



Old St Paul's,
from "Early Christian Architecture" by Francis Bond (1913).

The medieval St Paul's Cathedral was built between 1087 and 1314, following the destruction by fire of its Saxon predecessor. The spire collapsed in 1561. The whole building was irreparably damaged in the 1666 great fire of London, and was replaced by the present building designed by Sir Christopher Wren.

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RICHARD DE BELMEIS AND HIS FAMILY AT ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, LONDON

by Dorothea Rowse¹

ABSTRACT

Richard de Belmeis (d.1127/8) is a man as famous for being a pluralist as for being a Bishop of London. References to him invariably refer to the numbers of Belmeis relatives who found employment at St Paul's Cathedral, many as members of Chapter. Robert Eyton in his *Antiquities of Shropshire* dealt in some detail with Richard's career and the Belmeis family genealogy.² While largely correct, it has been possible to do greater justice to Richard and to the Belmeis family at St Paul's using more recent published resources.

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Introduction

One of the most interesting aspects of the Ruffus Project³ has been the reconstruction of a number of Norman families who must have been of middling or lowly estate in Normandy, who arrived in England after the Conquest and succeeded in professions associated with the work of the law or the church. Service at Court or in the household of one of the wealthier families was also a pathway to financial and social success. There was invariably one particularly able and ambitious individual who carried the family along with him – in this case Richard de Belmeis. Within two generations much of the property he had garnered at the beginning had moved on as the *maritagium* of a great niece whose brothers had died without heirs. The de Belmeis family represents an extreme example of using one pathway – the church – to advance the family. They were a force to be reckoned with in the Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral for over a century. At no stage did they have a majority in the thirty person chapter but they appear to have been residentiary canons and so were able to extract maximum influence from their numbers. They could (and did) turn on each other at various times! The by-name de Belmeis was used by other people, who appear to be unrelated. This study includes those for whom there is good evidence.

Richard de Belmeis I's career

Richard de Belmeis was the founder of the de Belmeis kin-group, which was so prominent in the Chapter of Paul's Cathedral in London. He used a by-name derived from his place of origin, Beaumais-sur-Dive.⁴ However, his *obit*,

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² Robert W Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire*, Vol. 2 (1854 – 1860), 192-208.

³ The Ruffus Project has been a twenty year project by the author to reconstruct the largest of the Ruffus/Rous kin-groups in England for the period from 1100 to about 1340.

⁴ J F A Mason, "The Officers and clerks of the Norman earls of Shropshire," *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 56(3) (1960):253.

commemorated on 16 January at St Paul's, described him as "*Ricardus Ruffus*" while his grave was marked with the epitaph "*Hic jacet Ricardus Beaumeis cognomento Rufus ...*"⁵ It is impossible to tell whether the St Paul's family used the name Ruffus on a regular basis or whether it was just a nickname for the first Bishop Richard. However, it is possible that the family may have been related to a number of families associated with the Grandmesnil family and the Abbey of St Evroul who used the name quite regularly.⁶ The fief of Beaumais-sur-Dive located in the Hiesmois in Calvados was held by the Grandmesnil family.⁷

Richard arrived in England before Domesday as a clerk in the train of Roger de Montgomery. He is probably the man of that name who in 1086 was holding half a hide of land at Meadowley and two hides at Preen, which later descended within the family estate.⁸ Richard's role in the work of the Montgomery family is well known. He was witness to charters associated with Earl Roger in the Shrewsbury cartulary for the period before 1102,⁹ but seems to have been more closely associated with Roger's eldest son, Robert, who, it is suggested, may have conducted his administration with particular efficiency.¹⁰ Shortly after Robert's fall from grace in August 1102 Richard started managing the Honour in both counties on behalf of Henry I.¹¹ By Christmas 1102 Richard had replaced Rainald as Sheriff of Shropshire, with greater powers than those of the average sheriff.¹² He is regarded as an early example of a man who made a smooth transition from a lowly position to one of the king's servants.¹³

