

THE KENT PROPERTIES OF THE NUNNERY OF  
ST. MARY, CLERKENWELL

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As the most popular London nunnery, St. Mary, Clerkenwell, was much favoured by London citizens whose endowments naturally tended to lie in the city. But the nuns also received benefactions in more remote districts; and though those in Norfolk, Cheshire and Gloucestershire were lost, the nuns had property as far away as Cambridgeshire and Dorset, up to the dissolution, besides considerable holdings in Essex and Middlesex. The purpose of this note is to discuss their property in Kent.

From the local topographical point of view, notes on the Kent properties of the nuns assemble in an organized way scattered references to Kent parishes from the few surviving muniments of the nunnery, and thereby provide local historians with material which it would have been perhaps uneconomic for them to seek for themselves. And from a wider point of view it is interesting to see in all the detail that may be, the relations between a London, or rather a suburban house, and a home county in which it had property.

Apart from the scattered documents and references in printed books given in the footnotes, the main sources used here are the cartulary and the account rolls of the nunnery and the register of Archbishop Warham at Lambeth. The cartulary is contained in the British Museum Cotton MS. Faustina B.ii. This cartulary contains 365 charters and was written in the middle of the 13th century, though the charters are followed by miscellaneous later additions. In preparing an edition of this cartulary for the Royal Historical Society I have referenced the deeds by numbers: and these, together with the folio numbers of the original cartulary, are both quoted below. The surviving account rolls are found in the Public Record Office in the class of Ministers' Accounts. Ministers' Accounts Henry VII 396 is the draft of the bailiff's account for 1490-1; Ministers' Accounts Henry VIII 2116, 2117, 2118, 2119 and 2120, are the accounts of the prioress for 1524-5, 1525-6, 1526-7, 1532-3 and 1534-5; and Ministers' Accounts Henry VIII 2396 is the account of the royal bailiff and collector immediately after the dissolution for 1539-40. Register Warham at Lambeth<sup>1</sup> contains transcripts of confirmations by

<sup>1</sup> Lambeth, Register Warham, fo. 121v-122v.

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Archbishops Richard (1174-84), Baldwin (1184-90), Hubert (1193-1205), and Stephen (1207-28), and of Roger, prior of Christ Church, Canterbury (1239-44) of Henry II's gift to the nuns of the church at Sittingbourne. These do not occur in the cartulary and have not been printed. The register also contains bulls of Urban III and Celestine III. As the latter were not included by Holtzmann in his *PapstUrkunden in England*, and do not confine themselves to confirming the Sittingbourne grant I have published them in the *English Historical Review*, LVII, p. 98.

Lovers of Chaucer's prioress will not fail to note that it was the prioress and convent of Clerkenwell whose priests served the church of Sittingbourne on the way to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury from Southwark. The church was given to them by the king just five years after the murder of Becket, and the nunnery was further associated with the martyr, for his sister, Agnes, was numbered among its benefactors and a vestment of Thomas Becket was retained at Clerkenwell even after Henry VIII had ordered the destruction of relics of the saint.<sup>1</sup>

Though the nuns held the church of Sittingbourne, their temporalia elsewhere in the county were limited to a small rent at Dartford. Stow and Hasted are in error when they assert that the nuns had property at Wellhall given to them by Jordan Brisett, their founder, and this error has been unfortunately perpetuated by a well-intentioned new street-name. The alleged property at Wellhall was really at Willingale in Essex,<sup>2</sup> and was not, as Horace Round had already pointed out, the gift of Jordan. The error has a venerable parentage for it occurs in the cartulary of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem at Clerkenwell, which alleges wrongly that Jordan, the founder of both houses, gave the nuns ten acres in "Welynghall in comitatu Canciae."

### DARTFORD

Thomas, the clerk of Dartford, granted to the nuns 6s. 4d. rent, probably after 20th March, 1190, on the messuages of William son of Levegar and Richard le Newman.<sup>3</sup> The subsequent history of this rent is not known, though perhaps it was augmented by 2d. For a quit-rent of 6s. 6d. is mentioned in the accounts of 1490-1, though this was "allowed," that is to say was not debited to the bailiff's account as it was not actually collected, having long fallen into decay. An interesting example of what a modern might regard as the unreality

<sup>1</sup> W. O. Hassall, "Relics," *Notes and Queries*, CXCI, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> W. O. Hassall, "The Essex properties of the nunnery of St. Mary, Clerkenwell," *Essex Archaeological Society Transactions*, XXIII, pt. i, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Cartulary, no. 195, fo. 53.

