



THE PRIORY AND MANOR OF  
APPULDURCOMBÉ, ISLE OF  
WIGHT.

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The Priory of Appuldurcombe was founded some eight centuries ago, circa A.D. 1100, as a cell to the Benedictine Abbey of Montebourg in Normandy, by Richard de Redvers and, since this occurred soon after the Lordship of the Island had been conferred upon him by the King in recognition of devoted zeal evinced in his service, it would almost seem that the foundation was a kind of thank offering for the increased worldly power and wealth with which he had been endowed.

In point of time this Priory was the second of the five religious foundations established in the Island. The Priory of St. Helens is believed to have been founded about the year 1090, that of Appuldurcombe some ten years later, that of St. Cross, 1120, Quarr Abbey, 1131, and the Priory of Carisbrooke in 1156.

The first mention of the name is found in an early Charter of Geoffrey de Insula of the time of Stephen (1135-54) to which the then Prior, Richard of Appuldurcombe, is an attesting witness.<sup>1</sup> It is found spelt in a variety of ways and it will be interesting, before proceeding with the later history of the foundation, to refer to the various derivations of the word that have been suggested. Sir Robert Worsley<sup>2</sup> in a memorandum dated 1720, says:—"This place took its name from its situation, for in ye old Armoric Language Pul is a Bottom or a Ditch or a Pool, and Dur is Water. Ye Armoric Language is yt of ye Brittons in France and agrees much with ye Cornish and was probably ye Language

<sup>1</sup>Percy G. Stone, *Archit. Antiq.*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Worsley's *History of the Isle of Wight*, p. 180.

of ye old inhabitants of this Island, ye Saxons added Combe which in their Language allso signifys a Bottom" and adds "I thought fit to leave this Memorandum to Posterity and refer them to Lhuyd's Dictionary. In ye oldest Court Roll I have, which was ye 16 year of King Henry ye Sixth, I find it entered Appuldurcombe as above and likewise in some of ye old ones since, but they often varied in ye spelling of it, not knowing from whence it was derived." Brayley<sup>1</sup> gives it as "*Y-pwll-y-dwr-y-cwm*," i.e., the pool of water in the hollow or recess of a hill. Canon Venables<sup>2</sup> says :—"Without going so far back, it may be deduced much more simply from the Saxon "Appuldre" and the British "Cwm," the valley of Apple Trees." Mr. T. W. Shore<sup>3</sup> remarks, that "Only a few village or town names in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight are entirely Celtic names, Appuldurcombe is one of the oldest of these few place names, and may possibly have been the name of the place it now denotes in Romano-British times. It is a compound syllabic Celtic water word "pwl" a pool, "dur," water and "cwm," a valley or hollow between hills, later on transformed by the Saxons into Combe. It is one of the water names derived from names which the prehistoric races gave them, and the character of it may possibly have been more appropriate when first used some two thousand years ago than it is now." A more recent writer is under the impression that "there is no water on this side of the down," whereas a constant supply issues higher up the valley, and flowing through the fields is joined by lesser streamlets to form the brook on which one of the three mills mentioned in Domesday Book, now known as "French Mill" after the foreign monks, is situated. The other two mills would belong to the Wroxall Valley, and in all probability would be placed on the same rivulet, since I infer that water mills are referred to in the record. The occurrence of the word Sandford on the manor with those of Southford and Appleford in the near neighbourhood would seem to indicate that in earlier days fords were much needed here for crossing the swampy valley during the winter months.

<sup>1</sup>Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, p. 373.

<sup>2</sup>Isle of Wight p. 239.

<sup>3</sup>History of Hampshire p. 59 and the Hants Field Club Proceedings, Vol. 3, p. 236.