Richard's activities in trying to manage the Welsh borders are of some interest and suggest a man capable of duplicity when he thought the situation required it. Despite his elevation to Bishop in 1108, the Welsh continued to see Richard as "*King Henry's steward at Shrewsbury*"¹⁴ and *a most able man in secular affairs [who was sent] far off to the Western Marches of England, there to manage the king's affairs.*"¹⁵

Richard's status as Sheriff of Shropshire is said to have lasted until about 1123. However, there is evidence of activity in that role until only about 1110; for example in April 1107/May 1108 he was instructed to leave the property of the Abbey at Shrewsbury free of all customs.¹⁶ He was elected Bishop of London on

⁵ John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1066-1300*, Vol.1, St Paul's London (1968), 1; William Stubbs, *Historical Introductions to the Rolls series*, ed by Arthur Hassall, (1902), 44, note 4.

⁶ J H Round, *Calendar of documents preserved in France, illustrative of the history of Great Britain*, (1899), 222, no. 632

⁷ J F A Mason, "The Norman earls of Shrewsbury: three notes", *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 57 (1962/3): 155.

⁸ T F Tout, "Belmeis or Beaumeis, Richard de (d.1128), bishop of London," *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)*, Vol. 2, (1885), 199; Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.1, 149 (eg Ranulf de Belmeis held Meadowley in 1165).

⁹ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 193.

¹⁰ J F A Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and his sons (1067-1102)", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 13 (1963):26.

¹¹ Mason, "Officers and clerks", *op.cit.* 254.

¹² Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 194.

¹³ Mason, "Roger de Montgomery", *op.cit.* 26.

¹⁴ Thomas Jones, ed. *Brut Y Tywysogyon or the Chronicle of the Princes, Red Book of Hergest* (1973), 75.

¹⁵ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 195.

¹⁶ William Farrer, "An outline itinerary of Henry I", *English Historical Review*, 34 (1919): 344.

24 May 1108, was ordained to the priesthood on the 14th June, made his profession of obedience, and was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Anselm at Pagham, Sussex on the 26th July 1108.¹⁷ Following his consecration Richard seems to have spent a lot of time at court and it is debatable as to how much he had to do with Shropshire and the Welsh Marches after this time.

Richard was a successful Bishop of London and the cathedral precinct in particular progressed under his leadership. Stubbs described him as “*a great prelate of the true Norman type, a magnificent builder, a great state official, and a most liberal benefactor to his church. He is said to have devoted the whole of his episcopal revenue to the restoration of his cathedral; he founded the cathedral schools; he obtained great privileges for the chapter from the king; by purchasing land and houses around St Paul’s he formed ... a cathedral close.*”¹⁸

Richard continued the construction of the new cathedral commenced by Bishop Maurice but in a more modest fashion. Early in his episcopacy the canons’ brewhouse and bakehouse were constructed outside the south gate and food from the cathedral manors was processed there. By 1127 a new quay had been constructed at Paul’s Wharf and the rents from it were assigned to the altar at St Paul’s.¹⁹ Richard created a number of educational foundations, the School at St Paul’s being one of them and he had founded a choir of boys and gentlemen by 1127.²⁰

Possibly the area of his career as Bishop that has attracted most attention has been his reputation for nepotism; “*... the tribe of his sons and nephews, great-nephews, cousins and other relations held many of the richest plums in the chapter down to the second decade of the thirteenth century.*”²¹ This would seem to be somewhat unfair since evidence suggests that this was common practice and that prior to 1127 canons at St Paul’s were often succeeded by their sons. Both Bishops Maurice and Richard de Belmeis I worked on wresting greater control of appointments to the prebends from Chapter. During Richard’s time the compromise was that the Bishop informed the Dean and Chapter of his nominee but the right of investiture, of custody during a vacancy, of jurisdiction, remained to the dean and chapter.²² Richard seems to have played an active role in the appointment of one of his sons, and his nephews Guy de Langford, Richard de Belmeis II, Richard Ruffus I and William de Mareni. It is possible that he had arranged for some of his nephews to hold positions at St Paul’s from an early age so that they were available to be made canons at a later date. However, the fact that they later moved into positions of authority seems to suggest patronage from succeeding Bishops. The rather enigmatic figures of Deans William and Hugh de Mareni seem to have been a more likely source of preferment for the rest of the family.²³

