

# Archæologia Cantiana.

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## THE SIEGE OF MAIDSTONE RECTORY IN 1297.

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IN the summer of 1297 Archbishop Winchelsey and his household were besieged in Maidstone Rectory, where they were then staying as guests of the rector, Nicholas de Cnoville. It was an incident in the struggle between Edward I. and the Archbishop.\* On January 13th, 1297, the Convocation of Canterbury met in London, at St. Paul's, to consider Edward I.'s demand for a subsidy. In the previous year Pope Boniface VIII. had issued the famous bull, *Clericis laicos*, which forbade the clergy to pay any tax out of the revenues of the church, and the laity to receive it, on pain of excommunication; and therefore Convocation sent an answer to the King that they would ask leave from the Pope to grant him a subsidy. The King replied by outlawing the clergy on January 30th, and on February 10th the Archbishop excommunicated the enemies of the clergy.

On February 12th the lay fees of the clergy of the province of Canterbury were taken into the King's hands, and shortly afterwards agents were sent to the different counties to offer protection to all who would redeem their property by payment of a subsidy of one-fifth. At the meeting of Convocation on March 26th Archbishop Winchelsey advised the clergy to act on their own responsibility, and most of them redeemed their goods and paid the tax. It was against

\* Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, ii., pp. 135—141 (ed. 1887).  
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the Archbishop's conscience to acquiesce, and he was not reconciled with the King until July 14th. When he was on his way to the King he was beset by the men of the sheriff of Kent, and at Maidstone they seized his horses and detained his clerks.\* It was a serious outrage, and six months afterwards the Archbishop issued a mandate to the rural dean of Sutton, in which he related the events at Maidstone, and notified the excommunication of the offenders. The mandate was entered in Winchelsey's register, now at Lambeth Palace, which is being printed in the original Latin by the Canterbury and York Society.† The following is a literal English translation :—

“ Robert by divine permission archbishop of Canterbury, primate of all England, to his beloved son the dean of Sutton greeting et cetera. We consider that it is expedient for the better spiritual health of our own subjects, whom in virtue of our office we are bound to put before others, that we should recall them from the errors which they have conceived; and reveal and publish, in accordance with the canon law, their present state and the danger in which they are living, as an inducement to them to repent, and as a fruitful caution to themselves and others to refrain from committing similar offences. When we were on our way to the king last year, we passed through the town of Maidstone with our household, and as the king had commanded that our manor of Maidstone as well as other manors belonging to the archbishop of Canterbury should be seized, we spent the night in the buildings of the rectory. Certain followers of Satan, tenants of our church of Canterbury, contrary to their oath of fealty to us, horrible to relate, and other accomplices besieged us and our household in the rectory with a multitude of armed men, as though we were robbers and enemies of the state. They set armed guards at the doors of the house and at the gates leading to it, and kept

\* Bartholomew Cotton, *Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. R. Luard (Rolls Series), p. 322; *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard (Rolls Series), iii., p. 293.

† *Registrum Roberti Winchelsey*, ed. Rose Graham (Canterbury and York Society), pp. 216, 217.

us and our household in a state of siege, as though we were in prison in a sacred place, and tried by force to prevent us and them from going out; whereby they were guilty of sacrilege, and as notorious violators of ecclesiastical liberty there is no doubt that they have incurred sentence of the greater excommunication. Hitherto we have waited patiently and have put off proclaiming so great a crime and taking steps to punish it in the hope that the delinquents would repent, but we can no longer keep it secret. Therefore we issue a commission and mandate to you, that as soon as you have received them, you shall go in person to the church of Maidstone, or if there is a legitimate hindrance you shall send a suitable priest, and on the next more solemn feast days there denounce before the clergy and people during mass and explain clearly, that all who have perpetrated any of those misdeeds and all who gave advice or help, are bound by the sentence of the greater excommunication. You shall command at the same time that any persons who know anything about this wrong doing shall make it known to you with the names of the evildoers within three days under a similar penalty, and you shall investigate the matter at once with every precaution, and you shall make a similar proclamation on solemn feast days in the four neighbouring parish churches. Certify us fully and clearly without delay of the date on which you receive this commission, the steps which you have taken, the names of the evildoers, by letters patent referring to this matter, but send the actual names of the evildoers in a schedule which you shall fasten up and seal with your seal. Given at Burne\* January 2nd, 1298, in the fourth year of our consecration."

There is no further entry in the register after the Archbishop had received the report from the rural dean of Sutton, but nevertheless the mandate is an interesting sidelight on an incident in the history of Maidstone.

\* Otherwise referred to in the same Register as *Burne iuxta Cant'*, i.e., Bishopsbourne, which continued to belong to the Archbishops of Canterbury until it was alienated by Cranmer. This identification and particulars are kindly supplied by Miss Irene Churchill.