

THE SUPPOSED MONASTERY AT BEDDINGHAM.

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I give the above title to this paper, because the existence of a Monastery in Beddingham seems to me to be a matter of "supposition." Various writers have made mention of a monastery there, so that in common with others I had been induced to accept the statement. Upon enquiry, however, I find there are some difficulties to be encountered, and the question whether there ever *was* or *was not* a Monastery in the parish of Beddingham seems to deserve consideration.

The statement that there once was a Monastery there is broadly made, and while it is accepted by some, it is denied by others. There remains, therefore, the probability or the possibility of its existence. But here we are thrown back into the far distant past, and, at the best, are left to speculate upon what *might have been*, without the ability to arrive at any definite conclusion whether it *was* or *was not*.

Was it before the Conquest? If so, was it,—as would seem to be the case—abolished before that era? Again, *what* was it? and *where* was it? These are fit questions for Archæological enquiry.

The advocates of probability must here take their stand. If the Monastery were there at all it would be before the Conquest, for if the Record to which by and bye I shall have occasion to refer points to the Beddingham of Sussex, such must have been the case. I have made enquiries into the manorial history of the parish, with a view to gather thence some evidence which might tend to substantiate the existence of this Monastery. There are herein many points of interest to the Archæologist, which may be more fitly considered by some future historian of the parish.

But we have to look back into times previous to the Conquest, when the tenure of lands with religious houses and churches was frequently matter of dispute; when the duration of existence in the case of Monasteries was frequently somewhat brief, and the religious foundation sank down into manor or farm. Many tenures also were disturbed at the period of the Conquest, when confiscations were rife, so that it is not strange if we find—as we do find—somewhat of confusion in the grants then made. But no mention is made of the particular Monastery into whose existence I have searched, neither can I find with any approach to certainty what manor or farm represented it. My enquiry had special reference to the question of which I treat, so that I abstain from introducing matter with which I do not feel myself concerned, because no clue is afforded me towards the solution of the difficulty which has to be encountered. With regard also to the name of the parish, “Beddingham,” I find a great variety of spelling in the documents to which I have referred. So that I see necessity for caution in applying to this particular parish any statement which I meet touching manors, &c. A great difficulty in such investigations always besets the Archæological enquirer, and I find special difficulties in the present case, so that the more caution is needed. Etymological questions are to be met and considered; and the present stage of Archæological science demands special reference to the most minute and apparently trivial matters. The genuineness and authenticity of ancient documents are to be canvassed, and the simulation of fact collated with fact itself. Statements must be submitted to the test of evidence, and evidence weighed according to its nature.

I come then to the statement which is made by Horsfield. In his *History of Sussex*, vol. i., p. 339, under “Beddingham,” he says, *here* was “a Monastery in the beginning of the ninth century.” In a note he refers to “Tanner’s Not. Mon.” In his work, “Lewes and its Environs,” there is this passage under “Beddingham”: “Tanner says there was a Monastery here in the beginning of the ninth century, and refers to Mon. Ang. vol. iii., p. 118, a. b. “de terris in Denton, ad hoc vel ad Selesciense monasterium spectantibus.” We have not, however, been able to obtain any further in-

