

## Bishop Durdent and the Foundation of Derby School.

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THE first century which followed the conquest of England was, of necessity, a period of struggle and strife between the new Norman lords and the humiliated sons of the land. Not only at Court and in the castles, but also in the Church had a new state of things been inaugurated, which, throughout the country, led to outspoken discontent and constant friction. Foreign prelates were freely appointed, who in language, manners, and sympathy were completely severed from the lower priesthood and the people; and, but for political intrigues, the national influence of the Church, constitutional as well as religious, was for the moment in abeyance. But it was chiefly in monasteries that this dissatisfaction was most pronounced. Though the latter clearly owed their origin and statutes to the Continent, they had become, in character, purely English, and not few were the instances when they appealed to the Chief head of the Church to help them in their quarrels with the Norman archbishops of Canterbury. During the preceding centuries the monks, among whom the Benedictines were by far the most important order, had been little hampered by the bishops, who were generally of their own choosing; but the new dynasty, enforcing its claim to investiture, was now foisting on them spiritual rulers who were in many cases antagonistic to the secular and regular clergy. At the particular time in which the subject of this essay lived, Archbishop Theobald, though a Benedictine himself, was doing all he could to check the efforts made by the monasteries to assert their independence and rid themselves of the new episcopal

control. It is, therefore, little surprising that the monastic centres bitterly resented innovations which tended to undermine their influence in the nation, and thus when Theobald appointed Walter Durdent to the see of Lichfield, against the wish of the local clergy, the sturdy Mercian monks broke out into open insubordination.

This Walter Durdent, or de Durdent, after having been the first precentor of Lichfield for thirteen years, had been appointed prior of Christ Church, at Canterbury, in 1143, to replace Jeremias, whose defiant spirit Theobald had in vain sought to curb into acknowledging his legatine authority. Some time before, Pope Innocent II. had interfered and restored Jeremias, yet the latter was forced by the archbishop to resign to his competitor. Not before the refractory prior had made a humble submission, and been duly *flogged*, was he reinstated to his post. This took place probably on the elevation of his more successful rival to the bishopric of Lichfield, or to speak more correctly, of Coventry,<sup>1</sup> which took place on the 2nd of October, 1149. "Durdent was consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, at that city, by the altar of Christ, these suffrages being present and assisting him: Robert, Bishop of London, Walter, Bishop of Rochester, and Nicholas, Bishop of Llandaff, and he gave in in writing, according to the custom of those times, a profession of subjection and obedience to the see of Canterbury, which is still preserved in the archives of the Church of that city."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The see of Lichfield, the former extent of which was almost conterminal with the ancient kingdom of Mercia, has undergone many vicissitudes. Founded by St. Chad in the seventh century, raised for a short period to an archbishopric at the close of the eighth century, it was transferred in 1075 to St. John's, Chester; but the wealthy Benedictine monastery of Coventry being considered more commodious than the Metropolitan Church at Chester, the bishop migrated to Lady Godiva's city in 1102. By this move he became, in addition, abbot of that monastery, where he and his successors resided, as stated by William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificum Angl.* From the time the see had been removed to Chester the bishops of Lichfield styled themselves "*Episcopi Cestrenses*," a title which was not dropped till long after they had established themselves at Coventry. Walter Durdent is more often called *Epi' Cestrensis* than *Coventriensis* in the various documents referring to him. About 1180 the see became the bishopric of Coventry and Lichfield, in 1661 of Lichfield and Coventry, and in 1836 once more the bishopric of Lichfield.

<sup>2</sup> Shaw's *Staffordshire*, 1798.

The prebendaries of Lichfield seem to have objected to his appointment, but "King Stephen over-ruled this election," and there is a tradition that on the occasion of his first appearance as Bishop of Lichfield the monks barred him out, to which Durdent retaliated by cursing or excommunicating them (so little was the difference between these two comminatory privileges of the mediæval clergy). There is a more precise record of another excommunication by this bishop, namely, against the turbulent Randle, or Ranulph, second Earl of Chester; but on receiving from the latter's wife and son the "town" of "Styshall" (Stivichall, Warw.) for himself and his successors, the prelate granted the Baron absolution.<sup>1</sup>

