

SIR GEOFFREY DE FINDERNE AND HIS FLOWER

BY MAXWELL CRAVEN
(Derby City Museums and Art Gallery)

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Sir Bernard Burke visited the south Derbyshire village of Findern, hoping to glean some information which would help him compile a genealogy of the Finderne family. Finding no monument or artifact remaining in the village obviously connected with the family, he resolved to question ('accost!') a villager — doubtless one of those greybeards who used to waylay the traveller in the sort of books one used to read in one's youth. Today if one seeks a villager to ask some pertinent question, one is more likely to find a Young Executive type just moved into a spanking new home from the nearest conurbation! Sir Bernard's informant told him: 'We have no Findernes here, but we have something that once belonged to them: we have *Findernes' Flowers*'. Whereupon the learned herald was taken into a field which 'still retained faint traces of terraces and foundations.' The villager pointed to a bank of flowers and said: 'There are the Findernes' flowers, brought by Sir Geoffrey from the Holy Land, and do what we will, they will never die!'¹ Llewellyn Jewitt later reported that these flowers had in fact been transplanted from the field in which Sir Bernard saw them into his garden and had promptly died.² This gave rise to a modern variation of the legend in which the flowers *would not live* (my italics) if removed from the site of the Finderne's seat. This is patently untrue, as specimens are today found all over the village and, indeed, that in the herbarium in Derby Museum came from 6, Main Street by way of the Vicarage garden in 1863.³ One feels that Jewitt's informant suffered more from poor husbandry than the immutable consequences of legend!

The legend is so well known — and so often misquoted — that some investigation into its origins and the truth which may or may not lie behind it seems worthwhile. Only last year recently (April, 1982) a dispute, amicable enough needless to say, broke out among some ladies of the village as to which flower actually was the Finderne Flower. Thus several questions offer themselves for resolution: what is the Finderne Flower, and what is its true origin? who was Sir Geoffrey de Finderne, and where did he live?

The flower deposited in the museum in the last century is a form of *Narcissus*: *Narcissus Poeticus Plenus*. This variety has always been rare in this country, and is a native of southern Europe and the Mediterranean littoral. *N. Poeticus* has been known in this country since the 16th century or slightly earlier, and has a small flower. The Finderne Flower has a larger flower (hence, *plenus*) but not as full as that on the many more modern hybrids, one of which was that claimed as a Finderne Flower in April 1982. Thus there is no reason why this particular narcissus could not have been brought to these shores in the saddlebag of a Crusader: in the Holy Land, such a man might well have encountered them. Indeed, Mrs Patrick has suggested that the Crusades may have been the occasion for the introduction of *N. Poeticus* into these islands. Therefore, having established the name and possible origin of the flower itself, we must turn our attention to the family of Sir Geoffrey.

It is the significance of this legend which serves to underline the uncertainties surrounding the inter-relationships of the early Findernes. Furthermore, the ramifications of neighbouring families of Willington and Toke are also imperfectly understood, yet present some features suggestive of common descent with the Findernes. Therefore in the light of the recent and scholarly articles in the *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* by Mr M. J. Sayer on the Twyfordes,⁴ it seemed appropriate that a re-examination of the problem be undertaken.

The Rev S. P. H. Statham in his classic series of articles in the *Journal* on Domesday tenants and under-tenants⁵ goes into the problem to some extent when discussing those

holding land from the Abbey of Burton, which held the manor of Mickleover, of which Findern and Potlock were part.⁶ Here he traces the Willington family from an inferred sister of a Humphrey de Willington, who married a John de Willington in the first half of the twelfth century. Concerning the Findernes, he draws no conclusions from the evidence, apart from calling attention to the fact that members of the families of de Willington and Toke held land at Findern. Finally, in discussing Potlock, he suggests that the family of this name appeared to be descended from a Humphrey de Touques whom he suggests may well be the same man as Humphrey de Willington (q.v.).⁷ Of these families, the one which has most baffled the antiquarians in the past is that of Finderne⁸ and Statham never returned to any of these families in his subsequent articles.

