

THE NORMAN ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY OF PELHAM.

Contributed by MARK ANTONY LOWER, M.A.

In vol. iii. of these "Collections," I published a somewhat elaborate account of the Badges of the Pelhams and De la Warrs. I travelled scores of miles to gather information on this matter. I also, in brief, traced out the Pelham and La Warr pedigrees. In the present (xxiv.) vol. I have contributed an article (see p. 5, ante) on Old Sussex Families, in which I have again mentioned the Pelhams among the oldest existing houses of Sussex. Now I have something *new* to say about that truly noble family.

There are in the county of Hertford three adjacent parishes called Pelham—1. *Brent-Pelham* (probably because at some period the village had been *burnt* down); 2. *Stocking-Pelham*; and 3, *Furneux-Pelham*. From which of these parishes the Pelhams migrated to Sussex, it would, after the lapse of centuries, be difficult to decide. From the Saxon character of the *name*, it has always been supposed that the *family* was one of the few who remained possessed of their good lands after the Norman Conquest. This I am prepared to shew is probably not the case, notwithstanding the belief of Dugdale, Collins, and later genealogists on the subject. My decided opinion is that the Pelhams are of as true a Norman descent as the Nevills and the Montagues, and any other of our aristocracy whose names are to be found in the much venerated but apocryphal "Roll of Battle Abbey." I am led to this opinion by the statements of Mr. E. Avenel, who, perhaps, more than any other living man, has made

the history of our oldest families his study.¹ He has, to my mind at least, proved that the great majority of our aristocracy are of Norman—not of Anglo-Saxon blood. Indeed, if we reflect upon the subject, we can scarcely think that many families of ante-Norman race could have survived the Norman Conquest. True it is that Hereward, and a few other brave men, resisted the new dynasty; and equally true it is that might overcame right. The saying of Master Wace must be accepted: “The Normans came and *conquered the land;*” and William might have truly said, “*Veni, vidi, vici.*” Yet the serfs, of whom Gurth in “*Ivanhoe*” is the true type, still exist in Saxondom; and I believe that it is only by their plodding industry that his representatives of more recent times have raised themselves to wealth and position. Our old nobility must be Norman. Did not the Israelites drive the Canaanites out of the Promised Land? So I firmly believe that it was with the Normans: but why, in the decrees of Providence, it was so ordered, we cannot say. Of course this remark must be modified, as only applicable to great families, for doubtless the bulk of our present population is Saxon, though with considerable admixture of other peoples and races.

“This noble family” (meaning the Pelhams) observes Mr. Avenel, “has been cursorily treated of by our peerage-writers. Collins traces it to *Ralph*, who held Pelham from the See of London, 1086, and who (or his ancestors) had probably possessed it before the Conquest. He also, with other writers, mentions a *Ralph de Pelham*, who held a knight’s fee in Hertfordshire from the same See in 1145, which, they add, *Jordan*, his son, held in the reign of John. They remark that the three Pelicans, the arms of Pelham, were formerly existing in the church of Pelham; and that *Walter de Pelham* was living in 1265 and died in 1292, possessed of Pelham in Hertfordshire, Cottenham in Kent [Cambridgeshire], and Gromestead in Essex. Although these statements are more accurate than is usual in the history of early English families, they still leave much untold, and an examination of the subject will not be without fruit.

¹ (Of this more, probably, hereafter.)

"It appears," continues Mr. Avenel, "that the Pelhams were originally a branch of the Barons of Bec or Bec-Crespin, in Normandy, though from the very early adoption of the name Pelham, and the number of branches of the family, it is not very easy to prove the identity of the Pelhams and Becs."

Concerning Bec-Crépin (St. Martin du) M. Louis du Bois, in his "Itinéraire" of Normandy, says—"Arrondissement de Le Havre, commune de Criquetot. Autrefois Le Bec-Vauquelin, et Le Bec-de-Mortemer. Il avait titre de baronnie avec haute-justice. Turstin du Bec-Crepin portait l'étandard du Saint-Siège à la bataille de Hastings, en 1066."² According to Master Wace, however, the Pope's consecrated standard was borne by the young knight Toustains (Turstin) Fitz-Rou le Blanc. This is probably an *alias* for Turstin du Bec. Surnames continually varied in those days.

