

**A FERRERS DOCUMENT OF THE
TWELFTH CENTURY**

BY ELEANOR SWIFT, M.A.

A Ferrers Document of the Twelfth Century

By Eleanor Swift, M.A.

AN early charter presented to Leicester City Museum by the British Records Association, is a confirmation and grant to Garendon Abbey by William Earl Ferrers, of land and pasturage rights at Heathcote in Derbyshire. The illustration that accompanies this note¹ will give some idea of the appearance of the deed, and a transcription and translation are appended. The grant is written, as was usual, in Latin on parchment 8" × 5", and is sealed with a fine equestrian seal of Earl William, appended to the deed by a woven silk thong.

William Earl Ferrers, Earl of Derby, who was undoubtedly the third earl of that creation, inherited his father's lands and title about 1160. He married Sybil de Braose, had a son William who succeeded him and died at the siege of Acre in the Holy Land, in 1190. The descent of the family, in the twelfth century, as given here follows that of G.E.C.'s *The Complete Peerage*. Nichols, in his *History of Leicestershire*, and Dugdale in *Baronage of England*, differ widely from G.E.C. Both give a greater number of holders of the title, including two in the twelfth, and one in the thirteenth century, who married ladies called Sybil. As far as concerns the dating of this deed, the 13th century Sybil can be disregarded, since she died before her husband succeeded to the Earldom, and was therefore never Countess.

Of the other two, Sybil de Braose is said to have married a Robert and to have had a son William, who also married a Sybil of whom nothing else is apparently known.² It would seem that confusion has arisen here because of a mistranscription of Robert instead of William, in a grant quoted in *Discoverie of Errours*, by Vincent³ in which *Sybilla de Braose* is given as the name of the donor's wife and the mother of his son William. That son, in a confirmation to the monastery of Tutbury lists his ancestors as follows:—*Henricus de Ferrariis fundator huiusdem*

¹By kind permission of the Director and Committee of the City of Leicester Museum.

²Nichols, *Hist of Leic.* II, p. 408; Dugdale, *Baronage of England*, 1675 edition, Vol. I, p. 259; T. C. Banks, *Dormant and Extinct Baronage of England*, Vol. III, Pedigree of Ferrers.

³Page 677, and see also G.E.C., Vol. IV, p. 194.

*ecclesie, Engenulfus de F, Robertus de F. et alius Robertus de F. Willhelmus comes de F. pater meus.*⁴ This seems fairly conclusive in conjunction with the lack of any other reference connecting Sybil with a Robert; whereas there are several documents in which William speaks of *Sibilla sponsa*, or *uxor mea*. The Museum document has one such reference; another is in a confirmation by William of various gifts of land to Breedon Priory;⁵ and a third is in a charter to the monks of St. Denis in France.⁶ In addition, one of the witnesses, William de Rideware, is known to have been steward to Earl William.⁷ His name appears also as witness to a charter to the priory of Breedon together with Jordan de Thoc and William Mauvoysin,⁸ while another from the same Earl to Ralph de Seile giving licence to alienate a mill at Nether Seale has a de Tokâ and a de Lecâ,⁹ among those present at the sealing. This document has attached to it a seal apparently from the same matrix as that on the Museum deed.¹⁰ Both are equestrian seals and shew striking similarities in design. The legend on the Nether Seale document is:—

Sigillum Willelmi Comitis de Ferrariis. In neither case is there a counter seal. Unfortunately, only the edge of the seal is visible on the design so that no new light is thrown on the arms borne by the Ferrers family in the twelfth century. They have been figured, probably hypothetically, as sable, six horse shoes argent; the same with tinctures reversed; and six horse shoes sable pierced or. The popular story that Henry de Ferrières was Master of the Farriers in the Conqueror's army would be sufficient to justify these arms, though it is more probable that they refer to the high office that the Sire de Ferrières held in Normandy as *premier baron fossier*. The workers in iron in that province were under the jurisdiction of six *barons fossiers* of whom the Sire de Ferrières and Chambrais was the chief.¹¹ Henry, who apparently came to England either with William I, or soon after, was the son of Wakelin de Ferrières who had been killed in the civil wars that accompanied the minority of Duke

⁴G.E.C., Vol. IV, p. 194, note e.