However, to understand the origin of the Findernes it is necessary to re-examine Statham's reconstruction of the pedigree of the early Willingtons and Tokes.

In an account of the tenants at Willington from the first years of the twelfth century the Burton Cartulary says: *Hoc manerium tenet Umfridus ... ad annos xvi pro c s(hillings)*⁹ where the manorial holdings of Umfridus (Humphrey) amount to six bovates and a mill. He also appears to have held four bovates at Findern.¹⁰ In another entry, dated from after 1114, we find that Humphrey no longer held the manor, which had gone to Aluredus de Cambrai, but retained five bovates there.¹¹ For possible further identification of Humphrey, a charter of Sir Nicholas de Willington (dated between 1188 and 1197) wherein in return for certain donations to the Abbey, he enjoins prayers for the souls of *Johannis avi mei et Johannis patris mei et Johannis fratris mei et Philippi et Umfridi avunculorum meorum...etc.*¹² is instructive.

It is worthy of note that the land given had previously been held by a Richard *filius* Hugo, who as we shall see, is an identifiable member of the Finderne family. This last reference to Humphrey rather turns on the interpretation of *avunculorum*, the word *avunculus* being applicable to a man's uncles, paternal or maternal, or even great-uncles.

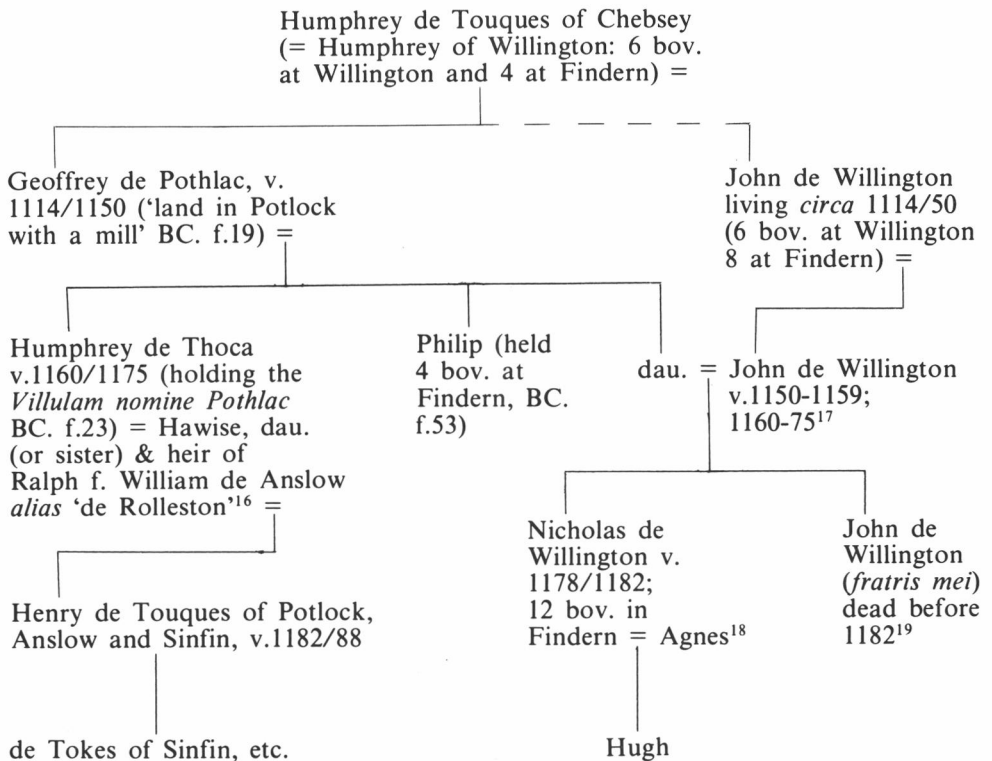
Statham identified this Humphrey with the Humphrey who held Chebsey, Co. Stafford, from Henry de Ferrers at the time of the Domesday Book, and whom he suggests may have been Humphrey de Touques *alias* Thouchamp. Certainly a Henry de Touques held Potlock a hundred years later.¹³ He was son of Humphrey de Potlock and grandson of a Geoffrey de Potlock. Could Humphrey de Touques, senior, be the same man as Humphrey who held Willington? As we have seen, he was certainly living at some time after 1114, and was so about twelve years earlier. To have held Chebsey as early as 1086 he would have to have been born no later than, say, 1065, which means he would have been a minimum of forty-nine years old after the lapse of his sixteen year lease of the manor of Willington, which makes the identification tenable at least.

