

### The Benedictine Cell of Redbourn.

BY THE REV. H. FOWLER, M.A.

I might call the notes I have to offer *Gleanings from the Monastic documents (as published in the Rolls series) on the subject of the Priory of Redbourn.*

The history begins with the account of the *Invention* of S. Amphibalus, *i.e.*, the (supposed) discovery of his relics. But it may perhaps add to the interest of the matter, if I commence with a few remarks on the martyrdom. Here I must acknowledge my obligations to the learned work of Messrs. Liebermann and Paul, entitled—*Ex Rerum Anglicarum Scriptoribus, sæc. XIII.*—a copy of which has been presented by them to the Cathedral Library.

It appears that the story of the martyrdom of the converter of S. Alban probably did not arise till the 12th century; it certainly was not connected till then with the name of Amphibalus. William, the monk of S. Albans, who wrote the *Agonal* of the saint for Abbot Simon (between 1167 and 1177), states, that he had added the name of Amphibalus, which he had not found in his S. Albans authority, but in "the book of *Galfridus Arturus* (*i.e.*, Geoffrey of Monmouth) *de Britannico.*" Geoffrey's character as a romancer is well known. Mr. J. R. Green (in his "History of the English people") calls him "that daring fabulist." The writer professes to be translating into Latin a vernacular history of S. Alban, written in the year 590, (the date is extraordinary). The story about this, current in the Abbey, we find in the *Gesta Abb.*, vol. I., p. 26. It is said Abbot Eadmer discovered in the ruins of Verulamium a history of S. Alban, written in the British tongue. It had illuminated letters, and was in good preservation. After much search an aged priest, named Unwona, was found, who was able to interpret it, and the scribes of the monastery wrote down his interpretation (in Anglo-Saxon). No sooner was the translation completed, than the book crumbled to powder and disappeared. We may form our own conclusions as to the genuineness of the work which William alleges as his authority.

It is stated that the British narrative agreed in all respects with Bede's, but we know Bede says nothing

whatever about the martyrdom of the clerk who converted S. Alban.

We can hardly fail to notice how the story of S. Amphibalus grew out of that of S. Alban by successive accretions from the 5th to the 12th centuries. Venantius in the 5th century simply states that S. Alban suffered martyrdom in Britain (see Bede's *Eccl. Hist.*) Gildas, in the 6th century, adds that he changed clothes with another confessor, to save that confessor's life (*Gildas de Excidio Britannicæ*—Ed. Stevenson, p. 17). Then Bede, in the 8th century, relates that the other confessor was a *clerk*, who converted the citizen Alban, at Verulamium, while concealed by him in his hut ; that the *clerk* escaped, while S. Alban offered himself to martyrdom in his cloak—(*caracalla*). (*Bede Hist. Eccles.*, Ed. Moberly, 1869, p. 18). Then at last, in the 12th century, William the monk gives an elaborate history of this clerk, who now receives the name *Amphibalus*, which happens to mean a *cloak*.

William's legend, as printed in the *Acta Sanctorum* (*Vid. Acta Sanct., Junius tom. V., Dies 20-24*) occupies ten folio pages (it is taken from the Cotton MS., Claudius E. IV., fol. 34). The saint's martyrdom is said to have been caused by the rage of the authorities at Verulamium at the multitudes converted by his preaching. The number of martyrs is stated to be 999 ! Amphibalus (according to this account) is sent from Wales to suffer at Verulamium. He is fallen upon by his persecutors at Redbourn ; is disembowelled, stabbed with knives and lances, and then stoned. His nine disciples are despatched by the sword. The bodies are buried on the spot by converts. What name the Britons gave to Redbourn does not appear. Soon after this *legend* was completed (it must have been less than ten years), we have the account of the *Invention* of the saint. It comes from Roger of Wendover, whose work, called "*Flores Historiarum*," was embodied by Matthew Paris in his "*Historia Major*." Roger was not contemporary with the event, which is assigned to 1178. He began to write under John de Cella, in 1204 (*Liebermann*). It is thought that the account may be taken from a roll belonging to Adam the Cellarer (alluded to in the *Gesta Abb.* [I. 206] as *the roll of Bar-*

*tholomeu the clerk*). Adam was one of the most distinguished persons in the Monastery in 1178, and may have been an eye-witness of what was then done at Redbourn.

