Thomas Astle
A charter of Withred king of Kent for the church of St Mary at Liming, circa A.D. 693
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THE

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To the EDITOR of the ANTIQUARIAN REPERTORY.

SIR,

HEREWITH I send you the Charter of Withred, King of Kent, whereby he gave Lands to the Church of Liming in that County.

IN times preceding the seventh century, property was usually conveyed without any Writing or Charter, by oral declaration, made by the Grantor in the presence of a great number of respectable Witnesses; and the better to perpetuate the memory of the transaction, it was customary upon those oc=casions for him to deliver to the grantee a cup, a horn, a sword, a helmet, or some other valuable moveable, which was known to be his property.

Sir Henry Spelman in his Discourse upon Ancient Deeds and Charters /*, says, anciently, where the Saxons gave or sold lands absolutely, they usually did it without Deed, but when they gave them in a special or limited manner, then they did it by Writing.

Many Charters of more ancient date than the present, are entered in the Leidger Books of Religious Houses, but the authenticity of several of them hath with reason been doubted.

This Charter of King Withred, may be accounted one of the most ancient original Charters or written Instruments now extant, whereby property in this kingdom was conveyed. The characters much resemble those of the four Gospels written about the year 686, now in the Cottonian Li= brary, (Nero D. 4.), and called St. Cuthbert's Gospels; and are very similar to the Gospels preserved in the church of Durham, which was written about the same time. Other instances might be produced of the similarity of the characters in which this Charter is written, to the MSS. of the seventh cen= tury, but let it suffice to observe, that the present Charter is written in the hand which was used in England at the time it bears date.

This Charter is not only mentioned in the annals of the church of Canter=bury, but by most of the authors who have written concerning the affairs and possessions of that church; in Chronico Gervasii Dorobernensis MS. in Bibl. Cotton. sub titulo, Donationes Maneriorum & Ecclesiarum Ecclesiæ Christi

Cantuarien. & nomina donantium una cum privilegiis & libertatibus eidem Ec=/* P. 253.

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clesiæ concessis; sic continetur. "Anno Domini 693 Withredus Rex Cantiæ dedit terram quatuor aratrorum, pro amore Dei & Brithwaldi Archiepiscopi Ecclesiæ beatæ Mariæ, quæ sita est apud Liminge, quæ terra vocatur Nunhelmestun."/*

There is in the Cottonian Library (Galba E. 3.) a catalogue of the bene= factors to Christ Church, Canterbury, which mentions at what time comme= morations were made for each benefactor. From this MS. it appears, that King Withred was annually commemorated upon the day of his death, for having given the lands conveyed by the present Charter:/† the words are, "9 Kal. April. obiit Withredus Rex Anglorum, qui dedit Wyelmestone." With respect to the church or convent of Liminge /±, in favour of whom this Charter was made, it appears that in the year 633, Ethelburga, daugh= ter of King Ethelbert, the first Christian King, after the death of her husband Edwin, King of Northumberland, returned into Kent, and by the favour of her brother King Eadbald, built a monastery at this place, which she dedi= cated to the Virgin Mary, placing therein Nuns; but afterwards, this house came under the government of an Abbot, and continued till about the year 964. But having suffered very much by the Danes, it came soon after, with all its possessions, into the hands of the Archbishop or Church of Can= terbury, by whom they were enjoyed till the reign of King Henry VIII. in the twenty-ninth year of whose reign Archbishop Cranmer exchanged them for other lands with the crown; and King Henry VIII. in the thirty-sixth year of his reign, granted the manor of Liming, &c. to Sir Anthony

The CHARTER is as follows:

+ In Nomine Dn'i D'i nostri Ih'u Xp'i, Ego Uihtredus Rex Cantuariorum, providens mihi in futuro, decrevi dare aliquid omnia mihi donanti, et Con= silio accepto, bonum visum est conferre, Bassilicae beatae Mariae genitricis Di quae sita est in loco qui dicitur Limingae. Terram iiii. Aratrorum quae dicitur Wieghelmestun, cum omnibus ad eandem Terram pertinentibus, juxta notissimos Terminos, id est, Bereueg et Meguines Paeŏ, et Stretleg. Quam donationem meam volo firmam esse in perpetuum: ut nec Ego, seu heredes mei, aliquid minuere praesumant. Quod si aliter temptatum fuerit a

/* See more concerning this Charter in Mon. Angl. Vol. I. p. 19. Hickes's Thes. Vol. II. p. 263. An ancient Copy is preserved in the Cotton Library, Aug. 2. 83.

 $/\dagger$ This King built the Monastery of St. Martin in Dover, and was buried at Canterbury within the porch, on the south-side of the church of St. Mary, which had been built by his great grandfather King Eadbald.

/‡ This place was called Nunsborough, from its being the habitation of the Nuns.

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qualibet persona, sub Anathematis interdictione sciat se praevaricari, ad cujus confirmationem, *pro Ignorantia literarum* + Signum Sc'ae Crucis expressi et Testes idoneos ut subscriberent rogavi, id est Berichtualdum Archiepisco= pum /*, virum venerabilem.

- + Ego Berichtualdus Episc. rogatus consensi et subscripsi.
- + Signum manus Uihtredi Regis.
- + Signum manus Aechtburgae Reginae.
- + Signum manus Enfridi.
- + Signum manus AEðilfridi.
- + Signum manus Hagana.
- + Signum manus Botta.
- + Signum manus Bernhaerdi.
- + Signum manus Theabul.
- + Signum manus Frodi.
- + Signum manus Aehcha.
- + Signum manus Aessica.
- + Signum manus Adda.

+ Signum manus Egisberichti. Actum in Mense Julio. Indictione X'ma.

With respect to the lands granted by this Charter, they are, as I conceive, four aratra or plough lands, situate at Wilmington in the lathe of Scray and hundred of Wye in the county of Kent.

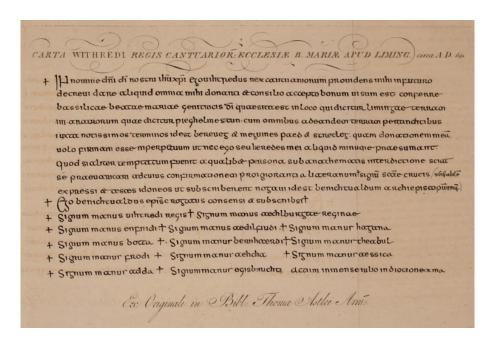
It appears by an indorsement upon this Deed, that the ancient name of this place was Berdelhameswic; the words are ðœs landes boc æt Berdelhames bicum boc nunc þigelmignetun. This place was afterwards called Nunhelmstun, probably because it belonged to the Nuns of Liming. As to the orthography which was in use when this Charter was written, it is observable that the letters a and e are written separately; the letter r is written like the letter n, which was not unusual in the seventh and eighth centuries /†. Crosses instead of Seals were used by the Ecclesiastics, who introduced the practice of conveying property by written instruments, and this custom prevailed invariably till the conquest, and occasionally for near a century afterwards.

T. ASTLE.

April 29, 1777.

/* Archbishop Brathwald's festival was celebrated at Canterbury the 9th of January. He was consecrated in 693, and died in 731.

/† V. M S. in Bibl. Harl. No. 2965.



<Now BL Stowe Charter 1, this was one of the charters stolen by Astle in 1767 from the library at Surrenden Dering. Page images of this volume of the 'Antiquarian Repertory' – a periodical edited by Francis Grose – can be found at the address below. (In the 'new edition' published by Edward Jeffery in 1807–9 this article of Astle's appears in vol. 1, pp. 25–7.) – C.F. July 2012.>

http://archive.org/stream/antiquarianreper02gros#page/130/mode/2up

http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/kemble/singlesheets/4-24.html