GILBERT, surnamed Crespin, Baron of Bec and Castellan of Tillieres, in the arrondissement of Evereux,³ was a man of note in his time. He aided Herluin, the first Abbot of Bec, in founding that monastery in 1034.⁴

WILLIAM, Baron of Bec-Crespin, his son, accompanied the Conqueror in 1066, and had extensive grants in Barony in Hertfordshire, and the neighbouring districts, consisting of at least 25 lordships (Domesday, 140). He died before 1086, and left issue, 1, GOISFRID or Geoffry; 2, Ralph; 3, Gilbert, Abbot of Westminster, who, in 1086, held lands in Buckinghamshire from Walter Giffard (Domesday, 147), and was probably son of William. Goisfrid was an ancestor of the Lords Bec or De Beke, of Eresby in Lincolnshire.

GEOFFRY de Bec, the eldest son, inherited the Barony, and

² I shall not soon forget a glance at the venerable Abbey of Bec. When a party of 23 members of our Society visited Normandy in 1857, on our route from Rouen to Caen, we encountered a very steep hill, and the gentlemen were requested to leave the *diligence* for the ease of our team of seven horses, which they did. On walking up the hill, I observed on the sunny banks of the road a profusion of the largest wild strawberries I ever saw. With the gallantry which is the distinguishing characteristic of antiquaries (!), I gathered

a handful of that delicious fruit and presented the same to the ladies inside the carriage. "Virtue is its own reward;" for, on turning round for this purpose, I caught sight of a majestic tower, and eagerly asked the *conducteur* what building that was. "Monsieur," he replied, "c'est L'Abbaye du Bec." I need not say what pleasure that sight gave me.

³ Tillieres was an ancient *compté*. In the 12th century it was called *Tegulense Castrum*. (Ordericus Vitalis.)

⁴ Anselme, vi., 632; Moreri, Dict. Historique.

held it in 1086. His gifts to the Abbey of Norwich were confirmed by a charter of Henry I.⁵ Dugdale's Baronage and Chauncy's Hertfordshire give no account of the descent of this Barony; but it appears that Geoffry was succeeded by his son,

WILLIAM de Bec, who in 1103 witnessed the foundation of Coges Priory, Oxfordshire, by Manasser Arsic,⁶ and probably had a daughter and heiress, who carried the Barony to another family. We now return to

RALPH (de Bec) of *Pelham*, in whose line the male succession of the English branches of De Bec seems to have vested. In 1086 this noble held from Geoffry de Bech, his brother, Wenrige and Hengestansdone in the county of Hertford,⁷ Middleton, Cambridgeshire, from Picot de Cambridge⁸ and Pelham (Peleham), and Eldberie, Hertfordshire, from the See of London.⁹ Pelham became the chief seat of the family, and they bore the title of that Lordship. Ralph de Bec, after the compilation of Domesday, appears to have received considerable grants in Cambridgeshire from William Peverel of Dover, whose Barony afterwards vested in the baronial family of *Peché*, with which family and Cambridgeshire we find the Pelhams subsequently much connected. Ralph appears to have had several sons: 1, Robert de Bec; 2, Alan de Bec, who is mentioned about the time of Henry I. as Dapifer to the ancestors of the Peché barons. (*Liber Niger*.)

ROBERT de Bec witnessed the charter of William Peverel of Dover, in favour of Thorney Abbey, Cambridgeshire, *temp.* Henry I.¹⁰ He was father of—1, Ralph de Pelham; 2, Arnulf de Bec, who gave lands in Staffordshire to Tutbury Priory, *temp.* Stephen;¹¹ 3, Gilbert de Bec, who is mentioned in Lincolnshire,¹² and who possessed estates in Cambridgeshire, held from Hugh de Douvres, which in 1165 were held by his son, Alan, then a minor.¹³

RALPH de Pelham, the eldest son, in 1165, held one knight's fee in Hertfordshire from the Bishop of London by ancient enfeoffment (*Liber Niger*). His son appears to have been

⁵ Mon. Angl. (original edition), i., 413.

⁶ Mon. Angl., i., 574.

⁷ Domesday, 140.

⁸ *Ib.*, 201.

⁹ *Ib.*, 133.

¹⁰ Mon. Angl., i., 247.

¹¹ *Ib.* i., 355.

¹² *Ib.*, i., 823.

¹³ *Liber Niger Scaccarii*.

