

The Early
History of the Davenports
of Davenport

BY
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PREFACE

THE bulk of the evidence incorporated in this work is derived from the Bromley-Davenport Muniments, deposited at the John Rylands Library partly in 1948, and partly in 1951. Dr. Taylor arranged these under four headings: I. Correspondence, II. Deeds and allied documents, III. MS. Books, and IV. Miscellaneous. In section I are some letters from Earwaker and Ormerod, written when they were compiling their histories. In section II are most of the original and contemporary documents used in this thesis. This is a vast collection, covering wide areas of England, and the number of separate items listed runs into several thousands. Inevitably, therefore, I was obliged to confine myself to the strictly relevant parts; but there will be very little concerning the earlier Davenports that I have not been able to examine, thanks to the guidance and assistance of Dr. Taylor and the library staff. To them also I am indebted for the excellence of the photographs herein reproduced. The other collections at Rylands also proved helpful, to most of which I was directed by examination of the excellent calendars and hand-lists of Dr. Tyson, M. Robert Fawtier, and Dr. Taylor.

From the middle of the thirteenth century onwards the bulk of the Cheshire materials preserved at the Public Record Office increases, both in size and complexity. The plea rolls of the Chester county court are the earliest, and become the most voluminous of the local courts. There are 102 such rolls before 1399, but only a few could be selected, since many rolls are very poorly preserved, and some are unfit for presentation. The "recognizance" rolls of the county were records of the Chester exchequer, at first largely concerned with recognitions of debt and other memoranda, and then enrolling various warrants and grants under the Chester seal. These rolls survive from 1307 onwards, with a gap between 1365 and 1375. The Cheshire Quo Warranto rolls, three of which I examined, were really plea rolls, concerned simply with these special pleas in the county court. The most fruitful source of information on the serjeants in Macclesfield, and the Davenports, were the Macclesfield Eyre rolls, covering, with large gaps, the period to the end of the fourteenth century, and after. The earliest one, 1285-90, was calendared by R. Stewart-Brown. With these must be coupled the Indictment and Calendar of Indictments rolls of the Macclesfield eyres, which survive from the time of Edward III. Useful, too, was the collection of Ministers' Accounts, covering the Chamberlains and other ministers of Chester, and the Great Roll of Debtors of the county. Various other items were examined, among which, but not transcribed, since they had already

been pretty thoroughly worked through by Earwaker, were the files of inquisitions *post mortem*, which do not survive regularly until the reign of Edward III.

The only contemporary evidence derived from the collections of the British Museum was amongst the Additional Charters, most useful of which were 37,242—Transcript 15—and 37,255-8. Other useful evidence was derived from Additional Charters 37,243, 37,246 and 37,249, which last is the will of Thomas de Macclesfield. There were also one or two references in the Shrewsbury-Talbot collection. Non-contemporary but valuable evidence was derived from the work of the copyists. Among the most important of these were the Randle Holmes of Chester, whose work survives in several volumes of the Harleian Manuscripts.

I am indebted to the Registrar of the Diocesan Registry at Lichfield for permission to consult the Episcopal Registers, and to the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archæological, and Historic Society for permission to make abstracts from the Earwaker Collection, more especially from the MS. books of John Booth of Twamlow which include his so-called "Swettenham Chartulary", written about 1636, and many deeds not now extant.

Miss Lofthouse, Librarian of Chetham's Library, kindly allowed me to make extensive use of the calendars of the Legh of Adlington MSS. and the Leicester-Warren MSS. at Tabley House, compiled by Miss E. M. Halcrow for the National Register of Archives. In the Leicester-Warren collection are the manuscripts of Sir Peter Leycester who copied some deeds which have not survived. Also at Chetham's are one or two useful Towneley MSS., the Adlington MS., c. 1611, and an Elizabethan Book of Tenures, which provide useful comparisons with earlier evidences.