#### INVENTION OF S. AMPHIBALUS.

I will now give a brief summary of this famous story. [Matt. Paris, Hist. Maj. sub. an. 1178]. In the time of Abbot Simon S. Amphibalus was much talked about, and a certain elderly burgess of S. Albans, named Robert, had a dream about him. He thought S. Alban appeared at his bed, and said he was sent to reveal the burial place of the clerk, who had converted him. He then conducted Robert to Redbourn. The spot visited is thus described:—"That locality in the vill called Redburne, distant about 3 miles from S. Albans, had a plain pleasant for travellers to rest in, with its pastures and ditches. Here rose two hillocks (*colliculi*) called the *Mounds of the Banners*, because the people assembled here with banners, when they made their annual processions to the church of S. Alban. (The dream is evidently intended to be correct in its topography). S. Alban pointed to one of these mounds and said, "That contains the relics of my master." He opens the ground with his hand, and displays a cist (*scrinium*), and a light breaks forth from it. He replaces the sods, and bids the astonished Robert mark the spot and consider what he ought to do. Robert then returns to his bed and the saint to his shrine. We are told that after a time the dream was written down by a monk called Gilbert de Sisseverne. Thereupon Abbot Simon at once takes measures for realizing the prognostic. Some of the brethren are sent to Redbourn, Robert points out the spot, and a watch is set. The proceedings attract a great crowd from the country round, and the place has the animated appearance of a fair. On the Friday before the Feast of S. Alban special Litanies are observed. Then miracles are heard of at Redbourn—persons are cured of their maladies by lying on the grass beside the mound, and so forth. The 25th of June is fixed for the important search. The Abbot comes to Redbourn, and celebrates mass in the old chapel of S. James, which stood close to the mound. He invokes the saint; and the excavators are set to work. He returns home. By and bye, while the excited monks are

listening to the recital of the *Agonal* in the Refectory a messenger runs in, announcing that S. Amphibalus and three of his friends have been found. The Convent hold a service of thanksgiving. Then it is related how the bones of the saint were found broken to fragments ; a knife was in his skull, another at the breast. He lay between two others, and a third athwart him. But the skeletons of these and of the six others found round about were unmutilated. All these particulars are said to agree with the narrative of the *Agonal*, and prove the genuineness of the *Invention*.

We must finish the story, and then make a remark.

The Abbot takes the Prior and some brethren to the site of the excavations ; they reverently collect the *relics* in cloths, and the procession takes its way to the Monastery. They are met by the shrine of S. Alban, which is borne forth to greet the relics of his master. The shrine flies on the shoulders of the bearers. A sudden shower descending betokens the benediction of heaven, (for it was a time of drought), the relics are carried into the church with the singing of canticles, and deposited by the shrine at the High Altar.

I suppose we may take it for granted that we have here certain facts, which have received a peculiar colouring in accordance with the superstitious notions of the age. The account of the locality has an air of reality, and may be borne in mind when we are enquiring for the site of the Priory. The level plain amid pastures and ditches was not far from the high road (we suppose Watling Street). The mounds of the banners and the chapel of S. James are the land marks. The chapel must have been in existence when Wendover wrote.

Whatever may be thought of the dream, I suppose we may accept it as a fact that in one of the mounds excavations were made, and bones and weapons were found.

In a paper written by the late noted antiquary, Mr. T. Wright (contained in the *Archæologia*, date 1849), the opinion is advanced that these mounds were Saxon *tumuli*, and the remains found were those of pagan Saxons. That the knife described as lying in the scull of the saint was a spear-head, generally found in such interments by the scull ; the other knife may have been the *saxe*, which is usually deposited a little below the

breast. Mr. Wright says, "I am convinced that a large portion of the *relics* of saints, shewn in the middle ages, were taken from the *sepulchral barrows* of the early populations of the countries in which they were shown."

I have nothing to add to this suggestion.

### THE PRIORY.

The Priory was certainly founded on the site of the so-called *Invention*. There is no account of its erection. In the time of Abbot Warin, 1183-95, the successor of Simon, we read, some monks were sent to Redbourn for change and refreshment (*Gest* 1. 211). We infer, therefore, that the monks' habitation had then been built.

I had better now state what we glean from the documents about the cell.