Evidently the new bishop was not a *persona grata* with the monks, and yet he was a man of considerable learning, especially in Divinity, "*vir eximiae religionis et sacris literis apprime eruditus*," as Gervase has it. Was this indecorous opposition due to the fact that he had been imposed on them, or because he was of Norman blood? The very name of this prelate proclaims him to be of foreign extraction; in fact, there is in Normandy a small river, called the Durdent,<sup>2</sup> flowing into the Channel, near St. Valéry-en-Caux, which neighbourhood itself is answerable for the names of two other gentlemen who had become landowners in the old Mercian kingdom: Wydo de Sancto Walerico (St. Valéry) and Robert de Cauz (Caux), who founded the priory of Shelford, in Nottinghamshire. Indeed, most of the geographical names met with in Normandy have, after the Conquest, been implanted in England, such as Arcy, Estouteville, Gournay, Vernon, Harcourt, and many more, including that of Ferrers, the first Earls of Derby, who derived their name from Ferrières, some miles south of the Durdent.<sup>3</sup> The archbishop who consecrated

<sup>1</sup> See Leycester's *Prolegomena*, Ormerod I. 25.

<sup>2</sup> They speak in that district of a town buried under the sand at the mouth of the river Durdent. It is called *la grande ville de Durdent*, and people assert that at very low tides some of its walls can still be seen.—*Répertoire archéologique de la Seine Inférieure*, 1872.

<sup>3</sup> The spelling adopted by Robert de Torigni and Dugdale points to a different etymology of the name, and suggests one of those sobriquets which account for so many names dating from the Middle Ages—*dure dent* (hard tooth).

Durdent, and who belonged to a Norman family of knightly rank, had, like his predecessor Anselm, been Abbot of Bec, in the same district, where he may have known his learned contemporary or some member of his family.

To Bishop Durdent King Stephen granted the privilege of coining money at the city of Lichfield, and he further gave him proofs of his royal favour by granting him lands at Cannock and Rugeley, and Henry II., when yet Duke of Normandy, followed this up by further gifts of all (what Shaw calls) the grubbed-up parts of the forest of Cannock, or, as the Charter says: *Oms t'ras de exartis de foresta Chanoci, de Langedona et de omibz p'tinentibz suis et de omibz t'ris epi' ubicq' snt, i' foresta mea qcqd videlicet exartartu' fui ab olim usq. ad pentecosten quo fui ap' Legecestriam anno videlicet icarnationis D'ni MCLIII.* (Does *exartis* stand for *exarsis* or *exaratis*?) These grants were not purely ecclesiastical, but must have been personal, for it is interesting to find numerous descendants of the name of Durdent owning these parts of Staffordshire as late as the end of the fourteenth century.

The family of Durdent flourished concurrently in England and Normandy during several centuries after the Conquest. Already during Durdent's episcopate we come across sundry persons of the same name: Roger and Rabel Duredent witnessed a charter of Hugh, Earl of Chester, and Matilda, the earl's mother, granting to the bishop the land Stivinghall (Stivichall) (Dugdale, *Monasticon Angl.*, p. 1,246), and in 1201 a William Durdent is described in a deed as of "Salawe," Derbyshire (*Salt Arch. Soc.*). Later we find another Walter Durdent, who was, according to Foss, a resident of Buckinghamshire, for which county he acted as Justice Itinerant (9 Henry III.). In Dugdale's *Baronage* (vol. i., p. 46 b.) there is an interesting notice of that family.

In Normandy the name occurs in a deed of 1159, in which a Gaufridus Duredent is recorded as a witness to a charter of Mont St. Michel. The Duredents were of knightly rank; the heads of the family were lords of Mesnil, a fief which was styled

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<sup>1</sup> Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*.

after them Mesnil-Duredent, and eventually devolved upon the Grouchys. Later it was confiscated by Henry V. of England, and by him given, in 1421, to Thomas Maisteron, bailiff of Caux (*Croniques de Normandie* (sic), 1223-1453).

When or whether the family became extinct has never been stated, but by the eighteenth century all their estates in England had been alienated.

That Durdent took an active interest in his diocese is fully attested by the numerous charters which he granted and confirmed, of which a great many are recorded in the *Monasticon*; but the one which to Derbeians is of paramount importance is that which connects his name with Derby School, and which will be mentioned more fully hereafter.

His episcopate only lasted about ten years, and he was buried at Coventry.

