

NEW FACTS CONCERNING  
 “CLERKENWELL DETACHED”  
 AT MUSWELL HILL

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IN a paper printed in *Archæologia*, Vol. LVI, p. 223 (1898), the late Dr. J. H. Round reached the conclusion that the Priory of St. Mary Clerkenwell was founded by Jordan de Briset, a younger son of Ralph Fitz-Brian of Breiset in Suffolk, about the year 1144. Richard de Belmeis, Bishop of London (1152-62), granted to the newly-founded nunnery “the land of Mosewell” which can be clearly identified on the map to-day, where it is shown as a detached portion of the parish of Clerkenwell, containing  $64\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Study of the older maps, combined with detailed knowledge of the topography of Hornsey, suggests that the grant of the Bishop of London was made as lord of the manor of Hornsey and consisted of part of the common or “waste” land of that manor bounded on the north by the parish of Fryern Barnet, east by the road from Muswell Hill to Whetstone, and west by Tottenham Wood in Tottenham parish. (The present boundary of the boroughs of Hornsey and Wood Green here marks the ancient boundary of Tottenham Wood.)

Whether any particular sanctity attached to the well at that time we do not know, but the nuns built a chapel there and cultivated the land. John Norden in his *Speculum Britannicæ* (1593) mentions a legend that a king of Scots was cured of disease by the water of the well, a miracle that led to “a continual resort in the way of pylgrimage” to the image of the “ladie of Muswell.” Prior to the year 1306, several kings of Scotland were

lords of the adjoining manor of Tottenham because they held the honour of Huntingdon, and that is the nearest we can get to origin of this legend. Little evidence has hitherto been available regarding the pilgrimages and belief in the miracle-working shrine of “Our Lady of Muswell,” but ample confirmation of both is now available through the publication of two papal Bulls by the Public Record Office. The translation of a Bull of Pope Sixtus IV, dated 4th May, 1476, runs as follows: “Confirmation, as below. The recent petition of the prioress and convent of the priory of St. Mary, Clerkenwell, in the suburbs of London, O.S.A., the church of which is founded and dedicated in honour of Almighty God and His Mother the Glorious Virgin Mary, contained in the chapel [called] Muswell Chapell within the bounds of the parish church of Harnesey in the diocese of London (which church is likewise founded in honour of Almighty God and His Mother the Glorious Virgin), belongs, with certain lands and tenements adjacent thereto, to the said priory; that the farmers and others holders of them have from time immemorial, as if they were parishioners of the parish church of St. James, Clerkenwell (which is united to the said priory, and which the prioress and convent hold and possess, converting its fruits, etc., to their own uses and causing its cure of souls to be exercised by a chaplain or priest revocable at their pleasure), been accustomed to pay all their tithes and oblations to the said church of St. James, and to receive the sacraments from such chaplain or priest, in the said church of St. James or in the said chapel; that in the said chapel the Most High has worked and still works very many miracles by the intercession of the said Glorious Virgin Mary, wherefore many persons have been and are wont to resort thither every year, especially from the first vespers of the feast of the Assumption of the said Glorious Virgin Mary to the second vespers of the octave thereof, and make their oblations, which oblations the said prioress and convent

have peaceably received, as they still do, the rectors of Harnesey knowing and consenting thereto; and that divers popes and others have granted sundry indulgencies to those who visit the said chapel, especially from the said first to the said second vespers, and that some of the apostolic and other letters granted in the matter of the said indulgences have been lost and taken away, whilst some are obscured and damaged. The Pope, therefore, hereby confirms all the said indulgences, provided that they be not plenary, and the said privileges and custom, etc." (*Papal Letters*, Vol. XIII, p. 225).\*

This most important document, reciting that the tithe of land in Clerkenwell Detached was paid to the church of St. James, Clerkenwell, still leaves a doubt whether, strictly speaking, it was not in Hornsey parish. The priest, appointed by the nunnery and holding office at their pleasure, apparently had no ownership in the tithes or offerings. It will be noted that the offerings at the shrine of our Lady of Muswell were taken by the nunnery with the consent of the rectors of Hornsey. The Bull was analogous to a charter of confirmation, granted because earlier documents were lost or damaged.

Another Bull followed, setting out the nature of the "indulgences" granted to those who visited the church at Clerkenwell and chapel at Muswell and made offerings. Dated the 6th March, 1478, it runs as follows: "Decree, as below. The recent petition of the prioress and nuns of the house of [St. Mary], Clerkenwell, in the suburbs of London, O.S.A., contained that the chapel commonly called Muswell Cappell' within the bounds of the parish church of Harnesey in the diocese of London (which depends on the said house), is renowned for the miracles which are worked by the divine grace and the merits of the Blessed Virgin, wherefore there is a great resort thither of the faithful, especially on the feast of the

\* This volume has not yet been published, but the sheets of the text are available to Students on the shelves of the Literary Search Room at the Public Record Office.

Assumption of the same Blessed Mary [Aug. 15] until the last vespers of the octaves of her Nativity [Sept. 8] [and] on Good Friday; and that the prioress and nuns have begun to build a church at the said house in honour of Almighty God and His glorious Mother the Virgin Mary. The Pope, therefore, hereby decrees that all the faithful who, being penitent and having confessed, visit the said church, when it is built and consecrated, on Good Friday and from the first vespers of the feast of Corpus Christi to the last vespers of the same feast, and who visit the said chapel from the first vespers of the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary to the last vespers of the octaves of the Nativity of the same, and give alms for the maintenance and increase of their buildings, and for the purchase, etc. of books, chalices, lights, etc., shall gain, for each of the said feasts, twenty years of indulgences, and that the prioress and nuns may choose three or four priests, secular or regular, who may on the said days and feasts hear the confessions of the faithful, absolve them from all their sins, except in cases reserved to the apostolic see, and enjoin penance, and may also commute their vows of pilgrimage and abstinence, except only vows of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Rome and Compostella" (*Papal Letters*, Vol. XIII, p. 244).