It was a very small place. The constitutions of Abbot Richard de Wallingford (*Gest*. II., 202), limit the establishment to a prior and three monks. The three monks were to be changed every month. The inner court contained the chapel or church of S. Amphibalus, and the old chapel of S. James. There must have been a prior's lodge. The monks' hall, dormitory, and other offices are mentioned (*Gest*. II., 399). There was not much need of a kitchen, because the monks' meals were sent down in a cart from the monastery daily, the sub-kitchener supplying them (*Gest*. II. 202). The foundation is stated to be for honouring the spot where the martyrs suffered. The locality is described in an indenture of Abbot Thomas de la Mare as Redburne's Heath, where the martyr Amphibalus was found, after whose translation (the document says) the Abbot of that time (we suppose Abbot Simon) caused about a third part of the Heath to be enclosed by fences and ditches (*'sepibus et fossatis'*), and erected within the enclosure a certain cell, which up to the present time (it means the year 1383) is called the *Priory of Redburne*, (*Gest*. III. 260).

Redbourn Heath seems to have disappeared, but "Heath House" marks a point in it. The outer court of the enclosure certainly contained a barn and a dovecot and stabling for the Prior's horses. The chapel of S. Amphibalus has the most interest for us. It may have been begun by Abbot Simon, but it was not consecrated till at least 40 years after the date of the *Invention*. The

account is in the *Gesta Abb.* (vol. I., 289). "Abbot William Trumpington caused the church of the Blessed Amphibalus and of his friends, for veneration of the spot where they suffered, to be dedicated by John Bishop of Ardfert; the Abbot himself being present in pontificals, with Gilbert de Sisseverne, the Prior." An Indulgence of 40 days was granted. The Abbot presented a Psalter, splendidly bound, with an Ordinal.

Gilbert de Sisseverne was no doubt the first Prior. A monk of the same name was master of the works for 30 years under Abbots John de Cella and William Trumpington, when they were rebuilding the west front of the Abbey Church. If this Gilbert was the same person as the Prior, he was certainly a most accomplished and energetic man. He probably superintended the building of the Priory, which must have been going on at the same time as the work in the Abbey Church. Abbot Trumpington did not forget to dignify the oratory here with relics; when he translated the Redbourn relics to the nave of the Abbey Church, and had an altar there dedicated by the same John Bishop of Ardfert, in honour of S. Amphibalus, he sent to Redbourn two gilded coffers, containing some particles of the presumed martyr's bones and dust, and appointed a monk to watch them in the oratory (*Mat. Paris, Vit. Abb.*, p. 122, ed. Wats). Thomas of Redbourn, the chronicler, who was Bishop of S. Davids in the 15th century, records that two large knives (*grandiores cultros*) were preserved among the relics at Redbourn (*Bollandus, Acta Sanct.*) The relics are the turning point of a story related by Roger de Wendover, who was the historian of the Monastery at the time. Chauncy takes this story to refer to the parish church, but the words of the chronicler clearly designate the Priory. "In 1217 (soon after the death of King John), the army of the Barons and the French, under the command of the Count of Perch, marched to the relief of the Castle of Mount Sorrel (in Leicestershire), which was besieged by the King's army under the Earl of Pembroke. They set out from London in great force (600 knights and 20,000 soldiers), scouring the country, and not sparing churches and cemeteries. At S. Albans the Abbey was saved with difficulty. On the 1st of May they directed their march for Dunstable, and passed through Redbourn. Here they

pillaged the *church of S. Amphibalus*, and stripped the monks of their habits. Laying hands on the relics over the altar, they desecrated them. One of them seized a silver cross, containing a fragment (supposed) of the true cross, and secreted it in his bosom. He was immediately possessed with an evil spirit; he fell down foaming, and then threatened the life of his comrades. Being ignorant of the cause of his madness, they bound his hands out of pity, and brought him with them to the church of Flamstead, intending to plunder it. The priest of Flamstead presented himself in his alb, and withstood them at the door of the church. In the confusion which followed, the silver cross dropped from the man's bosom. His comrades now perceived that his madness was a judgment on sacrilege. In abject fear they entreat the priest to restore the cross to the monks before tasting food. The priest hastens to the oratory with the cross, and relates the wonder to the Prior" (*Mat. Paris, Wats, p. 249*). This incident probably occurred after the dedication.