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of medieval accounts is provided by the conservative tenacity with which account was again rendered for this rent in 1524-5, 1525-6, 1526-7 and 1532-3, though the 6s. 6d. was included in the list of arrears in 1524-5, becoming 13s. in 1525-6 and 19s. 6d. in 1526-7. In 1532-3 nine years arrears amounted to 59s. 6d., up to Michaelmas 25 Henry VIII. The true value of this asset was indicated in 1534-5 when it was said that no account was rendered for quit-rents on certain lands and tenements in Dartford as "they do not know where they can take distress."

There is no doubt that in the cartulary the rent totalled 6s. 4d. for two component rents are each described and *quatuor* is written in full. Perhaps the account rolls should read 6s. 4d. and not 6s. 6d. This rent had lapsed long before and it had evidently been copied in the accounts of each year from those of the preceding year. If *vi* had been written for *iv* in any year, the mistake might have been perpetuated and never noticed. The multiples of 6s. 6d. in the lists of arrears show, however, that the accountants believed the rent to be 6s. 6d. and were not themselves guilty of a clerical error in this instance, whether or not some predecessor of theirs may have been.

### SITTINGBOURNE

#### (a) *Spiritualia.*

After Sittingbourne church had been given to the nuns in a royal charter of 1175 (no. 7, fo. 9v) it was confirmed to them by Richard I in 1190 (no. 6, fo. 8) as well as by the prelates mentioned above.

There was a dispute about the tithes of Sittingbourne between St. Mary, Clerkenwell, and Christ Church, Canterbury, and the details of the composition finally made are given in a document in the Black Book of St. Augustine.<sup>1</sup> No mention of Sittingbourne by name occurs but it is certain that this is the parish meant, because reference is made to the chapel of St. Thomas de Scamele which would have been the "Schamel" Hermitage and the Chapel of St. Thomas of Canterbury with a house for the shelter of pilgrims and travellers' at Sittingbourne, discussed by Arthur Hussey.<sup>2</sup> The date of this deed would have been about 1196 as it is one of R. abbot and is witnessed by Firminus as is a deed dated 25th August, 1196.<sup>3</sup>

In 1227 any doubts as to the rights of the nunnery to the church as given by Henry II were rejected by the royal courts:<sup>4</sup> and five years later we are so fortunate as to get an intimate glimpse at

<sup>1</sup> Printed by G. J. Turner and H. E. Salter in *Records of Social and Economic History* (1924), III, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XXIX, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> G. J. Turner and H. E. Salter, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O., Assize Roll 358, m. 25, cited in *Book of Fees*, p. 1346.

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Sittingbourne in one of those medieval sermons whose significance we have been taught to appreciate by the work of Owst.<sup>1</sup>

In 1279 Archbishop Peckham instituted at the presentation of the prioress and convent Robert Baudewyn to this vicarage "estimationis comunis x marcarum."<sup>2</sup> An inquisition of 1287-8<sup>3</sup> makes it clear that the prioress had not only the church but also the chapel near Sittingbourne. The taxation of Pope Nicholas, from which "poor" nunneries like Clerkenwell were exempt fell most heavily on the poorer parish priests: and in discussing a petition to Boniface VIII from the clergy of the province of Canterbury in 1297, Dr. Rose Graham cites the fact that the vicarage of Sittingbourne was raised from 1½ to 10 marks.<sup>4</sup>

A valuation<sup>5</sup> taken about 1384 describes the church as worth £23 6s. 8d., and the temporalities as worth 40s. Both these are described as belonging to the *prior* of Clerkenwell, though St. Mary not St. John's Hospital at Clerkenwell is meant and Mr. H. W. Fincham tells me that he knows of no connection between St. John's priory and this parish.

