

XXXII. *Account of Two Leaden Chests, containing the Bones, and inscribed with the Names, of William de Warren and his wife Gundrada, founders of Lewes Priory in Sussex, discovered in October, 1845, within the Priory precinct. By W. H. BLAAUW, Esq.*

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Read 19th Feb. 1846.

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No. 3, Queen Anne Street, Feb. 19, 1846.

It is well known that the coffin-shaped tomb of Gundrada, finely sculptured in black marble, probably a limestone found in Britany in Dr. Mantell's opinion, was discovered in 1775 in Isfield Church, five miles from Lewes, forming the upper slab of the monument of Edward Shirley, cofferer to Henry VIII. who died in 1558; and Sir William Burrell removed it to Southover Church in Lewes, where, after seventy years' interval, her bones and coffin, as well as those of her husband, have now been brought. The sandstone slab, which was substituted on the Shirley monument, is five feet five inches and a half long; and as Gundrada's monument has been broken off at five feet four inches, it may be suspected that the Shirleys broke off the twelve or fourteen inches, wanting to complete it, in order to adapt it to the space required.

The line of the Brighton and Hastings Railway having been projected to pass through the precincts formerly belonging to the Cluniac Priory of Lewes, the trustee of the property, John Hoper, Esquire, on the sale of the land to the company, at the useful suggestion of Mr. William Figg, of Lewes, reserved his right to any antiquities that might be discovered during the excavations. This led to the discovery, on October 28, 1845, about two feet below the surface, of two leaden chests containing the bones, and inscribed with the names of the founders, William de Warenne and his wife Gundrada, and they were removed to the adjoining church of Southover, preparatory to their future re-interment in a small building to be constructed for the purpose, for which a subscription is now raising.

The cist of Gundrada measures thirty-one inches and a half long by twelve inches and a half broad, and that of her husband is about two inches longer. The lids, one of which is now exhibited, were loose and folded over the lower cists, which were about eight inches deep, and were in the same manner ornamented with crossed cords raised in relief on the leaden surface.

It is obvious that the bodies have been transferred from their original sepultures to these cists at some period not recorded, but probably on their being found decayed, when, in the progress of the buildings of the priory, the chapter house in which they were buried was completed. This would not be among the earliest parts of the priory finished, and it was not till some years after the founder's death that even the church was dedicated. William de Warenne, the second earl, son of the founder, alludes thus to the gradual progress of the building in his second charter (Cotton. MSS. Vespas. F. xv. f. 14):—

“Aliquantis posthac in ecclesiæ constructione annis evolutis, tandem peracto opere, a priore loci et fratribus ut eam dedicari faciam invitatus, diocesis ipsius episcopum, Dominum Radulphum, dominum quoque Walchelinum Wintoniensem, dominum etiam Gunnulfum Rofensem ut eam dedicarent, rogans, conduxi, peractaque ab eis solemniter et secundum tebitum dedicatione,” &c.

This must have been however between the years 1091 and 1097, when Bishop Walchelin died, and the chapter house must have been built within the next fifty years, being referred to by Orderic Vitalis, who wrote his history about the year 1145. (Recueil des Hist. de Fr. tom. xii. p. 635.)

“Tunc Gulielmus Rex Gulielmum de Guarena Comitem de Suthreyæ constituit, quem paulo post mors nulli parcens e medio rapuit. Corpus vero ejus Cluniacenses monachi quos Laquis honorifice locavit in capitulo suo sepelierunt.”

The Priory church was, however, not fully completed until some time between 1136 and 1147, for a second dedication then took place. This is expressly mentioned in a charter of William the third Earl de Warenne, grandson of the founders (Vespas. F. xv. f. 15, 19):—

“inde saisivi eam per capillos capitis mei et fratris mei Radulphi de Warenn quos abscidit de capitibus nostris cum cultello ante altare Henricus Episcopus Wintoniensis; Testibus, Theobaldo Archiepiscopo Cantuarensi, Henrico Episcopo Wintoniensi

Roberto Episcopo Badensi, Ascelino Episcopo Rovestrensi, qui eandem ecclesiam dedicaverunt.”

By collating the periods of the episcopacies of those thus named, the date is confined between 1136 and 1147, as before mentioned.

It may be remarked that the name of Gundrada is invariably spelled with an “*a*” in all the older documents, not Gundreda, as has been often written.

In the MS. Tiberius A. x, usually referred to as the Lewes Annals, the deaths of the founders are recorded simply thus:—

“1085. Obiit Gundrada Cometissa.

1088. Obiit Willelmus Comes primus fundator.”

It appears that she died May 27, 1085, and he on June 24, 1088.