formation on this point." Tanner's work I have not at hand, nor do I believe it is regarded as a valid authority; but Tanner, Horsfield says, refers to Dugdale, so to Dugdale I also refer. And here I feel bound to bear in mind the wise caution given by Mr. Blaauw in p. 6, of vol i., S. A. C., where he says, "It may be permitted here to caution antiquaries from drawing too hasty conclusions from similarity of names." Reference to Dugdale shows me that "Beddingham" is mentioned in various records, and under varied forms of spelling. In the charter of Richard I. there is a recital of the grant by Matilda Countess of Moreton to Grestein of two hides of land, and the church in "Bedingeham," this being the "Beddingham" of which I write. We find also a recital, temp. Edward I., of a grant to the Priory of Walsingham, in Norfolk, of the Church of St. Andrew "de Bedingham," also in that county, "ex dono Huberti de Burgo." There is under the head of "Berkingense Cœnobium in agro Essexiensi," a recital of a grant "ad augmentum monasterii tui quod dicitur Bedenham," but this clearly has no reference to or relationship with the "Beddingham" of Sussex, the two titles being etymologically different. In the "Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici" (Thorpe) there appear "Beadingaham," "Beadyngham," "Bedingehom," all of which are set down in the index of the work as "Beddingham, Sussex." The special record of the Monastery of Beddingham, wherever and whatever it may have been, appears in a Charter of 801, "King Cénwulf of Mercia," (Diplomatarium Anglicum, p. 45). In this Charter it is spelled "Beadyngham;" and in another Charter, 825, it is recited as "Bedingehom." These Charters appear, too, in the Monasticon. In the will of King Alfred, also, there are named "Beadingas" and "Beadingaham." Out of this variety of spelling, we do not gather information with regard to the special question under consideration, but are thrown upon the Charter of 801, where a distinct statement is made. This appears to be *the one Charter* upon which the *supposition* of the "Beddingham Monastery" is grounded, and corroboration is inferred from the supposed fact that the neighbouring parish of "Denton" is therein named as the place where the lands in dispute were situate. "Selsey," also, is named as

the religious house or See to which the lands were allotted, and as these places so named are represented by places in Sussex bearing similar names, the conclusion is drawn that the Monastery of "Beadyngham" was in "Beddingham," now so called, in Sussex. In the recital, also, of 825, the place again appears as "Bedingehom;" so that under these two varied forms of spelling, the same parish is described.

If it be that Beddingham and Denton, which are mentioned, are the Beddingham and Denton as we know them now in Sussex—and they are neighbouring parishes—the mere fact of their juxtaposition is no proof of the Monastery of Beddingham; for Selsey, which is far distant from both, appears as the successful claimant. And if a Monastery existed at Beddingham of sufficient importance to enter into dispute with the See of Selsey in the matter of lands, we might not unreasonably look for some further record of such a Monastery than that which is thus afforded. Herein, it seems, lies the main point. It is not credulous to accept this evidence, but no one who desires something more by way of corroboration can justly be deemed sceptical. And the Charters of Selsey, as they stand in the Monasticon, are "full," Palgrave says, "of the most extraordinary corruptions."

The question then occurs—not *what* was it? for of that no evidence is forthcoming—but *where* was it, if it was in Beddingham of Sussex? In Vol. I., S. A. C., we have a paper by Mr. Blaauw, "On the Translation of Saint Lewinna," of whom he writes, that "her body was buried, and her bones held in honour, at a Monastery dedicated to St. Andrew, in Sussex, not far from the sea, the position of which we shall presently inquire into." The martyrdom of this Saint occurred between 680 and 690. In 1058, a monk of the Benedictine Monastery of Bergue, in Flanders, named Balgerus, made a voyage to England, apparently with the view of collecting relics of Saints. A contemporary monk, named Drogo, gives the narrative of the voyage. Being driven from their course by unfavourable winds, the crew were fain to put their ship into such port as they could fetch, and that port is called "Sevordt." The harbour is described as of

narrow entrance, and having on each side thereof two headlands, or cliffs, and Mr. Blaauw's opinion is that "it would be difficult to describe more accurately than this ancient topographer has done the mouth of the river Ouse, which now forms Newhaven Harbour, but then entered the sea near Seaford." I must here take the liberty of quoting Mr. Blaauw's paper (p. 49, Vol. I., S. A. C.) verbatim: "The next morning the Monk Balgerus began to inquire immediately whether there was any church near, for it was Easter Sunday, and he perceived at a distance a Monastery separated from the port by almost three leagues. Taking one companion, he gladly started on his journey, and, when half way, sat down, pale and covered with cold perspiration. A grey-headed old man coming up, Balgerus asked him, 'What Monastery is that; what relics may be there, and to whose honour is it dedicated?' 'It is the Monastery of St. Andrew,' he answers, 'which you see, and Saint Lewinna, Virgin and Martyr, rests there also in her body, the excellence and merit of whom is every day testified by heavenly power. You have your answer; do you wish for more?' 'No; farewell.' No such monastery is known to have existed, but there may have been one, notwithstanding the silence of records. In Dugdale's Monasticon (Vol. VIII. p. 1164) are deeds relating to a dispute concerning lands at Denton (a village two miles and a half from Seaford, on the road taken probably by the monk), 'claimed A.D. 801, by Cœnulph, King of Mercia, as belonging to the Monastery of Bedinghom' (Beddingham, two miles and a half from Lewes) 'and on the other hand, claimed for the See of Selsey by the Bishop Wethun, as having been transferred by the Abbot Pleggaard to Selsey, by permission of King Offa' (A.D. 758—796). By a deed, A.D. 825, Beornulf, King of Mercia, surrenders it to the See of Selsey." Vol. I., S. A. C.