It is possible that Richard de Belmeis assisted in furthering the career of Geoffrey Ruffus, Chancellor and Bishop of Durham in the early 12th century. Geoffrey’s

¹⁷ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.* Vol.1, 1; Tout, *DNB*, *op.cit.* Vol. 2, 199.

¹⁸ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions*, *op.cit.* 44.

¹⁹ Derek Keene *et al.*, eds., *St Paul’s: the cathedral church of London, 604 – 2004* (2004), 18-23.

²⁰ <http://www.stpauls.co.uk>

²¹ C N L Brooke, “The composition of the Chapter of St. Paul’s, 1086-1163”, *Cambridge Historical Journal* 10 (2) (1951): 126.

²² Marion Gibbs, ed., *Early charters of St Paul’s Cathedral church* (1939), xxv.

²³ Ralph de Diceto, *The Historical works of Master Ralph de Diceto*, ed. William Stubbs (1876), 249. “*Willelmo decano Lundoniae consanguinei sui maxime restiterunt, non quae Dei sed quae mundi sunt saepentes.*”

early career included working for the King's chancery and as a royal chaplain. He became chaplain to the Chancellor Ranulf Flambard and, on his death, was appointed to the very lucrative office of the Chancellor on 4th February 1123. He became Bishop of Durham in 1133.²⁴ It is possible that Richard assisted him by drawing him to the king's attention and may have helped him with the funds necessary to take on the Chancellorship.

His relationship with St Osyth's at Chich in Essex, a foundation for Augustinian regular canons was curious. Tradition suggests that Richard, while creating an estate for himself at Clacton-on-Sea, seized a number of neighbouring estates including lands belonging to the shrine at St Osyth's. The canons appealed to their saint and Richard was said to have been struck down with paralysis, and unable to see or speak. When his steward offered a ring from Richard's finger at the shrine, his sight and speech were restored but he remained unable to walk. Richard founded a priory of Augustinian canons at Chich in about 1119-1121 in repentance and gratitude for his partial healing.

Richard remained at St Paul's until ill-health forced his retirement to St Osyth's in about 1123, where he died on 16 January 1127/8.²⁵ Eyton was ambivalent about Richard, possibly as a result of the sources he had available. "*Richard of Belmeis was a type of ministerial prelate of the twelfth century, and may be placed after Roger of Salisbury ... As administrator and jurist, as ecclesiastic, church-builder, and statesman, he ranks high among the bishops of his age.*"²⁶ He seems to have been an extremely able man who achieved a great deal – and was probably no worse than other churchmen of his day.²⁷

Richard's Family at St Paul's

Whether Richard was ever formally married is debatable since his estates in Shropshire were left to his nephew Philip, but he certainly had two sons, William and Walter, both of whom became canons of St Paul's. William de Belmeis held the Prebend of Reculversand and was probably appointed Archdeacon of London by his father, *ie* before 1127. He had died by the close of 1150²⁸ and he was succeeded by his cousin's son Hugh de Marení. His *obit* was probably celebrated on 5 June.²⁹ Walter de Belmeis was described as "*filius Ricardi episcopi*" in the catalogue of canons - in this case in the Prebend of Newington. As he first appears as canon before 1138 and last occurs in the 1150s he was probably not appointed by his father.³⁰

Richard had at least two brothers – Walter and William - and a sister, Adelina who may have been the eldest in the family. They provided the offspring who peopled the Chapter at St Paul's.

