

BIDDLESDEN ABBEY AND ITS LANDS.

By REV. H. ROUNDELL.

(Continued from page 40.)

XX. In Brackley, County Northampton, 4 Hen. 8, Thomas Majo granted the Abbey one messuage in the street called Hancock's-lane, a cottage next the croft of St. Mary's Church, and one acre of arable land in the part of Brackley fields, called Castlefield, and in the same Charter he granted in

XXI. Evenley, County Northampton, three acres and a half, confirming them to the Abbey for the term of ninety-nine years, on an annual payment of six shillings to himself during his life, and afterwards a red rose, when demanded, to his heirs. The situation of this land is still marked by a farm and out-buildings on the Brackley and Finmere road, known as "Monk's House," with which locality the terms of the original conveyance accurately coincide, describing Majo's lands as "jacentes insimul " et conjunctim in campis de Evenley intea terram modo " in tenuram Agnetis Chapel ex parte occidentali *et riam* " *regiam ex parte orientali.*"

Besides the foregoing estates, this Abbey at different periods held lands in Cosgrove* and Water Stratford,† Bucks, and Tusmore,‡ Oxon, and in 1296, the Abbot took a five years' lease of the Prebend of Sutton cum Bucks from Cardinal Neapolis, then Prebendary, at a rent of 120 marks per annum, giving as security for payment a mortgage upon all the property of the Abbey. This speculation proved unfortunate, and the rent fell into arrear, and a notification in the Norman French of the period is extant,§ from the Procurator of Buckingham to the Abbot of Biddlesden, declaring that in default of the payment of certain arrears of the salary of the Church of Sutton, he should seek his remedy at law; so that at the end of the second year the Abbot was glad to obtain the cancelling of the lease by payment of a fine.|| There

* Cart. Ant. 85 A. 15.

‡ Cart. Ant. 85 F. 26.

† Cart. Ant. 85 A. 23.

§ Cart. Ant. 84 D. 23.

|| Cart. Ant. 84 E. 26. The Lease of Sutton cum Bucks was afterwards taken by the Prior and Convent of Bicester. Dodsworth's MSS. in Bodleian, Vol. 63. folio 109 b.

are some grounds for conjecture, that a Hospital for the poor and sick was once attached to this Abbey. Several Charters early in the thirteenth century confirm to Biddlesden lands in Evershaw for the relief of the poor and infirm; and in one of these, executed on the occasion of a fine levied by Hugh de Evershaw, as Lord of the Manor, mention occurs of Frater Adam Vitreanus, Custos Infirmatorii. The Chartulary however supplies no distinct or very reliable information on this point.

After the passing of the Act for the Dissolution of the Lesser Monasteries, the Abbot, by payment of a sum of money to the King's Privy Purse, obtained a Licence for the continuance of Biddlesden. With the consent of his Monks, he then leased out the Abbey lands upon easy terms to various tenants. The greater part of the lands owned by the Abbey in Biddlesden, Wappenham, and Syresham, together with an enclosure of 110 acres in Evershaw, were let for ninety-nine years to Edmund Clarke at a rent of 29*l.* 7*s.* By a second lease for forty years Edmund Hazlewood obtained lands in Weedon Pinkney at 5*l.* 6*s.* annually, and the tythes of the hamlet of Weston in the same parish, for 3*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* Another lease to Edward Bull and John Fellows gave them for forty years the rest of the Abbey lands in Weedon Pinkney, with their tythes of wool, lambs and hides, at a yearly payment of four pounds, while a moiety of the tythes of Astwell and Wappenham were leased to John Lovet at 13*s.* 4*d.* per annum.

These leases, so disadvantageous to the Abbey, were evidently granted by the Monks in the vain hope of securing to their successors by a present sacrifice the fee-simple in their lands. And in the general scramble that was then commencing for the property of Religious Houses, other influences were brought to bear upon the Biddlesden Monks, not always with success, as the following answer of the Abbot to a request of Thomas Cromwell will shew:—

“ The Abbott and Convent of Biddlesden about letting
“ of some of their lands at Evershawe.

“ Most mete and humble submission premised; It may
“ like yo^{re} Honor to bee advertized that wee have received
“ yo^{re} lettre datid the xxiiii daye of Aprill for the pre-
“ ferment of yo^{re} frende Master Edgare, wherein yo^{re}

“ Honor willeth us to make the same a sufficient lese
 “ under oure convent seyle for ii closes with their ap-
 “ purtenances in Evershaw for the terme of XL yeres.
 “ forsomuch as wee in like manner received yo^{re} former
 “ lettre datid the xviii daye of Marche, and for the same
 “ purpose to the preferment of Edward Wilkynsonne, at
 “ which tyme and to whom I declared that one of the saide
 “ closes were already graunted, and the other wee cannot
 “ conveniently lett withowt decay of our poore howse, yett
 “ neverthelesse at the contemplacion of that yo^{re} fyrst lettre
 “ wee graunted unto the said Edward a Lese of certain
 “ closes, called Helmden Stokkyng, wherewith hee was
 “ well contentid and pleyسد. Wherefore wee lowlye
 “ beseeche yo^{re} Honor to considre and accept these pre-
 “ mises. And wee shall bee gladd according to our
 “ bounden dutie to pray for yo^{re} Honor long to contynne.
 “ From Bitlesden the iiii daye of Maye.

“ To the Kings Most Honorable
 Chauncelor, and his especial good
 Lorde, the Lorde of Pryvy Seale.”