⁵Nichols, *Hist. of Leic.* III, p. 698.

⁶*Ibid.*, *Hist. of Leic.* II, p. 408.

⁷*Ibid.*, III, p. 902*. Quotes Dugdale, *Monasticum Anglicanum* II, p. 506.

⁸*Ibid.*, III, p. 697.

⁹*Ibid.*, III, p. 979.

¹⁰Illustrated, *ibid.*, III, p. 993, plate cxxxiii, fig. 1.

¹¹The others were: La Ferté and Fresnel; Chaumont; and the Abbots of Lyre, St. Wandrille and St. Evroul.

William. He was one of the Domesday Commissioners and according to that record, himself held 210 manors or lordships in England, including 35 in Leicestershire, 114 in Derbyshire, and the rest scattered over 12 other counties. He set the example his successors were to follow so thoroughly of founding and endowing monasteries. His chief foundation was at Tutbury in Staffordshire, the head of the Ferrers honor, where he built, and with his wife Bertha, endowed, a house for Cluniac monks.

His only surviving son, Robert, succeeded to his possessions in England, except Oakham and Lechlade, which, with those in Normandy, were inherited by Henry, son of either Engenulf or William, Robert's elder brothers. The line thus endowed continued in Normandy as Seigneurs de Chambrais until the sixteenth century. Lechlade and Oakham were the marriage portion of Isabel, Henry's grand-daughter, who married Roger Mortimer. The custom observed by peers of the realm on their first visit to Oakham of giving a horse shoe to be nailed on the castle gate, is, no doubt, a tribute to this ancient ownership. Robert, the heir in England, died in 1139, the year after his services as commander of the Derbyshire men in the Battle of the Standard, had been rewarded by King Stephen with the Earldom of Derby.

The second earl, another Robert, used as well the titles: *Comes junior de Ferrariis* and *Comes junior de Nottingham*. He was outstanding, in an age when the endowment of monasteries seemed to be the privilege of every nobleman, in the number and generosity of his foundations: Breedon¹² in Leicestershire; Darley¹² near Derby; and Merevale¹³ in Warwickshire where he was buried, wrapped in an oxhide. To Garendon Abbey he gave the land at Heathcote confirmed in the Museum deed. He married Margaret, daughter and eventual heiress of William Peveril of Nottingham. In 1199, their grandson William, the 4th earl, claimed successfully his great-grandfather's lands, in right of his grandmother, and acquired thereby extensive properties including the lands between Mersey and Ribble which were later to become part of the Earldom of Lancaster.

Though he was not responsible for the foundation of any religious house, William, the 3rd earl, was a generous benefactor to the church, increasing the endowments of Breedon¹³ and Tut-

¹²Austin canons.

¹³Nichols, *Hist. of Leic.* III, p. 698.

bury¹⁴ Priors; making grants to the Hospital of St. Lazarus,¹⁵ the Knights Hospitallers,¹⁶ and the monks of St. Denis in France;¹⁷ and, in this deed, extending his father's gift to Garendon Abbey—which was later doubled by his son.¹⁸

Garendon Abbey was fortunate in its founder, Robert le Bossu, Earl of Leicester, who endowed it in 1133; and in its benefactors the earls of Chester, Derby and Lincoln, Margaret de Quency, Countess of Winchester, and many lesser folk who gave to the monastery rich lands in many parts of England. Its history, impossible to trace in these few notes, was not of outstanding political importance, and still remains to be written. At the Dissolution, the site passed to the Earl of Rutland, thence through the second Villiers Duke of Buckingham, to the Phillipps family, in a branch of which it still remains.

Transcription

Parchment 8 in. by 5 in.

