



ASHBY PARVA CHURCH

**MEDIEVAL DEEDS RELATING  
TO ASHBY PARVA**

**BY HUGH GOODACRE**

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SEARCHING through some old deeds in my possession a year or two ago, I unexpectedly came across a little bundle of charters, fifteen in all, relating to Ashby Parva, and ranging in date from the reign of Henry III to that of Richard II, a period of about one hundred and fifty years. Only the later charters actually bear a date, but the date of the others can be fixed with comparative confidence from internal evidence. Fortunately, at the time of my discovery Mr. George Farnham was still with us, and with his habitual generosity he undertook the translation of the charters for me. It is to him, therefore, that I am mainly indebted for my knowledge of their contents.

Ashby Parva was closely associated with the parish of Leire in the thirteenth century, an association which remains to this day, notably in the incidence of tithe, many of the fields in Ashby Parva being still rated to tithe in Leire. This association has recently been still further strengthened by the union of the two benefices. That it existed in the thirteenth century is clearly evidenced by the two earliest charters, both of which relate to land described as "in the territory of Leyre". Each is a grant to Roger at Ashby Parva—"Essebi parva", as it is called—one by William Heres (heir) of Leyre, and the other by his brother Robert, the clerk, of Leyre.

The family of Leyre, or "de Leyre", was evidently of some importance at the time. Nichols records a grant of about the year 1210, by which Thomas, lord of Leyre, confirmed to his younger son, Thomas, then rector of Leyre, the gift of certain land made to him by his brother William, no doubt the William Heres of the charter.

To all the deeds are appended the names of a number of witnesses, and much assistance in arriving at the dates of the documents is derived from the names of members of a family called Danvers which occur throughout almost the entire series.

The pedigree of this family, who were ancestors of the modern earls of Lanesborough, is well known, although the Ashby Parva charters enable us to add one or two hitherto unpublished names to it. Hugh de Anvers, or D'Anvers, the descendant of a Brabanter who came over with William the Conqueror, married Felicia, daughter and heir of Thomas Saukvil of Frolesworth, an adjacent parish of Ashby Parva. Hugh D'Anvers died about 1211, and was succeeded by his son Bertram, whom we know to have been dead in 1213, leaving a son Stephen who is mentioned in the Close Roll of 1235, and in an Assize Roll of 1260. This Stephen Danvers is a witness to both the above charters. But the date of one of them is fixed with still greater precision by the name of another witness—"Roger the parson of Sarneford". Now we happen to know that this man was rector of the neighbouring parish of Sharnford from 1219 to 1220. As both charters are clearly contemporary, we may safely date them at about 1220.

It is almost impossible at this time of day to identify the land referred to in the charters; but in the case of these two earliest, which relate to land in Langefurlong, we are able to do so approximately. The fact that the charters had been stored away with deeds relating to the old Paul estate in Ashby Parva suggested to me that the land in question had once formed part of the Paul possessions in the village which lay along the rising ground on the north-west of the parish adjoining the Leire boundary. A further search amongst later deeds established the accuracy of this surmise; for I found that amongst the property settled by John Paul upon his marriage with Sarah Barford in 1678 were two fields of 21 and 16 acres respectively, each actually called Langefurlong. Further, I found that the name, as Long Furlong, survived until the purchase of the property by my great-grandfather in 1823; but that it was then restricted to a single field of 6a. 3r. 20p. now known as "Beale's meadow". At the date of the charters, Langefurlong was no doubt a large open field extending into the present parish of Leire, and cultivated in strips, or selions, as they were called.

I have been less fortunate in the identification of other lands mentioned in the charters. Where the common method of description by adjoining ownership is employed, identification becomes practically impossible at this date; but in a few instances

the actual names of the fields are given, e.g. "2 selions in Peshull", and "4 selions in Sachdole". Again we get "2 roods of meadow under Baggemuldam". There is a suggestion of a mill dam about this last, but this may be only fancy.

The charter to which I have given the next place in point of date is a grant by Robert le Schereman of Butmaswell (Bitteswell) to Ralph, son of Thomas Robelot of Esseby parva. The name of the grantor is of interest. A shearman was not one who sheared sheep, as might be thought, but one whose employment was the cutting, or shearing, of cloth. The name survived as Sharman in the district until quite recently, and may do so still for all I know to the contrary. I came across it in the person of an old bricklayer who lived at Broughton Astley. The poor fellow had a seizure when engaged on the roof of a house and had to be lowered by ropes. The names of the property referred to in this grant are curious, but the land lay "in the fields of Butmaswell", and not in Ashby Parva. "One acre on Lutlewolfonshul", we read, half an acre "on Hoverefine medowe between the land of Robert le Hotot and the land of the Abbot and Convent of Leicester".

