

## CALKE PRIORY

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Calke Priory was a small foundation of Augustinian canons situated in the extreme south of Derbyshire. For most of its history it was a dependency of Repton Priory, but its foundation preceded that of Repton by thirty years or more, and early in the reign of Henry II it was sufficiently flourishing to be able to colonize a daughter-house at Depedale between Ockbrook and Kirk Hallam.<sup>1</sup> Its site is now occupied by the great mansion of the Harpur-Crewe family, originally known as Calke House, but renamed 'Calke Abbey' by Sir Henry Harpur in the 1790s.

The exact date and circumstances of the foundation of Calke Priory have never been satisfactorily established, and although a number of Calke charters have been published in various places,<sup>2</sup> the matter could not be properly investigated so long as the Harpur-Crewe family archives remained inaccessible. When, by the kindness of Mr. Henry Harpur-Crewe, they were examined by the writer in 1964, and again more thoroughly in 1981, a number of charters relating to the priory came to light, and although several documents once in the muniment-room at Calke are no longer among the family archives (recently deposited in the Derbyshire Record Office), the early history of the priory may now be reviewed in the light of all the available evidence.

In the twelfth century Calke, together with Repton, Ingleby, Stanton-by-Bridge, Ticknall, Walton-on-Trent, Rosliston, Measham, Smisby, Newton Solney, Packington, Chilcote and Bretby, formed part of the vast estates of the Earls of Chester. In 1086 all or most of these manors on the borders of Derbyshire and Leicestershire had belonged to the royal demesne, and their acquisition by Earl Hugh d'Avranches (d.1101) is to be attributed to the politic generosity of King William II.<sup>3</sup> When Hugh died in 1101 he was succeeded by his son Richard, then only seven years old. As Richard perished in the wreck of the 'White Ship' in 1120, he can have been the effective lord of the earldom of Chester only for five or six years — from the year (1115) in which he would have attained his majority, until his untimely death in 1120. It is to this period that we must look for the foundation of Calke Priory. The crucial document is a writ of King Henry I enjoining Ranulf, Earl of Chester (presumably Ranulf I, who succeeded Richard, and died in or about 1129) to respect the grants which Earl Richard had made to the canons of Calke. This writ (below, p.104) was transcribed by Thomas Blore (d.1818), the topographical historian, who was a solicitor at Derby. Where he found it is not clear, but he probably had access to the archives at Calke, for he cites two other deeds as belonging to Sir Henry Harpur.<sup>4</sup> His transcript is not quite grammatical, but there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the document itself, and this is fortunately confirmed by the text of a similar writ of King Henry II which still survives among the Harpur-Crewe archives (below, p.105). Not only do these two documents put the foundation of Calke Priory back a decade from the dates given in the standard work of reference<sup>5</sup>, but they show that, like so many other Augustinian houses, it had as its principal benefactor a member of Henry I's court. As Earl Hugh had been a great benefactor to the Benedictine Abbey of St. Werburgh at Chester, the foundation of Calke Priory can thus be seen as an instance of the shift in royal and aristocratic patronage from Benedictine monks to canons regular following the 'Rule of St. Augustine' that was so marked a feature of Henry I's reign.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the young Earl Richard had the reputation of being no friend to the monks of Chester<sup>7</sup>, and subsequent friction between the latter and the canons of Calke (below p.103) may well have been due in part to the jealousy thus engendered.

Earl Richard's benefactions to the canons of Calke are set forth in greater detail in a

confirmatory charter of Earl Ranulf II (d.1153) that has been printed by Professor Barraclough.<sup>8</sup> Like the writ of Henry I, it is known only from Blore's transcript, the original being lost. In it Ranulf refers to 'the gift to the church [i.e. monastery] of St. Giles of Calke and to the lords canons (*dominis canonicis*) there serving God with all additions (*incrementis*) and alms which Earl Richard gave [them] to restore and build that place (*eum locum ad restaurandum et edificandum*), that is, the wood in which they live between Seggburgebroc and Alrebroc, and Little Geilberg, and the cultivated land (*cultura*) between Alrebroc and Sudwde, and the small mill at Repton, and 4 bovates of land in Ticknall'. These benefactions were in due course confirmed by Earls Hugh (1162-81) and Ranulf III (1188-1232).<sup>9</sup> They presumably represent the original endowment of the priory, but in the absence of a formal foundation charter the precise circumstances in which Earl Richard made these gifts to Calke remain obscure.