#### DATE OF HIS DEATH.

As to the date of his death, the former historians of Lichfield were unanimous in placing it in the year 1161,<sup>1</sup> but more recent authorities, at Le Neve (*Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, 1854), Eyton, the Salt Archæological Society, Beresford (*Diocesan History of Lichfield*), Madan (*Gresleys of Drakelow*), and others state it to have occurred on the 7th of December, 1159. In proof of this, the following extract from a note communicated by the famous antiquary, R. W. Eyton, to the Editor of Le Neve's *Fasti*, will be of interest: "No. 287 in Madox's *Formulare Anglicanum* is a grant by this bishop (Durdent); No. 70 (in the same) is a confirmation of T. of Canterbury of Walter Durdent's said grant, but the confirmation passed after the death of Walter, for it speaks of him as *bonae memoriae*. No. 80 (in the same) is King Henry II.'s confirmation of both the above, and is here quoted merely to prove that Archbishop T. (of No. 70) was Theobald, and not his successor Thomas. It follows that Walter Durdent predeceased Theobald, Archbishop of

<sup>1</sup> In the *Anglia Sacra* at the passage referring to this bishop, occurs the following footnote: "*Obiit 1161, 7 Dec. ex fide obituariorum Cantuariensis et Salopiensis*," as if, 200 years ago, there was some misgiving about the year.—(Communicated by Rev. E. Bradley, of Lichfield Cathedral.)

Canterbury. Now Theobald died, on the best authorities, on 18th April, 1161. Therefore Durdent died before that date, and the day of his death would (as far as the joint evidence given above can prove) be the 7th December, 1160. But it may be doubted whether that date is not still erroneous, for Walter Durdent died at Rome, and if on the 7th December in any year, the news would not probably reach England till February following. Then would follow the royal license to elect a new bishop, which, in this case, would be attended with some delay (as the King was in Normandy), and yet it is certain that Bishop Walter's successor, Richard, was consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester, in the presence of Archbishop Theobald, then in his last illness, and who was carried into his chapel to witness the ceremony. As, therefore, between 7th December, 1160, and 18th April, 1161, there can hardly have been time for all these transactions, the next probable date for Walter Durdent's death is 7th December, 1159, which, as regards circumstantial evidence, is, as far as I have seen, unobjectionable. But in aid of circumstantial evidence comes that of the Norman Chronicle, which, calling him *Cistrensis episcopus* (Chron. Norm. 996), places his death in 1158. I need not enter into the proofs that the year of the Norman Chronicle at this period is a year too early, *i.e.*, that this year is really 1159 and was so intended by the writer of the Chronicle. The Annals of Winchester (*Angl. Sacra*, p. I. 300) give the date of Bishop Walter's death correctly, *viz.*, 1159." Then follows a postscript in which Eyton says he has lost the reference for his statement that Durdent died at Rome.

An old MS. (Douce MS. 139) at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, entitled "Dies obituales Regum Angliæ a Guilelmo Conquæstore ad Johannem, necnon Episcoporum Coventrensiùm," says, after the year 1159: "In hoc anno obiit Walterus Duredent."

But probably the most accurate date of the bishop's demise is the one recorded by Robert de Torigni, Abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel, who was a contemporary of Durdent, and very closely followed events referring to his fellow-countrymen, both

in Normandy and England. He records these events monthly, and the entry of Walter Durdent's death occurs early in September (possibly the 7th), 1159.

#### FOUNDATION OF DERBY SCHOOL.

It is generally understood that Derby School was founded by this bishop in 1160, but, as it has been shown above that he died in 1159, the reputed date of its foundation cannot logically be retained. The question now arises: What year ought to be substituted for 1160?

The Charter granted by Walter Durdent to the Canons of Darley Abbey, and in which Derby School is mentioned, furnishes some clue for an approximate date, for a careful examination will show that the various grants enumerated in it are recorded in a strictly chronological order, as can be tested by the single charters referring to the same donations. It starts with the foundation of the monastery of St. Helen, *de dono Henrici, regis Anglorum* (i.e., Henry I.) and Earl Ferrers. This must have been before 1121 (and not 1137, as stated by Simpson, Glover, and others), for in that year a Concord was signed between the Abbot of Darley and the Hospital of Jerusalem, at Waingriff, to settle an *old standing* dispute between them; then come various gifts by Dean Hugh, the burghers of Derby, and others, all falling within the reigns of Henry I. and Stephen; then the mention of Derby School, on which follow a gift of Henry Tuschet, senior, and a grant by Robert, Earl of Derby, of the tithe of his revenue, still in the reign of King Stephen, "*ex concensu regis Stephani.*" The further gifts, following in succession, gradually pass from the time of Stephen to that of Henry II. From this it seems fairly conclusive that the grant of Derby School to Darley Abbey falls well within King Stephen's reign, and the date cannot be posterior to 1154.