²⁴ Diceto, *Historical works*, *op.cit.* 246.

²⁵ Denis Bethell, "Richard of Belmeis and the foundation of St Osyth's", *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 2 (3) (1970): 303-304, 309.

²⁶ Tout, *DNB*, *op.cit.* Vol. 2, (1885), 200.

²⁷ W R Matthews, *et al.*, eds., *A History of St Paul's Cathedral and the men associated with it*, (1957), 50.

²⁸ *CChr*, Vol.1 p. 31 quoted in "Review by H.G. Richardson, of Marion Gibbs, *Early Charters of the Cathedral Church of St Paul, London*", in *English Historical Review*, 57 (225) (1942): 128.

²⁹ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.* 9.

³⁰ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.* 65/66.

The sons and grandsons of Walter de Belmeis

Many of the de Belmeis/Ruffus men who graced St Paul's were the sons and grandsons of Walter de Belmeis. Given that so many of his family joined St Paul's he must presumably have settled in England. There is no doubt that Philip was his eldest son. Ralph de Langford was also Walter's son. Ralph de Diceto, who seems to have known them well, stated that Ralph and Bishop Richard II de Belmeis were brothers, and that Richard was the son of Walter de Belmeis.³¹ Richard Ruffus I was said in *Fasti* to have been the brother of Bishop Richard de Belmeis II and both of them the sons of Robert de Belmeis.³² An examination of the only document which fits the reference provided covers an agreement in which the witness list includes "*Richard* [presumably Bishop Richard II as Archdeacon of Middlesex] *and Richard brother of the Archdeacon*" [ie the later Archdeacon of Essex]. This document must date from before 1138 since Richard Ruffus I was appointed Archdeacon of Essex in that year and Richard de Belmeis II had regained his title of Archdeacon of Middlesex by that time.³³ Walter had a further son, Robert de Belmeis. Proof of this relationship comes from the fact that Robert's son William de Belmeis II was described as "*canon of St Paul's and nephew of Richard de Belmeis II*" in 1183.³⁴ Walter also seems to have had a daughter married to a man named Albi. Richard and William Albi "*nephews of the Bishop*" [ie Richard de Belmeis II] were witnesses in an 1160 document from St Paul's in which Hugh was Dean and Richard II was Bishop.³⁵

Philip de Belmeis

The eldest of Walter's sons was Philip, and he was the one singled out to inherit his uncle's temporal estates. Philip was married to Matilda de Meschin and had at least two sons - Philip and Ranulf - and a daughter Adelicia. He was the heir to a considerable inheritance, which included the land at Tong and Meadowley in Shropshire, three knight's fees in Sussex, and Ashby de la Zouch and Blackfordby in Leicestershire.³⁶ He was probably also in possession of the three fees of old feoffment in Blymhill, Brinton and Wilbrighton in Staffordshire which were held by his son Ranulph in about 1165 and had been granted *temp* Henry I.³⁷ During the 1140s Philip founded an establishment for the Canons of Arroasia.³⁸ The Canons moved in about 1145 to Donington and sometime later moved again, this time to Lilleshall, under the guidance of Philip's brother Richard de Belmeis II, at that time Archdeacon of Middlesex. This later became a very important Augustinian foundation. Philip seems to have died sometime after this grant.

His son Philip confirmed the grant in about 1152/59 when the witness list included Bishop Richard de Belmeis II, Richard the Archdeacon [Richard Ruffus I], Radulf de Belmeis "*my brother,*" Richard de Belmeis who was one of Philip's

³¹ Diceto, *Historical works, op.cit.* 250/251.

³² Le Neve, *Fasti, op.cit.* 13.

³³ Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *9th Report ...*, 1883/1884, 63a.

³⁴ Richard Newcourt, *Repertorium ecclesiasticum parochiale Londinense*, Vol.1, (1708/1710), 705.

