

VCH Surrey ii (1905)

64–76 (Bermondsey abbey)

64

Founded 1082 for Cluniac monks by Alwin Child, citizen of London (*Ann Mon* iii.425). Not till some years later that a colony from St Mary Charité sur Loire arrived to take possession: four monks, Peter, Richard. Osbert and Umbald arrived 16 April 1089 and said to have been brought over by Lanfranc; Peter appointed first prior (ibid, iii.427; Leland, *Collectanea*, i.263). Various rent charges in London assigned by Alwin augmented by the gift of the manor of Bermondsey from William II (Lansdowne MS 863, f91). It included that part of the manor then called Bermondsey, the other part called Rotherhithe being reserved to the Crown. One moiety was given the priory by Henry I (*Monast*, v.100) and the other to Robert fitzHamon, which late came into its possession in 1397–8 (Pat 21 Ric II, pt iii. m 25). This manor, the nucleus of all future possessions, was retain (65) by the convent uninterrupted until 1417 when a writ of Quo Warranto was brought against them, the verdict being in their favour (Inq p.m. 5 Henry V no 60 (a)). Other gifts quickly followed, many of them recorded in the foundation charter of William Rufus which confirmed the manor of B and the church of St Saviour to the monks of Caritate. Among these were the manor of *Bridesthorn* with lands in *Widon* and in *Hardwicke*, a rent charge of 100s from a mill at Sutton, the grant of Wynebald de Balaam, sold later by the convent in order to purchase the manor of Richmond in Bengeo, Herts, for which they gave 160m (etc).

Henry I regarded by Cluny as one of their most generous patrons and friends (Duckett, *Record evidence of Cluny*, 42). He confirmed the grants of Rufus and his followers, to which had since been added other gifts. He himself granted Rotherhithe, Dulwich, a hide of land in Southwark and the manor of Waddon in Croydon, and in 1132 the advowson of Shorne and Cobham (etc)

(66) Stephen's grants. Charter of immunities 1141 (*Ann Mon*, iii.437). Henry II gave free warren throughout all the convent's lands in Surrey.

(68) Convenient means for reprisal and exhibiting ill-will against the abbey lay in the fact that its position rendered it always open to danger of inundation from Thames unless the dykes and ditches which protected it were well guarded and maintained. In 1346 the prior complained that Alan Ferthyng of Southwark and others had broken and thrown down his close and dykes at B and dug so much of his soil there that 140 acres of meadow were inundated and profits entirely lost, added to which they felled his trees (Pat 20 Edw III pt ii, m 15d). On one occasion contumacy of prior and brethren led to their excommunication in December 1363 for the non-payment of 15m pa to St Paul's [not clear what relation this had to inundations]

Despite vast possessions and imposing rent roll are accounts of dire poverty from the 12th century onwards, in addition to losses suffered from flooding, usual economic problems affecting religious houses and subjection to la Charité (Cluniacs insisting on complete subjection of dependant house on parent houses). Eleven priors between 1134 and 1184, only one dying at his post. Also mortality in certain years no doubt (69) caused damp and

unhealthy situation of the monastery. Frequent absent of prior at parent house – opportunity for good management. Visitation in 1262 (Duckett, *Charters and records of the abbey of Cluny*, ii.122), and 1275 (ibid, 124): depleted numbers, ‘deplorable’ conditions; overwhelmed by debt.

(70) Inundations of 18 October 1294. Broke the embankment at Rotherhithe. Next year the king placed the abbey in the hands of David le Graund on account of debts, with instructions for repairing the breach (*Ann Mon*, iii.468; Pat Roll 23 Edw I, m 6).

(72) Bermondsey sequestrated as an alien priory in August 1337 and the prior appointed custodian. Inundation of 19 February 1338: destruction of ditches and dykes.

(74) Abbey surrendered on 1 January 1538 by Robert Wharton the last prior and also bishop of St Asaph. For his co-operation he received the large pension of £333 6s (*L&P*). Valor shows it was worth £474 14s 4¾d.