The earliest endowment was that of the founder who gave "The Manor in the Island of With, which is called Wiche (Week)" to the Abbey of Montebourg. It is interesting to note that the manor in question formed a part of the personal estate of the Earl. No doubt the spirit that animated him was the same as that of the seer of old: "Neither will I offer unto the Lord my God of that which costeth me nothing." Hillier<sup>1</sup> states that "the lands received from the Crown by the Lord of the Island were principally those mentioned in Domesday Book as being in the hands of the King at the period of its compilation." We find that "Wiche" in the Confessor's reign was part of a royal manor and belonged to estates that became known later as the "ancient demesne" of the Crown. It was in many ways a large and valuable estate, for the Domesday record says<sup>2</sup> :- "The land was 3 hides. There is land for 12 ploughs, in (the) demesne are 3 ploughs, and (there are) 10 villeins and 3 bordars with 6 ploughs. There are 10 serfs, and 2 mills worth 70 pence; and 6 acres of meadow. There is wood (land) without pannage. The above manors were worth T.R.E (tempore regis Edwardi) 25 pounds of weighed and assayed money, &c." The conjoined manor extended across the parish of Godshill, Week forming the southern and Sandford the northern boundaries of the parish. It was an ideal estate for an early settlement, and marked out by nature as a desirable one, having a constant water supply, being well wooded, and affording plentiful resources for fuel.

The establishment at first must have been a small one; a prior and two monks are mentioned on one occasion<sup>3</sup> with probably some lay brothers as being resident here to take charge of the rents and to look after the profitable cultivation of the estate.

The founder's son and successor, Baldwin de Redvers; "Confirmed to the Abbey of Montebourg and to the monks

<sup>1</sup>History of Antiquities part ii p. 66.

<sup>2</sup>Victoria Jub. History of Hants. Vol. I, p. 457.

<sup>3</sup>Venables, The Alien Priors p. 3.

there serving God, all the gifts which his father had made to them in England."<sup>1</sup>

The seventh lord, Richard, confirmed the previous gifts and "gave his body to the Church of the blessed Mary of Montebourg, and 100 solidates of land in the manor of Wroxall, in the Isle of Wight, for a perpetual alms for the soul of his brother, those of his other ancestors, and his own. The land to be held free and quit of all services and customs, as well in ways as in bye-paths, pastures, pasturages and waters, and in all other places."<sup>2</sup> The manor here referred to was a part of the parish of Newchurch and was opposite to and adjacent to the grounds of the priory, forming, as in the previous instance, a part of the personal possessions of the Lords of the Island.

This endowment was still further augmented by the celebrated Countess Isabella de Fortibus who looked upon the priory with great favour, since she "not only confirmed the manor of Wicha, but also gave the manor of Appuldurcombe and 100 solidates of land (equal to 1200 acres) in the manor of Wrokesall (Wroxall), in free, pure and perpetual alms for ever—for the safety of herself and all her ancestors and successors."<sup>3</sup> The charter is dated at Caresbroc, 53 Hy 3rd, the land referred to was known as Cleavelands (Clifflands, now Cook's Castle); it was of the annual value of 100s. The Countess showed so much regard to the convent of her ancestor's foundation that we find in a charter dated at Caresbroc, A.D. 1279, to her new town of Medina (Newport) that she "exempted the Prior of Appuldurcombe from the toll and the petty customs granted to that borough."<sup>4</sup>

In the *Testa de Nevill* we find that "The Abbot holds of the Countess Isabella one fee in Wyke, Staumford, and Appeltrecoumb, and it is also recorded that the Abbot holds one fee at Wydecoumbe, as a tenant of the Lady Matilda le Estour, Lady of Gatcombe. The estate mentioned here is in

<sup>1</sup>"Confirmavi Deo et abbacie sancte Marie Montisburgi et Monachis ibi Deo servientibus omnes donationes quas ipsis fecit Richardus de Redveris pater meus in Anglia Et aliud manerium in insula de With quod dicitur Wicha liberum et quietum cum omnibus pertinentibus." Chartulary of Lodres, No. 2, p. 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup>Extract from the Chartulary of Montebourg p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>Hillier, History and Antiquities of, Part II., p. 90.

<sup>4</sup>Worsley History of the Isle of Wight, p. 181.

the Whitwell parish, and was probably given to the priory by some member of the Stur family. The Domesday record shows that it was part of the possessions of William Fitz-Stur. In an indenture dated 1644, when defining the boundaries of a small estate "Dolcoppe," in the Godshill parish, reference is made to "the lands that did sometime belong to the Monastery of Mounteberrough." It would almost appear that to safeguard local interests the Prior had a provost (*præpositus*) at Swainston, and a reeve at Brighstone.<sup>1</sup>

In the Taxatio of Pope Nicholas (1291) grants the tenths which of all ecclesiastical properties to the King "The Prior de Apelderescombe is assessed at £30 17s. od. The assessment by A.D. 1345 had risen in annual value to £45.