There was no cemetery at the Priory. Abbot Michael de Mentmore ordained, that if any brother died here the body was to be conveyed to the monastery for burial, and admitted at S. German's gate (*Gest. I., 453*).

The priors here, as far as we learn, were not very remarkable. The prior, Geoffrey of S. Albans, is named as one of the three monks sent to King Edward I. about the *congé d'élire* for the election of Abbot John de Berkhamstead, in 1290 (*Gest II., 7*). Prior Richard de Hatfield rendered himself obnoxious to Abbot John de Maryns by persistently opposing his election in 1302; he was deposed (*Gest II., 54*). Prior John Woderove suffered a good deal of trouble; and the account of it gives us some landmarks. The Priory land bordered on the manor of Flamstead, and the men of Flamstead disputed the manorial rights on Redbourn Heath. They persisted in digging the Prior's sand, belaboured his servants, and threatened to pull down the house of his tenant (or neighbour), \* Thomas Bedel, which was built on the Heath. They seized the Priory cart and horses, with the provisions, and drove them into the manor of Flamstead. They swore they would erect a gallows, in

\* This was probably on the site of Heath House on Redbourn Green.

defiance of his jurisdiction, in front of the Priory gate next to the Heath.

The Earl of Warwick, lord of Flamstead, supported his tenants' claims. The Prior was hard pressed, and was obliged to purchase from the Commons of Redbourn a back road, extending from the mill of Bettespole to the lane called Heybrygge Lane, to secure the safe transit of his dinners. After a time the Abbot, who was Thomas de la Mare, by dint of persevering efforts, came to an amicable settlement with his powerful neighbour. The boundaries of the Heath having been surveyed, and meetings held, the Abbot's manorial rights were established by the Indenture to which I have already alluded. The Earl's tenants were allowed the favour of driving their cattle over the Heath to water, and to market. Thomas de Beauchamp, the younger, was the Earl referred to (Gest. III. 259-261). The above description indicates that part of the Heath was identical with Redbourn Common.

Abbot Thomas' interest in the Priory was not limited to protecting its rights. He presented to the House service-books, mass plate, vestments, and altar furniture, also cushions for the hall; he made better provision for the dinners and fuel; he erected a convenient study for himself in the Priory, also a wardrobe; he paid frequent visits, and made himself very agreeable to the brethren. It is said he was often the first to rise for matins, and rang the bell with his own hand. He also rebuilt the chapel of S. James (within the court), which had been burnt down, and remained in ruins many years. He ordered it to be dedicated by a foreign Archbishop (Gesta II. 397-399). In 1396, at the election of Abbot John Moute, William Wylum was Prior of Redbourn (Gest. III. 425). He was probably the same William of Wylum who wrote the *Liber Benefactorum* for Abbot Thomas de la Mare, c. 1380. After his time the Priory suffered from neglect. In the annals of Amundesham we read, "The cell stood sometimes vacant" (Amun. II. 204). Abbot John de Wheathampstead resuscitated it. He ordained that four brethren should be in residence (in succession), besides the Prior, and keep the canonical hours. He added to the staff two singing clerks to assist at mass, and provided for their maintenance out of the Manors of Radwell, Burston, and Sandridge. The



Festival of S. Amphibalus was to be observed with three Lections, as in the Monastery. We have a hint of a congregation of the laity at the Priory chapel. "On every festival when the people (populus) resort to the church a mass to note is to be celebrated." (Amund. II. 204-210). Abbot Wheathampstead expended £40 on the buildings. He repaired the kitchen, renewed the enclosure of the outer court, and made certain alterations in the church.\* There is a doubt whether these do not refer to the parish church. He gave the brethren a silver salt, and a crimson velvet vestment (Amund. II. 200). What relations the Prior had with the parish church is a difficult question, but there is a hint in the documents that the Priors of the cells had some authority delegated to them in the matter of tithes, and ministrations to the laity of the parish in which they were located (*Mat. Pars, Vit. Ab.*, ed. Wats. p. 180).

On the death of Wheathampstead, Prior Thomas Westwode was among the electors of his successor, William Alban, in 1465 (*Regist. II.* 30). This Abbot visited the Priory, for he signed a certain deed here, on September 24th, 1474 (*Regist. II.* 115). In 1476 Thomas Alban, Prior of Redbourn, was present at the election of Abbot William Walingforde (*Regist. II.* 145). In 1480 he came to the Abbey for the visitation of the Abbot of Westminster (*Regist. II.* 231).

