

LYRE and CORMEILLES.

Domesday Book, 1086, records that “*Of these two manors¹ St Mary’s of Cormeilles holds in alms from the King the churches, priests and tithes and 2 villagers*”²

Yet it is also recorded that “*While William FitzOsbern was earl of Hereford and had the royal manors in Herefs at his disposal, that is between 1067 and his death in 1071, he gave the church at Eardisland to the abbey he had founded at Lyre in Normandy (Gallia Christiana, xi, instrumenta,col.25). Domesday Book’s assertion (f.179) that Cormeilles Abbey (which FitzOsbern had also founded) had it is therefore wrong.*”³

Can it really be simply accepted that Domesday Book is wrong?⁴ What is the provenience of “Gallia...”?

Domesday Book says “tithes”, Coplestone-Crow says that “Gallia” has it that FitzOsbern gave “the church at Eardisland”, what aspects of the church? Just the church itself? Its Tithes? Its lands? The produce of its lands? The rents of such lands?

Other various sources also express the situation differently and it is not always clear what they really mean.

Blount says “*Fitz Osborne founded both ‘Lira’ and ‘Cormeils’ for the better support of which Abbies he gave divers churches lands and Tythes both in this County and in Worcestershire.*”⁵

Bannister says “Fitz-Osbern in earlier days had founded the abbeys of Lyre and Cormeilles. In the former of which he had buried his wife and had his own tomb in the other. These he now endowed with the manors and tithes in Herefordshire, and from the first they would seem to have entered into close relationship with the cathedral church. In later times, at any rate, we find the abbots of both monasteries “ex-officio” prebendaries of Hereford, with vicars to represent them in the choir.”⁶ The mention of “manors” in this context I find surprising.

Guery says [According to Laurent’s email of 2nd April 2007 it is Guery.]... “*Guillaume Fitz-Osbern.....en 1070, il donna, par sa deuxieme charte, a son abbaye de Lyre, des biens considerable en Angleterre: 48 eglises avec le patronage...[etc., etc.]... Cette donation est de 1070, disons-nous.... Le Gallia a publie ce document in extenso*” Guery goes on to say that all these donations are listed in his Appendix number two, which I believe to be his pages 158 and 159 which I received from Laurent via Graham some months ago.⁷ On page 159 is listed “Werlesten”, which Laurent maintains is Eardisland. After initial doubts I now

¹ Kingsland and Eardisland.

² Domesday Book, folio 179d. - via Phillimore edition.

³ Coplestone-Crow- Other.

⁴ This may not be as unlikely as I had first imagined. Towards the end of the introductory notes to the ‘Phillimore’ Domesday edition is the comment: “*Herefordshire seems to have caused the scribe a great deal of difficulty.....It would seem that the scribe began to write up the county before all the material was available.*” This makes confusion between Lyre and Cormeilles more possible than would otherwise have been the case.

⁵ Blount Mss of 1675, page 332 at HRO B56/12.

⁶ Bannister. “The Cathedral Church of Hereford” 1924, page 127.

⁷ Guery, C. “Histoire De L’Abbaye de Lyre.” Evreux, 1917.

agree with him. More importantly he says in his email “The note on page 159 is about a charter. This document is known as the second charter of the founder William Fitz-Osbourne in favor of abbey of Lyre in 1070. William gives a lot of incomes and rights in England. But I think it’s a false paper.”

However the essence of this point is that Guery (if he it is) lists as his source “Gallia” [see Coplestone-Crow in my second paragraph, above] - and Laurent also kindly provided a copy of what he says is “Gallia”. Although it has no page number, the sequence of the places listed is the same as in Guery, appendix 2. It lists “..., *ecclesiam de Werles-lena*, ”, which is very close to the spelling which Coplestone-Crow has, not in his “Other” notes by email, but in his “Herefordshire Place-Names”⁸ where he has “Werlesluna 1067-71 Gallia Christiana,...” under his section for Eardisland. Unfortunately he does not there quote a page number. But there is now no doubt in my mind that Werlesten/Werles-lena does indeed refer to Eardisland and Coplestone-Crow also referring to it removes my previous intention to check that what Laurent sent is indeed “Gallia”.

