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Robert de Toden and his Heirs

by A. L. Browne
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ROBERT DE TODENI AND HIS HEIRS

by REV. A. L. BROWNE, Rector of Great Rissington

AMONG the companions of the Conqueror a Robert de Todenî was awarded many lordships in England, including four in Gloucestershire: Sapperton, Frampton, Horton, and Great Rissington. His great barony, constituting the Honour of Belvoir, as entered in Domesday, included lands in thirteen counties, comprising eighty manors altogether.

Robert appears to have sprung from Tosny, a small picturesque village on the left bank of the Seine in the commune of Tanis and department of Eure, near the well-known Château-Gaillard. The place-name has varied between Toeni, Tottenium, Todiacum, Thony, Toni, and other forms, but appears to be now fixed as Tosny.

The origin of Robert is, however, shrouded in mystery. Much confusion has been caused by medieval and modern writers confounding him with the Toeni family, seigneurs of Conches. The late Mr J. H. Round, in a critical notice of *The Red Book of the Exchequer*¹ (referring to the entry under 'Tanie'): writes, 'Here we have, in hopeless confusion, the two utterly distinct families . . . "Tani"² and "Toeni" It is always possible, in a corrupt text, that names at all similar should be sometimes confused by a scribe'. Mr Falconer Madan, late Librarian of the Bodleian, states, 'that no proof has been found of any connexion between the Toeni and Todenî families'.³

¹ Rolls Series, 1896, 3 vols.

² *The Genealogist*, n.s. xiv, 6. By 'Tani', the critic apparently alludes to the Todenî.

³ *Staffs. Hist. Collections*, 1898. The Gresleys of Drakelowe: chap. 1. The Norman family of Toeni, p. 15.

Last summer the writer made a pilgrimage to Normandy hoping to find in the library of Caen University or the Municipal Library in Rouen, material which might furnish a clue to the origin of the Todeni family. The pilgrimage was made in vain. French historians are also baffled. Monsieur Etienne Dupont, after exploring all available records, ends his enquiries thus ⁴:—'M. de Merville says that he cannot prove that this commune (Tanis) had at the Conquest a seigneur named Robert de Todeni. It is reasonable to assume that the Toeni of the Conquest were originally of this parish as there is not in Normandy or France another family of this name. As to the chateau, its site presumably would be found on the land at Tanis where the inhabitants claim that it was situated'. So the mystery remains unsolved.

Robert's chief estate, lying together, was on the borders of the counties of Lincoln and Leicester, extending far into both, and in the midst of this upon a commanding site, which he called Belvoir, he built a castle for his residence. He also founded the Benedictine priory of St. Mary's, Belvoir, and endowed the monks with ample revenues, including two-thirds of the tithes from his demesne in the vills of Hortun, Risendun, Frantun, Saptun and in each of these vills a man with a toft and a bovate of land and a meadow and common pasture as collector of the said tithes.⁵ The monks were to pray for the souls of Count Robert de Mortaigne, earl of Cornwall (half brother to the Conqueror); of Robert de Todeni, the founder, and Adeliza his wife; for the soul of the King; as well as the souls of their parents and children. Robert died 4 August 1088, and was buried on the north side of the priory chapter house. 'His

⁴ Etienne Dupont, *Recherches historiques et topographiques sur les Compagnons de Guillaume le Conquérant*. 1907.

⁵ Hist. MSS. Commission, Rutland papers, IV, 110.

remains continued undisturbed until Dec. 6th 1726, when a ridged stone coffin was dug up upon the site of the old chapel, with an inscription in French, and in Longobardic characters of lead, noticed by Dr Stukeley, who records "that his bones lie in the same trough underneath". The inscription is: Robert de Toden le Fundeur'. In one of the stained-glass windows in the gallery of the guard room at Belvoir castle are the arms of Robert: *gules*, an eagle displayed with a *bordure argent*.⁶

If the origin of the Toden is obscure, the succession to the barony and manors is not less mysterious. The late Prebendary Eyton discussing the matter, says,⁷ 'The early history of the Honour of Belvoir is worse than mysterious; it is masked by wilful falsehood. Robert de Toden . . . was succeeded, said the monks of St. Albans, by a son William, which William the same monks identified with William de Albin Brito, the favourite of Henry I', and husband of his widow. This monkish myth, admitted by Dugdale into his *Baronage*, has been followed by other writers; but it ought to have been arrested with the publication of the Pipe Roll for 1131, edited by Joseph Hunter. But of this there is more to be said in another place.