Be this

“ By yo^{re} pore bedesmen }
 T^r Abbott and Convent } there.” *

But neither the King's royal word, nor the temporary alienation of their estates by these leases, availed to preserve Biddlesden. Upon the 26th of September, 1540, this Abbey and all its possessions were surrendered to the Commissioners who made this return—

“ The Abbey of the *Cistercian* Order.

“ Value by the first Survey, 130*l.* 4*s.* 3*d.*

“ By the second Survey, 138*l.* 7*s.* 6*d.*

“ Monks there 11, whereof Priests nine, Incontinent
 “ none, desirous Capacities one. An Abbot *quondam* hav-
 “ ing a Pencyon by Convent Seal 13*l.* 6*s.* 4*d.*, Servants
 “ 51, whereof Hinds 24, waiting Servants 13, Boys and
 “ Children 9, Women for the Dairy 4, Bells, Lead, and
 “ other Buildings worth there by estimation 51*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*
 “ The entire Value of the moveable Goods 61*l.* 5*s.* 4*d.*
 “ Stocks and Stores none. Woods there 400 Acres.” †

To the Monks were assigned pensions for their lives—
 Richard Greene, Abbot, 40*l.*; Thomas Todd. Sub-Prior,

* Harl. MSS. 604. Plut xxxviii. I. fol. 60.

† Willis Bucks p. 151.

6*l.*; and eight others 5*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.* each; and the greater part of the estates were granted to Sir Thomas Wrythesley, subject, as the tenor of the grant shews, to the above-named leases and pensions, to a Royalty of Four Pounds per annum to the Crown, and a rent-charge upon the Biddlesden lands of 6*l.* yearly to the Curate of Biddlesden for his stipend. This payment formed the only endowment of the Incumbency till 1720, when it was augmented with 200*l.*, the gift of the Rev. W. Friend, Rector of Turvey, co. Bedford, and an equal sum from Queen Anne's Bounty, obtained by the exertions of Mr. Justice Denton, of Hillesden. The 400*l.* thus raised was subsequently invested in the purchase of land.*

The parish Church, assigned as has been already stated to the Abbey in 1209, formed part of the Conventual Buildings. Within it, and the extensive burial-ground which once surrounded it, were interred many of the principal benefactors, and among them one William de Boys, who died in 1313, and was reported to have wrought many miracles at the time of his decease. A Rent in Buckingham had been given for the maintenance of a Light in this Church, and a small plot of ground at Water Stratford for the repairs of the Fabric; but as these rents were usually paid to the Abbot, no distinction was made at the Dissolution between them and the endowments of the Abbey, and the Church and Church-yard were included in the grant to Sir Thomas Wrythesley. Sir R. Peckham, a subsequent proprietor, who died in 1569, dismantled the building, and the parishioners then resorted for worship to a small Chapel dedicated to St. Margaret, which stood upon the south side of the demolished Church, and about one hundred and fifty paces distant from it. This Chapel (of which and the old Church an interesting account from the pen of the Rev. W. Hastings Kelke will be found at page 81 of the First Volume of the RECORDS) was undoubtedly a foundation distinct from the Abbey, and had been endowed with lands in Evershaw, of the gift of Robert, son of Albert Integres. But even this Chapel was pulled down, by a future proprietor of the estate, Mr. Sayer, who at the same time desecrated the burial-ground

* To the Lists of the Incumbents of Biddlesden hitherto published the contributor of this paper can add the name of Richard Earell A^o 1632, on the authority of the pleadings in an Exchequer Suit, Denton v. Ingoldsby. Trin. Term. 7 Car. 1st

of the former Church, and removed every remaining trace of the Abbey. When re-building the mansion, he set apart a large room, under the same roof with the stables, and similar with them in its style of architecture, which, although unconsecrated, continues to serve the purposes of a parish Church.

The Biddlesden estates of this Abbey have so often changed hands that it will not be uninteresting to close this paper with the names of their successive owners, taken from Willis' *Mitred Abbies*.* Sir Thomas Wryothlesley sold, in 1541, the whole of his lands of the grant of this Monastery to the King's Cofferer, Edward Peckham. By Willis the Peckhams are called "the unfortunate proprietors of Biddlesden," and with reason, for George Peckham, son of Edward, not only lost his wife at Biddlesden in the 18th year of her age, within fourteen months of her marriage, but in 1578 suffered the confiscation of this and his other estates in Buckinghamshire. In 1582 Queen Elizabeth bestowed Biddlesden on Arthur, Lord Grey, Baron Wilton, whose son and successor, Thomas, convicted of high treason and imprisoned in the Tower, where he died, lost these lands by forfeiture to the Crown. James the First is stated to have given them to the notorious Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, the murderer of Sir Thomas Overbury, from whom this estate again reverted to the King. It was next granted to Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, stabbed by Felton, at Portsmouth, and his son, George, sold it to Mr. Henry Sayer, merchant of London, about 1681. He, dying prematurely, left this property to his son, John Sayer, then a minor, who was murdered upon the 29th of January, 1713, by one Richard Noble, an attorney.† From this family Biddlesden passed by purchase to Earl Verney, whose niece, Lady Fermanagh, sold it in 1791 to George Morgan, Esq., of Abercothy, co. Carmarthen, and his brother, Dr. Morgan, Prebendary of Gloucester, joint purchasers, in whose heirs the estate is now vested.

* Willis' *Mitred Abbies*. Vol. 2, p. 14.

† Mr. Sayer.—For further account, see a rare Tract entitled "Case of Jo. Sayer, Esq., from his marriage to his death, with the whole intrigue between Mrs. Sayer and Mr. Noble, at Kingston Assizes, 1713."