After this the priory disappears from the documents. It perhaps fell into abeyance. There is no account of its suppression. The subsequent history of the site we learn from Mr. Cussans. The Manor of S. Amphibal, including the site of the Priory, was granted by Henry VIII., in 1544, to John Cock, of Broxbourne; the annual value was £5. It soon came to a Stepneth, who, about the commencement of Queen Elizabeth's reign, sold it to Sir Richard Reade. He lived at the "Place House," was a benefactor to the parish, and died in 1576. His monument is in the church. The Place House was probably the most important residence in the parish. In 1577 his son, Innocent Reade, obtained the Queen's license to alienate the Priory estate, and among the plots of land named in the document we find "a parcel of ground called St. Amfabell's Chapel, containing half an

\* I think, however, they refer exclusively to the Priory church or chapel.

acre, with barn and dove-house appurtenant." This clearly designates the site of the Priory church or chapel. Before 1615 the manor passed to Sir William Cavendish. In 1628 it came to Thomas Saunders, of Beechwood, whose family conveyed it before 1660 to William Beaumont. He devised it to his son-in-law, Eignon Beynon. We shall see the monuments of this family in the church. They probably lived at the Place House. In 1776 it passed by sale to James Viscount Grimston, the ancestor of the Earl of Verulam, who is now lord of the Manor of S. Amphibal.

And now a word in regard to the site. The boundaries of the manor would probably give us the line of the priory enclosure ; but our evidence at present is rather scanty. I will just point out on this rough plan the few points I have been able to ascertain. For my information I am greatly indebted to the very courteous assistance of Miss Grimstead.

Some houses on the west side of the High-street and in Lamb-lane are in the Manor of S. Amphibal. Then a row of cottages called the Bees Nest, on the north side of the avenue, on the edge of the Common, is in the Manor. This is likely to be the site of the Prior's Apiary. The line of the ditch there extending along the common westward would, I suppose, be the boundary. Heath House, which projects into the common, is probably outside the line. I believe these clusters of houses are also outside. Perhaps the line runs behind them up to Lamb-lane. According to information the High-street bounds the Manor for some distance on the east ; it extends up northwards to a house called Crouch Hall, not far from S. Agnall's Farm, where the Manor of S. Agnall's meets it. The history tells us that the prior's land bordered in one part on the Manor of Flamstead. Thus we get a general idea of the situation of the Manor. It lies in the north of the parish. Lyebury-lane passes through it. This lane enters the common at the Bees Nest, and here probably there was a gate of the Priory. The south-east corner of the Manor is the most interesting to us, but it seems very difficult to define. The stables of this house (Miss Grimstead informs me) are in the Manor of Redbourn. It is not known in which manor the house and garden were before

they were enfranchised, but in this garden we may be very near the meeting line of the two Manors.

We must now look to another clue. The striking feature of Redbourn Common is that fine avenue of elm trees which leads up from the church. But to what does it lead? To nothing now except the opening of the passage called *The Ruins*. Assuming that an avenue existed in early times, the idea suggests itself that it led to the "Mounds of the Banners." After the Priory was erected, a gate may have stood here opposite the avenue. *The Ruins* seems to be the old traditional name of this passage, not a modern invention. No vestiges or foundations appear to be known now, but an old name is generally accepted as an evidence in such investigations. The lane passes from the High-street just outside Miss Grimstead's garden wall, so I think here we cannot be far off the site of the Benedictine Cell.

When the Priory buildings had been pulled down, Sir Richard Reade may have built his house out of the materials on the verge of the Manor. The Place House may have been on the site of Miss Grimstead's house, which in recent times has been called "The Priory." The site of the chapel of S. Amphibal, which has given its name to a piece of ground may be discoverable.

The Earl of Verulam has obliged us, that a piece of ground called "The Chapel," and believed to be the site of S. Amphibal's Chapel, formerly existed in his Manor of S. Amphibal. It has been enfranchised, and has passed into the possession of the Lyon-Bowes family. Miss Grimstead has most courteously assisted us in making enquiries, but the site has not at present been identified.