I was privileged to examine and use the unpublished sections of Mrs. Margaret Sharp's typewritten Ph.D. thesis, 1925, "Contributions to the History of the Earldom and County Palatine of Chester, 1237-1399". Her lists of office-holders in the county and the various hundreds, especially Macclesfield, are a very useful background of chronology, on which I have based the dating of many charters.

Finally, my sincere thanks are due to Mrs. Bromley-Davenport for the interest she has shown in the publication of this book, and for permission to print extracts from the family muniments and reproduce three of the documents in facsimile; and also to Professor C. R. Cheney and Dr. G. H. Tupling for inspiring me to undertake the work and for their guidance in seeing it through.

T. P. H.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.D.M.	Bromley-Davenport Muniments.
B.I.H.R.	<i>Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research.</i>
B.J.R.L.	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library.</i>
B.P.R.	<i>Black Prince's Register.</i>
Cal. Close R.	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls.</i>
Cal. I.P.M.	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem.</i>
Cal. Lib. R.	<i>Calendar of Liberate Rolls.</i>
Cal. Pat. R.	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls.</i>
Chart.	Chartulary.
Chet. Soc.	Chetham Society.
D.K.R.	<i>Deputy Keepers' Reports.</i>
East Cheshire	By J. P. Earwaker.
E.H.R.	<i>English Historical Review.</i>
H.M.C.	<i>Historical Manuscripts Commission.</i>
L. & C. Ant. Soc.	<i>Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society.</i>
N.R.A.	National Register of Archives.
N.S.	New Series.
Ormerod (Helsby)	<i>History of Cheshire</i> , Second edition, 1882-5.
Q.R.	Queen's Remembrancer.
R.C.	Record Commission.
R.S.L. & C.	Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.
R. L. Lit. Claus.	<i>Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum.</i>
Rot. Parl.	<i>Rotuli Parliamentorum.</i>
S.H.C.	Historical Collections, Staffordshire, Publications of the William Salt Archaeological Society.
Trans. Hist. Soc. L. & C.	<i>Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.</i>
V.C.H.	<i>Victoria County Histories.</i>

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BEFORE listing the printed materials under authors it would be as well to mention some of the more important printed records. The Public Record Office Calendars and other publications were useful, as also were some of the publications of the Record Commission, and the materials in Deputy Keepers' Reports, as referred to in the text. Especially useful was the Black Prince's Register, Part III, Chester, 1351-65, published by the Stationery Office in 1912. The various volumes of the Cheshire Sheaf, being notes reprinted from the "Chester Courant", appeared in three series from 1880, and were also very helpful. The publications and transactions of many of the learned societies and reviews were used extensively, and the more important items are listed below under the names of the individual authors. Many standard works have been omitted, but are referred to in footnotes.

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THE EARLIEST DAVENPORTS ¹

(a) ORME AND RICHARD DE DAVENPORT

THE township of Davenport from which the family derived its name is about five miles west of Congleton, on the banks of the River Dane. The earliest reference to Davenport is in the twelfth-century chronicle of Symeon of Durham who says that in A.D. 920 King Sihtric of Northumbria *infregit Davennport*.² This suggests that Davenport had a strategic importance in the defence of Mercia from raiders across the Cheshire plain, deriving from its situation on the steep bank of the narrow valley through which the River Dane runs. If Symeon's chronology is reliable, then Davenport had a foundation earlier than 920, and by the latter date was already a place of some note. The River Dane, from which the town derives its name, was probably known as such in pre-English times.³ The town itself may have been founded by Scandinavian merchants, but certainly existed for well over a century before the Norman Conquest. Even before the Conquest, therefore, the local magnates may have been known as "of Davenport".

At the time of the Domesday survey Davenport was held by Gilbert de Venables, "the hunter", Baron of Kinderton. Before him it had been held by Godwin. In Davenport there was half a hide that paid geld, land enough for one plough, one radman, two oxmen, three bordars, and an acre of woodland. At the time of the survey the manor was worth three shillings but Gilbert had found it waste. It was situated in the hundred of Middlewich—later known as the hundred of Northwich.⁴ This Domesday evidence does not seem compatible with the claim that the Davenport family descended in "one uninterrupted male line from the Norman conquerors of the palatinate . . ." ⁵ unless the Davenport family received the grant at some date after Domesday.

