



An Old Hurley Priory Deed (A.D. 1306.)

A few weeks ago, I came across a reference—in the *Archæological Journal* for March 1851—to an old Hurley deed hitherto unknown to me. It is in the form of a Notification by Alexander de Neuport, Prior of Hurley, dated The Vigil of St. Laurence, 34 Edw. I. [August 9th, 1306]. In 1851 this interesting little document was finding sanctuary in the Duchy of Lancaster Office (in London); but on my applying there, early last April, I was courteously informed that it was no longer preserved in that Office, but that, if still in existence, I might find it in the Public Record Office, in Chancery Lane. And there, sure enough, to my great satisfaction I soon ran the deed to ground. It is now docketted in that marvellous Repository as “Ancient Deeds, L.S. [Lancaster. Seals.] No. 138.”

An excellent photograph of this literary *bijou* has just been taken, which represents it with extraordinary fidelity and exactness, the same size as the original. The parchment upon which this manuscript is written, in old French, is seven inches and three-quarters in length by three-and-a-half in depth. It is somewhat blurred, but it is almost entirely legible throughout. A dark-coloured seal appended to the deed, on the centre of a parchment tag, is quite distinct. Slightly oval in shape, one inch in length and three-quarters of an inch in breadth, the edges of this seal are a bit chipped and irregular; but, inasmuch as the impression was made nearly six hundred and six years ago, it is wonderful that the wax has lasted so long and so well as it has! The seal represents the head and shoulders of a man in Benedictine robes, with the cowl drawn up over his head, whilst the right hand and arm, with the fingers slightly apart, are raised from the elbow in prayer or adoration. Several letters of the word SIGILLVM are embossed on the border of the device and the last three letters of NEVPORT are distinctly traceable. A second tag of parchment

partly tucked under the back of the body of the deed appears in the photograph ; it is rather narrower than the other tag already referred to.

The text of the deed is a Notification by Prior Alexander. It commences as follows :—"To all those who shall see or hear this letter Alexander de Neuport [sends] greeting in God" ; and then it proceeds to recount the fact that the House of Hurley (*Meson de Hurle*—Hurley Priory) is grievously distrained upon for ten oxen and six cows (*pur akune cho[se]*) which Humfrey de Bohun and Elizabeth his wife (*sa compagne*) demand of us, &c., &c. This is the main plaint of the case ; and the Prior binds the Priory to pay before a certain time all that is due from them under penalty of forty pounds (*Quarante livres*), &c.

The special interest of this deed centres in the reference contained in it to the family of de Bohun.

The house of de Bohun was allied by marriage with the house of Geoffrey de Mandeville, the founder and benefactor of Hurley Priory, gifted with more than a hundred manors by the victorious Conqueror (besides the Suffolk holdings). He held estates in no fewer than eleven different counties. The exordium of Geoffrey's Charter to Hurley is one of the prettiest imaginable. It is an outpouring of thankfulness for the bounties which have been showered on him by his royal patron :—"Let the Faithful and sons of the Catholic Holy Mother Church, now and hereafter, know that I, Geoffrey of Mandeville, have granted and of my bounty have given to God and S. Peter, and to the Church of Westminster, as also to S. Mary of Hurley, for the salvation and redemption of my own soul, and for that of my wife Leceline, at whose counsel, by the Providence of Divine Grace, I began this good work ; and for the soul of Athelais my first wife, and mother of my sons, as also for that of all my heirs and successors, the said Church of S. Mary of Hurley, in Berkshire, &c., &c." He had buried Athelais in the Westminster Cloisters and expressed the pious wish that he should lie beside her at his death. He says of himself (in a grant to Eye) "*qui etiam juxta eam sepeliendus sum.*" His eldest son and heir, William, was created first Constable of the Tower of London. He married Margaret, only daughter of Eudo de Brie, "dapifer" or King's Steward to William the Conqueror. Their eldest son Geoffrey was created first Earl of Essex, a reckless dare-devil, who died at Mildenhall, in Suffolk, in 1144, from a wound which he had received at the battle of Burwell in the wars with King Stephen.