Despoliation in progress first half 1538. Ancient crucifix, picture of St Saviour: refs on 24 February, 21 March (etc). A condition of the original grant of the manor had been that a residence be built in the monastery for the use of the sovereign if he required it. From this may have sprung the custom of bestowing there distressed queens and important individuals. In 1140 William de Mortain, earl of Surrey, retired there and took the habit (*Ann Mon*, iii.436). Katharine, widow of Henry V (75), passed rest of her life there, and Elizabeth Woodville condemned there in 1486. Many benefactors buried there. Adeliza wife of Hugh de Grantmesnil and mother of Ivo, Mary sister of Queen Matilda and wife of Eustace of Boulogne; Walcelin Maminot said to have died there. King presented a life boarder to the prior and convent for life maintenance in William de Topclyve in 1313, Thomas le Long and William Bale (Close Rolls 6 Edward II, m 6d); 16 Edward II, m 14). Earls of Gloucester also claimed right of maintenance when at Bermondsey (Inq p.m. 21 Edward III no 59). Ralph earl of Gloucester d in 1372 seized of a lodging within the priory.

Bishop of Winchester claimed an annual procuration for one day when visiting that part of the diocese, though it was exempt from diocesan visitation. In 1276 this claim revived and resisted, but compromise reached.

Size made it at every date suitable for large assemblies and councils of state. By Henry II, Christmas 1154 (*Gervase of Canterbury*, ii.77). Chapter of Benedictine order held there 1249 (*Matthew Paris Chronicle*, v.81; *Chronicle John Oxenede*, 80). In the reign of Henry I many magnates who had taken the cross met there to consider the order of their journey.

‘This contact with English political events and proximity to the centre of a vast and important life [sic] lends more lustre to the abbey of B than can be found in the records of its internal history’

The parish of St Mary Magdalene bounded by Southwark on the west, Rotherhithe on the east and Camberwell on the south. It became important from the existence of the abbey, which reclaimed, embanked and cultivated it. Preserved its rural till the 17th century, and had no direct connection with the City until Tower Bridge was built. The most ancient streets led from Southwark to the abbey, Long Lane and Bermondsey Street, neither wholly in B (partly in Southwark).

Banks and ditches but frequent incursions, as in 1230, 1294, 1304. In 1304 the abbey was exempted, at the queen's request, from contributing to the king's needs because of losses due to submersion of lands through breeches in the bank of the Thames (*Cal Pat Roll 1307-13*, p 114). Commission *de wallis et fossatis* appointed 1309, 1346. According to tradition the watercourse of the Neckinger was once navigable from the Thames to the monastery. Mill Street in B appears to have (18) reached the Thames at St Saviour's Dock, which derived its name from St Saviour's Mill. Existence of these tidal streams recorded in place-names: late 13th/early 14th century: *le waterweye* (Ancient Deed A8025), *le Handbrigge* on the west side of the by *le watergang* of the prior (ibid A7962). In 1639 tenements were described as lying between the Stonebridge and the parish church. *Pevereffelde* (A7962), *le gretewall* (A8025) and the common path called *Shiteburlane* and the garden of *Beaurepeyr* (A7979) occur with le Handbrigge.

A certain importance attached to Rotherhithe as a landing place for boats below the dangerous arches of Old London Bridge. A bishop of Winchester returning from abroad was apparently expected to land on the shores belonging to Bermondsey (Reg Pontarissa f 155). Abbey less disordered after being freed from foreign control in 1381.

Sir Thomas Pope built a house, apparently out of the ruins of the church, though the place was not permanently attractive for residence, and was gradually deserted by the higher classes. The fatalities caused by the plagues of the 17th century, especially that of 1625 (Lysons, i.547) probably shows that it then had a poor riverside population. (Footnote 37 says that abbey buildings, consisting of a gateway and some houses, remained to the mid 19th century. A piece of the south side of a gateway is still incorporated in some houses on the south-west of Grange Walk.

(19) Manors. Manor of B held by Earl Harold TRE, and in 1086 by the king. In 1086 there was land for 8 ploughs, one on the demesne and four held by 25 villeins and 33 bordars. There were 20 acres of meadow and wood worth 5 hogs from their pannage. In London there were 13 burgesses who paid 44d in rent belonging to the manor (*VCH Surrey*, i.296). In a later register of Bermondsey monastery it is stated that B, Camberwell (part of), Rotherhithe, the hide of Southwark, Dulwich, Waddon and Reigham (probably an error for Leigham in Streatham) all pertained to B as having once formed part of the manor which was of the ancient demesne of the Crown. All lands and tenements held of B manor were pleadable in the court of that manor by writ of right according to custom of the manor and not at common law (Dugdale, v.100). The later and lesser manor of B granted by William II, probably in 1094, to the priory (20). Confirmed by Henry I in 1127 (Dugdale, v.100; *Ann Mon*, iii.434; *Testa de Nevill* (Rec Comm) 226).

