

Hurley Church and Priory.

By the Rev. F. T. Wethered.

IT would be interesting to know as to how quickly the great mission of Birinus to Wessex made itself felt down the Thames below Wallingford, a distance of some thirty-two miles from Hurley, along the river. Birinus arrived in Hampshire in the year 634, and was established in the See of Dorchester in 635 by Cynegils, King of Wessex, whom he himself had baptized. Birinus died in 650, and his body was buried at Dorchester, in Oxfordshire, translated afterwards to Venta (Winchester), to which place the Dorchester See was removed by Bishop Heddi in *c.* 683. Bede tells us that Birinus "built and dedicated Churches"; and inasmuch as our County of Berks was within the limits of the great West Saxon Diocese until 909, in which year Berkshire was transferred to the See of Ramsbury, I see no reason at all why some Saxon Thane may not have been converted to Christianity at Hurley at a very early date indeed and founded a great portion of our present Church. There are two distinct periods, chronologically and architecturally, in the structure of the present building—one from the angle on the south-east side of the quadrangle (on the northern side of the Church) to a point in the rubble wall of the Church a few feet west of the old blocked-up Norman doorway, while the other extends to the extreme south-west end of the quadrangle. I quite agree with "Plantagenet" in "The Gentleman's Magazine" (1839) when he says that there is a great probability that this identical Church may have been ravaged and partly ruined by the Danes in A.D. 870, during their occupation of Reading, or else in 894 when they traversed Herlei on their way "up by Temese" from Essex to Gloucestershire—as we are informed by the Saxon Chronicle, and as attested by the existence of the "Danes Ditches" at Danesfield across the Thames, three-

quarters of a mile or less from this Church, on the Buckinghamshire side of the Thames. The movements of the Danes from Essex into Gloucestershire are mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 894. So much for the first, or conjectural, stage in the history of Hurley Church. The next stage is, of course, by far the most interesting of the periods into which our Hurley history may conveniently be divided. Geoffrey de Mandeville (originally Mandeuille or Magnaville), who founded Hurley Priory in *c.* 1086—1087, is said by Wace to have “rendered great aid at the Battle of Hastings, and to have been one of the chief grantees after the conquest, and to have held lands in ten different counties.” He owned the whole or part of more than a hundred Manors besides his Suffolk holdings. The Abbey at Walden (Saffron Walden) in Essex was founded by his grandson Geoffrey de Mandeville the second, a reckless dare-devil, in the year 1136. This grandson of our founder did something for Hurley. That is to say, conjointly with his wife Roesia, he made a grant to Hurley Church of part of the tithe which their chaplain, William, had received “*de domenica curia monachorum ejusdem ecclesie.*” He was killed at the battle of Burwell, in Cambridgeshire, when fighting against King Stephen on a hot summer’s day, he having carelessly removed his headpiece and loosened his coat of mail. A humble bowman saw his chance and shot an arrow from the fortress which struck Geoffrey’s unguarded head (“*. . . quidam vilissimus sagittarius ex his qui intra castellum erant capiti ipsius comitis lethale vulnus impressit*” (*Chron. Ram.* 331, 332)). The wound was fatal, and he died later at Mildenhall in Suffolk. Inasmuch, however, as the Earl died excommunicate, his body was refused Christian burial. It was taken straight off to the “Old Temple” in Holborn, and was enclosed in a leaden coffin—and, according to some, hung up on a gnarled fruit tree, where it remained for twenty years. Later on, it is said that, the ban of excommunication having been removed from Geoffrey, the Prior of Walden endeavoured to seize the body in order to bury it in Walden Abbey; but the Templars forestalled the Prior and buried it in their own new graveyard in London.

I do not know the date of the death of the elder Geoffrey, who was the founder of Hurley Priory. All I can say is that he signed a charter in 1119. He had buried his first wife, Athelais, in Westminster cloisters and had mentioned his intention of being buried by her side (“*qui etiam juxta eam sepeliendus sum*”). Looking back