The immediate purpose of this Bull seems to have been to attract donations towards building the church at Clerkenwell, and incidentally shows the date of the erection of the old church of St. James which was pulled down in 1788. The surviving annual statements of cash received and expended show the following amounts received in various years from offerings at the shrine of Our Lady of Muswell, viz., in 1525, £6 9s. 10½d.; in 1527, £7 13s. 10½d.; in 1532-33, £6 18s.; in 1534-35, £1 12s. 4½d.<sup>1</sup> A running account of the offerings was kept in a separate book, from which the totals yearly were entered up in the annual accounts of the nunnery.

In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (1535) is recorded that

6s. 8d. was paid yearly to the Rector of Hornsey for tithes of certain land which was part of Muswell, and also that the woods there extended to 10 acres. It is not the purpose of this article to set out systematically all the facts to be derived from the monastic surveys and accounts, but it appears desirable to extract the following facts from the first post-Dissolution cash account rendered to the Crown, to Michaelmas, 1540.<sup>2</sup> Leased to John Avery, 29th September, 1535, for twenty years, Muswell Farm with the chapel there called Muswell Chapell with the "Prestes Chamber" over the gate, a house, garden and orchard adjoining the chapel, a "store howse" and stable under one roof. Leased to Robert Joneson, 28th February, 1535, for 40 years, a messuage and an acre of ground; in the tenure of John Twyford, of London, vintner, a pasture called Stonefield. There were also a few copyhold tenants. The nunnery was dissolved in September, 1539.

With the exception of Stonefield and a small portion at the south end, this estate remained entire in one ownership until the eighteenth century and the title can be traced down to the time when different portions passed into the ownership of the Birkbeck Building Society, London Financial Corporation and others. A mistake made by Daniel Lysons in his *Environs of London* (1795) has misled every subsequent writer, and they have all followed him in saying that it belonged to the Rowe family until the end of the seventeenth century, then to the Pulteney family, and afterwards to the Earl of Darlington in the beginning of the nineteenth century. It never belonged to the Pulteney family. From the Dissolution to 1707, the owners were as follows, it being understood that various leases of parts of it were granted at different times:—

1543. William Burnell of London, gentlman (by purchase).  
 1545. William Cowper of Westminster.<sup>4</sup>

1545. Thomas Goldinge, gentleman.<sup>5</sup>  
 1549. John Goodwyn, citizen and merchant-taylor of London.<sup>6</sup>  
 1574. William Goodwyn, son of John Goodwyn.<sup>7</sup>  
 1576. (Sir) William Rowe, Lord Mayor, 1592-93.<sup>8</sup>  
 1593. Nicholas Rowe, son of Sir William.<sup>9</sup> He leased the "capital messuage" from 10th May, 1601, to Bartholomew Matthewson—hence the name "Mattysons" given to the house in Lord Dorset's survey of Tottenham, the residence of Sir Julius Cæsar.  
 1616. (Sir) Nicholas Rowe, son of Nicholas Rowe.<sup>10</sup>  
 1633. (Sir) George Benyon of London (by purchase).<sup>11</sup>  
 1654. Colonel Robert Thorpe (by purchase).<sup>12</sup>  
 1655. Philadelphia Hill and Anne Hill, spinsters.<sup>13</sup>  
 1655. John Stone.<sup>14</sup>  
 1664. Sir George Benyon.<sup>15</sup>  
 1665. Sir Paul Paynter.<sup>16</sup>  
 1682. William Dyke of Stepney, mariner.<sup>17</sup>  
 1685. Mary Dyke, widow of William Dyke.

Sir George Benyon, who bought Muswell Farm from (Sir) Nicholas Rowe in 1633, followed King Charles I in the Civil War and his land was forfeited and sold by the Commonwealth in 1654 to Colonel Robert Thorpe, who settled it on his two step-daughters. After 1707 the estate became divided.

Frank Marcham has collaborated in this research and many of the records brought to light were copied by him.

References to original manuscript records in the Public Record Office :

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| 1. S.C. 6. Henry VIII. 2116,<br>2118, 2119, 2120. | 9. C. 142, Vol. 241, No. 108.     |
| 2. S.C. 6. Henry VIII, 2396.                      | 10. C. 142, Vol. 359, No. 134.    |
| 3. C. 66/729/m. 15.                               | 11. C.P. 43/204, m. 5.            |
| 4. E. 371/323 m. 16.                              | 12. C. 54, 3808 (16).             |
| 5. C. 66/775 m. 17.                               | 13. C. 54, 3863 (32).             |
| 6. C. 54/463 (13, 14).                            | 14. C. 54, 3863 (26).             |
| 7. Wards 7, Vol. 16, No. 17.                      | 15. C. 54, 4169 (29).             |
| 8. E. 368/401 (66).                               | 16. C.P. 25 (2)/Midd./689 Trin.   |
|   | 17. C.P. 25 (2)/Midd./692 Easter. |