Then there is the matter of Humphrey's relationship to Sir Nicholas de Willington, and it becomes plain that the possibility of two Humphreys must be admitted: Humphrey de Touques, of Chebsey and possibly of Willington (living 1086/1114) who could only be an *avunculus* of Sir Nicholas if one separates the Willington Humphrey from de Touques (even if we assume, with Statham, that he was a *great* uncle), and Humphrey de Thoca father of Henry, of Potlock. This latter Humphrey certainly seems to be the most likely candidate, and Statham makes a rather classical interpretation of *avunculus* when compiling his *stemma*; it is thus necessary to compare the *stemmata* of Nicholas de Willington with that of his contemporary, Henry of Potlock.

It can be seen that it would be more logical for Humphrey de Touques of Potlock to be Sir Nicholas' *avunculus* (as, say, mother's brother) than Humphrey de Willington (as grandmother's brother) as Statham, who dates the elder John de Willington too late: 1150/1159. The relevant Charter¹⁴ says that Abbot Robert (1150 to 1159)¹⁵ 'Concedes and confirms the donation of his predecessor Abbot Geoffrey (1114 to 1150) which they (Geoffrey and the monks) had conceded to this John (sic) and his heirs . . . in Willington, (i.e. 6 bovates of land) . . . held by his father before him' (and the same for two lots of four bovates in Findern).

This passage surely establishes John de Willington as living in 1150-1159 (and at

STEMMA II.



Aula. Furthermore, we can identify a probable grandson of this Hugh calling himself 'de Willington'.²⁵ Hugh de Finderne, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, makes a grant in soul-arms for himself and his wife Aline of land at *Willington* (my italics) to the Canons of Repton.²⁶ He is presumably identical to the Hugh de Finderne, to whom (with significantly, Nicholas de Willington) Robert de Alvel' quitclaimed four bovates of land at Findern.²⁷ For some reason this man is omitted from Jewitt's account of the family, which commences with two unconnected men: Walter and Nicholas. The latter, who was living 1251, is presumably the same as *Nicholas fil. Hugonis de Finderna*, who witnessed an acquittance from *Ralph clericus fil. Mag. Ricardi de Finderna* in 1248.²⁸ Regarding Walter, note should be taken of the Walter who held two bovates (for 3s.) at Findern in about 1100.²⁹ This, however, is by no means conclusive, for the family's holdings a century later accounted for considerably more than two bovates, and a single, relatively common, name tells us little. Jewitt dates Walter 'between 1181 and 1232' and he is found attesting a grant of Ranulph, Earl of Chester to the Church and Canons at Repton. The first witness of this is William de Vernon *Justiciarius Cestrie* and as William's appointment only dated from 1230, Walter de Finderne can be said to have flourished in 1230/1232, but not necessarily earlier.

Thus Hugh de Finderne is the first identifiable member of this family, living after 1199,³⁰ and was perhaps a brother of Master Richard de Finderne (q.v.). The question then arises, who was Hugh's father? The brothers of Nicholas de Willington the elder may represent possibles: John, described by Nicholas as *fratris mei* about 1188/1197³¹ and Philip de Willington who was a witness of a grant concerning Findern at the end of the twelfth century.³² These men were almost contemporaries of Hugh de Finderne, however. There is also a John *filius* Simon de Willington who made a grant in soul arms of land at Willington to the Canons of Repton; a witness was Sir Nicholas de Willington

of Willington, a fact which again might render this John (perhaps a cousin of Sir Nicholas) too young.³³ Finally, there is Philip, brother of Humphrey de Thoca (and cousin of John de Willington, junior?) who held four bovates at Findern.³⁴ Certainly he is the best candidate chronologically, but although the name Philip occurs again in the related Toke family,³⁵ it is unknown amongst the Findernes (as is Simon) and families did tend to keep reviving names of men from whom they descended, despite the usual and widespread practice of taking a son's name from his father-in-law or grandfather.³⁶