along the vista of our Hurley history, I always think of Leceline, Geoffrey's second wife, with peculiar interest. *O si sic omnes!* Her's was a very gracious and unselfish character. She was a lady, in the truest and best sense of the word—a gem in the chaplet of our very interesting past! Her religion was genuine altogether. It was by her loving suasion and out of her affection for her husband that our monastery was built. In the Hurley charter which founded our monastery, Geoffrey de Mandeville gives us to understand that he dedicated his gift to God and to St. Peter and to the Church of Westminster as also to St. Mary of Hurley for the salvation and redemption of his own soul, and for the soul of his wife Leceline, “by whose counsel [and] by the Providence of Divine Grace I began this good work; and for the soul of Athelais my first wife and the mother, now deceased, of my children; as also for that of all my heirs and successors.” Such are some of the opening words of his interesting deed of gift, a copy of which—in English—has been hanging up on one of the walls of Hurley Church for many years. I append his words in the original grant, viz., “*pro salute et redemptione anime mee et uxoris mee Leceline cujus concilio gratia divina hoc bonum inchoavi et pro anima Athelaise prime uxoris mee matris filiorum meorum jam defuncte me succedentium.*” His gift was, of course, also offered as a thank-offering to God for the bounties in this world's goods that had been showered upon him by his friend and Sovereign, the Norman Conqueror.

When our founder came to Hurley he found Esgar, the constable of King Edward the Confessor, in actual possession of three out of the six manors in Berkshire which had been given to him by the Conqueror, viz., Hurley, Esgarston and Streatley. (The other three in Berkshire were East Ilsley, West Ilsley and Whatcombe).

The name Esgar (or Asgar) has a curious and thrilling derivation. “As” is an old heathen name for “God.” “Gar” is Anglo-Saxon for “spear.” Perhaps in the transmutation of the name to “Esgar” the idea of *æsc*—ash tree may be noticed. The wood of the ash tree is often used for spear shafts.

It is stated in “Ely Book” that Alfhære or Esgar, Cing's stabul (Constable), seized upon the Abbey lands at Pleshey, in the time of William the Conqueror, and extorted a permission from the House to hold them during his life. But the Monks, we are told, never

recovered their property. Being, like honest Englishmen, staunch haters of the Frenchman and invader, they incurred the resentment of the Norman Duke for aiding and comforting his bitter foes, Edwin and Morcar. He imprisoned Alfhre for life, perhaps because he was a formidable person, and kept his lands. Such, then, was the man who undoubtedly gave his name to "East Garston," viz., Esegarestona (Esgar's Town). I mentioned all this about Esgar in my paper entitled "*Esegarestona (Esgarston) versus East Garston*" in the "*Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal*" for January, 1904. Esgar met his successor in the Manor of Hurley at the Battle of Senlac near Hastings on October 14th, 1066. Even as it was the privilege of the men of Kent to strike the first blow, so too was it the privilege of the men of Middlesex, with Esgar their Sheriff at their head, to defend Harold's standard on that memorable day. Esgar was badly wounded in the fight. Mr. Freeman writes: "The chief military command in London was in the hands of the wounded Staller Ansgar [Esgar], the Sheriff of the Middle Saxons. . . . But he is spoken of as being the soul of all the counsels taken by the defenders of London." Unmanageable at last by King Edward [the Confessor], he was severely dealt with by King William. He lost his liberty, and then his life, in a prison cell.

Hurley Church was restored and repaired in 1852—53; but the Norman work in it is very beautiful still. A Crusader's Cross is scratched on an old stone in the wall, close to the west door with its beautiful chevron work around the arch of it.

Hurley Church is the burial place of Edith, sister of King Edward the Confessor. A large black folio-book commonly known as the *Liber Niger Quaternus* exists at Westminster which contains a register of Charters from the reign of William I. to the time of its compiler, Abbot Esteney (1474—1498), which gives the following Memorandum, dated 15 Richard II. (June, 1391—92):—"Eodem tempore Prior et Conventus de Hurley supplicant domino Regi vt pro reverentia domine Edithe sororis sancti regis Edwardi confessoris ibidem sepulte Et quia dictus locus in multis aggravatur videlicet de inundatione fluminis Thamisis de domibus ruinosis de moris tenentium suorum de onere hospitalitatis sue et quia modice sunt dotati placeat eidem domino Regi appropriare eis ecclesiam de Warefeld Sar' diocesis unde ipsi patroni sunt et ab antiquo fuerint."—There is a brass plate also firmly rivetted on to the stone

floor of the aisle of the Church, with six elegiacs engraved upon it as follows in abbreviated Latin, viz. :—

Percelebris Doyly tenet hic locus ecce Joannem
 Eheu quem pestis hinc inopina tulit
 Dum sibi vita comes, fuit hic preclarus et annis
 Sanguineque, et virtus claruit ampla viro
 Tecum igitur pie Christe Jhesu fac vivat in evum
 Armiger iste sibi celica dona parans
 Obiit ⁱⁱⁱⁱ^{to} Idus Februarii Anno dni. 1492.*



* The date of the year here has an Arabic-Indian numeral, viz. : The aspirated F or V of the Pelasgian alphabet. It represents our modern triangular or crucial figure 4.

