

NOTES ON THE ANCIENT NUNNERY OF ANKERWYKE, IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

BY WALTER DE GRAY BIRCH, F.R.S.L.

Dugdale's continuators do not add much to the scanty information that has descended, to this day, concerning the ancient Religious House of Ankerwyke, in the parish of Wyrardesbury and diocese of Lincoln, not far from Staines, on the banks of the Thames. The foundation is placed so far back as the time of Henry II., the middle period, that is, of the twelfth century, and a very fertile age in monastic dissemination in England. Some writers, however, consider that the founder, Sir Gilbert de Montfitchet, Knight, and his son, Sir Richard Montfitchet, flourished in the early years of this century; and this is borne out by the mention of Hugh, Abbot of Chertsey, as a benefactor of this nunnery, a name which occurs in the list of abbots of that abbey in A.D. 1107. The nuns, who occupied this small and unpretending establishment, were under the rule of St. Benedict, and their house was dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. The *Monasticon Anglicanum* contains a list of the prioresses from Browne Willis's *Mitred Abbeys*, the Rev. William Cole's manuscripts in the British Museum, and other original sources. The last of these

prioresse, Dame Magdalene Downes, had a pension of one hundred shillings granted to her at the dissolution. The *Monasticon* also prints an interesting Charter of King Henry III., A.D. 1257, confirming the donations of the benefactors of the nunnery who are thus named:—

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| Gilbert de Munfichet, grantor of lands, etc., at Ankerwyk. | | |
| Ricardus de Bruera | " " | Wyresdehuri, Alerburn. |
| Gilb. de Muntfichet and Avelina, his wife | } " | Wymede. |
| Richard, his son | " " | { Morelaund and the Island of Tyngeyt. |
| Richard, son of the above } Richard | " " | In the same island. |
| Hugh, Abbot of Chertsey | " " | Pernerhs. |
| Ralph, son of Matthew | " " | Herpefeud. |
| Grunwine de Trottesworth | | |
| Geoffrey de Middelton | } | " |
| Robert de Middelton | | |
| Henry, son of Hen. de Middelton | | |
| Ralph Picke | | Egeham. |
| Aylena de Maneghedene } William, her son and heir | " " | Maneghedene. |
| Ricardus Anglicus | | |
| Albretha de Basingburne | " " | Tackelay. |
| Walter Brun | " " | London. |
| Martin de Capella | " " | Allerburne. |
| Nicholas de Farnham } Walter Le Fraunkeleyn | " " | Grenefeud. |
| Alice de Oppenhore | " " | Horton. |
| John de Pilessedissee | " " | Dodesdene. |
| Geoffrey, son of Henry | " " | Henlegh. |
| Simon the Chaplain, son of } Richard de Burnham | " " | Windesore. |
| John de Sto. Phileberto | " " | { Veteri—Windesore, and in Prestewyk. |
| William de Papewurth | " " | Papeworth. |

These names and places the reader will have no difficulty in identifying with surrounding localities in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

The nuns also appear to have held land in Datchet, of which they were unjustly, as they alleged (in a petition to King Edward III., printed in the *Monasticon*) disseised by the powerful Baron "Sire Hugh le Despenser le pere."

There were but five inmates in the cloisters when the dissolution took place, and the site was granted to Andrew, Lord Windsor.

Sir Thomas Smith, in the reign of Edward VI., obtained Ankerwyke by exchange. He resided on the site,

and it was afterwards for many years the seat of the Salter family, from whom it was purchased by the Lee family, from whom it descended to John Simon Harcourt, who held it in or about 1823. The hall of the mansion, which was built on the original site of the conventual building by Lord Windsor or Sir Thomas Smith, still remains. (*Dugd. Monasticon.*)

I am able to lay before you a transcript of a deed relating to this house, which I believe has never been yet printed. It is numbered X. 7. in the collection of Charters presented to the British Museum by Lord Frederick Campbell.—

“Omnibus fidelibus sanctæ Ecclesiæ tam francis quam Anglis: *Lecia* priorissa de Ankerwuc et conventus ejusdem loci: Salutem. Noverit universitas vestra nos sub hac forma conditionis finalem concordiam cum Willelmo filio Helie de Takeleia in Curia domini Regis iniisse quod prædictus Willelmus nobis concedit tres virgatas terræ cum pertinentiis in Takeleia tenendas de prædicto Willelmo et de heredibus suis libere et quiete pro servitio distincto in Cyrographo facto in Curia domini Regis die Sabbati proxima post festum sancti Laurentii martyris v^o anno Regni Regis Ricardi. Sciendum etiam quod si heredes Ricardi Le Engleis prædictas tres virgatas terræ in Takeleia á nobis prædictis monialibus evincant et derement,* nullum escambium á prædicto Willelmo vel heredibus suis habebimus. Histestibus. Avenello pincerna, magistro Willelmo de Sumercote, Magistro Reinerio de Stanforde, Magistro Gervasio de hobregge, Roberto de alencun, Stace de kersinge, Andrea de Poilli, et multis aliis.”

By this curious deed, *Lecia*, the Prioress of Ankerwuc, declares the substance of a final concord entered into by the convent with William, son of Hely of Tackley, in the Court of Common Pleas, whereby the said William grants to the convent three virgates of lands in Tackley, for a service set forth in the deed of conveyance made in the above Court on the Saturday after St. Lawrence's Day [10th August], in the fifth year of King Richard I. [A.D. 1194], with a clause that, if the heirs of Richard Le Engleis [see Ricardus Anglicus, on page 381 of these notes] deprive the Convent of the land, the Convent is not to claim redress from the said William or his heirs.

* For dirimant?



SEAL OF THE CHARTER OF THE NUNNERY OF ANKERWYKE,
CO. BUCKS, A.D. 1194.

The Nunnery was founded and erected *temp.* Henry II.



SEAL OF LEDES PRIORY, CO. KENT, A.D. 1119.

To this charter, dated in the concluding years of the same century that witnessed the foundation and erection of the building, is appended a seal in pale green wax, bearing the inscription :—

SIGILL : ECCLĒ : SCE : M[AR]IE : MAG : DE ANK'WICK.

Sigillum ecclesiæ sanctæ Mariæ Magdalænæ de Ankerwic.

The field of the seal is filled with an elevation of the principal building of the Convent—viz., the church or chapel of St. Mary Magdalene. This remarkable representation is undoubtedly as correct a picture of the actual first building, set up in the twelfth century at Ankerwic, as the relations between the arts of the architect and the seal-engraver can make it. We see here the thatched roof; the square, or rectangular ground plan; the centre doorway, with simple Saxon arch; the walls composed of panels of plaister, mud, or brick, enclosed within wooden framework, not very unlike the present cottage structures which are so prevalent in the county of Buckingham to this day; the bell-tower, with its thatched roof, and two lines of moulding or string-courses near its insertion into the roof, surmounted by a spherical boss or finial supporting a cross; the ridges of the roof are finished off with a hooped or engrailed line, which probably represents some kind of straw ornamentation applied to the edges, where the straws start from the central beam to pass down opposite sides of the sloping roof. Altogether, this is a very interesting picture of a modest nunnery of the twelfth century, and I leave those of your audience who study ancient religious architecture to explain, better than I can, the beauties of the structure. I send you a drawing in pen and ink, just roughly sketched four times the scale of the seal size. I send also a seal of *Ledes Priory*, county Kent, founded in 1119, and so contemporary with Ankerwyk. This latter seal, however, is more elaborate than that of Ankerwyk, although the conception is the same.