Willelmus Comes de ferrariis. Omnibus hominibus et amicis suis tam presentibus quam futuris salutem. Notum sit uobis omnibus me concessisse. et hac presenti carta mea confirmasse: in puram et perpetuam elemosinam deo. et sancte marie. et abbacie de Geroldon'. et monachis ibidem deo seruiantibus donum patris mei. scilicet Clausuram terre quam habent apud hedcote cum pastura ad centum oues. sicut eam tenuerunt tempore patris mei et post in meo tempore. Preterea ego Willelmus pro amore dei. et pro animabus patris et matris mee. et omnium predecessorum. et pro salute anime mee. et Sibille sponse mee. et infantum nostrorum. et omnium propinquorum nostrorum dedi et concessi predicte abbacie de Gerold'. et monachis in puram et perpetuam elemosinam sex acras terre iuxta predictam clausuram suam de hedcothe. et pasturam ad .C.C. oues. et ad quinque uaccas. et unum taurum. et ad .vj. boues. ita quidem quod omnes angni qui exhibunt per annum ex predictis .C.C.C. ouibus remanebunt in pastura illa usque ad festum sancte crucis de inuentione et tunc inde amouebuntur.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, II, pp. 143, 399, 408.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, II, p. 273.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, II, p. 331.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, II, p. 408.

¹⁸Dugdale, *Monasticum Anglicanum*, V, p. 328 (1846 edition).

et sciendum est quod oues predictae numerabuntur per maiorem centenarium numerum. scilicet per sexies. xx.^{ti}. Hanc autem doni patris mei concessionem. et confirmationem et predictae terre mee. scilicet. vj. acrarum et pasture premissae donationem meam feci predictae abbacie. et monachis concessu Willelmo filii mei ut teneant eam in puram et perpetuam elemosinam liberam et quietam et solutam ab omni seculari seruitio. et Ego et heredes mei Warantizabimus predictae abbacie. et monachis prefatam terram cum pastura sub predicta libertate tenendam sicut nostram liberam elemosinam. His testibus. Domina Sibilla Comitissa. Roberto de ferrariis fratre Comitissae. Luciano tunc dapifero. Willelmo de Rideware. Hugone de Thornd'. Willelmo mauueisin. Willelmo filio Comitissae. et Henrico. et Roberto fratribus suis. Jurdano de thoc. Henrico uinitario. Willelmo clerico de lec. Cum multis. Aliis.

NOTE.

The Latin has been extended throughout in all cases where there could be no doubt of the form.

Translation

WILLIAM Earl Ferrers to all his men and friends, present as well as future, greeting. Be it known to all of you that I have granted and by this my present charter have confirmed in pure and perpetual alms to God and St. Mary and the Abbey of Garendon and to the monks there serving God, the gift of my father: that is the close of land which they have at Heathcote with pasture for a hundred sheep, as they held it in my father's time and afterwards in my time. Moreover I William for the love of God and for the souls of my father and mother and of all my predecessors, and for the good of my soul and that of Sybil my wife and those of our children, and of all our relations have given and granted to the aforesaid Abbey of Garendon and to the monks in pure and perpetual alms, six acres of land adjacent to their aforesaid close of Heathcote, and pasture for two hundred sheep five cows one bull and six oxen, with the proviso that all the lambs which are born each year from the aforesaid three hundred sheep shall remain in that pasture until the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross, and shall then be taken away. And be it understood that the aforesaid sheep shall be counted by the greater hundred: that is, as six

twenties. Moreover I have made this grant and confirmation of my father's gift, and my gift of the aforesaid my land, that is of six acres and the aforementioned pasture to the aforesaid abbey and monks with the consent of William my son, so that they may hold it in pure and perpetual alms freely and quietly and exempt from all secular services. And I and my heirs will warrant to the aforesaid abbey and monks the aforesaid land to hold with pasture by the aforesaid liberty, as our free alms. By these witnesses : Countess Sybil, Robert de Ferrers brother of the Earl, etc., Luke, then Steward, William de Rideware, Hugh de *Thornd'*, William Mauveisin, William, son of the earl and Henry and Robert his brothers, Jurdan de *Thoc*, Henry the vintner, William the clerk of *Lec*, with many others.