In Earl Ranulf II's charter the site of the priory is defined as 'the wood between Seggburgebroc and Alrebroc'. The canons were also given a piece of cultivated land between Alrebroc and Sudwde. As Southwood (in which the canons had leave from Earl Ranulf II to make sufficient charcoal to operate a forge<sup>10</sup>) still exists as a large wood a mile south of Calke Abbey house, Alrebroc can probably be identified as the stream that runs from west to east between Calke on the north and Southwood on the south, while Seggburgebroc may have formed part of what is now the chain of lakes to the north of Calke. The site of the priory was a hollow or depression whose sides have since been rendered less abrupt by landscaping in the eighteenth century.

Of the buildings for whose restoration and construction Earl Richard made provision during the second decade of the twelfth century virtually nothing is known, but the word 'restoration' would seem to imply some pre-existing structure. With the possible exception of one doorway, half buried at the east end of the Beer Cellar, not a vestige of medieval masonry is visible at Calke today, but the plan of the existing house, rebuilt in 1701-3, shows irregularities of alignment that could be monastic in origin, and reports of blocked-up arches (one at least apparently of Gothic form) seen in the past in the course of alterations suggest that some portions of the priory's fabric may actually be incorporated in the mansion.

Calke Priory was not the only religious foundation which held land in Derbyshire through the generosity of the Earls of Chester. In 1092 Earl Hugh and his wife Ermentrude had, in the presence of Archbishop Anselm, given the manor of Walton-on-Trent to the monks of St. Werburgh's Abbey at Chester, and the latter also acquired lands in Quarndon, Shardlow, Morley and Wilne.<sup>11</sup> The canons of Calke were therefore endowed by Earl Richard in an area where the monks of Chester were already established as landowners, and a document issued by William de Corbeil, Archbishop of Canterbury, towards the end of Henry I's reign shows that serious friction had arisen between the two religious communities, in the course of which the monks had actually deprived the canons of their conventual church. What lay behind this incident we can only guess — possibly there had been some earlier connection between the ancient collegiate foundation of St. Werburgh (the predecessor of the abbey) and Calke which the monks had attempted to revive — possibly their resentment at Earl Richard's neglect found an object in the priory of which he was the patron. Eventually the canons were restored to possession of their church at a church council held in London in the presence of the archbishops of York and Rouen and the settlement of the dispute was formally notified to the Bishop of Chester and to Earl Ranulf by Archbishop William, himself a canon regular.<sup>12</sup>

Although Calke was successfully defended against the malice of the monks of Chester, it was not destined to retain its status as an independent Augustinian priory for many more years. Earl Ranulf II died in 1153 and some or all of the Derbyshire estate of the earldom of Chester must have formed part of the dower of his widow Matilda.<sup>13</sup> Repton may well have been one of her places of residence, and it had of course been the site of a famous Anglo-Saxon monastery before the Danish invasions. It may have been with these considerations in mind that, early in the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), the Countess Matilda made arrangements for the canons of Calke to move to Repton on