But the really important point arising from the extract from “Gallia” which Laurent provided is that there is differentiation between “*ecclesiam*” and “*decimam*” ie. between the church itself and tithes due to it. At lines 4 & 5 of what Laurent provided this distinction is quite clearly applied “....., *ecclesiam de Arreton, et totam decimam de dominio ejusdem ville*, ” but when it comes to “*Werles-lena*” it says only “....., *ecclesiam de Werles-lena*, ” and continues by mentioning a different place “..... *ecclesiam de Tametab cum omnibus pertinentiis suis*, ” a further differentiation. It is important to attempt to establish a specific meaning to each of these different wordings.

So far about the only “fact” on which all are agreed is that the death of William FitzOsbern occurred in 1071.⁹ Another firm piece of ground is that not very much later, in 1075, FitzOsbern’s son rebelled and was stripped of his lands and earldom.¹⁰ However, in the Welsh marches, as in the Isle of Wight... “*the possessions of Lyre remained intact when the earldom [of Hereford] was suppressed.*”¹¹ And so it was not then that a switch of benefits arising from Eardisland church, of whatever nature, from Lyre to Cormeilles took place.

And so back to 1086 and Domesday Book, first drawing the reader’s attention to the first two paragraphs of this Paper and repeating the wording in Domesday Book : “*Of these two manors [Kingsland and Eardisland¹²] “St Mary’s of Cormeilles holds in alms from the King the churches, priests and tithes and 2 villagers.*”¹³ I must leave it to each individual reader to decide how this wording compares, both textually and as to intended meaning, alongside the various recordings of what Lyre Abbey held, as already referred to above.

⁸ Coplestone-Crow, B. “Herefordshire Place-Names” BAR British Series 214.1989.

⁹ Guery has 22nd February 1071.

¹⁰ Matthew D.J.A. “The Norman Monasteries and their English Possessions”, page 33. [Amongst several others].

¹¹ Hockey, S.F., in “Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies III” 1980, page 97.

¹² Of recent years Historians have been unanimous as to this identification.

¹³ Domesday Book, folio 179d.-via Phillimore edition.

Of other references to Cormeilles receiving any benefits from the church at Eardisland I know of none. However, one historian [Matthew] does record movements of assets between the two abbeys, Lyre and Cormeilles: *“In the Marches, where he [FitzOsbern] received from the Conqueror his last important commission, the hitherto neglected monks of Cormeilles were given possessions in sixteen of his manors, while Lire received possessions in only six manors. Yet when Henry II confirmed the possessions of the monks of Cormeilles in 1172 they retained interests in only eight of the sixteen vills of 1086, and judging from Lire’s late-twelfth century rental it was Lire which had replaced Cormeilles in six of these eight.”*¹⁴ To complicate matters further he goes on to say *“FitzOsbern was replaced in the Marches by William de Briouze and he brought with him the monks of Saint-Florent-les-Saumur, whom he had already introduced into Sussex. The first surviving record of dispute between the monks of Lire and Saumur belongs to the mid-twelfth century”*¹⁵, *but their rival spheres of interest probably began to intersect in the Conqueror’s own lifetime.”*

Hockey’s Paper in “Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies III. 1980” from which I have already quoted has more information helpful to the thrust of this Paper.

He records:¹⁶ *“Lyre held the greatest number of churches recorded in Domesday and appears there also as the greatest recipient of ecclesiastical tithes.”* It is very relevant that he differentiates between *“...held...churches...”* and *“...recipient of ecclesiastical tithes”*. This sits comfortably with my earlier point about differentiation which arose from the wording in “Gallia”. He goes on to say: *“More interesting is the fact that the geographical distribution of these churches follows the career of their donor and marks out the spheres of his activity, first in the Isle of Wight and”*¹⁷ *then in the Welsh marches,.....his earldom dated from 1067...”*. At this stage he refers to an appendix in which he lists the *“...so many scattered benefactions...”*.

This appendix,¹⁸ he explains has *“Churches or chapels in italics; t. for tithes”*. Under the sub-heading: “Priory of Livers Ocle (Heref.)” he lists:

“...; Eardisland, rents;...”

