

GEOFFREY DE WARMELEGH

By ROBERT PRITCHARD

Walmley is first mentioned not as a place but in a person's name, one Geoffrey de Warmelegh. We know very little about him, and nothing of any relatives. He became Prior of the Benedictine Priory at Coventry early in the 13th century; the priory at that time was very powerful, and shared control of Coventry with the Earl of Chester. We do not know where the de Warmelegh family lived, but a possibility is the moated site in Walmley Ash Road on the corner of Webster Way. (see Mike Hodder *The Development of some aspects of settlement and land use in Sutton Chase* 1988 p. 259)

The name Walmley probably derives from the Anglo-Saxon *weallan*, to flow or bubble up, probably a spring of water, and *ley*, a clearing. A stream, now culverted, runs alongside the moated site.

Geoffrey is mentioned twice in the *Warwickshire Feet of Fines* (Dugdale Society Publications vol. XI); both entries are for 1231/2:-

Coventry, quinzaine of St. John, at Coventry. Geoffrey, Prior of Coventry, petitioner; Beatrice, daughter of William, tenant. -A messuage in Coventry. Tenant acknowledged the right of the petitioner and quitclaimed. Consideration 40s. sterling.

Sutton Coldfield. Geoffrey de Warmelegh, petitioner, Augustine de Weshagh (Wishaw) and Margery his wife, tenants. - 2½ acres of land in Sutton. Assize of Mort d'ancestre. Petitioner quitclaimed to tenants and heirs of Margery. Consideration 10s. sterling

The Feet of Fines are part of court records, and could be referred to in any subsequent query as to title to property, and a similar series of transactions was recorded by the Earl of Warwick in a document known as the Beauchamp Cartulary, published by the Pipe Roll Society, vol.81 1980. A document of 1240 (no. 301) refers to land brought under cultivation at Peddimore and Langley:-

This is the final agreement made the day after All Souls in the 25th year of the reign of King Henry son of King John at Coventry, between Thomas, Earl of Warwick, and Henry de Acelis, namely that the said Henry quitclaims the said Earl and his heirs for all the assarts which he has made or which have been made in Sutton up to the feast of All Saints in the said year: the assarts which William of Ebriteston , John the Farrier, Adam of Berhull, Simon of Bereford, and John Coket made in Breclinrste and Blakemor: and which Simon alias Simonio made between Langeley and Hanekesciestrete; and which Walter Fundu, Richard the Forester, William of Coventry, Robert Cleed, Geoffrey of Warmeley, and John Baker made in Wyttemor.

There is also a brief account of him in the *Victoria History of the County of Warwick*, volume 2 page 54; William de Cornhill was his predecessor as Prior, having been consecrated Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in 1215:-

Bishop Cornhill died on 19 August, 1223, whereupon the Coventry monks elected Geoffrey their prior to the vacant see. The chapter of Lichfield, however, refused to acquiesce, and the election was set aside. Pope Honorius III interfered, and Alexander Stavenby was consecrated bishop of Coventry and Lichfield at Rome on 14 April, 1224.²⁸

The strife between the two chapters of Coventry and Lichfield as to their respective rights in the election of a diocesan was maintained from 1224 to 1227, and gave occasion for a variety of papal commissions.²⁹ In 1228 the two chapters agreed that the right of electing to the bishopric should belong to each alternately, provided that the prior of Coventry should always have the first voice.³⁰ In 1255 the monks of Coventry and the canons of Lichfield agreed that in any future election of a bishop the number of electors of each chapter should be equal. This prolonged and costly litigation was a most serious tax on the resources of the priory.

After the death of Prior Geoffrey in 1245 the monks foolishly resolved to join issue with their diocesan, and refused to admit him as visitor.

Geoffrey died in 1245, but whether his tomb is one of the stone coffins in the old Cathedral (formerly the Priory church) is not known. All that is left of the old priory are some footings near the new Cathedral.