It will thus be seen that Mr. Blaauw points to the *probability* of the existence of a Monastery at Beddingham, the point of debarcation, as he views it, being Seaford, or the mouth of the river Ouse there. On the other side we must hear Mr. Lower, and I must take the same liberty of quoting words of his from his notice of Saint Lewinna in his

“Worthies of Sussex” (p. 319). “The topographical description of the port given by the Monk does not at all agree with the outlet of the Ouse, where the headlands of Newhaven and Seaford are nearly three miles apart.

“My own opinion is, that the haven reached by the shipmen was that of Cuckmere, which, though not strictly speaking in Seaford, forms the eastern boundary of that parish for a considerable distance. This little harbour exactly corresponds with Drogo’s description, there being a high cliff on each side, the one culminating westward at Seaford Head, and the other eastward at Beachy Head. The Monastery of St. Andrew I take to be Alfriston Church, which is still dedicated to that Saint, and where there was a seat of religion in very early times. This would be visible from Cuckmere, the distance being between four and five miles.”

In the topographical question here introduced, I incline decidedly to Mr. Lower’s view, and consider it to be satisfactorily proved that the Monk Balgerus did not see the “Monastery of Beddingham” on his route from his port of debarcation, wherever that may have been. If Seaford were the port, there were physical impossibilities in the way: if Cuckmere were the harbour, then he saw Alfriston and not Beddingham.

But, then, here again we have the “Beddingham Monastery” still in supposition, because Mr. Blaauw observes that though records are silent on the subject, still there *might have been such a place*. Mr. Lower’s evidence, though it does not touch the actual question under consideration, yet operates as a check upon the question of *probability* raised by Mr. Blaauw. We come, then, to the question, *where was it*, if *our* Beddingham be the *locus in quo*? Upon this point I have neither evidence nor records, nor even tradition to aid me. “Imagination fondly stoops to trace” various probable sites, but the Archæologist is not at liberty to draw upon his imaginative faculties. The Church, though bearing evident marks of considerable antiquity, can scarcely be expected to carry us back to the dates which have been alluded to. I have never remarked, neither have I ever heard mentioned, any locality in the neighbourhood of the Church as the site of a Monastery. In Hussey’s “Churches of Sussex”

(p. 194), it is stated under "Beddingham," and in reference to the Monastery, that "nothing definite appears to be known of this foundation, the situation of which is totally lost."

When I was engaged in collecting materials for my paper on "Glynde," published in Vol. XX., my attention was directed to a portion of the parish of Beddingham, whence a small rent-charge is payable to the vicar of Glynde. This portion of the parish though called and known now, probably for brevity's sake, as "Preston," was originally known, and is entered in maps and old books, &c., as "Preston Beckhelwyne." This was suggestive—"Preston" would be "Priest Town," and "Beckhelwyne" is clearly a corruption of "Bec-Hellouin," the abbey in Normandy to which this Manor with the Church of Glynde was granted by William Earl of Moreton between 1096 and 1139.

There are evident traces of very ancient road communication through this parish, which would incline one to suppose that there might have been here or hereabout some halting place, or "travellers' bungalow" as the Anglo-Indian would term it. A roadway may still be partly traced under the hill leading from Itford (? Atte-ford) in the direction of Firle, thence viâ Alciston and Alfriston towards Eastbourne. This road would seem to be in conjunction with the Ermine Street passing from Lewes to Newhaven by Iford (Eye-ford), by Swanboro' to Northease (? Northeye) through Southease (Southeye), thence a diversion to the eastward crossing the estuary to Itford (? Atte-ford), and thence taking a route to the north under the hill by Asham, then to N.E., through Beddingham. This road communication is deserving of notice by those interested in such matters. Horsfield records the discovery of several skeletons, male and female, with arms, ornaments, &c., in a field at no great distance from this road. Wisdom, in his MSS., often referred to in my paper on Glynde, speaks of Sir Thomas Carr's, "Drayton-field," as the locality where Major Shadwell, Capt. Fraser, and Dr. Shrapnal, found skeletons, and a spear-head about 18 inches long, the handle being decayed and gone. The date of this discovery would be about 1804 or 5.

