

ART. X. – *Three pre-Reformation documents concerning South Cumbria.*

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SINCE pre-Reformation documents concerning Cumbria are by no means very numerous, it seems desirable to draw attention to three of them which have not hitherto attracted more than very minor notice but are of no little interest.

1. The earliest of these was largely unknown until after it had been deposited in the Lancashire County Record Office at Preston by Sir Roger Hulton, Bart. in 1943. It is an elaborate document,¹ in admirable condition, measuring 42.5 cm by 24 cm., written in fine bookhand and has the luxuries of an elaborate initial miniature depicting a half-length figure of Christ rising from the tomb and a quite elaborate border of blue, green, red and gold around the text. The seal unhappily has not survived.

The deed is addressed to “William prior of the monastery of Cartmel of the Order of St. Augustine” by “brother John Tilk, prior of the English province of the Order of Preachers (i.e. the Dominicans). By it “in consideration of your devotion which you have towards our Order” the General Chapter of the (English) Dominicans grants to prior William, in life and in death, full participation in (the merits) of “all the masses of the Order of Preachers, and their fasts, abstinences, vigils, labours and other good works effected by brethren of our order throughout the province of England . . . both in life and death” and grants that after his death William’s soul should be commended to the prayers of all the brethren of the whole province (of the Order) at their general chapter, if it should be announced there, and also the same masses and prayers offered for him as were customary for one of their own departed brethren. A concluding note announces that the document had the seal of the provincial prior affixed to it at the Dominican chapter held at Northampton on the feast of the Assumption (Aug. 14) in the year 1418.

This is a very fine example of a species of medieval English ecclesiastical deed of which very few examples have survived, and raises the interesting but very obscure question of why so prestigious a grant should be made to so little known a person as the head of the remote, not very large priory of Cartmel (not, it be noted, to the priory itself). In view of the fact that the archives of this monastery have almost all completely disappeared, no absolutely certain answer can be given to this question, but certain major conjectures are reasonable. The very considerable service which the deed implies that the prior of Cartmel had rendered to the Dominicans, is very much more likely to have concerned some very considerable benefaction to the Order to swell the alms on which it depended for its sustenance, than anything else. This benefaction is most unlikely to have come from the revenue of Cartmel priory, which could not have spared any large sums to expend in this way. What then was the source of the large sum of money – if such it was – which the Dominican Order acquired in this way?

To any student of the social history of the area at this time, it is obvious that the Harrington family was the only very rich household in what is now south Cumbria, and it is very suggestive indeed that only a short while before the English Dominican province drew up this letter of thanks, Lord John Harrington III had died heirless (11 Feb. 1418) leaving a will.² It is dated 8 June 1417 and was proved on 26 April 1418. After gifts to

his wife and arrangement for payment of debts due, he orders "the residue of all my goods and the debts remaining due I will that my executors shall dispose of and distribute in the manner in which for the safety of my souls, it shall seem best to them to be done". This in effect left distributions of his effects to his wife, as was noted elsewhere.³ He appoints as his executors his wife Elizabeth, Thomas Baldyng clerk, John Copleston senior, Thomas Broughton and John Russell clerk. For a reason or reasons at which we can only guess, the will is very short, lacking totally the complex list of special benefactions so usual in such places in late medieval times.

To anyone well versed in the wills of medieval England it is clearer than daylight that no service was more valued by testators than the prayers for their souls made by those living the monastic life. Accordingly it would be most surprising if the executors of the will did not donate much of what was quite certainly the very large amount of wealth left by Lord John to a monastery or monasteries. It is virtually certain that first on the Harrington list here would be Cartmel priory, with which their family had especially close contact ever since Lord John Harrington I (d. 1347) had established there a chantry in which he and his wife were buried, much of which remains. Although the matter cannot be proved absolutely, the present writer is convinced that the executors of this will provided the money for the enormous east window of Cartmel priory which is now known to have been made in or very close to the third decade of the fifteenth century i.e. only a very few years after the death of Lord John Harrington III. It is very likely also though we cannot prove it, that prior William was offered by its executors other substantial sums for his priory which he refused, and which at his instigation were transferred to the English province of the Dominicans, whose intense gratitude to him, the document here considered so vigorously expresses. The fact that the Dominican letter of thanks was written only a bare four months after the Harrington will was proved, fits in most admirably with the theory advanced above. It is not impossible but far from provable that prior William himself was a Harrington, his Christian name being a favourite in that family.