³⁵ Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *9th Report ...*, 1883/1884, 32a.

³⁶ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 201, 206.

³⁷ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 207.

³⁸ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 205.

knights [probably the son of William de Belmeis], Robert de Belmeis and William his brother [the sons of Robert de Belmeis and grandsons of Walter].³⁹ He did not survive long and had died and been succeeded by his brother Ranulph by 1159.⁴⁰ He too had died young and without children by 1167⁴¹ when his sister Adelicia, married to Alan de la Zouche, inherited the family estate, which then passed to her descendants.

Ralph de Langford

Walter's son Ralph de Langford first occurs definitely as a canon of St Paul's in charge of the Prebend of Brownswood in about 1132. He may have been appointed earlier as some documents mentioning him could date from as early as 1114, implying that he must have been born before the turn of the 12th century. His by-name probably came from an early appointment to the parish of Langford in the Colchester Archdiocese. Ralph became Dean of St Paul's in about 1142, following the death of his cousin William de Mareni in 1138. Ralph seems to have sided with his brother Richard fairly consistently through their joint careers at St Paul's and was certainly a support to him for the first couple of years of the bishopric. He aged fairly prematurely since he was described as "*old and infirm*" by John of Salisbury in about 1154 when he was unlikely to have been more than about 50 years old. He must have died at about that time and his *obit* was celebrated on about 10/11 April.⁴²

Richard de Belmeis II

Richard de Belmeis II, was appointed as Archdeacon of Middlesex while he was "*still a child*," possibly as early as 1121 by his uncle, Bishop Richard I. This suggests that he was born after the turn of the 12 century, possibly c.1105/07, and he may have been the third son.⁴³ "*While he was still quite a boy*" his cousin Dean William installed him in his seat in the choir.⁴⁴ The position was held in trust for him by Hugh, chaplain to Bishop Gilbert the Universal. Hugh was reluctant to hand back this position in 1128 when Richard reached maturity, and Hugh was supported in this by Bishop Gilbert. Assisted by his brother Ralph of Langford and cousin, Dean William, Richard appealed to Rome for confirmation of his appointment in about 1134. He obtained a decision which compelled Hugh to hand back the position in 1138 after Richard's visit to Rome.

In the period following this event, the See was granted by the Empress Matilda to Robert de Sigillo in 1141. He had formerly been the holder of the Seal under the Chancellor Geoffrey Ruffus and acting Chancellor from 1133 – 1135 but came to the See of London from his retirement as a monk at Reading Abbey.⁴⁵ When Stephen gained the ascendancy in London in about 1145, Bishop Robert fled into exile. He received no support from the Belmeis group in the Chapter who "*did their utmost to reduce their bishop to destitution*." The men involved in this were said to be

³⁹ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 206.

⁴⁰ Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 207.

⁴¹ *Great Roll of the Pipe for the 14th year of Henry II 1167/68.* Pipe Roll Society, Vol.12 (1890), 57.

⁴² Le Neve, *Fasti, op.cit.*, 5.

⁴³ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions, op.cit.* 44; Eyton, *Antiquities, op.cit.* Vol.2, 201.

⁴⁴ Diceto, *Historical works, op.cit.*, 251.

⁴⁵ Le Neve, *Fasti, op.cit.*, 2.