By Adeliza his wife, Robert had 3 sons and 2 daughters, and the problem to be solved is to ascertain which, if any, of the children inherited the Gloucestershire manors. But the question, if it can be solved, depends on the larger problem presented by the dubious succession in the Belvoir barony. To do this it is necessary to investigate the fortunes of the children of the

⁶ The paragraph is taken from an article on 'The early lords of Belvoir' contributed to the *Journal of the British Arch. Assoc.*, 1901, n.s. vii, 301, by W. A. Carrington, keeper of the archives of Belvoir. The writer incidentally perpetuates historical inaccuracies associated with the Toden.

⁷ *Staffs. Hist. Colls.*, 1881, II, pt. 1, 228.

marriage in their commonly received order, which is as follows :—

(1) BERENGAR DE TODENI

This name appears on M. Léopold Delisle's roll⁸ of knights who fought at Hastings, and Berengar in his father's lifetime was liberally rewarded with manors. In Domesday he is found holding 1 manor in Lincolnshire, 2 manors in Oxfordshire, 3 in Nottinghamshire and 27 in Yorkshire. Berengar had also 2 houses in York and rented 6 others, 4 of these being in the castle ditch.⁹ In a charter conveying the church of Thorp and certain tithes to St. Albans abbey, the name of his wife Albreda appears. When Berengar died is uncertain, whereas that he died without issue is certain. Sometime before 1116–1118, Albreda married^{10–11} Robert del Isle, carrying with her in dower the estates in Yorkshire. Mr Round writes, 'the portions of the great Belvoir fief, held in Domesday by Robert Todeni, now [c. 1124–29] owned by Robert de L'Isle and William de Albin Brito'.¹²

(2) WILLIAM DE TODENI

This name also appears on the Battle Abbey roll. William succeeded to the barony of Belvoir,¹³ and the *D.N.B.* states of him as follows :—'William de Albin, justiciar, son of Robert de Todeni, supposed to have been named de Aubigny from his place of birth, and to have been distinguished from his contemporary namesake by the appellation Brito. He assisted at the battle of Tenchebrai (1106) and grew in high favour with Henry I; an itinerant justice in 1130; later espoused the

⁸ *Les Compagnons de Guillaume à la Conquête de l'Angleterre en 1066.*

⁹ *Yorkshire Arch. Trans.*, IV, 137.

¹⁰ W. Farrer, *Early Yorkshire Charters*, I, 461.

¹¹ In a Barnoldswick charter Hugh Bigot refers to Albreda as 'my aunt'.

¹² *Feudal England*, 213.

¹³ Farrer, *Early Yorkshire Charters*, I, 461. Also *Hist. MSS. Com.*, Rutland papers, IV, 153.

cause of the Empress ; Stephen forfeited his lands, but subsequently restored them and he lived to see the accession of Henry II; died 1155-6'. Lipscombe ascribes the victory of Henry I at Tenchebrai to the gallantry¹⁴ of William, and it is quite possible that William de Todeni is thus correctly portrayed. The same shrewd writer confesses to be puzzled at William de Todeni apparently discarding his patronymic to assume that of Albin the Breton. History cannot give an explanation of something that never happened. William, son of Robert de Todeni, never changed his name. A Todeni born, a Todeni he lived, a Todeni he died. William de Todeni and William de Albin the Breton were two distinct persons. Prebendary Eyton¹⁵ proves the utter impossibility of such an identification, which if correct would make William de Todeni survive his father by some 67 years. Thomas, lord of Ros and Beauver, confirming a charter to Belvoir priory 23 April, 8 Henry VI, speaks of William, son of Robert de Totenye and William de Albin as distinct persons.¹⁶ However William and his younger brother Geoffrey de Todeni also died without issue.