Other places listed are listed as paying tithes, others have a quantity of land listed; the list is clear and specific throughout.

Another, very authoritative, source schedules exactly the same information.¹⁹

From this it seems clear to me that he gave “rents” accruing to Eardisland church to Lyre Abbey, not, as stated by Coplestone-Crow, *“...the church at Eardisland”*.

Is it possible that Lyre got the rents and Cormeilles the tithes at this early date? The comments towards the top of page 157 of Kemp, B.R. “Monastic Possession of Parish churches in England in the 12th Century.” in “The Journal of Ecclesiastical History.” April 1980, lend some support to this suggestion.

¹⁴ Matthew’s footnote from this position [his page 34, footnote 1] says “Lire received no manor from FitzOsbern, but all its churches were in vills belonging to him while he lived.....Cormeilles’ churches were also situated on Fitz Osbern’s lands.

¹⁵ His footnote here quotes his source.

¹⁶ Op.cit. page 96.

¹⁷ Op.cit. page 96.

¹⁸ Op.cit. page 104.

¹⁹ Hockey, S.F. *William fitz Osbern and the endowment of his abbey of Lyre.* at page 104 in *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies III. The Boydell Press. 1980.*

But even if that was the case, the tithes must have been switched to Lyre at some date because after Domesday there is no mention in my notes of Cormeilles getting anything, of whatever nature. However the loss of Cormeilles' archives in a fire in the thirteenth century²⁰ makes research into this very difficult and for the moment this particular question must be left in abeyance.

One possible solution to the switch from Cormeilles to Lyre arises from Laurent's comment²¹ to the effect that he considers Fitz Osbern's Second Charter of 1070 to be a "false paper" and that others think so also. If that was the document that Henry II relied on in 1172 when he confirmed to the monks of Cormeilles their then holdings, when they had interests in only eight vills as opposed to sixteen in 1086, and if Matthew is correct that it was Lire that replaced Cormeilles in six of the eight²², and if Laurent and others are correct in that it was indeed a spurious document, then we reach a possible solution to the question mooted at the start of this Paper. The solution being that the monks of Lire in 1172 "got away with" putting in front of Henry II a forged document, thus establishing a false claim to benefits arising from Eardisland church and at the same time back-dating the evidence by almost exactly one hundred years. Later this "false" document was to be picked up in "Gallia"²³, and subsequently, because of the effect it had undoubtedly had (ie. Lire certainly held the right to benefits from Eardisland church after 1172 until 1415)²⁴, it has been taken by historians as being genuine; this conclusion perhaps being assisted by the absence of the Cormeille archive "destroyed in a fire in the thirteenth century" as mentioned at the end of my last paragraph. One wonders as to the circumstances surrounding that fire!

CONCLUSION:

It is not possible to reach a conclusion at this stage.

After 1172 there are fourteen references in my files to Lire holding Eardisland church [I word this loosely intentionally] before in 1415 the property in England of various monastic establishments, including Lire, was added to the endowment of the then new²⁵ Shene Priory in Surrey. There is nothing which could, even with my imagination, assist the thrust of this Paper.

However, much remains to be done. Whilst reading the sources to which I have referred, in particular some of the footnotes, it has become apparent to me that, because everybody approaches a subject in their own way and because (not surprisingly) nobody else has been at all concerned about the special circumstances of Eardisland viz-a-viz Cormeilles/Lire there *may* or equally well *may not* be something to be learned by turning up the actual references quoted by my sources and seeing them from a different point of view.

As a result I have a long list of items of Research to undertake, from which, in the fullness of time, I shall gradually update this Paper.

²⁰ Hockey, S.F., O.S.B. "William fitz Osbern and the endowment of his abbey of Lyre" in "Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1980", page 98.

²¹ His email reply to Graham Simpson dated 2nd April 2007.

²² Matthew, page 34; where he goes on to say "These two sister foundations can have borne no deep love to one another, in spite of the identical circumstances which deprived them of their influential patrons so early." What prompted him to say this he does not record. Had he seen something to suggest a dispute between the two monasteries?

²³ The second paragraph of this Paper refers.

²⁴ This will be dealt with hereunder.

²⁵ Founded 25th September 1414. [Matthew].