William the Archdeacon "*cum gente eorum qui a Bello Manso traxere cognomen.*" Depending how loosely this appellation was applied, and how the family was taking sides at the time, this group could have been quite substantial in numbers - William de Belmeis, the son of the first Bishop Richard, was the Archdeacon of London and his brother held the Prebend of Newington. Their nephews, the two brothers Richard de Belmeis II and Ralph de Langford were Archdeacon of Middlesex and Dean of St Paul's respectively, and their nephew Hugh de Marenis was a canon. Richard Ruffus I was Archdeacon of Essex, and Ailward Ruffus, possibly a relative, was Archdeacon of Colchester. This same group appealed against the suspension of English bishops by the Pope after they failed to attend the Council of Rheims in 1148.⁴⁶

In spring 1152 Richard de Belmeis II was elected Bishop of London. He held the position for a rather unhappy ten years. His judicial sentences were constantly appealed against, his rights of patronage infringed and his supremacy in the chapter disputed.⁴⁷ His family continued to split into factions and when his cousin's son, Hugh de Marenis, was appointed to an unnamed prebend, it was, according to John of Salisbury, against Richard's wishes. This may in fact have been Hugh's appointment as Archdeacon of London, sometime before 1154.⁴⁸ Richard had the support of his brother Ralph de Langford as Dean until about 1154 but he took three years to appoint the next Dean, Hugh de Marenis⁴⁹ a delay which probably owed something to the antipathy between them. In about 1160 Richard was struck by paralysis. His finances were in a disastrous state and the See was in urgent need of management. He died in May 1162, probably aged about 55.⁵⁰ Richard seems to have been a weak bishop, reliant on others for support and advice. Ill health and age may have affected his capacity to enforce his authority from the late 1150s until his death.

Robert de Belmeis

Walter had a further son, Robert de Belmeis, who is probably the man who occurs as a witness to Philip's grant to Buildwas Abbey in 1139. Robert had two sons. William de Belmeis II was probably appointed as canon before the death of his uncle Bishop Richard de Belmeis II in 1162, and was Prebendary of St Pancras from the late 1170s to about 1184.⁵¹ As "*canon of St Paul's and nephew of Richard de Belmeis II,*" in 1183 he gave St Pancras at Kentish Town to the canons of St Paul's, with the consent of Bishop Gilbert Foliot, for the health of his uncle's soul and that of his father Robert de Belmeis.⁵² The above document proves that Newcourt's description of him as "*nephew to the first Richard de Belmeis*" was incorrect.⁵³ The second son Robert de Belmeis flourished about 1152/1159 and had a son William who held land in Tong, *temp* Henry II.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions*, *op.cit.*, 45, and note 1 on that page.

⁴⁷ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions*, *op.cit.*, 54.

⁴⁸ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions*, *op.cit.*, 55; Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.*, 6.

⁴⁹ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.*, 5.

⁵⁰ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.*, 2.

⁵¹ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.*, 69.

⁵² Newcourt, *Repertorium*, *op.cit.* Vol.1, 705.

⁵³ Newcourt, *Repertorium*, *op.cit.* Vol.1, 194.

⁵⁴ Eyton, *Antiquities*, *op.cit.* Vol.2, 206.

Richard Ruffus, Archdeacon of Essex, and his sons called Richard

Richard Ruffus I, the Archdeacon of Essex, was yet another of Walter's sons. This line of Richards may have used the name Ruffus to differentiate themselves from the Bishop, who used de Belmeis. Richard Ruffus I held the Prebend of Holbourn during the 1120s and moved on to become Archdeacon of Essex from about 1138. He was best known for his pioneering work in managing Chapter farms and turning them into a profitable venture. His agreement for the management of Belchamp gives a graphic picture of the state of farming in Essex at the time.⁵⁵ He also managed the estate at Runwell and created an assart of 240 acres in the forests on that manor.⁵⁶ The success of his work was such that farming the manors became a perk of the canons residentiary.⁵⁷ He created considerable confusion for future generations by naming both his sons Richard - Richard Ruffus II and Richard [Ruffus] Junior, both of whom became canons of St Paul's.