Count of Mortain held in 1086 one hide in B which T RE and in 1066 was in the manor. Worth 8s. Count's house was situated on it. Must have resulted from a grant by William I to his half-brother Robert of Mortain and earl of Cornwall, which reduced the hidage of the royal manor from 13 hides to 12. Earl William, his successor, took habit at B in 1140 and died without heirs (*Ann Mon*, iii.436), and perhaps by his gift to the house his holding apparently reunited to B manor. Liberties of B confirmed by Richard I, Henry III, Richard II and Henry IV (*Dugdale, Ann Mon*, iii.434). In 1291 the value of property of the monastery in B was £19 10s 8d (*Taxatio*, 207).

Possession of the abbey at Dissolution difficult to distinguish from those in Rotherhithe, but of considerable value. Included water mill of St Saviour which yielded an annual farm of £8 and whose site is now marked by St Saviour's Dock. In 1541 Robert Southwell and his wife Margaret (who had received a grant of the site of the manor) and Thomas Edgware received a licence to alienate to Sir Thomas Pope, king's councillor, and his wife Elizabeth, the monastery's late rights of fishing and hawking in and near the marshes of B (*L&P*, xvi.g.1135 (15)). Edmund Powell was licensed in the following year to convey to the same persons messuages in B (*ibid*, xvii, g.71 (17)), and in 1544 Sir Thomas received a royal grant in fee of rents and tenements there (*ibid*, xix (i) g.610 (9)) late of the abbey of St Saviour, including view of frankpledge, court leet and royalties (*ie* all manorial rights). He held land in the parish at this date, jointly with his wife: the pond known as the east part of St Saviour's Dock, all fisheries, profits from the breed of swans in that pond, St Saviour's watermill, all goods and chattels of fugitives etc (Feet of Fines Surrey; Common Pleas; *L&P* xvii.g.1012 (41)). The wall in B and R, known as *le Long Wall*, which had belonged to St Mary Overy was also granted to him (*ibid*, xix(i).g.1035 (137)). In 1545 he obtained further grants of rents reserved by the Crown on lands in B, in fishing and hawking in the marshes of B and R, on a messuage called the *New Estgate* and on a garden outside the monastery wall (*ibid*, g.464 (47)), and of the [?] rent of St Saviour's Mill (*ibid*, xx (i), 1336 (122)). Pope held the manor until 1555 when he sold it to Robert Trappes of London (*Recoveries*; Feet of Fines 1&2 Philip & Mary).

(21) Site of the monastery of B granted in 1541 to Robert Southwell with a coneyyard, neighbouring lands in the parish and fishing and hunting rights afterwards conveyed to Sir Thomas Pope (*L&P* xvi.g.1056 (37)). In the same year Robert was permitted to alienate a meadow and pastures called Swan Mead and Nether Gravel Pittys, which lay between the highway towards the gate of the monastery on the north and Southwark on the south, the 'Stone House' near the abbey gate and lands near the gate and near the grange of the monastery (*ibid* g.1056 (40–41)). A rent reserved on the house of the monastery was granted by the Crown to Pope in 1545 (*ibid* xx (i) g.465 (47)). Stow states that the abbey church was 'pulled down by Sir Thomas Pope, and in place thereof a goodly house built of stone and timbers'. The house was modern in 1598. In 1571 it was held by Thomas earl of Sussex who was visited there when sick by the queen. He settled the capital messuage and site of the monastery in 1579 on his wife Frances for her life and on her death to his heirs in tail. Property not traceable after 1631.

(22) Advowson: 'new and handsome church' noted in B in 1086 must have been that of the monastery, founded a few years previously. St Mary Magdalene probably owed its foundation to the monks. No evidence that it was held by anybody else but prior and convent. Presentation by them in 1291 (*Ann Mon*, iii.468), and by Warenes during vacancies.

Rectory worth £17 5s 4d pa in 1535, of which £10 was the value of the messuage, garden and house annexed to it. After the Dissolution advowson was granted to Southwell in 1541, who alienated it to Pope (*L&P* xvi.g.1135 (15)). Thereafter it followed the manor.