



Extracts from the Chapter minutes from 1701 onwards and divers historical prospecting.

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DE VAUX COLLEGE

In the last edition I mentioned the college in connection with its founder, Giles of Bridport. I thought you might be interested in extracts from an article by academic Kathleen Edwards entitled **The Activities of some Fellows of De Vaux College, Salisbury, at oxford and elsewhere.**

De Vaux College, or as it was originally called, the House of the Valley of Scholars of St. Nicholas of Salisbury, has aroused the interest of antiquaries and historians of Oxford University since the time of Anthony Wood in the seventeenth century. It was founded in 1262 by Giles of Bridport, Bishop of Salisbury, *in a meadow by the cathedral church of Salisbury for two chaplains and twenty poor, needy and teachable scholars, serving God and Blessed Nicholas, and living there, studying and making progress in theology and the liberal arts.* Their warden (initially John de Holtby) was to be a canon of Salisbury cathedral, chosen by the dean and chapter, who were to be perpetual patrons of the house. At this time Salisbury was practically a university city.



De Vaux College from Gentleman's Magazine 1818, courtesy of rareoldprints.com

Bishop Giles had been acquiring property for some years, starting from his time as Archdeacon of Berkshire, and with these he endowed the College. Even in Oxford the word college was not used until the 14th century so it would have been *Domus* (home or college) or *Aula* (court or hall).

In 1238 there was an important migration of masters and students from Oxford, some of whom went to Salisbury, which seems to have been a centre of studies since the days of Bishop Richard Poore in the early thirteenth century. Hastings Rashdall (1858 - 1924) has suggested that some of these students may have decided to remain in Salisbury after lectures were resumed in Oxford, and that the colony of 1238 may have been reinforced by the troubles of 1264, or by one of the many disturbances between North and South or Town and Gown which marked the years 1264-78 at Oxford. In 1279 an agreement was drawn up between the Chancellor and Sub-dean of Salisbury cathedral, defining their respective jurisdiction over the scholars; this suggests both that the chancellor's jurisdiction over the scholars of the cathedral schools had been extended over the newcomers, and that Salisbury now had three main characteristics of a university city: there were a number of masters teaching in different faculties, and the scholars were liable to be involved in civil and personal disputes which were more than the disputes of schoolboys.



De Vaux House originally part of the College, courtesy of Savills/Stonephoto Ltd.

Probably, therefore, it was for students in this nascent university of Salisbury that Bishop Giles founded his college. His plans seem to have been influenced by arrangements in some of the colleges already existing at Paris. but in several ways the constitution of De Vaux was also similar to that of the later medieval colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. Therefore it has often been claimed as the first university college in England, founded two years before Merton, the first Oxford college.

Of the later history of De Vaux little is known apart from its dissolution in 1542, and there has been much speculation. Anthony Wood, writing in 1661-6, seems to have been the first to declare that, in the

later middle ages, the Valley scholars resorted constantly to Oxford, where they stayed in two halls in Schools Street called Salysurry, Salesury or Salisbury Hall and Little St. Edmund Hall, and that they had the privilege, on the Chancellor of Salisbury's recommendation, of proceeding to Oxford degrees.

Leach, building on this, and on a statement of Canon Moberly that in 1325 the Cathedral Chapter ordered all the scholars to leave Salisbury and go to Oxford, declared that, in 1325, the embryo university of Salisbury having practically come to an end, the majority of scholars went to Oxford, where they lived in Salisbury Hall at the cost of the endowment of the college at Salisbury; the scholars who remained in Salisbury apparently spent a period of probation there, attending the cathedral grammar school before going on to Oxford. Thus he claimed that while the early history of De Vaux reversed that of Merton (the fellows of Merton also having a double home at Merton in Surrey and at Merton College in Oxford), its later history formed an almost exact precedent for the two St. Mary Colleges of William of Wykeham at Winchester and at New College, Oxford.

These conclusions seem to be based almost entirely on legends. The name Salysurry Hall has now been shown to be a corruption of La Salle Desirée. One probable fellow of DeVaux, John of Harnham, was principal of Little St. Edmund Hall in 1428, but no other known principals or students of either hall seem to have been Valley Scholars. Again, no trace has been found at Oxford of the remarkable privilege of the chancellor of Salisbury cathedral of recommending Valley fellows to Oxford degrees without further examination: the *licentia ubique docendi* was one of the most highly valued privileges of the medieval university, and it seems most unlikely that Oxford would have allowed the chancellor of Salisbury to promote students for it. Finally, Canon Moberly was mistaken in attributing to 1325 the chapter act ordering the scholars to leave Salisbury and go to Oxford. There is no trace of such an entry in the chapter registers in 1325, while it is clearly entered in the act book under the year 1525-6.

