

# WILLIAM CAXTON AND SUFFOLK:

## A SUPPLEMENT

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In the Additional Note to my article 'William Caxton and Suffolk' (*Proceedings*, xxix, part 2 (1962), pp. 139-153) I drew attention to two charters in the series of Little Wratting charters which had been sold at Sotheby's in 1961. At that time I was unable to discover where the charters were, but recently I learned from Mr. L. Dow that the charters had been acquired by Mr. H. C. Drayton of Plumton House, Bury St. Edmunds. Mr. Drayton has very kindly allowed me to see the charters and to publish abstracts of them. I have retained the numbering given in the Additional Note, although No. 16 should properly come after No. 11 and No. 17 after No. 12.

16. *H. C. Drayton No. 1. Latin. 1450.*

Quitclaim by William Bourgchier Knight, John Crystemesse, Edmund Ekeney of London draper, John Writher of Wyntoma and Thomas Clerk to Thomas Bishop of Ely, Henry Lord of Bourgchier Knight, Thomas Fyndern and Thomas Terell Knights, John Doreward, Master Benedict Burgh clerk, John Flegg esq. and Agatha his wife of all their right in the manor of Parua Wrattyng in Suffolk with all its appurtenances in Wrattyng Magna, Hauerhill, Wydderesfeld, Bumsted ad Turrim in Essex;<sup>1</sup> but William Bourgchier, John Crystemesse, Edmund,<sup>2</sup> John Writher and Thomas Clerk reserve for themselves and their heirs all lands and tenements with their appurtenances called Gardeners in Parua Wrattyng,<sup>3</sup> and all the lands and tenements with appurtenances which Philip Caxton of Parua Wrattyng and Dionisia his wife acquired piecemeal from various people in Parua Wrattyng and Magna Wrattyng, and a tenement with appurtenances in Wrattyng Parua called Bukkes; which foresaid manor with all its appurtenances they acquired by the gift and feoffment of Philip Caxton son and heir of Philip Caxton late of Parua Wrattyng and William Brocroft clerk as the charter given at Wrattyng Parua on 20 July 16 Henry VI more fully shows.<sup>4</sup> Witnesses: John Burgoyne,

<sup>1</sup> This should presumably read 'in Suffolk and Essex'.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund's surname is included only at the beginning of the charter, never elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> There is a blot on this word which makes the first four letters illegible.

<sup>4</sup> i.e. Charter No. 4.

John Cukhowe, John Coksale senior, John Serle, William Barker, John Stubby and others. Given in Wrattyng Parua 15 November 29 Henry VI.

Place for five seals, of which one is missing, two are damaged and one has no impression on the wax. The names of the owners of the seals are written on parchment immediately above the seals.

17. *H. C. Drayton No. 2. Latin. 1456.*

Quitclaim by Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury, formerly Bishop of Ely, John Veer, Earl of Oxford, Henry Viscount Bourgchier, Thomas Fyndern Knight, John Doreward, Master Benedict Burgh clerk, John Flegge esq. and Agatha his wife to John Fyncham Gentilman, Henry Caldebek esq., Robert Deen, Simon Poley, John Yates, Master Richard Bumpsted, John Hervy chaplain, John Rysby chaplain, Henry Banyard and John Massenger of all their right in the manor of Parua Wrattyng called Bluntyshall with all its appurtenances and with all lands etc. belonging to the same manor and with all appurtenances lying in Parua Wrattyng, Magna Wrattyng, Magna Thyrlowe, Parua Thyrlowe, Wytheresfeld, Hauerhill, Kedyngton, Berneston, Stepilbumpsted, Clare and Hanchech in Suffolk and Essex together with the advowsons of the churches of Parua Wrattyng and Berneston. Given 2 November 35 Henry VI.<sup>5</sup>

Nine seals: two armorial, one damaged.

Together with the charters there is a letter from H. Thomas to Mr. Keen. The letter was sent from the Department of Printed Books in the British Museum and is dated 24. iii. 1942. The interest of this letter is considerable for it reveals that Keen must have had all seventeen charters at one time and that he must have lent them all to Thomas for his consideration. This is so because although the letter is now with Mr. Drayton's charters, it refers to some of the charters now in the British Museum. For example, the letter refers to the charter in which Caxton is described as a saddler (i.e. No. 14) and to the one in which mention is made of Sir William Oldhall (i.e. No. 11). The two charters and the letter now in Mr. Drayton's possession are stored in cases inscribed with Lord Kemsley's coat of arms. The fifteen charters now in the British Museum also once belonged to Lord Kemsley. One may accept, therefore, that Mr. Keen sold all seventeen charters, with the letter,

<sup>5</sup> Parts of this charter are rubbed and consequently difficult to read.

to Lord Kemsley and that the two charters and the letter became separated from the other fifteen in Lord Kemsley's library. How this happened is a matter for speculation only.<sup>6</sup> Because of war conditions Thomas was unable to do anything with the documents at the time of writing his letter, but he expressed the hope to be able to write a monograph on them after the war. He was never able to fulfil this wish, but as he was a Caxton scholar of some note, it might not be out of place to record his first impressions. He wrote 'It really looks as if we have Caxton's parentage at last, together with new light on his family's status and activities'. He then goes on to discuss the many correspondences between the documents and what we know about the printer (most of which are touched on in my own article) and concludes: 'The parallels set out above cannot all be mere coincidences. They have a cumulative effect, and seem to point to the identity of the William Caxton of the documents with William Caxton the printer'.

Unfortunately the two documents do not offer us much further assistance in deciding whether the two William Caxtons are the same person. Nevertheless a little progress has been made since my last article. There I mentioned that one of the most serious objections to the identification was that the accepted date for the printer's birth was too late to coincide with that of William Caxton of Little Wrattling. I have recently through the kindness of the Mercers' Company and their archivist, Miss Jean Imray, examined the Wardens' Account Book of the company and I have come to the conclusion that there is no support in it for the date 1422 normally given for Caxton's birth.<sup>7</sup> He could in fact have been born much earlier than that and consequently the objection is no longer valid. There still does remain the difficulty of how one can link a man who was born in Kent with a manor purchased in Suffolk at about the same time. This problem is more directly concerned with Philip Caxton, the father of William Caxton of Little Wrattling, about whom we know as yet too little. If he was a fairly wealthy man, as he seems to have been, it would have been quite normal for him to invest in landed property, which need not have been in his own county. This was done by merchants and other members of the middle classes. One need look no further for a parallel than to Robert Large, the printer's master. He was born in Leicestershire, worked in London and bought the manor of Horham in Essex. He did not sever his connexions with Leicestershire, for he made bequests to various churches there on his death. The possibility

<sup>6</sup> [Historians will be delighted to learn that these missing charters have been discovered; it is to be hoped that they will eventually be re-united with the other fifteen in the British Museum.—Ed.].

<sup>7</sup> The results of this investigation are to appear in *The Book Collector*.

remains; the proof has yet to be found. Until it is, the identification of one William Caxton with the other should be regarded as dubious, though it is to be hoped that further investigations will throw more light on the whole question.