In the Chartulary of Lewes, written in 1444, (Cotton. MSS. Vespas. A. xv.) William de Warenne, the founder, mentions in his charter that his endowment was given—

“Pro salute animæ meæ et anima Gundradæ uxoris meæ et pro anima Domini Willelmi Regis, qui me in Anglicam terram adduxit, . . . . et pro salute Dominæ meæ Mathildis Reginae, matris uxoris meæ ;”

and instructs his heirs to bury him at Lewes, near his wife,—

“Semper Sanctum Pancratium caput honoris sui habeant, et ibi se mecum reddant, ubi jacet Gundrada uxor mea, et ego cum ea reddidi corpus meum, et ipsi similiter mecum faciant.”

That this wish was gratified, we learn both from Orderic, and also from the Lewes Chartulary:—

f. 106. “A Conquestore Angliæ, cujus filiam desponsavit, plurimum honoratus est. Iste jacet in Capitulo Lewensi juxta Dominam Gundradam Comitissam suam et filiam prædicti Regis Conquestoris.”

At f. 103, among the names of those buried is again recorded—

“Domina Gundrada, Comitissa Surreyæ, filia Conquestoris, quæ sepulta est in Capitulo Lewensi cum conjugè suo.”

As some doubts have arisen as to the parentage of Gundrada, it may be

mentioned that the Conqueror in his original charter (MSS. Cott. Vespas. F. iii. f. 1), certified by his own cross, and that of her husband, gives Walton to Lewes Priory—

“ Pro anima Gulielmi de Warena, et uxoris sue Gondrade filie mee, et hæredibus suis.”

A fold of the vellum occurs at the words “ filie mee,” and has nearly effaced them; though a close inspection of the MS. in the present nearly blank interval of 5-8ths of an inch between the other words can still trace them, and some more modern hand has written above this interval the words “ filie mee,” evidently not for interpolation, but for clearer explanation. Judging from the signatures attached to this Charter, its date may be fixed between 1080 and 1087.

It may here be remarked, that some passages in the nearly illegible MS. of the Lewes Annals, before referred to, have been applied to Lewes in the new edition of the Monasticon, which may properly belong to the kindred Cluniac Priors of Montacute, founded by William Earl of Morton, and of Farley (Monkton Farley), founded by Humphrey de Bohun, in 1125, subject to Lewes Priory.

This will appear from the following extracts from the imperfect MS.

“ 1106. Henricus Rex cepit . . . . et Robertum fratrem ejus quem posuit . . . . una cum Willielmo Comite Mor . . . . tore hujus loci.”

The “ lacunæ” may safely be supplied, as referring to William Earl of Morton, founder of Montacute.

“ 1227. Obiit Walterus de Bret, Dominus de Odecumbe, qui dedit nobis advocacionem ecclesiæ de Odecumbe.”

“ 1250. Henricus Rex Angliæ fuit apud Montem Acutum, et dedit nobis cuppam argenteam.”

“ 1260. Venit Dominus Yvo Abbas Cluni apud Montem Acutum, eodem anno incepit ponere Rogerus fabricam presbiterii et magnæ voltæ.”

All these refer to Montacute, and must have been written by a monk resident there.

“ 1243. In die anniversarii Domini Willielmi Comitum positum est fundamentum in novo opere ecclesiæ nostræ.”

This has been applied to Lewes in the Monasticon, but, as connected with the entries of 1250 and 1260 above, it appears to be equally applicable to Montacute, unless we suppose it to refer to the works at Lewes, to which Prior Fovill thus alludes :

“ 1268. Obiit Willelmus de Fovill Prior Lewensis, qui domum dimisit in bono statu et sine debitis. Assignavit conventui . . . . ad duas turres in fronte ecclesiæ perficiendas cc marcas sterling.”

That some of the buildings at Lewes were of the 13th century, may be readily proved by remains frequently found of fragments clearly belonging to the early English architecture; but whether any such buildings may have necessitated the removal of the Founders to the leaden cists in which they were found, must be uncertain. It seems on the whole most probable that such removal took place about the time of the second dedication of the Church before mentioned, when about sixty years had elapsed since the deaths of Gundrada and William, a sufficient period for the decay of their bodies.

Though not immediately connected with Gundrada, there is one extract from this MS. certainly attributed in error to a Lewes Prior.

“ 1252. Obiit bonæ memoriæ venerabilis pater Dominus Henricus de Fleg, quondam Prior hujus loci, cujus animæ propicietur Deus.”

From the annals of 1222, we find he was Prior of Farley.

“ 1222. Obiit Maino quondam Prior de Ferle . . . . item Henricus de Fleg Pri . . . . Ferle intravit Kartusiam. Exivit Dominus Henricus de Fleg auctoritate apostolica de Kartusiâ per appellationem conventus de Ferle . . . et per D<sup>m</sup>. Hugonem Priorem de Lewes dictam appellationem diligenter persequentem, qui eodem anno prioratui de Ferle ad instantiam patroni scilicet Humfredi de Bohun Comitis de Hereford et conventus de Ferle est restitutus.”

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