The Epithet "Percelebris" as agreeing with "locus" in the lines quoted above has, most unquestionably, direct reference to the historical fact of Edward the Confessor's sister Edith being buried underneath Hurley Church.

There is in the Chancel of the Church a beautifully traced (Decorated) window of chalk (c. 1350 in date). Underneath this window is a blocked-up squint hole opening out into the Churchyard. I believe this to be a squint hole, through which to view the consecrated Host on the Altar near by. I do not think it can be for the purpose of communicating lepers. The font which (anterior to 1852) stood in a baptistery pew towards the west end of the building, on the north side of the aisle, now stands close to the large south (Norman) door, on a raised stone pedestal. It is mentioned in Van Voorst's book of celebrated fonts. The Monastery Dovecote (Decorated) stands in a large grass enclosure near a (Early English) large Tithe Barn. This pigeon house is said to be capable of holding 1500 pigeons. It is not uninteresting to mention here that at Michaelmas, 1389, the Prior of Hurley, William of Ipswich, and the Convent of Hurley gave a Bond to a certain John Terry, of Bray (the original of which is now at Westminster), for the due payment to him, during his life, of an annual pension of thirty shillings and two hundred pigeons [pipiones], together with a weekly payment of one bushel of corn, one bushel of barley, and one

bushel of "avenarum grossarum prout crescunt in terris dominicis de Hurle." The Refectory, or dining hall, of the Monks is still standing. A closed Norman door in the north wall of the Church is exactly opposite to a similarly shaped Norman door in the Refectory or dining hall of the monks. The number of the brethren was usually not more than sixteen, apart from their guests residing in the Monastery. The early Decorated (c. 1307) arches of this old hall of the monks are still in existence. The floor of the Refectory was carpeted with clean straw and with rushes from the fish-ponds in Lady Place, still existing, and it was specially provided that all this litter should be the perquisite of the village blacksmith, who acted as "Marshal" at dinner-time when the monks were in the hall. He carried a wand of office [virgam] at the dinner table, and when he was not doing work in the Monastery, he fixed-up the horses and bullocks [affros] with new shoes for their daily work in the fields and so forth. When the old shoes [ferramenta] were worn out he supplied others from his forge in the village, at the expense of the monks, and was allowed to retain the old iron and nails and the straw and scrapings for his own purposes; and when he had quite finished his day's work and cleaned up at the Monastery, he was always allowed a commons of bread and beer (panem et cervisiam). [I quote a portion of the deed itself:—"Aulam vero nostram quociens necesse fuerit scobare ac mundare et cum stramine ac viridi debitis temporibus facient straminare, quod stramen ad grangiam nostram petere, et viride in dominico nostro colligere et ad aulam nostram asportare, et ut predictum est straminare facient cuius mundacionis fecem vetus stramen ac pulverem ad usus suos proprios asportabunt, et in feodo optinebunt ac etiam qui aulam nostram sic mundaverint vel aliquid viride ad eandem asportaverint, cum aliqua urbanitate panis et cervisie remunerabuntur."] The old blacksmith's forge in Hurley village was pulled down during the last few years of the nineteenth century.

The exact derivation of "Marshal" is nothing else than *mare*—the female of a horse—and *schalb*, middle high German—a servant. No fewer than 562 original charters and deeds connected with Hurley Monastery—which our monks carried up to Westminster when they were driven out of Hurley, at some date between the fourth of February and the twenty-first of April in the historical year 1536,—were lent to me at the British Museum by Dean Bradley and the Chapter of Westminster in 1887. The originals

have long ago gone back to the Abbey, but I have epitomes of every one of them at Hurley Vicarage.

The days of Hurley Monastery are over, but the remains of it are well in evidence along the banks of the Thames. The monasteries were liable sometimes to abuses, but the monastic system of the Benedictines has done great things for England, and wherever they carried the cross they carried the plough. In fact, we have learned agriculture from the monasteries. At the time when Hurley Priory was dissolved, in the early part of 1536, it was worth, according to Dugdale, £121 18s. 5d., and according to Speed £134 10s. 8d.