¹ For existing printed accounts of the Davenports of Davenport see Ormerod (Helsby), iii, pp. 61-9; *East Cheshire*, ii, pp. 378-88; and also the only history of the family, as such, by Amzi Benedict Davenport, 1851, with supplement in 1876—a very unreliable book for the pre-1500 period.

² *Symeon of Durham, Opera Omnia* (Rolls Series, 75), ii, pp. 93 and 123. Arnold makes the curious suggestion that *Devennport* was the port of the Devonians at the head of Plymouth Sound. See Introduction, p. xxxi, and n. 1.

³ Ekwall gives the river-name a Middle Welsh origin.

⁴ Tait, *Domesday Survey of Cheshire* (Chet. Soc., N.S. 75), pp. 194-5.

⁵ Ormerod (Helsby), iii, p. 61.

The earliest recorded member of the Davenport family is an Orme de Davenport whose name occurs in the witness lists of two twelfth-century charters of which the originals do not survive.¹ From this scanty evidence it cannot be said that Orme was the original grantee of Davenport, nor that he was born in 1086, nor, even, that he was born about 1100.² The wide range of possibilities makes any definite conclusions about Orme's dates unwise. Equally, it would be rash to infer Norman blood from his name; there is no real evidence that Orme was one of, or was descended from, the Norman conquerors of the Palatinate. There is as much evidence for a Scandinavian or English ancestry,³ and the only conclusion that can be reached is that an Orme de Davenport was living in the twelfth century, probably before 1154, if we can be sure of the identity of the Gilbert de Venables of one of the charters.

The second Gilbert de Venables married Margery, daughter of Walthew son of Wulfric, and among their children were a son, William, and a daughter, Amabilia. Some time after the death of his father, William, then Baron of Kinderton, gave his sister in free marriage to Richard de Davenport, the second recorded member of the family, together with the half of Marton that her mother had had as her marriage portion. For this Richard was to render an annual rent of six barbed arrows at Pentecost.⁴ Ormerod, and after him Earwaker, both dated this grant in 1176, but thought that it might have been earlier.⁵ The evidence is inconclusive, and there is little to show at what point in the second half of the twelfth century the deed was made. The earliest terminal date is 1154, when William de Venables first appears, confirming grants made by his predecessors.⁶ The latest date is indeterminate, but, if Amabilia was young enough to have children, was probably not later than 1190.

In Domesday Book one half of Marton was held by Earl Hugh, and the other half, by Hugh fitz-Norman, of the earl. Both were previously in the hands of a *liber homo*, Godric. In both halves there was one virgate that paid geld. In the earl's half there was land enough for one plough, in the other for half a plough-team, and in both there were 20 perches of woodland. Both had always been waste, and still were.⁷ It is difficult to say which half was involved in the grant to Richard de Davenport, but the extent of the grant can be appreciated. The land itself may not have been particularly valuable, but, undoubtedly, considerably extended the

¹ See below, Transcripts 9a and 9b.

² B.D.M., I, 5 (iii): letter dated 29th December, 1817, from 16 Wimpole Street, London; and see Ormerod (Helsby), iii, p. 61, n.b.

³ Wainwright, "North-West Mercia, A.D. 871-924", *Trans. Hist. Soc. L. & C.*, 94, pp. 34-5.

⁴ See below, Transcript 10.

⁵ Ormerod (Helsby), iii, p. 61, n.b.; *East Cheshire*, ii, p. 379.

⁶ Tait, *Chart. Chester Abbey* (Chet. Soc., N.S. 79, 82), especially pp. 216-18.

⁷ Tait, *Domesday Survey of Cheshire* (Chet. Soc., N.S. 75), pp. 115 and 179.