 July, 1124), from which by the addition of three years and three days was obtained the date given in the first sentence as that of the foundation in Furness (7 July, 1127). In the opening statement there are two errors, already pointed out by Beck (*Annales Furnesienses*, p. 115*n*), which seem to have been derived from an earlier source: 7 July, 1127, was in the third, not the second year of Pope Honorius II, and in the twenty-seventh, not the twenty-sixth year of King Henry I. Perhaps, in that supposed earlier draft, *septimo* was written *sept'o*, which in the script of that time might have been mistaken for *sexto*; or if both years were originally written in Roman numerals, a minim may have been

wanting or have become obliterated in each, or have been accidentally omitted in copying.

The second statement as to the date of the foundation is to be found on folio 6 of the Coucher Book (*op. cit.*, pp. 21-22) in the following "barbarous hexameters," composed by Richard Esk, and transcribed by John Stell, as an introduction to the Chartulary, which thereafter immediately follows. The evidence here contained deserves perhaps more attention than it has yet received: for according to the Chetham Society's editor (Rev. Canon Atkinson) it was with these verses that the Coucher Book, as originally compiled, commenced, a deduction probably from the fact that in the original the verso of folio 4 and both faces of folio 5 are blank.

- Anno Milleno Centeno bis duodeno
 Fournays fundatum primo fuit et situatum.
 Primus ei fundus Tulket fuit, haud dubitatur,
 Quo jam fundatur, est Bekanesgillque secundus;
 5 Annis namque tribus transactis, totque diebus,
 Tollitur a fundo primo, struiturque secundo:
 Angmundernesiam, qua primo floruit ædes
 Hæc, teneas patriam qua Tulket erat sibi sedes.
 Annos a fundo si vis numerare secundo
 10 Illius ætatis, cape versibus hic subaratis.
 Anno Milleno centeno terque noveno,
 Julii primo, Fournes fundatur ab imo.
 Sedit Honorius, hoc sub tempore, Papa secundus;
 Ewanus primus Abbas fuit, hicque facundus.
 15 In Tulket fuimus grisei monachi; situati
 Hic, sumus albaty, presenti tegmine scimus.
 Hanc hac valle domum *Stephanus* Comes ædificavit,
 Quem gens Anglorum Regem sibi post titulavit,
 Anno Milleno centeno ter quoque deno
 20 Necnon septeno, Rex hic fit in ordine pleno.
Stephanus iste stetit Comes ad tunc *Boloniensis*
 Et *Moretonensis*, hanc ædem cum fore fecit,

- Henrici* regno primi currente sub anno
 Viceno sexto fundi jactamine texto,
 25 Sicque decenne fuit hoc cœnobium statione
 Cum primo micuit Comes iste decore Coronæ.
 Hic sed sex menses sex atque dies remove
 De numero penses, patet ætas postea vere
 Quo post Conquestum Domus anno cœpit oriri;
 30 In sexageno primo noscas reperiri—
 Anno Milleno sexageno quoque seno
Will. Norman. Ducem sibi pertulit *Anglia* Regem . . .

Here, the date of the foundation in Furness is given in ll. 11-12 as 1 July, 1127, from which by the subtraction of three years and three days (*cf.* ll. 5-6) we should get 28 June, 1124, as the corresponding date of the foundation at Tulketh. Now according to the Roman numeration this last date would be *a.d. iiii Kalendas Julias*, and if when transcribing from "the little old book, written in an antique character," Stell had by any chance mistaken the word *Kalendas*, or some abbreviation of it, for *Nonas*, we should then have an explanation of how the date 1 July, 1127, here comes to be given as that of the foundation in Furness. But any such misreading on Stell's part, though not impossible, does not seem very likely.

Postponing for the moment discussion of the years given in ll. 19-26, let us now consider the curious method of calculation involved in the last six lines, 27-32. Here, we begin with a date as to which there can hardly be any mistake, the coronation of William the Conqueror, 25 December, 1066; and Esk's verses tell us that the date of the foundation (in Furness) was in the sixty-first year after the Conquest, but that we must remember to subtract from that number six months and six days. If we follow that precept literally we should arrive at the quite impossible date 19 June, 1127. But it is evident that Esk's intention, though he has not succeeded in expressing it perfectly, is that we should first subtract the six days