The archiepiscopal registers show that in 1405 Arundel gave to the prioress and convent leave to let the parish church of Sittingbourne for two years.<sup>6</sup> They also preserve the names of the following vicars: Henry Clineshale, who in 1392 exchanged with John Wyche, rector of the church of Merton of the diocese of Norwich;<sup>7</sup> William Savage, on whose death in 1406 William Helton succeeded;<sup>8</sup> William Helton exchanged with John Lovell, vicar of Sellinge in the diocese of Canterbury;<sup>9</sup> Simon Somerset was admitted in 1420;<sup>10</sup> Richard Preest succeeded on Somerset's resignation in 1424;<sup>11</sup> Walter Charleton *alias* Hoigges succeeded on Preest's death in 1458;<sup>12</sup> Thomas Davy, who resigned in 1392 in favour of Richard (whose second name is unluckily smudged in the MS).<sup>13</sup>

The only patron mentioned is the prioress of Clerkenwell, except

<sup>1</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, II, p. 203, epitomized amusingly by William Lambard, *A Perambulation of Kent* (1576), p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Canterbury and York Soc., *Registrum Johannis Pecham*, pt. i, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *Cal. Inquis. Post Mortem sive Escaet.*, I, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> R. Graham, *English Ecclesiastical Studies*, p. 308.

<sup>5</sup> Chronicle Thorn 2168-9 in *Monasticon*, I, p. 91, and A. H. Davis, *Translation*, p. 632.

<sup>6</sup> Reg. Arundel, i, fo. 438, cited by I. Churchill, *Canterbury Administration*, I, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Reg. Courtney, fo. 205v.

<sup>8</sup> Reg. Arundel, i, fo. 307v.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, i, fo. 318v.

<sup>10</sup> Canterbury and York Soc., *Register of Henry Chichele*, I, p. 194.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>12</sup> Reg. Bouchier, cited in Ducarel's index at Lambeth, II, p. 806-7.

<sup>13</sup> Reg. Bouchier, fo. 154.

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in 1519,<sup>1</sup> when Thomas Nevyll, knight, presented Odo Sagar on the death of Roger Carmeston, the late vicar. On this occasion prioress Rose had granted the right of presentation to Sir Thomas, but for this turn only.

The visitation by Archbishop Warham, thanks to which the deeds cited above are preserved with the bulls of Urban III and Celestine III, revealed the encroachments of the vicar in the neighbourhood and the deficiencies of his church.<sup>2</sup>

In the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*<sup>3</sup> Sittingbourne, described as a rectory, was said to be worth £15, whereof the archdeacon's procurations were 7s. 6d., a charitable distribution of four quarters of peas (wrongly described in the *Valor* as three quarters) at 4s. each, cost 16s. and the rector had 20s. *pro ortulag' dicte rectorie*. The total of these expenses was stated to be 43s. The surviving account rolls show that in 1490-1 £18 was received from Thomas Davy, chaplain and seneschal of St. John's priory, Smithfield, who had succeeded Thomas Treginalde and John Benet as farmer of the rents, lands, tenements and other emoluments pertaining to the rectory with the tithe sheathes in autumn of 6 Henry VII, from Easter 5 Henry VII to Easter 6 Henry VII. Of this £18 the prioress answered for £4 for her livery for Easter and midsummer 5 Henry VII, and the receiver answered for £14 for the convent of which £5 was payable at Michaelmas 6 Henry VII and £9 at Easter 6 Henry VII. The farm had formerly been £22.

In 1524-5, 1525-6, 1526-7, 1532-3 and 1534-5, the farm of the rectory was £15 though, it is again recorded, it used to be £22. The lessee was John Crowmer, gentleman, called *armiger* in 1532-3 and 1534-5. He is also called "knight" in the list of arrears for 1525-6 and 1526-7. In the first year he was 33s. 4d. in arrears for that year, in the last he owed £15 13s. 4d. for the two. The will of John Crowmer, 3rd February, 1538-9, is included in Arthur Hussey's collection of Sittingbourne wills, an invaluable source of information about the inhabitants of the parish.<sup>4</sup> Other members of the Crowmer family have been discussed by Fane Lambard.<sup>5</sup> Outgoings recorded in the accounts are the procurations for the archdeacon of Canterbury and an annual pension due to the vicar called "Le Ortelage." The former was regularly 7s. 6d., the latter was 20s. in 1524-5, 1525-6, 1526-7 and 1534-5, but only 6s. 8d. in 1532-3. In 1524-5 the archbishop's visitation of the church cost 11s. 8d. That year 33s. 4d. was spent on alms at Sittingbourne.

<sup>1</sup> Westminster Abbey Muniments, 5190.

<sup>2</sup> Summarized, *British Magazine*, XXXI, pp. 544-5. For the visitation held on Friday, 16th September, 1502, see *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XLVII, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, I, p. 396.