Now about the foundation of the School *by* Bishop Durdent.

This bishop has been credited with its foundation by what appears to be a misinterpretation of the words in the Charter: "*Intimanus vobis . . . ex dono Willelmi Barbe*

'*Aprilis ET MEO Sc(h)olam de Derbie.*' To get an insight into the meaning of these words, let us take an analogous, authenticated grant by the same bishop to the same monastery. There are three charters, recorded in the *Monasticon*, referring to Bolsover Church. In the first, William Peverel, of Nottingham, gives and concedes in frankalmoigne the aforesaid church with its ecclesiastical lands *direct* to Darley Abbey. In the second, his wife, Avicia de Lancaster, during the lifetime and with the consent of her husband, reiterates the gift, but addresses her letter to the bishop. In the third, the bishop confirms the gift to the Abbey, prefixing the confirmation with the words: *Ex dono Willelmi Peverel et Aviciae uxoris ET MEO*, although it is clearly evident by the previous transactions that the church of Bolsover was not *his* to give.

Such confirmations occur in all monastical and other cartularies with almost tedious repetitions, but there was a potent reason for it. The law exacted it, for, if any undue length of time elapsed during which titles to possession or tenure were not legally proved and attested, the estates in question were liable to escheat to the royal fisc, that was ever on the look-out for such windfalls—a high-handed practice which culminated in the famous *Quo warranto* Act of Edward I. There are, for instance, in the Darley Cartulary grants referring to the same lands confirmed half-a-dozen times by either the same or successive Earls of Derby. Besides their temporal significance, those confirmations by bishops had, in the feudal time, a spiritual importance; thus, Dean Hugh of Derby, addressing King Henry and his "dearest father" Bishop Richard of Coventry, beseeches them *by the salvation of their souls* to confirm his gift to the Abbey, and it would seem that donations to monasteries were only valid in the eyes of the contracting parties when they were fully ratified and sanctioned by the diocesan.

The Charter itself, as it is preserved in the Cottonian Library at the British Museum (Titus, C. IX., fol. 154 a) is a copy dating from the fourteenth century, obviously transcribed from



the original one by which Bishop Durdent recapitulated in order and confirmed all the gifts and grants<sup>1</sup> which up to his time had been made to Darley Abbey.

WILLELMUS BARBÆ APRILIS.

The words "*Ex dono Willelmi Barbe Aprilis et meo*," by the position of the persons and by the above example, appear to point to a similar transaction. William Barbae Aprilis must have been the primitive donor of the School. Like his contemporary Peverel, he may have first made over the School direct to the Abbey, or, like the better-advised Lady Avicia, he may have preferred to address his grant to his bishop, and the later sanctioned it with his all-powerful *et meo*. The fact that William had a school to dispose of leads us to the natural conjecture that he had a vested interest in it, and was either the founder or the master of it. The latter surmise is the more likely, for schools had existed in most towns in England since the days of King Alfred, and the one in Derby, which was even in Saxon days and during the Danish occupation a fairly considerable centre, may have dated from that early period; but as the monastery of St. Helen, after its transfer to Darley, was rapidly growing in power and wealth, and it was the acknowledged privilege of such institutions to cater for the education of the people, some pressure may have been put on Magister Barbae Aprilis<sup>2</sup> to part with his pupils in favour of the all-absorbing Abbey.

To have been the object of a special clause in a document of such importance, the School must, even at that period, have had some claim to public notice, and it is gratifying to see it thus godfathered by a prelate who was a man of acknowledged scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> Among these were all the churches of Derby. It would be just as logical to attribute to Durdent the foundation of these churches as that of Derby School. Both churches and school must have been *in existence* and "going concerns" to be able to be transferred from one party to another.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller account of this personage see Vol. xxxii., p. 77, of this *Journal*

It would be supremely interesting to discover the original deed between the venerable Old Derbeian and the Abbot of Darley, for in it there must be statements which would relieve us of all hypothetical speculations as to the real origin of that old School and his connection with it.