At "Preston Beckhelwyne" there is a "Crundel" or

“Crumbel.” Professor Leo speaks of a Crundel as “a spring or well, with its cistern,¹ trough, or reservoir, to receive the water, such as are still found in the banks by the side of great roads, sometimes furnished with an iron ladle secured by a chain.” (Local Nomenclature of the A. Saxons.) Kemble (Cod: Diplom:) says the name denotes “a sort of watercourse, a meadow through which a stream flows.” Thorpe (Glossary, Diplom: Angl:) believes it “signifies a *tumulus* or barrow, and is akin to the Welsh Carneddaw, a Cairn or heap of stones.” Here in this instance of a “Crundel” it is a spring with a pond or reservoir, whence there runs a watercourse to the “Glynde Ritch,” and it is to be found in a field bearing the suggestive title of “Stoneburg field.” A place of some importance this Beddingham “Crundel” must have been to wayfarers in the olden time, when their road to which I have alluded passed by it, and was bounded by the chalk-hills of the Southdowns on the one side, and the estuary of the Ouse on the other. Traces of this road are now disappearing before the operations of the steam plough.

In this “Stoneburg field” there are discernible at particular seasons traces of lines as of the foundations of old buildings. But excavation has brought nothing to light which might indicate ancient work. And, moreover, there is evidence to show that here, some 150 years ago, or thereabout, there stood a malthouse, and the lines discernible very much resemble the lines which the foundations of a malthouse would present, so that great caution is needed in treating of them as appertaining to any other building than that. But it is well known that foundations of ancient buildings have been taken up and used for parochial or domestic purposes, as necessity arose, by those who considered themselves at liberty to do so. (Vide vol. xix., re

¹ One is bound to call to mind here the lines in Marmion, (Canto vi., xxx.)

“A little fountain cell,
Where water, clear as diamond spark,
In a stone basin fell.
Above, some half-worn letters say,
'Drink, weary pilgrim, drink and pray
For the kind soul of Sybil Grey
Who built this cross and well.'”

Northeys, p. 19-20.) Such, for all we know, may have been the case here; but, whether it was so or not, excavations here in recent times have not produced specimens of work which could be attributed to the days when this "Monastery of Beddingham" is supposed to have existed. Some few coins have been found in this locality at various times, several Nuremberg tokens, two or three Roman coins, and one of Offa, which last is now in the collection of J. C. Lucas, Esq., F.S.A., of Lewes. Coins also at various times and in various places have been discovered in the parish, but as these have been dispersed by gift or sale I have not the means of ascertaining what they are, or where they were found.

The only conclusion, then, which seems open is, that, if there ever was a Monastery at Beddingham it *was before the Conquest*, and that it had fallen into decay and oblivion before that era; for Wm. of Malmesbury "makes no sign." The case rests upon the two charters recorded in Thorpe's "Diplomatarium," *i.e.*, 801, King Cénwulf of Mercia, Reg. B. xviii., fol. 6, penes D. and C. Cicest: and 825 Archbp. Wulfred, M.S., Reg. B. xviii., fol. 6, penes D. and C. Cicest. In the latter it stands "de hæreditate Ecclesiæ Bedingehomes," in the former as "Monasterium in Beadyngham;" but, "Monasterium," Mr. Lower observes, was "in those times a term occasionally applied to very small ecclesiastical foundations."

It may be remarked that I do but leave the question where I found it, and I am free to confess that such is the case. I have given much thought and made considerable enquiry upon the subject, in which I felt interested, and though the result is that I am compelled to leave the case still as one of "supposition," I can, at all events, leave on hand a record of careful investigation, with some few points of evidence which may possibly be of service to future enquirers.