During the earlier part of the reign of Ed. I., when the French were very active in attacking places on the coast, elaborate preparations for the defence of the Island were organised, and it was thought unsafe to allow foreign monks to remain at Appuldurcombe, a priory situated so near the sea. It will be readily understood that "when England had only recently been brought under the Norman yoke, it was only a reasonable arrangement that when a benefaction of lands or tithes was made to anyone of the French monasteries by a Norman lord, an off-shoot of their establishment should be planted on the estate, in order to secure the profitable cultivation of the land, and to transmit the rents and revenues to the mother Abbey across the seas. This practice then presented nothing that appeared at variance with a sound national policy,"<sup>2</sup> but with the lapse of time, the loss of the Normandy provinces, and the changed relations between the two countries, a complete transformation of feeling towards the *Alien Priories*—the name by which they soon became known—took place. They were regarded with jealousy and dislike as interlopers, and the feeling became one of decided hostility when the two countries were at war with one another. "A reasonable feeling of suspicion was entertained that the priories might avail themselves of their position to obtain and furnish information to

<sup>1</sup>Venables "The Alien Priories," p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Venables, "The Alien Priories," p. 1.

the King's foes, and thus do serious mischief to the realm."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, a writ was issued, 22, Ed. I., (1294) directing the removal of all the priories in the Isle of Wight to the mainland during the continuance of the war with France. Their property was taken into the king's hands, the estates being managed by the king's officers. It is owing to this circumstance that we get two interesting returns of the property belonging to the Priory, furnished by Richard de Afton, one of the noted Islanders in those days.

From the evidence given to the jurors we find that "the same kind of stock which is now kept on an English farm, was kept five or six hundred years ago. Oxen, cows, horses, pigs, sheep, and poultry were reared on the Isle of Wight farms in the days of Edward I. just as they are now."<sup>2</sup> From the returns we find that only a limited number of farm horses were kept, and these must have been sorry drudges, since they are valued at 20d. each—the average price at the time being 6s. 9d. Cart horses are priced at 20s., a bull at 5s., cows at 6s. Young oxen used for draught purposes run from 4s. each, a great number of pigs,—an important stock in those days,—were kept, the largest return, viz. 92, from all the Island priories being from Appuldurcombe, where the woods in which they could pick up mast and acorns were the most extensive. They were valued at 2s. each. The Island then, as now, was a famous sheep breeding country, and on the downs of Appuldurcombe we find the largest number, viz., 403, the prices varying from 8d. to 1s., and the wool highest also in value, priced at 1s. 6d. a petra or stone of 13lb. The poultry consisted of eighty chickens, all valued at 1d. per head. The military equipment was limited, being returned at two pairs of "mustelers," probably a kind of body armour.<sup>3</sup>

Similar harsh measures were enforced again later during Edward II's and Edward III's reigns. In 1339 for example we find an order of Edwards III's for the removal of the prior and monks of Appuldurcombe to Hyde Abbey, Winchester.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Venables, "The Alien Priories." p. 10.

At this time the lords of Appuldurcombe had to provide two men at arms and two bowmen towards the general defence of the Island.<sup>1</sup>

Very little is known as to the extent of the conventual buildings at this period, but they must have been built on a fairly large scale, judging from the fact that in 1395, when a red letter day occurred, Simon, Bishop of Anconry, acting as suffragan of Winchester, conferred orders in the priory church or chapel on no fewer than four sub-deacons, three deacons and four priests.<sup>2</sup>

Soon afterwards in the reign of Richard II. (1377), very troublous times must have come, notwithstanding the defensive preparations, for "the church at Arreton was raided by the French, the Archdeacons return to the Bishop of Winchester being stolen from thence," and we find that "the Prior petitioned the king and council for relief in consequence of the devastation caused to their property by the enemy from France and Spain,"

During the next war with France, during Henry IV's reign, matters came to a crisis, for we find that a grant was made to the Abbess of the Nuns Minoresses without Aldgate to settle in the Isle of Wight, together with leave to the Abbey and Convent of Montbourg, in Normandy to dispose of the Priory and its demesnes to the Abbess and her sisters for ever, and in the second year of the following reign, A.D. 1414, the Priory, after an existence of over three centuries, was finally suppressed by statute, the Norman Abbey parting with all its rights and titles to the nuns, the validity of the transaction being confirmed during the ensuing reign 2 Hy. V. (A.D. 1422).<sup>4</sup> Whilst it remained in

<sup>1</sup>13th Edward III. and "in the year 1368, Appuldurcombe is represented as liable to keep a watch of two men, as it had also been at the time of the invasion, 18th Edward II" (1325) Albin p. 557.

