

PRESS-MARKS ON THE DEEDS OF LEWES PRIORY.

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UNTIL a few months ago the deeds of Lewes priory at the Public Record Office were preserved in two distinct collections. The great majority were in the class of *Ancient Deeds*, and the remainder, rather less than 300 in number, in *Chapter House Book B*⁵/₅. These seem to have been chosen from the main block of the deeds more or less at random and bound together within the last century, as a sort of scrap-book. This miscellaneous collection was recently broken up and the documents added to *Ancient Deeds*.¹ In this way attention was directed to their mediæval press-marks, and it was decided to group them according to the arrangement thus disclosed. The sorting of the deeds gave results which are interesting in themselves and which, it was thought, would be of practical use if, as it is very much to be hoped will be done, the Lewes charters should ever be published as a whole.

The most striking thing about the Lewes muniments from a record point of view, is the number and variety of their endorsements. Excluding all marks made upon them during their stay in the Chapter House at Westminster, the majority bear notes on the back in at least three different handwritings, while four or five are by no means uncommon. The earliest hands belong to the twelfth century, and the latest are before the middle of the fifteenth. Some of them are individual and could be accurately dated by a careful study of all the deeds. Taken as a whole they bear witness to careful custody and ordered arrangement of the priory muniments for two centuries or more.

¹ Viz. *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15389-15658: A.A. 461-474.

The various endorsements during this period corresponded to successive developments in the method of storing the deeds. The most important of these developments was the work of some monastic librarian who, about the year 1400, thoroughly revised the system of classification and instituted numerical press-marks. The earlier endorsements were thus superseded, and although there were some interesting alterations during the next fifty years, they in no way rendered obsolete this new classification.

The precious fragments of an early cartulary give a hint of how the deeds were stored in the middle of the 12th century. Only four leaves² remain and these give the names of the various donors of land in Norfolk, followed by a summary statement of their benefactions. The last entry summarises the total rent received.

Summa autem omnium que pertinent ad decaniam de Norfolch, hec est novies xx^{vi} libre et ix sol. et vii d. . . . The use of *decania* here is curious and difficult. The lands mentioned lie widely scattered in the county of Norfolk, which suggests that *decania* should be understood as the archdeaconry of Norfolk. This interpretation, however, is ruled out, as Norfolk had been divided into two archdeaconries prior to the compilation of the cartulary. Lewes had no exempt jurisdiction over its property in Norfolk: possibly the word denotes some purely private arrangement of its lands. However that may be, it is clear that the cartulary followed a systematic *local* arrangement, and it is reasonable to suppose that the original grants were stored in this manner. The deeds themselves yield no positive evidence. The earliest are often endorsed in a fine bold hand with the name of the grantor, with or without details as to the amount and situation of the land given. They suggest that, in whatever way they were packed, they were normally referred to by the names of the donors; and this was natural enough in the age of the priory's greatest

² Two leaves are printed in *Monasticon*, Vol. V., p. 9, from Vespasian E. ii., f. 106, at the British Museum. The two outside leaves are at the Public Record Office (*Ecclesiastical Docs. Exchequer*, 2/40).

benefactors, most of whose names were still familiar, and were daily remembered in the monks' prayers. With the rapid increase during the thirteenth century in the number of records, the endorsements seem to show a shifting of the emphasis from the grantor to the land in question. The details of the grant were now carefully specified, and where omitted in the earliest deeds have generally been added. To this period belong the very common endorsements of the rape or diocese or county in which the lands mentioned in the deed lay. The work of classification was evidently done piecemeal; it was the labour of many hands over a long period, and the divisions made were to a certain extent mutually conflicting. Deeds relating to lands in the same place were sometimes endorsed with the name of the manor, sometimes with the county, sometimes with the name of the diocese. In many cases these three endorsements, successively added, appear on the same deed. The result was a certain confusion in the classification of the records when, at the end of the fourteenth century the unknown librarian thoroughly revised their arrangement, and, so far as he could, harmonised the inconsistencies of his predecessors. The various categories were systematised and limited; each was given a number and the number endorsed upon each deed. The date of these press-marks, as these numerical endorsements can now be properly called, seems to be the very last years of Richard II.'s reign, and was certainly earlier than the fifth year of Henry IV. The evolution of the new system can be illustrated by one or two typical examples. An early 12th century grant of William Count of Mortain³ bears three endorsements, which may be dated roughly as 12th century, late 13th century, and late 14th century. In order of date they are as follows:

WILL'. CO'. MORITONII
De rapa de Pevenese
xii.

³ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15462.

A rather later deed of Hawisia de Gournay⁴ has four:

HAWISIE DE GURNAIE

de saysina nobis facienda de terra sua in Hacheling'

Rap' Lew'

xiii.

In each case the definitive endorsement is the Roman numeral, the work of the monk whom I have called the unknown librarian. It is these numbers, the work of one man, unmistakable from the deep black colour of the ink in which they are written, that are still of practical importance for recognising and arranging the extant Lewes deeds. The classification may be summarised thus:

- i., ii. Papal bulls.
- iii., iiiii. Royal charters.
- v., vi. Warenne family.
- vii. Archbishops of Canterbury.
- viii. Bishops of Chichester.
- ix. Bishops of Winchester and Norwich.
- x. Diocese of Lincoln.
- xi. Diocese of York.
- xii. Rapes of Pevensey and Hastings: Dover.
- xiii. Rape of Lewes.
- xiii. Rapes of Arundel and Bramber.
- xv. Dorset, Devon, Wilts.
- xvi. London, London diocese, Winchester diocese, Southwark, Surrey.
- xvii. County of Cambridge.
- xviii. Norwich diocese: Norfolk.
- xix. Ely diocese. Marshland.

The great majority of the charters of the various obedienciaries (there are some exceptions) were not included in the system and bear no numbers. They are generally endorsed simply *refectorarii*, *infirmarii*,⁵ etc. Perhaps each office at this time kept its own deeds, separate from the main collection.

⁴ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15537.

⁵ The most numerous class, however, the charters of the *custos lum[inum] Beate Marie et Sancte Crucis* are all endorsed in a single, distinctive hand. *Carta A. de B. ad lum' Be' Marie et Sancte Crucis*. The infirmary charters have been separately numbered, *elemosinarii* i., ii., iii., etc.

Of the xix. divisions of this classification, Nos. i.-ix. were chiefly if not entirely *personal*. They contained the deeds of popes, kings, the founder and his descendants, the archbishop of Canterbury, and certain bishops, regardless of the situation of the lands mentioned in them. Nos. xii.-xix. were *local*, the deeds being assigned according to where the lands dealt with by them lay. Nos. x. and xi. were intermediate between the two types, being both *personal* and *local*. They included not only the charters of the archbishops of York (xi.) and the bishops of Lincoln (x.), but also all charters relating to lands within these dioceses. It was the variety and number of the earlier endorsements which necessitated this mixed classification. Several were now often grouped under a single number. Thus charters relating to tenements in Dover, a small group, were included in class xii. (Rapes of Hastings and Pevensey), and charters of the bishops of Norwich grouped with those of the bishops of Winchester in class ix. Into No. xvi. (the "London area") were put instruments marked variously London, Southwark, London diocese, Winchester diocese and Surrey. This empirical system is in marked contrast with that adopted at the neighbouring abbey of Robertsbridge, where, about the middle of the thirteenth century, a single librarian, unhampered by earlier endorsements, was able to apply a clear cut, logical classification.⁶

So far no attempt had been made to number the documents within each class. Some of these classes contained several hundred documents, which clearly required further differentiation. The inconvenience of this was soon felt, and not long after the time of the unknown librarian, a beginning was made upon classes v. and vi., the most highly prized of the priory

⁶ *Archæologia*, Vol. 65 (1913-14), pp. 258-9. Mr. Kingsford distinguishes three classes: (a) Foundation charters (marked with a dagger); (b) Deeds relating to other religious houses (marked with a cross); (c) Deeds relating to transactions with private persons (marked with a capital letter). Each class was sub-divided, and these sub-divisions were numbered. The number of each deed within its sub-division was represented by dots. It is interesting to note that this system had become obsolete a generation before numerical press marks were evolved at Lewes.