In my Book entitled "Lands and Tythes of Hurley Priory," printed for private circulation in 1909, the following occurs under "Hurley Priors": "In 1452, whilst John Saffrey, or Sauery, was Prior, Hen. VI. vouchsafed a general pardon to the Hurley monks for all offences they might have committed, unless any of them should have murdered Adam Moleyns, or Molyneux, Bishop of Chichester, or William Ayscough, Bishop of Sarum (the latter being Bishop of the Diocese in which Hurley was then situated), or aided and abetted those who had killed them. Bishop Moleyns had made himself unpopular because—when he was sent by the King to negotiate peace with France, in 1448—he was generally regarded as largely responsible for the surrender (in 1449) of Maine and Anjou, and was murdered at Portsmouth, as a traitor.—Bishop Ayscough was almost entirely a Courtier rather than a Father in God to his Diocese. One day when, as a very unusual occurrence, he had left Court and was celebrating Mass at Edington in Wiltshire, he was dragged from the Altar in his robes to a neighbouring hill and having been there murdered, his body was left naked to the skin in the fields unburied."

Dom. Edmund Downe, who was Prior of Hurley from 1459 to 1467, like many of his predecessors no doubt, encouraged netting in the Thames (for salmon), which was close to the Priory. The reason why Monasteries so often occurred on the banks of a river is, of course, because fish-food formed so large a staple in monastic dietary. In 1461 Jeffrey Poole, Esquire [squier], of Medmenham, let his fishing rights, as lord of the Manor on the Buckinghamshire half of the Thames under Danesfield, one of the broadest reaches in the river, to the Hurley monks,—who, of course, held the fishing rights over the Berkshire half, in their own demesne. Newlock weir is undoubtedly referred to in the 80 years' lease to the Monastery ;

in fact the word 'lockestaple' occurs in the wording of the Instrument. In it the lease is granted of the water and fishing, etc., which "of old tyme perteyned to the Hall lond wythin the said lordship of Medmenham," but in it the right of fishing six times in the year with a draught net is expressly reserved by the lessor, the Priory at such times finding him with "fysshers bootys and servaunts." The rent paid by the Priory was twenty-six shillings and eightpence a year.

Until 1823 salmon were caught regularly, in eel-bucks, in the Thames near Maidenhead; but after that year the run seemed to die out. The latest year in which a salmon is known to have been caught in the Maidenhead district is 1836—on a spinning bait. The introduction of gas lighting into London, which became general in 1814, proved fatal ere very long to salmon in the Thames. The gas residues containing cyanide were poured straight into the river.

In a Close Roll (9 Hen. III. m. 10 *Dorse*) a suit between John of Hurley and the Knights Templars is referred to in respect of a certain obstruction (*de quodam stagno levato*) in the Thames, which had been raised at Bisham (*ad noxam residentium*). It has been a complaint in modern days, on the part of Hurley, that the gear at Temple cannot carry off the river water which Hurley sends down to them, in flood time.

Even Benedictine monks were not always wise, and sometimes our Hurley brethren very plainly gave proof that they were no exception to the rule, and ran riot. From the Patent Rolls of 1340 and 1342 we learn as follows, viz.: an Entry from Andover on September 18th, 1340, informs us of a commission of oyer and terminer which had been issued on complaint by John de Mauduyt that John de Tothale, Prior of Hurley [1338—1349], brothers John Baroun, John de Helmeden and Jordan Moynne, his fellow monks, John le priourescok of Hurlee, Edmund son of John le Cok the elder, Thomas atte Hale [Hall Place], John Splint, John le Heyward [hedge keeper], John Elys, Richard le Whelere [wheelwright] of Lidlewyk [Littlewick], William le Rypereve [steward of the river-bank], Simon de Tothale, chaplain, Philip his brother, etc., etc., assaulted him at Hurlee, co. Berks, and carried away his goods. We may gather that Prior John de Tothale ended his days eventually in the Infirmary of Westminster Abbey and died of the plague. The prison for offenders may still be seen in the vaults of Lady Place.