<sup>2</sup>Victoria History of Hants, Volume II., p. 232.

<sup>3</sup>Stone's Arch. Antiq. I.W. Vol. II. p. 198.

<sup>4</sup>The names of only four of the Priors are so far known. Richard (Hugh?) temp. Stephen. Lawrence Bertram 1331, Peter de Mouster, 1385, Thomas atte Townsend, 1403, Peter de Mymbrantot. A sentence of excommunication and sequestration was issued against the priory for the sum of £25 17s. od., due to the Pope for first fruits on the confirmation of prior John de Osanna, A.D. 1372-3.—Bp. Wykeham's register: Volume II., p. 191. Vict. History. Volume II., p. 232.



the hands of the Aldgate Nuns, the Manor was long held by the Fry Family under lease from the Convent. This family was one of some importance in the Island, for Sir John Oglander in his memoirs has the following reference in his notes on Godshill Church: "These Fries were an awntient famely, and ffermers of Aple-dorcombe aftor itt wase taken awaie from the Abbey in ffrance. In the sowth isle nex belowe the chawncell are two fayre stones under whom are buryed the bodies of the Fries, in ye stones are pictores of brasse, but the inscriptions are stolen awaie." In the south chancel there is another stone to the memory of a member of this family, leaving the inscription "hic jacet Johes Frye, filius Ric. Frye et Margaretæ uxoris suæ, qui obiit II. die January Anno Dom. 1512, cujus animæ propitietur Deus. Amen"; but the tomb is now destroyed.

The last descendant left the Manor and Priory, together with the valuable Priory of Carisbrooke and other estates, to his widow, one of the daughters and co-heiresses of John Hackett, of Wolverton, who subsequently married Sir John Leigh. A special dispensation was obtained 20th, Hy. VII. (1505) enabling Sir John to hold these several properties at the same time, though contrary to the tenour of an Act of Parliament passed earlier in the reign.<sup>1</sup>

When Sir John Leigh came into possession he probably used the house of the former owners, into which the remains of the old Priory House had most likely been incorporated.

Between the two altars in Godshill Church may be seen the very beautiful canopied tomb of Sir John Leigh and his wife, described in the Oglander memoirs as "the fayrest toombe in oure Island, the sayde Mary lyeth, in her coate armoure, embellished with Hackett's armes, etc."

The only daughter (Joan) married James Worsley, appointed captain of the Island A.D. 1511, and seventeen years later the final transference of the priory estates from Lady Dorothy Comberford to the Worsley family was made. The marriage took place A.D. 1510. Miss Leigh (Fry?) had been a lady in

<sup>1</sup>"Whereas John Leigh alias Sir John Leigh and Agnes his Wife and Joan Fry the Daughter of the said Agnes, have possessed and held and do possess and hold the Manor or Priory of Appuldurcombe with its appurtenances &c., thus" Albin p. 184.

waiting to Margaret Beaufort—the mother of the King—and was possessed of a very large Estate derived from her mother, including, with other properties, the lease of Bowcombe, the Priory of Carisbrooke, the Manors of Godshill, Freshwater, etc., which were then of great value. Sir James Worsley had been page for many years to King Henry VII., and the boyish friend of Henry VIII. He was a court favourite, a groom of the robes, and the personal attendant on the King, thus—as was the fashion in those days—succeeding to many offices carrying with them allowances and various ample emoluments. By this marriage he obtained a footing in the Island, and the association of the Worsley family with Appuldurcombe lasted for more than three centuries. The year after the marriage he was appointed captain of the Island for life, and two years later constable of the Castle, keeper of Carisbrooke Forest and Park, the steward of all the Crown lands, etc. In the account-book of Sir James, as keeper of the King's wardrobe in the Tower of London, we find this entry in the year A.D. 1525 : “Item, given to James Worsley by the King's grace, a cote of blake velvete with ij gardes of blake satten furred with blake conye.”