muniments. Class v. was sub-divided into two divisions, lettered A and B, and the deeds in each of these divisions were numbered i., ii., iii., iv., etc. To class vi. were assigned the letters C, D, E, and F, each of which was numbered in the same way as A and B. These were apparently subject groupings, to determine the precise nature of which would require a thorough collation. The endorsements were apparently all made by the same person, whose work is easily recognised by his elaborate Lombardic numbers and capitals. At the same time as these endorsements were added, some of the early deeds which were in bad condition were neatly backed with parchment. These repairs⁷ obscured the unknown librarian's numbers, and thereby prove that his work was prior to this sub-division.

Somewhat later the process of sub-numeration was extended by still another hand to classes xii.—xiii., doubtless because they were the most numerous, and in them therefore the need for more exact reference was most necessary. To class xii. were allotted the letters G to P, to xiii., Q to V, to xiiii., W, X, Y, Z, and a further mark [\mathfrak{D}] when the alphabet was exhausted. The much endorsed charters of the Count of Mortain and Hawisa de Gournay, mentioned above, may again serve as examples. Each now received a fresh endorsement, the former being numbered $\frac{\text{XXVIII}}{\text{J}}$, the latter $\frac{\text{IV}}{\text{T}}$. The sub-division of xii.—xiii.

differed from that of v. and vi. in being topographical.⁸ Both were carried out very thoroughly. Unfortunately the new endorsements upon the charters of xii.—xiii. were written in such poor ink that they are now in many cases illegible, and so have little practical value. No attempt was made to apply a sub-numeration to the remaining classes.⁹

⁷ E.g. *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15406, 15412.

⁸ E.g. J=Grinstead, Q=Southover, H=Horsted, P=rape of Hastings. Other letters, such as T, included a number of smaller properties.

⁹ No. XI. (diocese of York) is a partial exception. The deeds of Bradwell and Halifax in the cartulary are numbered i., ii., iii., etc., to xx.; those of Sandal i., ii., iii., etc., to xxv.

Up to this point our conclusions have been drawn from the original deeds. Further information is happily supplied by the fifteenth century cartulary of Lewes (Vespasian F. xv.). The book can be accurately dated by an entry on f. 9: *Robertus Auncell quondam prior de Lewes me fieri fecit anno domini millesimo cccc quadragesimo quarto*. Although it contains more than 300 folios, it is not a complete cartulary, but transcribes only the charters of classes v., vi., xii.-xiiii., xi. and those of the *magister operum*. Bound up with it are a few leaves of an earlier cartulary with charters of the rapes of Pevensey and Lewes. These leaves (from the date of their contents) are not earlier than 1404, and if we may trust the evidence of the writing are not many years later. The sequence of the charters in this earlier cartulary seems to have followed the arrangement into xix. classes. Against each deed is entered in the margin S¹⁰ or (more rarely) C¹¹, followed by the number of the class. The sub-notation by letter and number is not present, and had evidently not yet been carried out when the cartulary was written. In the main portion of the MS., written in 1444, in addition to the number of the class, the sub-number appears against each charter in classes v., vi. and xii.-xiiii. At the head of each leaf is written the name of the manor with which the deeds entered on it are concerned. There can be little or no doubt that the sub-notation of the deeds by letter and number was prior to the writing of the cartulary and that the compiler tried to follow it. The book is however a rather haphazard compilation. Although the order of the charters tends to follow the order of the sub-notation there are many exceptions, owing largely to charters having been omitted altogether¹² or added later and in some cases repeated. He has been more successful in following the arrangement of the deeds according to the division into xix. classes. He began his volume with v. and vi., the earliest sub-numbered

¹⁰ ? *scabellum* or *scrinium*.

¹¹ ? *cista*.