Richard Ruffus II, Prebend of Twyford was possibly appointed before the death of Bishop Richard de Belmeis II in 1162. He, too, was the manager of estates after his father's death, and was so successful that he acquired additional manors. He continued as canon at St Paul's until 1201 when he is believed to have died on about 18 January. Stubbs says that "*Richard was a great man in his way and possessed a house of his own within the cathedral precinct.*"⁵⁸

The second brother named Richard Ruffus lived in his brother's shadow and was usually known as Richard Junior. They sometimes can be seen witnessing documents together, described rather cryptically as "*Ricardo et Ricardo fratribus*" or even "*Ricardo Ruffo, Ricardo Juniore.*"⁵⁹ Richard Junior succeeded his father as Prebend of Holbourn, following his death in 1167. This is probably the last example of a son succeeding to his father's clerical position. A ban on clerical marriage and fatherhood made this almost impossible by the end of the 12th century. He continued in this role until his death in about April 1214. He has been described as one of the Chapter's financial experts - along with his brother who "*was a land agent and farmed at least six of the chapter manors; the younger was his counterpart inside the Close, the head of the 'chamber', or central financial office.*"⁶⁰

The Albi family

Walter also had a daughter who married a man by the name of Albi and had three sons – Richard, William and Stephen. Richard and William Albi "*nephews of the Bishop*" [*ie* Richard de Belmeis II] were witnesses in an 1160 document from St Paul's in which Hugh was Dean and Richard was Bishop.⁶¹ William was probably the priest named William Albus who witnessed a land deed c.1191.⁶² There was

⁵⁵ C N L Brooke, *London, 800 – 1216*, (1975), 353/354;
W H Hale, *The Domesday of St Paul's of the Year MCCXXII*. (1858), 138.

⁵⁶ Gibbs, *Early charters*, *op.cit.*, 29.

⁵⁷ Brooke, *London, 800 – 1216*, *op.cit.*, 354.

⁵⁸ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions*, *op.cit.*, 69/70.

⁵⁹ Gibbs, *Early Charters*, *op.cit.*, 193, 145/146.

⁶⁰ Matthews, *A History of St Paul's*, *op.cit.*, 51. There are references to a Richard the Chamberlain in the index to Gibb's book which probably refer to him, sometimes as Richard Junior.

⁶¹ Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, *9th Report ...*, (1883/1884), 32a.

⁶² H M Chew & M Weinbaum, eds., *The London Eyre of 1244*, (1970), 148.

also a Stephen Albus who in 1180 was granted 60 acres of land in St Pancras by William de Beaumes, *ie* his cousin the Prebendary of St Pancras, which had been held by Alfric Rufus.⁶³

The sons and grandsons of William de Belmeis

Bishop Richard I had another brother called William de Belmeis. He was chief witness to an undated grant of the manor of Ivelith and land in Hatton by Adam Traynel.⁶⁴ William de Belmeis gave the manor at "Andretesbury" to the monks at Bermondsey in about 1118.⁶⁵ Eyton suggests that this was the start of a line of men who were known as the lords of Donington, holding lands as tenants of the de Belmeis family at Tong. In the 1150s there was a Richard de Beaumes based at Donington who was a Knight of Philip de Belmeis, the younger.

The de Marení Family

William de Marení was the son of Richard I's sister Adelina [*"Willelmus decanus Lndononiae, filius Adelinae sororis memorati pontificis"*] and seems to have been a bit older than his cousins.⁶⁶ He must have had a reasonable degree of maturity to be appointed Dean in 1112 and must have been born in the last decades of the 11th century. He probably started out in the Prebend of Chiswick but was appointed Dean of St Paul's by his uncle *c.*1112 and probably transferred to the Prebend of Totenhall, traditionally held by the Dean.⁶⁷ He seems to have had designs on the Bishopric. Stubbs notes that when Gilbert, the Bishop of London (1127-1134) died, the Dean wished either to be nominated Bishop or to ensure that his nominee was successful. He was opposed by a large number of the chapter, including at least two of his kinsmen, who elected Anselm of St Edmunds.⁶⁸ In 1138 the See was entrusted to the Bishop of Winchester and in April of that year Dean William died – *"Willelmus decanus Lndononiensis migravit ad Dominum."*⁶⁹ His *obit* was celebrated on the 28th or 29th.⁷⁰