This Geoffrey's eldest son, Arnulf, was disinherited and outlawed; and Arnulf's younger brother Geoffrey succeeded to the Earldom of Essex. He died in 1166, and was succeeded by his brother William, as the third Earl. He died childless in 1189, and was succeeded in his estates by his aunt Beatriz, the sister of Geoffrey, the first Earl, who by that time must have been somewhat of a dowager. She had been married first to Hugh de Talebot and afterwards to William de Saye (from whom, by the way, the present Lord Saye and Sele derives his first name), and it was through a grand-daughter of this Beatriz (by her second husband), also named Beatriz, who had married Geoffrey Fitz Piers (4th Earl of Essex) that the connexion between the de Mandevilles and the de Bohuns was (directly) established, viz., on the marriage of this last-named Beatriz's daughter Maud, with Henry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Lord High Constable. He died in 1220.

Humfrey de Bohun, great grandson of this Maud, was married to Elizabeth, sixth daughter of King Edward I., and it is this Elizabeth who figures as one of the parties in the distress suit lately discovered by me in the Record office—a link in the chain of Hurley's wonderful position in the Monastic history of England. It is further interesting to remember that these last-named scions in the de Bohun pedigree [Humfrey and Elizabeth] were the great grandparents of that Mary de Bohun who married King Henry IV., whilst he was still Earl of Derby, and who was the mother of King Henry V. and of all the other children of Henry IV. (Henry IV. had no children by his second wife, who was Joan of Navarre). So great a benefactor was Henry IV. to Hurley Priory, that William of Ipswich whilst Prior [1380-1400] when granting (on May 13, 1387) to Peter Peterwych (besides a room in the Priory whenever he liked to use it) the following corody, or allowance, viz., "one white convent loaf, one flagon of beer and a mess of kitchen food (*unum ferculum coquine*), such as a Monk in the Refectory of the Priory receives as general commons" to enjoy daily for his life, gives expressly as his reason for so doing "*ad reverenciam et instanciam Nobilissimi ac illustrissimi domini viri ac fundatoris domus nostre domini Henrici Comitis Derby, Hereford et Northampton ac domini de Breknok.*" Thus, this Prior of Hurley even exalted Henry IV. as deserving a place in the Walhalla of Hurley benefactors, not less distinguished than Geoffrey de Mandeville I. himself!

By writ of privy seal at Westminster, on May 16, 1401, Henry IV. made a grant of timber and other wood to the Prior and Convent

at Hurley "to the value of a hundred marks out of their own particular wood within our [Windsor] forest aforesaid for the repair of the Church, belfry and houses aforesaid free from disturbance without impeachment at the hands of ourselves or our servants whomsoever, save always our vert and venison (*viridi et feris*)."

It is worthy of remark that, in the recently discovered deed of Notification which forms the subject of this paper, Hurley Priory is referred to as the "Meson [*Maison*] de Hurle"—House of Hurley; and in this connexion I may notice that in the number of "The Penny Magazine" for February 17, 1838, now before me—the old Elizabethan House, built by the Lovelace family, in Lady Place, Hurley—pulled down for the sake of its materials, in December, 1838—is styled "Hurley House, or Lady Place, Berks."

Alexander de Neuport, I may mention, appears as Prior of Hurley in the Westminster series of Hurley Charters and Deeds on three occasions only, viz., on July 25, 1305, when he is found as granting, in co-operation with the Chapter of Hurley great and small tithes arising from the demesnes of the lords of Eynho [Aynho, Northants] for life to Peter, son of Hubert de Eynho, at a yearly rent of twenty shillings payable at Hurley. Next, in a deed of Acquittance he figures as Prior of Hurley, on July 2, 1306, as absolved from rendering any account of certain moneys, etc., to Henry de Blontisdone; and lastly, on May 15, 1309, he is found co-operating, as Prior, with the Hurley Chapter in granting a messuage in Hurley to Reginald de la Hale [Hall Place].

F. T. WETHERED.

Hurley Vicarage, Berks.

June, 1912.

READING ABBEY.—From time to time relics of Reading Abbey are brought to light. Lately in digging the foundations for the Upper Ship Hotel, Reading, which is now being re-built, three pieces of masonry have been found. They are (1) a moulded keystone of the 15th century in very good preservation, which is enriched with four crockets to the base of a finial. (2) The other is apparently the voussoir of a 12th cent. arch, and is ornamented with a typical Norman billet moulding—fairly well preserved. (3) The third stone is apparently the voussoir of a 13th cent. arch, deeply moulded with the roll and hollow of the period. It is understood that these stones will be utilized by the architects in the new building. While a 4th object of interest has been discovered, viz., an old water pipe bored from an elm tree—these "tree water pipes" were used by our forefathers before the days of metal ones.