¹² E.g. f. 21, *hic deficit C. xxi*.

classes¹³, and then (quite properly) jumped to xii.—xiii which continued the sub-numeration. Thence he followed straight on with classes xv—xix, filling the last leaves with the deeds of class xi. and of the *magister operum*. It is thus clear that contrary to one's first suspicions the book has not been disarranged in rebinding. It is likely too, that there was another volume compiled before Vespasian F.xv, which contained the charters of the other classes, about half the total number. Such a volume is apparently referred to in the extant cartulary, where against a charter of King Stephen on f. 120 is entered in the margin *vacat quia habetur inter reges*.

Thus the system of press-marks outlined above, not only determined the method of storing the muniments but also influenced the form of the cartulary. So far as its practical usefulness to the modern student is concerned, it has two limitations. The first, not a serious one, lies in apparent inconsistencies in the classification of individual deeds. For example, a certain number of charters relating to the monastic offices bear numbers in accordance with the situation of the lands dealt with by them. A charter¹⁴ of William, bishop of London (1219) seems to have been wrongly allotted to class ix.; a charter¹⁵ of Henry I. to class xii: while one deed¹⁶ of Faxton is found in class xvii, and another¹⁷ in class x. Another blunder occurs in the case of an award¹⁸ by the archbishop of Canterbury concerning the rights of the parson of Langport (co. Northants.). It was originally endorsed: *de Simone Malesoures de xl. solidis. . . Langport*. A later writer, mistaking the place for Lamport, a "borowe" of Eastbourne, added: *Rap' de Pevenese*. The error was not corrected by the unknown librarian

¹³ It is worth noting that the highly suspicious foundation charter printed in *Monasticon*, Vol. V., p. 12, appears in the cartulary without either class number or sub-number. There was apparently no "original," the charter being transcribed from some earlier cartulary.

¹⁴ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 13877.

¹⁵ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15490.

¹⁶ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 14396.

¹⁷ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 14954.

¹⁸ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15466.

who wrote *xii*. But, being a deed of an archbishop of Canterbury, it should really have been added to class *vii*; and the double mistake shows that the unknown librarian followed earlier endorsements, without troubling to unfold and examine the deeds himself. These errors, a certain number of which were almost inevitable were on the whole very few. Sometimes it was really doubtful to which class a charter ought to be assigned. *Ancient Deed A. 15627*, for instance, the grant of a 12th century William Earl of Warenne *ad emendam lucernam sepulture patris mei*, was pardonably though somewhat illogically omitted from classes *v* and *vi*, apparently on the ground that it belonged to the unnumbered deeds of the *custos luminum*. There is too, the interesting case of a grant¹⁹ by the prior and convent to Ralph chaplain of Kingston at the special request of the bishop of Chichester who affixed his seal to the charter. The unknown librarian apparently took this as equivalent to a grant by the bishop and accordingly endorsed it *viii*. More serious is the second limitation viz., the comparatively large number of charters which bear no number. Some of these, such as deeds emanating from Cluny or other foreign houses can be accounted for by the assumption that they were in the custody of the prior. For others, which were not connected with land, as when the priory granted to a family the right of nominating a monk, there was no class to which they could be assigned. Others again which bear no number probably concerned lands, the revenues of which were assigned to one or other of the obedienciaries, even though there is no endorsement to show this. But when these deductions have been made, many remain which lack numbers. Some of these are doubtless the result of pure oversight, but more, it may be suspected, have no numbers for some good reason which is no longer apparent.

In spite of these very real limitations, the press-marks have a definite, practical value in two ways:

(a) In the case of title deeds to property which

¹⁹ *Ancient Deeds*, A. 15426.

had passed through several hands before being granted to Lewes, they are often the only test of whether or not such deeds were among the priory muniments. A great many of this kind lurk unsuspected among the *Ancient Deeds*.

(b) They explain, as has been said, the order of the deeds in the extant cartulary and provide a sure guide to the composition of the other volume (or volumes) now lost.

For these reasons it is not too much to say that they supply the true basis for any future edition of the muniments, which should thus follow the division into xix. classes and should include any document which bears this press-mark. This would involve a careful search among the charters at the British Museum and among *Papal Bulls*, *Ecclesiastical Documents*, *Exchequer* and other classes at the Public Record Office.