Sir James Worsley died in the year 1538, bequeathing to the King his best gold chain, and to the Lord Privy Seal his best standing cup. We conclude that he was not imbued with any leanings to the new religion, since he wills to his chaplain, Father Anghell, the sum of six pounds. “In the north chawncell in ye north syde of the wall (in Godshill Church) is the toombe of Sir James Woorseley without anie inscription, onlie he is theyre pictured kneelinge, erected by his wyfe.” “Under a fayre stone a little belowe in the same ile lyeth buried the Ladie Woorseley, the widowe of Sir James, who dyed a verie olde woman. There weare her armes and an inscription on brasse on her toombe, but now defaced.”<sup>1</sup>

In the year 1527, the final transfer of the estates took place and a perusal of the following indenture shows that for the space of 114 years, during which time the convent had possession of the estates, the nuns passed through very trying periods of financial anxiety and distress, the causes of which do not

<sup>1</sup> Oglander Memoirs, p. 185.

appear on the surface, but which we may surmise were operative on all monastic establishments, until they culminated in their dissolution in the reign of Henry VIII.

" A grant by Lady Dorothy Comberford, Abbess, etc., to Sir James Worsley of the Manor of Appuldurcombe for ever.

" This indenture made betweene Dame Dorathe Comberford Abbes of the Monastery of the Minories of the order of St. Clare, without Aldgate, of the one partie, and Sir James Worsley, Knyght and Dame Anne, his wyfe, on the other partie: Witnessith that the said Abbes and Convent with one assent, consent, and wille of all their hole chapitre, for certain good and reasonable consideracions, that is to say, Because the saide Sir James and Dame Anne now Tenants and Fermours of the Manor by Lease for xxxv. yeres and above, and Sir John Legh, Knyght, Fadir unto the said Dame Anne and their ancestries of long tyme Fermours of ye said Manor, have done many and grete costs and chargs as well in reparacions as in newe buyldings, in and upon the saide Manor, landes, and that the said Sir James and Dame Anne entendith there to doo more, And in consideracion that the saide Sir James hathe not only lent unto the saide Abbes and Convent nowe in this dere yere for many theire grete nedes and necessities, the somme of eighty-two poundes sterling to be paide in xi. yeres, that is to say every yere £6 13s. 4d., as by their Convent seale apperith, but also hathe frely gevyn unto the saide Abbes and Convent, towards the relevyng of their necessary chargs, £xx. sterlings, and also in consideracion that over and above the saide olde rent and chargs byndyng theym and their Heires, that every heire succeeding to the saide Manor after the dissesse of the saide Sir James and Dame Anne, shall pay to the saide Abbes and Convent and their successors, at every entre unto the saide Manours or Pryore, for a Relefe or Heryot £6 13s. 4d., Have gevyn, granted, and by this present indenture confirmed unto the aforsaide Sir James, etc., all their Manoure of Appeldercombe, etc., etc., and all the Landes, Rents and Services, with all other profits, etc., belonging to the Manor, to have and to hold in fee forme for evermore, paying yerely unto the Abbes the sum of £56 13s. 4d., at two terms of the



yere, etc., etc., etc. Givyn in the Chapitre House of the saide Abbes and Convent, the 17th day of December, in the xixth King Henry VIII."

On August 3rd, 1576, we find this grant renewed: "And noticing that the Rent of £56 13s. 4d. was become the property of the Crown, there follows a Release of all conditions for re-entry, etc., with a confirmation of the grant and a reservation to the Crown of the Rent and Heriot therein mentioned."<sup>1</sup>

In all probability the old Priory House continued to be the residence of Sir John Leigh and his successors. In the time of Queen Elizabeth the house underwent a thorough renovation with possibly some enlargement at the hands of Sir Richard Worsley, and remained the chief residence of the family till it was pulled down by Sir Robert in 1710, who boastfully says that he did not leave one stone of it standing. I have by me a copy of "an Inventorye of all the Household stuffe, implements of House and Husbandrye, Stocks of Corne and cattell with the pryces thereof, as also of such plate &c., taken by order of the Executor in the year 1566," and I think that some of the rooms mentioned in it can be identified by a reference to the etching taken of the building before it was pulled down. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the chapel forms so important a feature in the etching, suggesting the idea that it was very probably the building formerly used by the monks. Sir James had his own private chaplain, to whom he left a substantial bequest. Had the house been erected by Sir Richard Worsley, the chapel would scarcely have been placed in so conspicuous a position, for the reformed religious service would be attended at the parish church.

<sup>1</sup>18, Elizabeth; Letters Patent.