

NOTES ON THE FOUNDATION, ENDOWMENT, AND FITTINGS OF
THE CHAUNTRY CHAPEL AT LITTLECOTE IN THE PARISH
OF STEWKLEY, COMPILED MAINLY FROM UNPUBLISHED
CHARTERS, DEEDS, AND OTHER DOCUMENTS BELONGING
TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

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In the year 1266, one Hugh de Donesterre or Dunster and his wife Alice being desirous to found a Chauntry at Littlecote wherein masses should be said for the souls of John Bretach and Richard de Staunton, himself and his wife, their predecessors and successors, conveyed to the Abbot and Monks of Bitlesden in the County of Bucks, his estates in Thornborough in the same County, and a rent charge of five marks yearly which they paid him upon the Manor of Preston Capes in Northamptonshire, upon condition that they should from time to time for ever, appoint and maintain a Chauntry Priest in the Chapel of St. Giles at Littlecote, sustain the fabric in all requisites for the services, discharge all dues chargeable upon the lands, especially a Rent-charge of Forty Shillings a year belonging to the Nuns of Ivinghoe, and make certain specified allowances to himself and his wife Alice, during their joint and separate lives. To effect these objects, several charters and deeds were executed by Hugh and the Abbot of Bitlesden, and the Thornborough estates were duly ratified to the Abbey by William de Bello Campo,* and by John, son of Alan de Wolverton,† then Capital Lords of this Fee in Thornborough. The two Charters of Hugh de Dunster of the conveyance of the Thornborough lands are still extant, having been preserved in Lord Oxford's, now the Harleian, Library. The first is sealed with green wax, with the figure of a woman standing, and is entitled in the unpublished catalogue of the manuscript Rolls of that Library, compiled by Ayscough, (Charter Rolls Index, vol. III.), *Charta Hugonis de Donesterre assensu Aliciæ uxoris suæ Ecclesiæ de Bytlesden de terris in Torneberge cum piscariis.*‡ It conveys to the monks two carucates of land and a meadow

* *Charter Roll in Brit. Mus.* 84 H. 16.

† *Charter Roll*, 86 F. 61, and 86 F. 61.

‡ *Charter Roll*, 85 c. 39.

in the Holme near Stekeford Mill in Thornborough, to be held by them in frank almoigne in perpetuity upon condition of their regular payment of the rent-charge from these lands due to the Nunnery of Ivinghoe, and their maintaining for ever the Chapel at Littlecote, in all services, dues, customs to which it is liable. Another deed relating to these lands, executed by Hugh de Donesterre, is now lost, but a transcript of it occurs in the Cartulary of Bitlesden Abbey, a folio volume of 361 closely-written sheets, in the Harleian Library, MS. No. 4714. The document is of the nature of an agreement between Hugh de Donesterre, and William, Abbot of Bitlesden (William de Wykham, 1258—1286), and after reciting the grant of two carucates and a meadow and the perpetual obligations attaching to those lands, covenants for and specifies the allowances secured to Hugh de Donesterre and his wife. During their joint lives, they were to receive from the Monks yearly, ten and seven marks at Thornborough, and three Roman measures of corn (*tria miliaria allecta rubei*) at Bitlesden, payable as follows, on the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle four pounds; on the feast of the Purification four pounds and the measures of corn, and on the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, sixty-six shillings and eight pence. Should Alice survive her husband, the Monks were bound to pay her ten marks and the three measures of corn, due as follows: on the feast of S. Andrew, forty-six shillings and eight pence; on that of the Purification, the same sum and the measures of corn, and on St. John the Baptist's day, forty-six shillings. If, however, Hugh became the survivor, he should receive twelve marks yearly together with the rent in corn, payable in equal sums of sixty shillings each at the above-named three festivals, and all the corn at that of the Purification. For the security of these allowances, power is given to Hugh and his wife to distrain upon all the goods of the Abbey in Thornborough, where the Monks possessed other property of considerable extent, to the full satisfaction of all arrears and costs.* The terms of the agreement appear to have been faithfully complied with, for in a confirmation of the Thornborough lands given after her husband's death by Alice, then called Alice de Cotele, mention occurs of the reserved dues

* *Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 338.*

of ten marks and the three Roman measures of corn, which she desired to receive at Lementon (Leamington?) for the remainder of her life.*

The second Charter of Hugh de Donesterre, also sealed with green wax, having the legend, ✠ S HVGONIS DE DVNESTOR, and described under the same heading with the preceding in Ayscough's Catalogue, conveyed to the Abbey another farm of twenty acres in Thornborough. To these lands, the situation of which is specified at length in the Grant, was attached the condition of maintaining the Chauntry Priest, and discharge of the dues payable from the Chapel. The Priest should receive annually three quarters of corn, to be paid to him at Thornborough, namely, one quarter of wheat, one of barley, and one of oats, and a jar of oil, together with offerings throughout the year sufficing for all charges, and for all services, court dues, debts, customs and claims, (*oblata per circulum anni sufficiencia pro omnibus et serviciis sectis curiæ et curiarum debitis consuetudinibus et demandis.*)†