Thus, quoting Round again, and allowing for the Albin Brito confusion, all the sons of Robert were dead by 1124-29, without offspring. Now for the daughters:—

(I) ADELIZA DE TODENI

the elder of the two, married Roger Bigot, of whom the *D.N.B.* states 'he is not to be traced in English records before 1097 ; but by this time he may have been endowed with the forfeited estates of Ralf de Guader whose downfall took place in 1074. In Domesday he appears as holding 6 lordships in Essex and 117 in Suffolk ; held the office of dapifer under Rufus and Henry I ; died 1107 ; had two sons, William the elder perishing in the wreck of

¹⁴ *History of Bucks*, iv.

¹⁵ *Staffs. Hist. Colls.*, II, pt. I, 228.

¹⁶ Rutland papers, as above.

the White Ship, and Hugh the younger his heir'.¹⁷ The entry is impoverished by the absence of the names of his wife and daughter, upon whom the history of the Belvoir succession hinges.

An entry in the Pipe Roll (1130) affords conclusive evidence of the marriage of Adeliza de Toden to Roger Bigot. The entry in the accounts of the sheriff of Lincoln reads 'Adeliza, wife of Roger Bigot owes 100 marcs for her father's castle of Belvedere'. Further confirmation of the marriage appears in the Belvoir charters, e.g. a writ (undated) of Henry 1, to Adelia wife of Roger Bigot. 'She is to cause the monks of Belvoir to have their lands and tithes and all their substance, as given by her father Robert de Todeneio, etc.'. Again, in a writ of Stephen (1136-1141) addressed to Adelia Bigot, 'she is to restore to the monks of Belvoir their tithes of Bradley and of all her manors as they held it formerly'.¹⁸

It must be admitted that while the entry in the Pipe Roll (1130) favours the succession of Adeliza, another entry in the same roll excusing the payment of Danegeld of *vis* implies that the fief was in *manu-regis*. Roger Bigot died in 1103,¹⁹ and was buried at Thetford, where, according to Dugdale's *Monasticon* he had founded a priory. Roger left two children, Hugh and Cecily. Hugh inherited the Yorkshire and Lindsey manors of Berengar Toden²⁰ but did not inherit Belvoir, the caput of the barony, which with other manors ultimately passed to his sister Cecily. The reason for such a disposition of the Toden fief, excluding Hugh from succeeding to the whole of his grandfather's estates is a problem, to

¹⁷ A comparison between the sober account in *D.N.B.* and the picturesque narrative concerning Roger and Adeliza which appears in G.E.C.'s *Complete Peerage* is not without interest.

¹⁸ Bradley charters. Hist. MSS. Com., Rutland papers, IV, 158.

¹⁹ Ordericus Vitalis, III. The *D.N.B.* gives his death in 1107.

²⁰ In 1166, Hugh giving an account of his tenure *in capite* appends thereto a statement of his seignury over 10½ fees, which he entitles 'De Feodo Albrede de Insula', i.e., the widow of Berengar.

which a key is not yet found. If the Belvoir fief was in *manu-regis* as the Pipe Roll (1130) suggests, Henry I may have rewarded his justiciar, William de Albini the Breton, with the marriage of Cecily Bigot accompanied by a redistribution of the Todeni fee, on the death of Adeliza, daughter of Robert de Todeni. Different Belvoir charters, for the most part undated, establish the parentage, marriage and succession of Cecily de Belvoir. 'Charter of Cecily de Belveir, daughter of Roger Bigot, giving to Belvoir priory whatever [right] a lay person can give in the advowson and the parsonage in the church of Offinton . . .²¹ for the souls of Henry I, and Robert de Toeni her grandfather, and William de Albeneio, her husband and William de Albineio her son, and all her heirs with the presentation of her body. This she gives as of her own inheritance'.²²

Again, 'Charter of Cecily de Belveer, daughter of Roger Bigot, giving to Belvoir priory a toft in Tallington²³ which was in demesne, given by her lord with her witness and consent, she listening to foolish counsel, had taken from them. This she does for the weal of her soul, and the souls of king Henry and her son William de Albeney and all her predecessors and successors'.²⁴ Other charters to the same effect might be quoted, but enough has been submitted to make it clear that Cecily, lady of Belvoir, daughter of Roger Bigot, grand-daughter of Robert de Todeni, married William de Albini the Breton, justiciar of Henry I, and not her uncle William de Todeni; that the marriage introduced the Breton

²¹ Uffington, Lincs.