2. The second document to be considered is the will of William 5th Lord Harrington who died in 1457. It is dated 21 May of that year. In the hand-list of local wills published by the Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society it occupies pride of place as the oldest in the series. Unhappily when an attempt was made to reproduce its text in *Furness Lore*⁴ this was very seriously hampered by its damaged condition. The Record Keeper for the Principal Probate Registry at Somerset House reported that "owing to the defective and imperfect nature of the original it is extremely difficult to extract sense from certain passages". Certainly the published transcript suggests very extensive damage. As a result we have to rely on a reading which contains no few obscurities.

The testator "William Harrington lord of Aldingham" first enjoins that he be buried in "the conventual church of Blessed Mary of Conishead" and orders his executors to see that his debts are paid. The large sum of 100 marks is bequeathed for covering with lead the roof of the choir of Conishead, and the executors were ordered to provide a lead roof for the chapel annexed to the church wherein William and his wife were buried. £100 was left to the four chaplains "serving in my hospital"⁵ to celebrate mass for William's soul, payments to each chaplain being made in yearly instalments of 100s until this fund was exhausted. To his godson (*filiolus*) William Bonwell, he left all his gold and silver gilt plate and £40 "to be held in hand so that my wish be fulfilled". An

unknown sum for distribution to his indoor and outdoor servants came next, to be distributed at his executors' discretion. After these domestic bequests came gifts to local monasteries – £20 to “the church of Cartmel for its building (fund)” besides the £20 previously assigned to this purpose to be applied to no other work (?). Then came small gifts to local houses of friars – to those at Carlisle, two sums of 20s. and 10 marks for their prayers for his soul, 40s. to friars at Lancaster, 20s. to friars at Penrith, 20s. to friars at Appleby, 40s. to friars at Preston and 40s. to friars at Knaresborough. The final lines of the deed are not all clear, but 10 marks are left to Isabel Stabkyldde and indecipherable amounts to “Richard my chaplain”, to Agnes daughter of Roger de Betham for her marriage portion . . . and it ordained that at the funeral 100s. to be distributed in 4d. doles to the poor and needy.⁶ £24 went to the executors “so that they can carry out my will completely”. Any surplus funds were to be employed by the executors for the good of the testator's soul, as seemed best to them. They were Thomas rector of Aldingham, John Harington chaplain, Sir Roger de Betham and John Forton gentleman. Last comes a short list of witnesses, William Harington, William Bolton and “William Gathend with many others”.

3. The third document is a lengthy one of which parts, but not all, concern Cumbria. It was printed in a slim little-known volume of which only a very small edition was published. This is the will of Thomas Langton, bishop of Winchester from 1493 to 1501,⁷ who had the unique experience of being elected to the see of Canterbury but dying of the plague five days later. Had he not done so, and had he survived until 1508 when his nephew Christopher Bainbridge became archbishop of York, both the two primates of the English Church would have been Westmorland men.

The will of English bishops in late medieval times were usually very complex documents containing a large number of bequests great and small, and that of Langton, holder of a very wealthy see, certainly upheld this tradition. To extract all entries which concern Cumbria would require very prolonged research, not all of which would be fruitful. The opening bequests largely concern his diocese of Winchester and Oxford and Cambridge universities.