It thus seems that the later history of De Vaux and its relations with Oxford University need to be re-examined. The notes which follow are an attempt to throw light on these problems from

an aspect which has not previously been investigated, that is, the careers of individual fellows of the college. About 114 names of fellows and chaplains have been traced from the 280 years of the college's existence, mainly in lists of witnesses to deeds in a fifteenth-century *cartulary* (title deeds etc copied for safekeeping into a register) of the college, in ordination lists of the bishops of Salisbury (which begin only in 1397), and in the act books of the



dean and chapter of Salisbury. Above, chained cartulary 1025-1257 from Senlis, France, *courtesy of Chatsam Creative Commons*. Four lived in the late thirteenth century, 38 in the fourteenth century, 48 in the fifteenth century, and 24 in the early sixteenth century. Many seem to have been rather obscure men, whose names rarely appear in the records of the royal chancery or exchequer, or in ecclesiastical records outside the diocese, but some biographical material has been collected for the careers, usually ecclesiastical and academic, of a fair proportion. The sources used have been chiefly the registers of the bishops and dean and chapter of Salisbury, printed registers of bishops of neighbouring dioceses, the printed Calendars of Papal Letters and Petitions relating to England, the Calendars of Close, Patent and Fine Rolls, the volumes of the Oxford Historical Society, and the unpublished registers of Congregation of Oxford University.

Thus fellows of De Vaux appear as member of Oxford University probably from the third or fourth decades of the fourteenth century, and evidence for their activities there becomes fuller as the surviving records increase in number in the last centuries of the middle ages. These activities and the relation of their college with the University were evidently less remarkable than is suggested in the pages of Anthony Wood. Nevertheless, the way in which De Vaux adapted itself to the changed academic conditions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is extremely interesting. By the first quarter of the fourteenth century it was clear that Salisbury was not to develop permanently into a university city, yet the college remained there in the position, apparently unique in medieval England, of a university college more than forty miles from the nearest university. The careers of some fellows show that modifications of the founder's plans were made. Not all the fellows studied, at any rate for the whole period during which they held their fellowships. A few fellowships were apparently used as prebends or *corrodies* (A corrody was a lifetime allowance of food and clothing, and often shelter and care, granted by an abbey, monastery, or other religious house) rather than as university scholarships, and some of the older fellows seem to have settled down to live at the college.

Yet the founder's intentions were never really abandoned. At all periods undergraduate fellows were admitted according to the foundation charter, and a fair proportion took university degrees, most of them probably at Oxford, though without special privileges. Though few seem to have been outstanding men, either academically or in the church, the later careers of many suggest that they were competent and did useful work in their own and neighbouring dioceses, usually as parish priests or ecclesiastical lawyers. In this way the college fulfilled the main function of a medieval university college in helping to provide a more learned clergy for the church, particularly in its own diocese.

Two problems remain, which are possibly related: the apparent change of policy of the cathedral chapter in 1526, when, on the death of the warden, Thomas Martin, it was ordered that all the scholars should go to Oxford or some other university, and that none should remain in Salisbury except the two chaplains, two stewards, the cook and the butler, on pain of losing their commons; and the dissolution of the college in 1542. The



suddenness of the change of policy in 1526 must not be exaggerated. A number of fellows were already in Oxford, and the chapter may merely have wished to regulate and make uniform an existing practice. On the other hand, the decision may also have been in part

St. Edmund Hall, Oxford,
courtesy of
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an unsuccessful attempt to avert the dissolution, which some canons may have feared was approaching. There would seem to have been no very obvious reason for the dissolution, either in the wealth of the college, which was negligible, or, so far as surviving records tell us, in scandalous living. But the college was almost as much a chantry as an educational institution, and fears were being expressed even at Oxford that the ecclesiastical character of some colleges might lead to their downfall. Moreover, in the case of De Vaux, critics might be expected to urge that sixteenth-century Salisbury was not the best place for university masters and students to have their permanent home; and members of the chapter may well have agreed that all the fellows could study with more profit at a university. Yet the chapter, by allowing only the two chaplains and two stewards to remain at the college, may in fact have emphasised the chantry character of the foundation in Salisbury, and so have contributed to its dissolution.