from the six months, and then the remainder from 61 years, if we are to obtain the proper interval. In other words, for the purpose of reckoning, the "sex menses sex atque dies" of l. 27 has to be taken, not as six months *and* six days, but as six months *less* six days, in order to arrive at the date 1 July, 1127, given in ll. 11-12. This does not, of course, imply that the word *atque* was used by the monk in other than its natural sense, but only that he failed to see that his form of words did not accurately correspond with the arithmetical process involved. The discrepancy is, perhaps, not immediately apparent, which may explain why the monk's slip is also shared by the Chetham Society's editor, who at the end of his note on l. 23 of Esk's verses (*op. cit.*, p. 22) says: "from 25 December, 1066 . . . to 1 July, 1127, is just six months and six days short of the 61 years referred to a few lines below,"—whereas that interval is really six months *all but* six days short of 61 years.

The nature of this error, when considered in conjunction with the somewhat similar precept in regard to the three years and three days, raises the doubt whether in the original memoranda the date of the earlier foundation at Tulketh (4 July, 1124) was not after all found by working backwards from the above date for the foundation in Furness: for if in the same way as before we subtract from 1 July, 1127, not three years *and* three days, but three years *less* three days, we arrive at 4 July, 1124, as the date of the earlier foundation; and thus the various statements would be harmonized.

If this, indeed, be the explanation, it would suggest that the correct arithmetical interpretation of the original precept, though known perhaps by tradition to Esk, was not known to Stell, who when he afterwards came to draft the first statement might not unnaturally think that an error had been made in the verses, and by taking the words of the precept according to their natural sense

and so adding three years and three days to the date of the earlier foundation, as given in the "little old book," would thus arrive at the date 7 July, 1127, for the foundation in Furness.

The words of Symeon of Durham (*Symeonis Monachi Op. Omn. ed. T. Arnold*, Vol. II (*Historia Regum*), p. 267)—the only independent statement known to the present writer as to the duration of the monks' stay at Tulketh—may here be quoted, as being not inconsistent with the interpretation of the precept above suggested:—

Anno MCXXIII. Stephanus comes Bononicensis, postea rex Angliæ, dedit abbati Gaufrido Savinniensi villam, scilicet Tulket, in provincia quæ vocatur Agmundernes, super ripam fluminis Ribble, ad abbatiam construendam ordinis sui, tempore Calixti papæ; et ibi fere per tres annos permanserunt.

It will be noted that the foundation at Tulketh is here assigned to the year 1123, and not, as in the Coucher Book, to 1124; but whether the explanation is that the former happened to be the year of Stephen's gift, and the latter that in which the monks took possession of the land, or that it is merely an error due to the note having been entered under the wrong year in the *Historia Regum*, there is no evidence to show.*

The third statement in the Coucher Book as to the date of the foundation appears on the verso of folio 43 (*op. cit.*, p. 121), and is as follows:—

* It is only proper to mention that in the original, and only existing, MS. (*Corp. Chr. Coll. Camb.*, F. v. 139, *sæc. xii exeunte*), the passage above quoted is written in "a coarse hand" at the foot of the page, with a reference to the date (*Surtees Soc.*, vol. 51, pp. lxxvii, 120; *Sym. Mon. Op. Omn. ed. T. Arnold*, vol. II, pp. x, 267). Whatever may be the value of this evidence as regards the date of the foundation at Tulketh, it cannot affect the date of the foundation in Furness, the year of which is further confirmed by the date of the foundation charter as 1127. The preamble to that charter is not included in the extracts here quoted, as it is evidence rather of the approximate date of the charter than of that of the foundation. Moreover, as already stated, the year of the foundation in Furness is not in question. Certain points concerning the chronology of the charter are, however, discussed in an appendix to the present paper.

Stephanus, Comes Bolonii et Moretonii, filius Comitis Blesensis, genitus ex Audoena filia Will. Conquestoris, fundavit istud Monast^m Furniense Nonas Julii, A.D. M^oc^oxxvii^o, et regni Regis Henrici primi post Conq., avunculi ejusdem Stephani, A^o vicesimo sexto. Et, A^o decimo post dictam Foundationem, idem Stephanus est in Regem Angliæ coronatus immediate post dictum Henricum Regem, A^o viz. D'ni M^oc^o[^o]xxxvii^o.