A final possibility is that Hugh (de Aula) third son of Sir Nicholas de Willington is in fact identical with Hugh de Finderne. Statham tells us that he had one bovaté in Findern³⁷ and that a son was William de Aula.³⁸ If this is so, then Aline his wife may have been the daughter (or sister) and heiress of Roger *filius* William de Wyaston who held land at Roston (and was probably a grandson of Orm, who held Edlaston and Wyaston from Ferrers in 1086³⁹). In accepting this identification, however, it becomes necessary to bestow upon Hugh three, perhaps four, surviving sons. One would have been William de Aula, who had a grant of nine acres of arable, two of meadow and a toft at Findern from Burton Abbey in exchange for four bovates he held there.⁴⁰ He was perhaps father of William de Aula of Wyaston, living in Henry III's time.⁴¹ Then there would have been Thomas (by inference)⁴² and Nicholas de Finderne, living in 1251, and in an acquittance of 1246 called *Nicholas fil. Hugonis de Finderna*.⁴³ The latter may have been the brother of Robert de Finderne who was witness (with Nicholas) to a grant of 1275, the beneficiary of which was *Thomas fil. Galfridi de Potlock*, Margaret his wife and their heir(s).⁴⁴ It is possible that this Robert was the man of this family who was reported to have witnessed a meteor which alarmed the people of Alvaston on 18th September, 1253.⁴⁵

In conclusion, a word or two needs to be said concerning the heraldry of these families. Research by such as Cecil Humphery-Smith⁴⁶ has established a common 'pre-heraldic' source for much of the symbolism of early medieval heraldry; as in the use of the lion by descendants and heirs of the Dukes of Brabant from the eleventh century, and the use of the tinctures of *gules* and *or* by a large group of inter-related Anglo-Norman houses. Of the latter group, the Ferrers seem to have used some form of canting horseshoe badge, later transmitted from their earliest arms to those of several local families who held land from them, as was the *vairé or and gules* from their later coat, inherited as early as the third quarter of the twelfth century from Peveril.

Consequently, one might expect to find that the arms of Willington, Finderne and Toke to be similar, but such is not the case. The Finderne and Willington arms can be seen quartered in Harleian MS. 1093 at the British Library: 'Quarterly 1 & 4 *argent a chevron engrailed between three crosses formée fitchée sable* (FINDERNE) 2 & 3 *gules a saltire vairé or and azure* (WILLINGTON); Crest (of Finderne) *an ox yoke chained or, hook gules*.⁴⁷

The arms here given for Willington originally pertained to the family of Champernowne of UMBERLEIGH, Co. Devon (which house, incidentally, descended from an heiress of a younger branch of the de Solignys or Solneys, of Newton, near Repton). However, the heiress of the Champernownes married Sir Ralph Willington of Willington Court, Glos. (formerly Sandhurst) in about 1253,⁴⁸ Sir Ralph being a nephew of the younger Nicholas de Willington. It is this last fact which makes the use of the Champernowne arms as a quartering of Finderne and, ultimately, of Harpur, seem incongruous, as Margery, the heiress of the younger Nicholas was a first cousin of the first user of these arms, and in normal heraldic usage, only descendants of the Willington-Champernowne match would be entitled to the arms. However, heraldry was not brought under direct Royal control until 1415, and it seems likely that the senior branch of the Willingtons also assumed these arms of their own volition. The question then arises: what arms were used previous to the Champernowne marriage? Plainly coat armour must have been used, for at least one of the family had enjoyed knightly status.⁴⁹ If the hypotheses propounded above have any substance, the arms of Toke might be thought to have a bearing on the situation. According to Glover's *Ordinary* Robert de Touke bore *Barry of six sable and argent*.⁵⁰ Of the numerous