the understanding that Calke would be subordinated to the new priory as a dependency or 'cell'.<sup>14</sup> By this act the Countess became in effect the founder of Repton Priory, which she further endowed with lands at Gransden in Huntingdonshire and the advowson of the church of Great Baddow in Essex.<sup>15</sup> According to a note found by Dugdale 'among the memoranda of Henry Ferrers, esquire', Repton Priory was founded in 1172<sup>16</sup>, and this has been taken to be the year when the main body of canons finally took possession of their new conventual buildings at Repton.<sup>17</sup> Although the date lacks any real authority, it may certainly be supposed that by 1172 'the prior and canons of the Holy Trinity of Repton' were established in that place and that 'the prior and convent of St. Giles of Calke' had ceased to exist as an autonomous body.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> 'The History of the Foundation of Dale Abbey', ed. A. Saltman, *D.A.J.* lxxxvii (1967), 30. This was one of the abortive foundations that preceded the Premonstratensian abbey of Dale.
- <sup>2</sup> Notably in Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. Caley, Ellis & Bandinel, vi (1830), 598, I. H. Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters* (1906), 66-71, Historical MSS. Commission, *Hastings* i (1928), 119-134, and *D.A.J.* N.S. vi (1932), 66-87. To these must be added some 15 original charters of the 12th or 13th centuries still remaining in the Harpur-Crewe archives, of which several relate to land in Ticknall and one each to Melbourne, Smisby, Kegworth and Heather (Leics.).
- <sup>3</sup> W. Farrer, *Honors and Knights' Fees* ii (1924), 1-6 and *Book of Fees*, 1001.
- <sup>4</sup> Cambridge University Library MS. 3917 (Blore's collections for Repton and Gresley Hundred), ff. 26 et seq.
- <sup>5</sup> D. Knowles & R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England & Wales* (1971), 151, where the date is given as '- 1129-39, or 1130-6'.
- <sup>6</sup> See J. C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Augustinian Canons and their Introduction into England* (1950).
- <sup>7</sup> *The Chartulary of the Abbey of St. Werburgh at Chester*, ed. James Tait (Chetham Soc. 1920-3) i, xxv-xxvi.
- <sup>8</sup> *A Medieval Miscellany for Doris Mary Stenton*, ed. Barnes & Slade, Pipe Roll Society 1962, 32-3.
- <sup>9</sup> Earl Hugh's charter was printed by Dugdale, *op.cit.*, and calendared by Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, no. 536. Earl Ranulf III's charter (P.R.O. C 109/86, no. 5) is calendared in *D.A.J.* N.S. vi (1932), 75, no. 32.
- <sup>10</sup> *Miscellany for Doris Mary Stenton*, 33 (from Blore's transcripts).
- <sup>11</sup> See *The Chartulary of the Abbey of St. Werburgh at Chester*, ed. James Tait (Chetham Society 1920-3) i, xxiv, 55 and 142 et seq.
- <sup>12</sup> This document, now British Library Additional Charter 7214, was calendared by Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, no. 528, and printed in full by C. R. Cheney, *English Bishops' Chanceries* (1950), 150, where it is dated 1130 × 1136.
- <sup>13</sup> As was certainly the case with Clemence, widow of Earl Ranulf III, who held all the Derbyshire manors in dower from 1232 until her death in 1252 (*Book of Fees*, 1001).
- <sup>14</sup> *Monasticon* vi, 598, no. I (Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, no. 531). This charter, seen by Dugdale at Calke in 1664, was by 1906 in the Bemrose collection. See also Jeayes, No. 1939.
- <sup>15</sup> Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, nos. 1943, 1945.
- <sup>16</sup> *Monasticon* vi, 430, no. I.
- <sup>17</sup> J. C. Cox, in *V.C.H. Derbyshire* ii (1907), 59, followed by Knowles & Hadcock, *op.cit.*, 172.

## APPENDIX

WRIT OF KING HENRY I (from transcript in Cambridge University Library, MS. 3917, f.26), probably May 1127.<sup>1</sup>

Henricus rex Anglorum Comiti Rannulfo Cestrie & Ministris suis salutem. Precipio vobis quod faciatis Canonicis [*sic*] de Calc tenere terram & molendinum suum & boscum suum & omnes res suas ita bene & in pace & iuste & quiete sicut Ricardus Comes eis dedit & concessit in elemosinam. Et habeant iuste curiam suam sicut

predictus Ricardus eis concessit. Et nullus super hoc aliq' faciat eis iniuria [*sic*] vel contumelia [*sic*] vel disturbacione [*sic*] ne inde amplius audiam clamorem. Teste Ricardo Basset apud Westmonasterium.

'Seal large of white wax a good deal broken'.

WRIT OF KING HENRY II (from original in Harpur-Crewe archives),  
1162 × 1172, probably October 1164 (cf. Eyton, *Court, Household  
and Itinerary of King Henry II*, 1878, 75).<sup>2</sup>

Henricus rex Anglorum & dux Normannorum & Aquitanorum & Comes Andegauorum Hugoni Comiti Cestrie & ministris suis salutem. Precipio quod faciatis canonicos de Calc' tenere terram & homines suos & molendinum & boscum suum & omnes res suas ita bene & in pace & iuste & quiete. sicut umquam melius tenuerunt tempore Regis Henrici aui mei & sicut Comes Ricardus eis dedit. & in elemosinam concessit. Et habeant iuste curiam suam sicut Ricardus predictus eis concessit. Et nullus super hoc aliquam faciat iniuriam uel contumeliam uel disturbacionem ne inde amplius clamorem audiam pro penuria pleni recti. Teste, Reginaldo Comiti Cornubie apud Norhamt'.

Damaged seal of brown wax.

<sup>1</sup> For the date see Barraclough, *Early Medieval Miscellany for Doris Stenton* (Pipe Roll Soc. 1960), 32 n. If the Earl addressed is Ranulf I, as seems probable, the date must in any case be prior to 1129.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh, Earl of Chester, to whom the writ is addressed, obtained the earldom in 1162, and the absence from the king's title of the *Dei gratia* formula shows that it must be prior to 1172.