Priors of Hurley Monastery.



| | EARLIEST KNOWN OR APPROXIMATE DATE. | LATEST KNOWN OR APPROXIMATE DATE. |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Æiric | before 1141 | |
| William | 1157 | |
| John de Rocella | 1169 | |
| William Seger | 1170-3 | |
| Ralph de Arundel | 1173 | 1200 |
| Robert | 1200-1 | |
| William de Stanford | 1221 | |
| Richard le Gras | 1231 | 1236 |
| Sanson de Eswelle | 1236 | |
| Theobald de Ayswelle | 1246 | 1255 |
| Geoffrey de Suttone | 1258 | |
| John de Lyra | 1267 | 1274 |
| Walter de London | 1279 | 1285 |
| Adam | 1292-3 | 1295 |
| Richard de Waldene | 1299 | 1304 |
| Alexander de Neuport | 1305 | 1309 |
| Henry | 1311 | 1313 |
| Richard de Coleworth | 1320 | 1336 |
| John de Tothale | 1338 | 1349 |
| Thomas de Combroke | 1352 | 1363 |
| William de Bromle | 1365 | 1375 |
| William de Ypeswyche | 1377 | 1400 |
| John Feryng | 1409 | 1416 |
| William Pulburgh | 1416 | 1417 |
| John Sauereye | 1420 | 1452 |
| Edmund Downe | 1459 | 1467 |
| Thomas Ruston | 1468 | 1480 |
| John Hilston | 1482 | 1497 |
| John Hampton | 1498 | 1501 |
| William Graunt | 1504 | 1510 |
| William Southwell | 1513 | 1536 |

Hurley Priory was founded in 1086 or 1087.
Hurley Priory was dissolved in 1536.

F. T. WETHERED,

October, 1917.

Vicar of Hurley, Berks.

Vicars of Hurley.

| DATE. | PATRON. | VICAR. |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1190 | | Robert. |
| <i>Temp.</i> Henry III. | | Richard. |
| <i>Temp.</i> Edward I. | | John de Quercu. |
| Institution. | | |
| 130 $\frac{4}{8}$ 8 Feb. | Hurley Priory | Adam de Schireborn. |
| 1310 8 Kal. Oct. | " | William de Wytteneye. |
| 1335 17 Kal. Aug. | | Walter de Helmeden. |
| 1342 Id. May | Hurley Priory | Adam de Wytteneye. |
| 1349 8 April | " | William de Woketon. |
| | | William Hebbotastel. |
| 1351 15 April | Hurley Priory | William de Cornwall |
| 136 $\frac{2}{3}$ 22 Feb. | | John Athelard. |
| 1376 12 Oct. | Hurley Priory | John Grene. |
| 1400 7 July | " | Godfrey Petyt. |
| 1440 7 Dec. | Bishop of Salisbury | John Whatebrede. |
| | | Nicholas Pardon. |
| 1453 15 April | Hurley Priory | Edmund Spencer. |
| 1459 21 Aug. | " | John Page. |
| 148 $\frac{9}{10}$ 7 March | " | Geoffrey Spergore. |
| 1488 20 Aug. | " | Walter Dudston. |
| 1503 24 Sept. | | Edmund Aliard. |
| 1505 9 Nov. | | Richard Webester. |
| 1507 14 April | | Thomas Graunt. |
| 1541 10 Oct. | Charles Howard | James Holys. |
| 1552 | | William Rooke. |
| 156 $\frac{2}{8}$ Feb. | Queen Elizabeth | Ralph Marler. |
| 1565 17 Oct. | Richard Lovelace | Thomas Hudchmowghe. |
| 156 $\frac{6}{7}$ 20 March | " | John Dobbles. |
| 1568 9 Oct. | " | Peter Russell. |
| 1570 26 Nov. | " | John Butler. |
| 158 $\frac{0}{1}$ 20 Jan. | " | Thomas Maxwell. |
| 159 $\frac{4}{8}$ 7 March | " | Henry Lovelace. |

| | | | |
|-------------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1614 | 9 Aug. | Sir Richard Lovelace | Nathaniel Cannon. |
| 166 $\frac{4}{5}$ | 23 March | John 3rd Lord Lovelace | Richard Brogden. |
| 167 $\frac{5}{8}$ | 1 March | " | Samuel Rich. |
| 1678 | 3 Sept. | " | Thomas Mason. |
| 1683 | 23 Nov. | " | Daniel Ayshford. |
| 1723 | 20 Aug. | Robert Gayer | James Smith. |
| 1782 | 6 Feb. | Duke of Marlborough | Alban Thomas. |
| 1789 | 8 Sept. | " | William Mavor. |
| 1838 | 14 July | Hon. Henry Walker | Florence J. Wethered. |
| 1868 | 5 Feb. | Florence T. Wethered | Florence T. Wethered. |

F. T. WETHERED,

Vicar of Hurley, Berks.

JUNE, 1909.