unidentified coats-of-arms in Derbyshire churches, the six or so noted by Wyrley at Walton-on-Trent in 1592 included *Barry of six argent and sable on a canton of the second a fleur-de-lys of the first*,⁵¹ which is closely allied enough to Toke to be a candidate for the original arms of Willington. It will be noted that the Finderne arms although different in pattern were also tinctured *argent and sable*. Jewitt⁵² noted that the Norman tympanum at the church at Findern included a *cross formée* which was perhaps the inspiration for the arms of the family.

Whilst the various hypotheses put forward above seem, at this late remove, incapable of proof, it is to be hoped that the amount of circumstantial evidence, compounded with the probabilities that have been highlighted above, will show how the legend of the Finderne's descent from a crusading 'Sir Geoffrey' who brought back a narcissus from the Holy Land, may well rest on more solid fact than may at first glance be apparent. The similarities between the early histories of the Houses of Toke, Potlock, Willington and Finderne are such that it is unreasonable to question their inter-relationship. That they all descend in the male line from a common ancestor seems extremely probable, although final certainty is likely for ever to elude the researcher. That this is so detracts nothing, however, from the antiquity of these families, or the considerable interest which attaches to their origins in post-Conquest south Derbyshire. It may, however, come as a disappointment to the residents of Findern to find that their flower was probably brought back from the First Crusade by Sir Geoffrey de Potlock, who lived at Potlock, not Findern Manor House: in contrast, it makes the site of Potlock house very important indeed.

A note on the seat of the Finderne family.

From the foregoing it is to be hoped that it will be realised that the early members of the house of Toke/Touchamps were seated at Potlock. Indeed, as late as 1314 Sir Robert de Toke was described in a charter as *Dom. de Pothlac*. Shortly afterwards this estate seems to have passed to his kinsman John de Finderne, and to have become their chief seat, rather than Findern Manor House, the vestiges of which Burke claimed to have discerned. A chapel dedicated to St. Leonard was attached to it under the Tokes, but was dissolved at the time of the Reformation. The house lasted until c.1800, when it was demolished by John Glover, who built the present Potlock House, now under threat from gravel extraction by Amey Roadstone Ltd. It is doubtful if Findern Manor House was, as Sir Bernard Burke believed, 'one of the quaintest and largest family mansions in the Midlands.' Potlock Manor may well have been, however. Both became surplus to requirements after the Finderne heiress carried the very extensive family estates to the Harpurs in 1558: Findern Manor House was dismantled in 1712. Potlock was no doubt tenanted, and later sold to the Burdets and later still to Glover.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am much indebted for botanical research and advice to my friend and former colleague, Susan Patrick (who adjudicated at Findern in 1982) and to John Crossling and Stephen Jackson, also of Derby Museum.

NOTES

- ¹ *Vicissitudes of Families*, II, (London, 1861), 11-13.
- ² L. Jewitt, *Reliquary*, III (1863), 198-9.
- ³ Derby Museum, 408-5-1971 (614/6): grown from a bulb in the Vicarage garden, 1863.
- ⁴ M.J. Sayer, *D.A.J.*, XCIV (1974), 26 f. and XCVII (1977), 23 f.
- ⁵ The Rev. S.P.H. Statham, *D.A.J.*, XLVI (1924), L (1929) and LII (1931).
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, XLVII (1925), 157-9. They also held land at Willington although the manor was held by Ralph fitz Hubert.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ cf. Jewitt, *Reliquary*, III (1863), 192-9.
- ⁹ Burton Cartulary, Wrottesley's edn. in *Staffordshire Historical Collections*, v, pt.1 (1884) (hereafter Burton Cartulary).
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* A Leuric and Alured (presumably Alured de Cambrai) also held 4 bovates there; no one

person held more than this.