The numerical details in the first sentence correspond with those in Stell's first statement, including the error of *sexto* for *septimo*, which, by the way, also occurs in Esk's verses (l. 24). In the second sentence Esk's puzzling statement (ll. 19-26) that Stephen was crowned in 1137, when the monastery was of ten years standing, is repeated, but with this difference, that the coronation was in the tenth year after the foundation, and with the addition of "immediate post dictum *Henricum Regem*." Now Henry I died on 1 December, 1135, and the date usually assigned for the coronation of Stephen is 26 December of the same year. William of Malmesbury places the coronation four days earlier, on 22 December; and John of Hexham—owing, possibly, to the accidental omission in the MS. of one or more Roman numerals before the word *kal.*—makes it five days later, on 1 January, 1136. But that seems to be the extent of the divergence. It is evident then that Stephen's coronation took place in the ninth, not the tenth year after the foundation in Furness.

It will also be noticed that in this last extract from the Coucher Book the year 1137 is a deduction from the supposed interval of ten years between the two events, while in Esk's verses (ll. 19-20, 25-26) that interval is deduced from the numbers of the years themselves. This rather suggests that the original of both these statements recorded only the interval in years, expressed as an ordinal number written in abbreviated form in Roman numerals: for in that case, by the obliteration, or

accidental omission of a minim, it would be easy for IX° (*nono*) to be read as X° (*decimo*).

The results of this discussion may be briefly summarized as follows:—

(i) The date derived from the earliest MS. authority is that given by Stell for the foundation at Tulketh, viz.: 4 July, 1124. But unfortunately there is no independent evidence to show whether this fundamental date was correctly transcribed.

(ii) The only date separately attested is Esk's 1 July, 1127, for the foundation in Furness, which he says was sixty-one years less six months *and* six days, but which was really sixty-one years less six months *all but* six days, after the Conquest. But this date of Esk's for the foundation in Furness cannot be connected with Stell's date for the foundation at Tulketh, unless in the same way as the above we take, not three years *and* three days, but three years *all but* three days, as the interval between the two foundations, or unless we suppose that Stell in transcribing from his MS. authority the date of the foundation at Tulketh wrote *nonas* by mistake for *kalendas*. Neither proposition is, perhaps, entirely satisfactory; but if on the other hand we accept Stell's date, 7 July, 1127, for the foundation in Furness, there seems to be no explanation, satisfactory or otherwise, of how the first of that month came to be given as the date by his contemporary, Richard Esk, in the verses which Stell himself transcribed. It is, of course, assumed that both monks are referring to the same stage in the abbey's existence.

If, then, with Esk, we take Friday, 1 July, 1127, as the date of the foundation in Furness, and wish to know the day of the month according to our present mode of reckoning to which that date most nearly corresponds, we have only to imagine the Gregorian calendar carried backward to that epoch to find that the difference between the

Julian and Gregorian calendars would then have been seven days. Accordingly, the addition of eight hundred years and seven days to the above date would bring us to Friday, 8 July, 1927, as the octingentenary of the foundation in Furness.*

APPENDIX.

NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE FOUNDATION CHARTER.

The original charter seems to be missing. In the Coucher Book transcript of it the date of the charter is given as "Anno ab incarnatione domini nostri, M^oC^oxx^{mo}vij^o, Indiccione quinta, epacta xvij^{ma}" (Farrer's *Lancs. Pipe Rolls*, p. 301; *Chetham Soc.*, IX, n.s., p. 123).

The Indiction here referred to is doubtless the Constantinian, generally adopted in Western Europe, the fifth year of the current cycle of which began on 24 September, 1126, and ended on 23 September, 1127.

In the old style lunar calendar the epact was the age of the moon on 22 March in each year. Now it can be shown that the age of the calendar moon on 22 March, 1128, was 17, the same as the epact given in the charter. But the epact was changed each year on 1 September. Hence the above value of the epact would be current from 1 September, 1127, to 31 August, 1128.

The charter is to be assigned, therefore, to some date within that portion of the year 1127 which is common to both the above periods, that is to say, to some day between 1 and 23 September, 1127, inclusive. It would, then, appear that the charter was not completed until some two or three months after the foundation of the monastery in Furness.

* The same result is reached by taking from the table in the *Nautical Almanac* the day of the Julian period, 2132876, which corresponds to the date 1 July, 1127, and adding thereto 800 tropical years (equinox to equinox) of 365.2422. . . days, or to the nearest whole number, 292194 days. We then find that the sum thus obtained, 2425070, is the day of the Julian period corresponding to 8 July, 1927, which accordingly is the eight-hundredth anniversary of the foundation.