

Bishops' manors

A note by Peter Balmer

29 November 2009

One question which arose at the meeting of the Forum on 14 November 2009 was that of the separation of manors and other sources of income between bishops and their cathedrals. This was in the context of the Bishop of Salisbury's possession of the manor of Godalming (which included Haslemere in the Middle Ages) and Salisbury Cathedral's possession of the rectory of Godalming (which until the late twelfth or early thirteenth century included Chiddingfold and its chapel of Haslemere).

Further reflection and investigation suggest different patterns for the secular cathedrals (served by secular canons) and the monastic cathedrals (served by monks). In southern England, the former group included Salisbury, Chichester and London, while the latter included Winchester, Canterbury and Rochester.

The normal way of supporting secular canons was through prebends (a church or group of churches, or other property, from which the income was used to support an individual canon, and the congregation of such a church was paid a fixed stipend). Some prebends existed before the Norman Conquest [1], but their number expanded greatly after that [2] (not least because absentee canons were useful as clerks for the royal or magnates' households [3], leaving their work in the cathedral to be fulfilled by poorly paid vicars choral). Domesday Book, while not generally concerning itself with church appropriations, records a number of cases where lands were held communally by the canons of cathedrals, separate from the lands of the bishop, for example in the dioceses of London and Chichester [4], and considerably fewer cases where lands were held by individual canons [5]. Some of the communal lands were subsequently allocated to individual canons as prebends, so that property supporting the communal aspects of the cathedral in the later Middle Ages may, in effect, have been a residual. In other secular cathedrals, the separation of the canons' property from that of the bishop is not apparent in Domesday, but the creation of prebends is likely to have seen the separation of sources of income by the early to mid twelfth century.

For the monastic cathedrals, the distinction between the bishops' and monks' property is rather less clear in Domesday Book. This records some of the Bishop of Winchester's villas as being allocated to the sustenance of the monks [6], and in Kent the lands of the Archbishop of Canterbury are recorded separately from the lands of the archbishop's monks [7]. For these latter villas, the formulation in Domesday suggests that the archbishop was still the tenant-in-chief. On the other hand, the lands of the archbishop's monks were almost all later medieval manors of the cathedral priory [8] (and none became manors of the archbishop), suggesting that effective separation had occurred before Domesday [9]. Among the archbishop's manors in Surrey, Cheam was recorded in Domesday as being held by the archbishop for the sustenance of the monks [10], but was

later split (before 1291) between a manor of the archbishop and a manor of the cathedral priory [11], whereas Merstham appeared in Domesday as held by the archbishop for the clothing of the monks [12], but the manor later belonged to the cathedral priory and not the archbishop [13]. The example of Cheam suggests the process of separation may have been more complicated than the pattern in Kent would indicate. The separation of manors between the abbot and monks of major monasteries could also be protracted. Westminster Abbey, for example, did not see final agreement on separation until 1225 [14].

Any comments and further information would be most helpful. Information on the split between the two Cheam manors would be of particular interest.

- [1] Blair J 2005. The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society Oxford, OUP pp362-3
- [2] A grant of 1175x84 of Chiddingfold church with its chapel of Piperham (Haslemere), contained in the Register of St Osmund and reprinted in English Episcopal Acta 18: Salisbury 1078-1217 p39, shows that it belonged to the Prebend of Heytesbury in Salisbury Cathedral at that date, although evidence of prebends in Surrey is rare.
- [3] Bartlett R 2000. England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225 Oxford, OUP pp389-90
- [4] Domesday Book (DDB) e.g. Folio 127V Middlesex, Fulham, Twyford, Willesden, Harlesden; Folio 128 Middlesex, Tottenham Court, Hoxton, West Drayton; Folio 17 Sussex, Preston; Folio 136 Hertfordshire, Kenworth, Caddington, Ardeley, Sandon.
- [5] DDB e.g. Folio 127V Middlesex, Harlesden; Folio 128 Middlesex, Hoxton.
- [6] DDB Folio 41 Hampshire
- [7] DDB Folios 4 and 5 Kent
- [8] Sweetinburh S 2004. Landholding in 1300. In T Lawson and D Killingray (eds) An Historical Atlas of Kent Chichester, Phillimore pp48-9
- [9] Smith RAL 1969. Canterbury Cathedral Priory: a study in monastic administration Cambridge, CUP pp4-5
- [10] DDB Folio 30V Surrey
- [11] Victoria County History (VCH) Surrey volume 4 1912, p196
- [12] DDB Folio 31 Surrey
- [13] VCH Surrey volume 3 1911, p215
- [14] Harvey B 1977. Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages Oxford, OUP pp85-91; Sullivan D 2006. The Westminster Circle London, Historical Publications pp123-6, 132-3, 135-6, 195-201