- 11 Alured was presumably of the de Chambrais of Bearwardcote, which family Statham
postulates as cadets of de Ferrers, *D.A.J.*, XLVII (1925), 184.
- 12 Burton Cartulary, f.35.
- 13 *Ibid.*, f.23.
- 14 *Ibid.*, f.28.
- 15 He also served 1175-1177, but this seems a less likely date in view of a subsequent document
referring to Nicholas of 1178/82.
- 16 William de Rolleston held a manor from Ferrers at Sinfin (*Swynefen*). His son Ralph held
half a knight's fee there in the time of Henry I (Burton Cartulary, f.33). Ralph also held
Anslow, Co. Stafford from the Abbey; see Statham, *D.A.J.*, XLVII (1925), 199.
- 17 Burton Cartulary, f.17: granted 7 bovates in Willington and 12 in Findern.
- 18 Burton Cartulary, f.28: *Agnes vero uxor et Hugo filius meus*.
- 19 Probably an elder brother.
- 20 For his name see above, n.12.
- 21 See *stemma* II.
- 22 I.H. Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters 1274-1275 (circa 1188/97)* cf.2756, where Nicholas ac-
knowledges that he holds *inter alia* a mill in Potlock in fee of William, Abbot of Burton
(1204).
- 23 cf. Hugh f.Gamel de Alsop at the same period; his younger brother, Henry de Alsop held
Alsop and was ancestor of that family (Local MS.6341).
- 24 *D.A.J.*, XLVII (1925), 158.
- 25 Thomas f.Thomas f.Hugh de Willington, Repton Charter 72 (*D.A.J.*, LIII (1932), 89, no.80).
- 26 Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, 2571.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 2757.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 1277; presumably a kinsman, cf. for *Ricardi*: Jeayes, 1276.
- 29 Burton Cartulary, f.12.
- 30 Jeayes' dating.
- 31 Burton Cartulary, f.35.
- 32 Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, 1276.
- 33 Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, 2569 where it is implied (in a grant of soul arms from Nicholas
de Willington to the Canons of Repton) that he is already dead.
- 34 Burton Cartulary, f.53.
- 35 e.g. Philip de Touke, living c.1216/1236, q.v. Jeayes *Derbyshire Charters*, 936.
- 36 But note that Humphrey was never revived amongst the Tokes. Walter, however, was
common to Toke and Finderne, and repeated Nicholas's and Johns to Willington and
Finderne.
- 37 *D.A.J.*, XLVII (1925), 158.
- 38 q.v. *supra*.
- 39 Domesday Book for Derbyshire; on this postulated relationship see also Jeayes, *Derbyshire
Charters*, 1130-4, cf. Statham, *op. cit.*, 189.
- 40 Burton Cartulary, f.43.
- 41 Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, 2719: 'William fil. Willelmi de Aula de Wyardestone ...'.
q.v. *supra*, n.25.
- 42 Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, 1277 (cf.2584) and Jewitt, *op.cit.*, 193.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 2584. Thomas de Potlock must surely be a descendant of Humphrey de Thoca of
Potlock (q.v.).
- 44 British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian EIII f.41.
- 45 *Anglo-Norman Armory*, (Canterbury, 1978), *passim*.
- 46 This marshalling is through the marriage of Margery, daughter and heiress of Nicholas de
Willington of Willington (junior) with Hugh, son of John (or Robert) de Finderne before
1252.
- 47 Burke, *Landed Gentry* (1875 edn.), II, 1532 gives this heiress as Joan, dau. and heir of Sir
William de Champernowne; Statham (*D.A.J.*, XLIX (1927), 126) calls her father Oliver. The
latter appears to be correct.
- 48 At this relatively early period, however, this did not mean automatic use of arms, but
comparisons with contemporary south Derbyshire families of similar status (e.g. Toke,
Basset, etc.) suggests that arms would most likely have been used.
- 49 Sleigh in *Reliquary*, XII (1872), 96, gives *Barry of six argent and sable billetée or a quarter
ermine* which has the *billetée* effect of the Nottinghamshire Tokes, cf. Papworth's *Ordinary*
293, 54.
- 50 Derby Library, Local MS.6341.
- 51 *Reliquary*, III (1863), 191.