²² Hist. MSS. Com., Rutland papers, iv, 144.

²³ Lincolnshire.

²⁴ Belvoir charters. In *Coll. Top. et Gen.* i, 33 is quoted another Tallington charter, the original of which is said to be in the possession of John Gage, esq., Director of the Society of Antiquaries (1832). The charter opens thus:—'William de Albineio Brito et uxor eius Cecilia et filius eorum'. On the back in a later hand is written 'Carta W. de Albeniaco Brit' de Ecc'ia de Talinton' cum p'tinenciis'.

Albinis into the lordship of the Honour of Belvoir ; and that the Breton Albinis were a separate and distinct family to the Albinis of Sussex.

So far so good, but nothing emerges to elucidate the succession to manors in this county. There was however, yet another daughter with a curious history, viz :—

(2) AGNES DE TODENI, Domina de Horton

In a bull of Hadrian IV, referring to the foundation of a monastic house at Aldeby,²⁵ Agnes is described thus: 'nobilis matrona Agnes de Tonia', and to her Robert gave the Gloucestershire manor of Horton at her marriage.²⁶ In the *Monasticon*, III, p. 285, is printed a charter wherein she describes herself as a daughter of Robert de Todeni and wife of Hubert de Rye, and whereby she grants lands to the priory of Belvoir. In the charter (already quoted) of Thomas, lord of Ros and Beauvoire dated at Belvoir 23 April, 8 Henry VI, notifying his inspection and confirmation of the charters of Robert de Toteneyo, William de Toteneyo, William de Albeneyo primum, Agnes de Toteneyo, daughter of Robert is mentioned as wife of Hubert de Ria and mother of Henry de Ria. Agnes is said to have married first, William de Beaufoy, bishop of Norwich.²⁷ The bishop died in 1091, leaving a son Richard, who became archdeacon of Norwich in 1107. For a second husband the lady took Hubert, second son of Hubert de Ria of Rye near Falaise. Hubert the elder had been employed as Norman ambassador at the court of Edward the Confessor, taking with him on his return tokens by which William was declared the Confessor's heir, viz: a sword with a hilt containing

²⁵ Aldeby = Aldborough, Norfolk.

²⁶ *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, IV.

²⁷ It was not until 1102 that an absolute rule of clerical celibacy became the law of the Church of England. A synod was held at Westminster, when nobles sat with ecclesiastics and decided that no married man should henceforth be ordained to the sub-diaconate, and that those who had wives should dismiss them.

relics of saints, a hunter's horn of gold, and the head of a great stag. After the Conquest his sons held three of the largest castles in England, viz: Nottingham, Colchester and Norwich, of which last the husband of Agnes was castellan. The date of the second Hubert's death is not known, but presumably it occurred before 1128, when Agnes was fined 35 marcs because her son went over to the earl of Flanders, the king's enemy.²⁸ According to the same roll, Henry de Ria rendered an account of £11 13s. 4d. for a suit between him and the archbishop (of Canterbury) about his father's nuncupative will.

Henry de Ria was a considerable benefactor of his grandfather's foundation. A Seaton²⁹ charter (undated) runs, 'Mandate of Henry de Ria to William, the dean of Seiton. As he loves him, he is to cause the monks of Belvoir to have their land and tithe in Seiton, as given by Robert de Toteneio, his grandfather'. By another charter³⁰ he grants the tithes of Horton to the same priory, a grant which implies possession of the lordship of the manor. In the Belvoir archives is preserved an original letter from Henry to Reginald de Warrenne, printed in Nichols's *Leicestershire*.³¹

Thus beyond succession to the Horton seigneury nothing is known at present of the immediate history of the other Todení manors in Gloucestershire.

²⁸ Pipe Roll, 1130-1, records the fact without giving the son's name. That there were other sons is evident from Henry's first charter to Castle Acre. British Museum, Harl. MS. 2110, no. 47.

²⁹ Seaton, co. Rutland. Hist. MSS. Com., Rutland papers, iv.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Appendix, vol. II, 3.