The first Cumbrian gift concerns Langton's place of origin – Appleby. He ordered that if it can conveniently be arranged, a suitable chaplain shall celebrate (i.e. say mass) for over a space of a hundred years for his own soul and those of his parents and all the faithful departed, in the parish church of St. Michael at Appleby. He was to receive an annual salary of 8 marks and have the use of a house or tenement at the end of Appleby Bridge. This is followed by a gift of 20 marks to the (Carmelite) friars in Appleby on condition that they prayed for his soul. A little later comes the bequest to his sister Elizabeth, her husband Roland Machell and their legitimate off-spring of all the lands and tenements in Westmorland recently (held) by Rowland Harison, Robert Orders and . . .?. . . Stores, except the tenement left for the use of the chaplain; if Rowland and Elizabeth left no legitimate heirs, the lands and tenements were to pass to Reginald Bainbridge and his heirs and assigns.

There follows a legacy of 200 marks to the same Rowland and his wife Elizabeth Machell, and 100 marks to the bishop's sister Joan Blynkensop and £20 each to her two daughters and a gift of 10 marks to John Crakenthorp “for building his house,” £100 to Reginald Bainbridge and the same amount to Thomas Bainbridge, another £100 and a cup or piece of silver to “Elene” Bainbridge. Four more gifts of £100 follow to Margaret

wife of Thomas Dragley, Eleanor wife of John Collinson, Ellen wife of Robert Herteley and Elizabeth wife of John Spencer, who may or may not have been Cumbrians. Then follows the bequest of a silver basin and silver ewer to each of the following, who were all nephews of the testator – Master Christopher Bainbridge, Master Robert Langton, Edmund Blenkinsop, Robert Blenkinsop and Lancelot Bainbridge, who was also left £40.

Next come mostly smallish gifts of cash to some fifty folk of no high degree whose places of origin are mostly unknown, though Christopher and Thomas Staveley, Giles Machell and Michael Warcop sound local as does Thomas Briggs (a Cartmel Fell name). The gift of 40s. to “Master Machell a student studying at Cambridge university” is worthy of note, as is the gift of £20 to Thomas Uvedale son of William Uvedale knight, from money owed by the latter to the bishop. To each of the parish churches of Penrith and Seaham “where I was formerly beneficed” the bishop leaves a chalice worth 100s and a set of vestments.

A notable provision provides grants for the space of twenty years for six scholars *in scienciis liberalibus* and theology in Queen’s College (Oxford) “if this can conveniently be managed”. If there were available relations of the testator who were devoted to study and well-behaved, they were to be given preference to others. To the Queen’s College he left a silver gilt statue of St. Clement. To Richard Pace “my scholar studying at Bologna” £10 a year for seven years. Christopher Bainbridge was one of the largish number of executors appointed. The will was proved on 20 May 1501.

Notes and References

- ¹ I am much obliged to the owner of this document (reference number DD/53/3) – Sir Geoffrey Hulton, Bart. – for his permission to publish it, and also to Mr K. Hall, B.A., Dip. Arch. Adm., County Archivist of the County Record Office at Preston for facilitating my use of it and help with the corrupt text of the second deed published here.
- ² M. Halliday, *Description of the Monument and effigies in Porlock Church* (Torquay, 1882) 67-8. For drawing my attention to this admirable work with its useful little collection of Harrington deeds, I am most grateful to Mr D. M. M. Shorrocks, County Archivist of Somerset.
- ³ 8 June 1417. Joh. de Haryngton miles d’n’s de Haldyngham condit. Testam. proponens visitare exteras regiones; legat omnia sua Elizabeth uxori ejus; probatum 27 Apr. 1418. A. Hamilton Thompson, “Registers of the Archdeaconry of Richmond 1361-1442 Part I” in *Yorks. Arch. Journal* xxv, 201.
- ⁴ Published in *Furness Lore* Transactions of the B.N.F.C. 1880-2 (1900), pp. 92-4. (A bell inscribed with the names of William de Harrington, lord of Aldingham and Lady Margaret is preserved in Urswick Church, but may have come from Conishead priory).
- ⁵ Conishead priory had a small hospital attached.
- ⁶ The printed text gives £100 but this seems unlikely to be correct.
- ⁷ *Sede Vacante Wills* ed. C. E. Woodruff, Kent Arch. Soc. Record, Branch iii, (1914), pp. 105-12.