But Ralph Robelot does not seem to have kept his possessions very long, for we soon get two more charters by which he disposes of them to Henry Danvers, son of Stephen Danvers of Frolesworth. In one of these we get the following variations in the spelling of the names of the fields, *viz.*, "Wolfonshull", "Luttelwollsonhul", and "Hoverefine the medue", while we also read of half an acre on "Smalthorn".

Amongst the grantors, in addition to those already mentioned, we have William, son of Richard of Esseby parva; Robert, son and heir of James, son of Roger of Esseby parva; Matilda, formerly wife of Robert Mille of Leicester; Henry Danvers, rector of Frolesworth; Hawyse, who was the wife of William, brother of Goda of Esseby; Matilda Danvers of Assheby parva, and Gilbert, parish chaplain of Assheby parva. The grantees are mainly members of the Danvers family.

The considerations for the grants are strange to our modern ears. "One rose flower on the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist" runs one charter; "one penny at Easter" another; "one half penny of silver at Pentecost" yet another.

The method of dating such of the charters as are dated is also worthy of notice. One reads "Sunday in the Octave of Holy Trinity in the 29th year of the reign of King Edward, son of King Henry" (*i.e.* Edward I). This would be 1301. Another of 2 March, 1339, reads "Sunday next after the feast of St. Chad the Bishop in the 13th year of the reign of King Edward the Third after the Conquest". "Tuesday after the Feast of Easter, 15 Edward III of his reign of England and the second of his reign of France (*i.e.* 1341)" runs another. "Dated at Welleford (Welford) on the Vigil of Holy Trinity, 26 Edward III" (*i.e.* 1352) says another, whilst the latest reads: "Dated at Assheby parva on Monday next after the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist in the 7th year of the reign of King Richard the Second after the Conquest" (*i.e.* 1383).

Many of the names of the witnesses have local interest, and some are of more than local importance. There is, for instance, Sir Andrew de Estley, whose family name survives in Broughton Astley. He was summoned to Parliament 24 June 1295, and died in January 1300/1. Then there is Simon Basset, whose name is recalled in Dunton Bassett, and Sir Robert Flaumville in Aston Flamville. The name of Robert Bele of Ashby Parva also occurs. This family owned land in the parish from very early to comparatively recent times, and still survives in the neighbourhood.

The charters enable us to add two new names to the already published list of incumbents of Ashby Parva, the first "Thomas, the chaplain of Esseby", whom we know from another source was instituted by Hugh, bishop of Lincoln, in, or before, 1220; the second "Gilbert, parish chaplain of Assheby parva" in 1341. This, as far as I know, is the only record of this man's existence.

The charters, as a whole, are in an excellent state of preservation, but unfortunately in only one instance is the seal intact.

To summarize the results obtained from a perusal of the deeds, we find that, in addition to the names of the two incumbents referred to above, we are brought into touch with a number of early residents and landowners of Ashby Parva and the adjoining villages. In Ashby Parva itself we become familiar with the family of Esseby, who would appear to have been the principal people of the place in the thirteenth century. The earliest member of the family of whom I have found mention is

Roger de Esseby, who was living at Ashby Parva in or about the year 1220. We must remember, however, that we are dealing with times when surnames had not yet come into general use, and Roger simply derives his name from his residence. There was another family, also known as "de Esseby", in the neighbouring parish of Ashby Magna at the time; but whether there was any relationship between them and the Ashby Parva family I do not know. Roger had at least two sons, James and Richard. Richard had a son William. This much we gather from the charters. There was also a Thomas, son of John de Esseby; but there is nothing to show their connection with the other de Essebys. In addition, we also find mention of a Nicholas, "son of the lady of Esseby parva", whose name we learn was Matilda. This Nicholas had a son named Thomas.

In the adjoining parish of Frolesworth lived, as we have seen, the great family of Danvers, a branch of which apparently moved into Ashby Parva. By one of the charters, Henry Danvers, described as "rector of Frolesworth", granted to his brother William a capital messuage and lands in Ashby Parva, Leire and Bitteswell. This may possibly have been the occasion on which the Ashby Parva branch took up their residence in the village. As Henry Danvers ceased to be rector of Frolesworth in 1296, it must have been before this date.

The charters contain several references to the family of Cotes, from which Cotes-de-Val takes its name. The "de Val" is a corruption of the name "Deville", Cotes Devile having been the former name of the hamlet. Nichols shows grounds for believing that the last name is derived from that of a family named "D'Eyevil".

In conclusion, we get various spellings of the names of adjoining and neighbouring parishes, *e.g.* Leyre for Leire; Sarnford for Sharnford; Frollesworth for Frolesworth; Butmaswell, Butmuswelle, Butteswell and Bytmeswell for Bitteswell; Olestorp for Ullesthorpe; Chirche Wovere for Church Over; Welleford for Welford, and Kylligworth for Kilworth. The name of Ashby Parva itself is first written Essebi, then Esseby parva, and finally Assheby parva.