<sup>4</sup> *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XLI, p. 51. Cf. XLII, p. 37, and XLVIII, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem*, XLI, p. 107.

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In 1539-40 the farm of the rectory with lands, meadows, pastures, tithes, fruits, obventions and emoluments with all other profits and advantages was £13 6s. 8d. After John Crowmer's death the rectory had been let to John Wakefield, his executors and assigns, by an indenture dated 4th January, 1539, for forty years from Michaelmas next following, payments being due at Christmas and Midsummer. The king was liable for repairs as shown in the lease which was enrolled among the memoranda of the Augmentations Office. This was the second year of the term. This lease was made just eight months before the dissolution, and the farm exacted, although quite considerable, was distinctly less than had been previously received. It cannot be ascertained whether these favourable conditions were granted in return for a substantial fine of ready money, though such was very possibly the case: and still less can we know, if such were the fact, whether the transaction was made on such principles because of a temporary need for cash or with a particular view to the danger of impending dissolution.

### (b) *Temporalia.*

The nuns not only held Sittingbourne church but seem to have built up a considerable estate in the parish out of small temporal gifts. Thus Walter, son of William Franceis, in no. 218, fo. 58v, gives them, about 1232, a rent of 12d. and a hen due yearly from a half acre which William the tailor held in a piece of cultivated land called Nechenekere, lying between the lands of Osbert Franceis and Christiana Atenake. For this the nuns were to pay 1d. each Michaelmas and a *gersum*, or premium, of 11s. 6d. In no. 213, fo. 57, he sells and confirms 2s. and two hens annual rent on one acre held by William the tailor in Sittingbourne in the valley of the Chealewell, lying between the lands of *Elgar* King and Osbert Franceis for 2d. each Michaelmas. If William the tailor defaults the nuns are to have the land paying the above 2d. The *gersum* is 18s., which suggests that the *gersum* of 11s. 6d. in no. 218 may have really represented a slightly less favourable financial investment in rent.

In no. 212, fo. 57, Walter sells and confirms to the nuns, for a *gersum* of 12s. and a rent of 1d. per annum, a half acre in the Chealewell valley between their land and that of Osbert Franceis. It may be that this is really the same half acre as in no. 218, but this would imply that the land of Christiana Atenake was the same as that of the nuns and was another patch in the hands of the nuns before anything had been obtained from Walter. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that Walter seems only to have parted with  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres to the nuns: for in no. 219 he quitclaims 3s. and 3 hens from the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres held by William the tailor between the lands of *Algar* King and Osbert Franceis

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for 3d. yearly and a *gersum* of 29s. to him and half a load of two kinds of corn to his wife Matilda. If William defaults the nuns are to have the land, paying as above. In no. 217, fo. 58v, Walter son of William the tailor quitclaims to the nuns his land of the fee of Walter Franceis with 3d. rent which Jeremiah the tailor and Hugh the cobbler used to pay thereon. The nuns give 28d. *gersum*.

Other small benefactors made their contributions and in no. 194, fo. 53, Robert son of Edward *falmarius* gives and confirms to the nuns in free alms for the safety of the souls of himself, his father and mother and predecessors and successors, 12d. yearly rent on his mother's messuage at Sittingbourne, between those of Richard Becce and Osbert the tailor. Altogether the nuns had a considerable amount of property in the parish by 1227 when a pardon from the sixteenth included 25s. from Sittingbourne<sup>1</sup> and a mandate was sent to the bishop of Rochester that the nuns should not be troubled about the tax. Nor was this the end of their acquisitions for in no. 118 (fo. 34v) and in no. 211 (fo. 57), a duplicate entry of the same deed, Adam son of John de Fugelestune or Fugelleston' for the safety of his soul and those of his predecessors and successors gives in free alms six-tenths of an acre in Sittingbourne next the road from the church to Tunstall to the East and next the messuage of Simon Babbe to the South. This land is described as in *Fugheleston*' on the Close Roll for 1232, where it is recorded that the sheriff of Kent was ordered to allow the prioress to have the land in spite of the fact that Adam son of John held of the king *in capite*.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the valuation of the Clerkenwell temporalities at 40s. in 1384 already cited in the note on the *spiritualia*, no later reference to them has been noted. Perhaps, therefore, they came for convenience to be farmed with the rectory.

<sup>1</sup> T. D. Hardy, *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati*, II, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Cal. Close Rolls (1231-4), p. 40.