THE BACHELOR'S PORCH (Continued)

David Sherratt (Wednesday morning guide) writes: These pre-Reformation practices may be of interest concerning the 'Bachelor'sPorch' :

1: you will no doubt remember that Chaucer's Wife of Bath is described in the General Prologue as having been at the church door five times, i.e had married five husbands. The usual practice was for the marriage to take place at the door and porches were undoubtedly built to provide shelter. With the marriage ceremony completed, the couple led by the priest then entered the church as man and wife to hear the Nuptial Mass and the Blessing on their union. This liturgical procedure is described in a 15th century Sarum Manual thus: *In primis statuatur vir et mulier ante ostium ecclesie coram sacerdote et populo...hie entrant ecclesiam usque ad graduum altaris...* I wonder whether the name 'Bachelor's Porch' came from the custom that the bridegroom stood at the door awaiting his bride and soon ceased to be a bachelor by the marriage ceremony ? Some porches usually built by a wealthy Patron - could be elaborate structures and very occasionally were vaulted in stone as at Marlborough St Peter where the Bishop was Patron.

2: It is highly doubtful that there would be a piscina in a porch. More commonly a holy water stoup was built into the wall for the faithful to purify themselves by crossing themselves and

then biting their thumb to drive away evil spirits in the porch. At Bishop Cannings church near Devizes the holy water stoup is built, unusually, into the wall outside the entrance to the porch. I think it exceedingly doubtful that an altar would be placed in the porch. Pre-Reformation altars had to be of stone, marked with crosses at each corner and with a relic built into the centre (vide St Laurence Chapel altar) and there simply would not be enough room to accommodate one.

3: The lych/lich gate would be the most usual repository for a coffin awaiting burial, again since it gave shelter to the 'followers'. A very few churches still retain a stone slab in the centre of the lychgate on which the coffin rested whilst the priest asperged it with holy water and said prayers. Middle English *lich* a corpse. The followers would then pass along the lichway/lichwake to the grave which would be censed by the priest, and the corpse, wrapped in wool was laid in the grave. This was followed by the Requiem Mass within the church. I suppose that a porch could be used for the asperging but I doubt it since the bearers would have to back out of it to move on to the lichway, rather undignified.

4: Far more important than the burial was the liturgy of extreme unction. To the medieval mind in its preoccupation with evil spirits, hobgoblins, and devils the death chamber was filled with these monstrosities awaiting to seize the soul as it departed the body of the dying man. There are several lurid illustrations of this event in medieval manuscripts. A priest was sent for. He blessed the chamber, asperging it with holy water. He then attended the person who confirmed that he believed the clauses in the Creed, heard his confession (during which the room might be cleared). After absolving the penitent, the attendants returned and the priest then began the physical tasks of preparing the man for what some called his 'launching into heaven'. With a separate swab the priest anointed each of the hands, the feet, all the bodily orifices with holy oil (chrism) absolving the dying man of sins associated with each, e.g. lying, swearing, with his tongue. This done the priest then intoned the *Proficiscere, anima Christiana de hoc mundo...*, 'Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul..' and the family would join with the priest in saying more prayers and the 'Subvenite'. Most will know Cardinal Newman's poem 'The Dream of Gerontius' which Sir Edward Elgar, a Roman Catholic, set so movingly to music, and this preserves many of the main elements of the so-called 'last rites', the liturgy of extreme unction.

Right is porch of Manordeifi Old Church, Pembroke, complete with font and coracle (for when River Teifi floods). *Courtesy of August Schwerdfeger Creative Commons*. Incidentally the dedication has changed from St. Llawddog to St. Lawrence and finally St. David.

AFTERTHOUGHT

Ipicked up an interesting paperback from Oxfam before the Lockdown. It is the *Secret Lives of Colour* by Kasia St.Clair. The outer strip of each page is colour coded, and under Hematite Red is the following snippet of 'useless information'. The Athenians made ink out of it and the Romans used it for titles and subtitles. As it was made from red ochre this was known in Latin as *Rubrica* from where we get Rubric (heading or instructions).