HUGH de Pelham, whose sons were—1, Ralph Fitz-Hugh, whose widow Alicia in 1199 brought a suit for dower against Walter de Pelham,¹⁴ 2, Helias de Pelham, who died before 1199, to whom Walter de Pelham, his brother, was heir ; 3, Walter ; 4, Petrus de Bec, who in 1194 was defendant in a suit for Middleton, Cambridgeshire, which Ralph de Bec, or Pelham, had in 1086 held from Picot, of Cambridge, and which Robert Picot now claimed, probably as heir of Picot of Cambridge.¹⁵

This shows the connection between the Pelhams and De Becs. Peter appears in 1218 as Peter de Pelham, when he returned to his allegiance. This appears by a Breve directed to the Viscount of Cambridge (see Hardy, Rot. Claus., i, 376). WALTER de Pelham,¹⁶ the eldest surviving son, lived in the reign of King John. In 1199, as already observed, he was defendant in a suit for dower by the widow of Ralph Fitz-Hugh. It appears in the proceedings in a lawsuit about the year 1200, Elias and his brother Walter had claimed lands at Hinton, Cambridgeshire, against the Abbot of Eynesham, in right of their mother, Avicia, but, as was alleged, had resigned their claims by deed, as appeared by the charter of Everard de Bech, then Viscount (that is, sheriff) of Cambridgeshire.¹⁷ "I do not as yet see with certainty," observes Mr. Avenel, "the name of Walter's son or sons, who lived in the reign of Henry III. Probably the Walter Pelham who is mentioned in the peerages as living in 1265 may have been one ; but several members of the family are mentioned about 1272. There is some chronological difficulty, which enquiry will remove."

1. Walter de Bec, styled "le chamberlain," descended, perhaps, from Alan de Bec, *temp.* Henry I., who was Dapifer¹⁸ to the ancestors of the Peché family, of Brunne.¹⁹ This Walter de Bec held lands in the 13th century from Gilbert Peché.²⁰

2. Walter de Pelham, *c.* 1272, held from this Walter le

¹⁴ Palgrave, Rot. Cur. Regis, i, 408.

¹⁵ Ibid., i., 15.

¹⁶ Hardy, Rot. Claus., 376.

¹⁷ Palgrave, Cur. Regis, ii., 260.

¹⁸ "Dapifer." Qui dapes fert. Qui cibos mensæ imponit. Literally a bearer

of dainties, or *sewer*; in old times a principal officer of kings and magnates. See my "Patronymica," p. 82.

¹⁹ Liber Niger Scac.

²⁰ Rotuli Hundredorum, ii., 525.

Chamberlain two hides of land in Cottenham, of the fee of Peché as of the see of Ely.²¹ He was probably the son of the Walter Pelham mentioned as living in 1265.

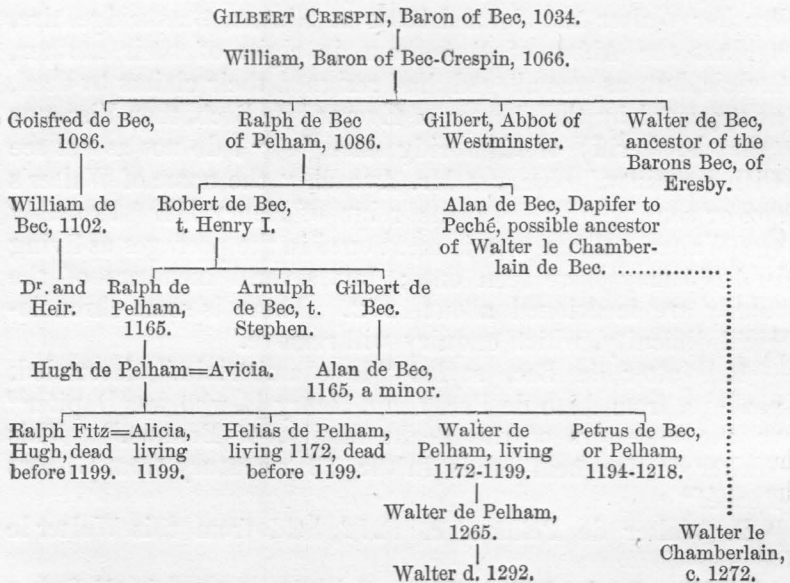
3. Robert de Pelham was vicar of All Saints, Fulbourne, Cambridgeshire.²²

4. Geoffry de Pelham held lands in Cambridgeshire from Robert de Insula²³ (De L'Isle), and was one of the King's officers in Suffolk.²⁴

From the last-mentioned Walter, who was Lord of Pelham, the surviving branches descended, as the peerages state.

For the substance of this paper I am indebted to Mr. Avenel, and therefore I head it as "contributed" by myself. But I think Mr. Avenel has clearly shewn that the ancient house of Pelham is Norman, and not Saxon. The genealogical reader must judge for himself.

I subjoin Mr. Avenel's outline pedigree of the family, which I believe to be substantially correct.



²¹ Rotuli Hundredorum, i., 410.

²² Rot. Hundr., i., 436.

²³ Ib., 491.

²⁴ Ib., 174. The name is found under

the forms of Bec, Bech, Becha, la Bek, and others, in the records. Bolbec also appears as Bolbech. Goisfrid de Bec is written "de Bech" in Domesday, 140.