The Rent-charge of five marks of silver paid by the Monks of Bitlesden, from their Manor of Preston Capes in Northamptonshire, had been originally secured to himself and heirs, by Ralph son of William de Chenduit, upon his grant to them of that Manor, in the earlier part of the 13th century.‡ The FINE ROLLS, co. BUCKS, shew that in 1254, Hugh de Dunster and his wife Alice purchased a Rent-charge at Preston, from Stephen de Chenduit,§ and although the annual amount is not specified in the catalogue of these Fines, but could be ascertained if necessary by reference to the original documents, there can be no reasonable doubt of its being that Rent-charge fixed on Preston Manor by Ralph de Chenduit. For at the time of his grants to Bitlesden, about ten years after his purchase from Stephen de Chenduit, Hugh de Donesterre is found seized of a Rent-charge of five marks yearly paid him by the Abbot and Monks of Bitlesden from Preston Manor, and this he transferred to the Endowment of Littlecote, releasing the Monks from all further payment of it to himself and heirs, but binding them to pay in perpetuity, a sum of five marks yearly to his Chauntry Priest.||

* Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 108.

† Charter Roll, 85 C 41.

‡ Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 102.

§ FINES, co. BUCKS; A^o 38 HEN. III. Addit. MSS. No. 21,267, folio 54.

|| Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 339.

The terms upon which the Abbot and Monks of Bitlesden, as far as they were concerned, undertook the charge of the Chapel of Littlecote, are embodied in a deed which may be called that of the "Endowment of Littlecote Chauntry." It is entitled in the Chartulary *Scriptū cantarie capelle de littlecote*, and in it the Abbot of Bitlesden binds "himself and his successors for ever, to provide and "maintain one sufficient honest and faithful Capellane "every year and every day for ever to celebrate Divine "Service in the Chapel of St. Giles for the souls of John "Bretache and others named, and for all the faithful "dead, together with the office for the departed, that is to "say, the offering of the 'COMMENDATION,' the 'PLACEBO,' "and the 'DIRIGE' at the Canonical Hours according to "the season."*†

Then follows the provision for the maintenance of the Priest, as already detailed in the extracts from Dunsten's grants, and the Deed proceeds to declare that "if at any "time the Capellane should become delinquent as a "notorious evil-doer, or be incompetent to his duty, "the Abbot, upon the complaint of Hugh, his heirs or "successors, will remove him at the end of the year in "which he has transgressed, and replace him by another "competent Capellane. And in the event of the death "of the Capellane, the Abbot will appoint a secular or "ordained Capellane, *capellanum, secularem vel religiosum* "to perform service in the said Chapel to the end of the "year." Then occurs a clause reciting the release of Hugh de Donesterre to the Monks of their Rent-charge from the Preston Manor, and his Confirmation to them of twenty acres in Thornborough, stating also these agreements to have been ratified in the King's Court (probably before the Justices Itinerant), and the deed concludes with a covenant on the part of the Abbot to the effect, that if at anytime the stipulated allowances should be withheld from the Capellane, then notwithstanding any privileges granted to the Cistercian order by the Pope, the Archdeacon of Buckingham in the first instance on the complaint of

* *Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 341.*

† The Vespers for the Dead were sometimes distinguished as the *Placebo*, the *Dirige*, etc., from the word with which the Antiphonar commenced, as for example, the Canticles at Morning and Evening Prayer are now denominated the *Te Deum*, *Magnificat*, etc.

Hugh de Dunster and his heirs, and, if he be remiss, then the Bishop of Lincoln, and after him the Archbishop of Canterbury, may intervene in behalf of the Capellane.*

In addition to these Benefactions held in Trust and administered by the Abbey of Bitlesden, Hugh de Dones-terre gave a further endowment to the Chauntry: he had in 1248, as appears from the Fines,† become possessed of lands and a mill in Littlecote in the Parish of Stivecle, by purchase from Robert le Lovereng, and out of the estate thus acquired, as it is probable, a provision of a residence and glebe at Littlecote added by the founder to his other endowments of the Chauntry, may have been effected. The house at Littlecote assigned to the Chauntry Priest is described as "that messuage with its yard, " situated near the Chapel which is surrounded and " enclosed with walls," and the deed of conveyance permits the Capellanes, present and future, "to raise, repair, " and rebuild the walls, as often as they require it." Three acres of arable land and their appurtenances in Littlecote field were also conveyed to the Chauntry, and are described as "one half acre situated in the West Field " upon Micheldon between the land of Peter Mancell and " William le Frankelaine; and one half acre is situated " in the same Field opposite the Cnolle (Knowl) between " the lands of the said Peter and William; and one half " acre in the same Field upon Brerehull (Bare hill), be- " tween the lands of the said Peter and William; and in " the East Field one half acre abutting on the Wadiche, " between the lands of Aylmer de Aspreuill and Peter " Fitz-Stephen; and one half acre in the same Field upon " Long Widemore, between the lands of Peter Mancell " and William le Frankelaine; and half an acre in the " same Field in the Brockfurlong, between the lands of " the said Peter and William, all to be held by Hugh de " Bathon, and all successive Capellanes being nominated " by the Abbot of Bitlesden to perform mass in the Chapel " of St. Giles."‡

(to be continued.)

* *Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 339 b.*

† *FINES, CO. BUCKS; A₀ 32 HEN. III. Addit. MSS. No. 21,267, folio 48.*

‡ *Harleian MS. No. 4714, folio 340.*