Adelina seems to have had a further unnamed son, whose sons also joined the staff at St Paul's Cathedral. Hugh de Marení was Adelina's grandson and the nephew of William de Marení, Dean of St Paul's 1112-1138. He was probably a member of the Chapter from about 1138 to about 1148 when he occurs as "*Hugh, nephew of the Dean*" in an unidentified prebend.⁷¹ He became Archdeacon of London in about 1154 in succession to William de Belmeis, who had held the position since 1132.⁷² He was Prebendary for Totenhall and Dean of St Paul's from about

⁶³ N J M Kerling, ed., *Cartulary of St Bartholomew's Hospital. founded 1123*, no. 1167.

⁶⁴ Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire, op.cit.* Vol. 2, 169. Eyton believed it to date from *temp* Henry I although there are arguments to suggest that it was as late as *temp* Richard I.

⁶⁵ G W Phillips, *The History and antiquities of Bermondsey*, 11; Newcourt, *Repertorium, op.cit.* Vol.1, 907.

⁶⁶ Diceto, *Historical works, op.cit.*, 251.

⁶⁷ Brooke, *Composition, op.cit.*, 129.

⁶⁸ This may have been William de Belmeis, the Archdeacon of London, and Richard Ruffus I, the Archdeacon of Essex.

⁶⁹ Stubbs, *Historical Introductions, op.cit.*, 44/45.

⁷⁰ Diceto, *Historical works, op.cit.*, 252.

⁷¹ Le Neve, *Fasti, op.cit.*, 93.

⁷² Le Neve, *Fasti, op.cit.*, 9.

1158 to about June 1179, succeeding his father's cousin, Ralph de Langford. The de Belmeis family held the Deanship from 1112 to 1179.⁷³ His death marked the end of the de Belmeis family influence in the Chapter.

John de Mareni, probably Hugh's brother, was a canon of St Paul's from about 1174, and the manager of the Chapter estate at Navestock from about 1174 to about 1179/80.⁷⁴ There was a further possible brother, Roger de Mareni, who held two fees of the Bishop of London in 1166.⁷⁵

Richard Ruffus the King's Chamberlain

The presence in London after 1165 of a further Richard Ruffus has been the source of some confusion. Richard Ruffus, possibly a clerk, was the King's Chamberlain from about 1166 to about 1181/2.⁷⁶ Discussing the advantages to St Paul's of being able to appoint clerks to the cathedral who were making their career in the king's service, Gibbs says "*that the proximity of London to Westminster, rapidly becoming the fixed centre of government and administration, made it possible for [a canon] to reside near, if not technically in his church, in a prebendal or chapter house,*" and combine this with a career in the judiciary or at court. She goes on to list such men and includes Richard Ruffus.⁷⁷ Richard Ruffus, the King's Chamberlain, was never a canon of St Paul's, and was definitely not related in any way to the Belmeis family.

Conclusion

The de Belmeis/Ruffus connexion flourished at St Paul's Cathedral through a century of turmoil, warfare and financial difficulties. It included two Bishops of London but, perhaps more significantly, it held the Deanship for 68 years. This combination seems to have provided the means whereby the family could create a significant bloc within the chapter, thus ensuring that their preferment was generally successful. They are a good example of a Norman family who made the most of opportunities offered by the conquest of England.

⁷³ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.*, 5.

⁷⁴ Le Neve, *Fasti*, *op.cit.*, 93.

⁷⁵ Hubert Hall, ed. *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, (1896), 186.

⁷⁶ See Dorothea Rowse, "The King's Chamberlain, Richard Ruffus, c.1140s–1202 and his family", *Foundations*, 3 (4) (2010): 283-292.

⁷⁷ Gibbs, *Early Charters*, *op.cit.*, xxvi.

Table I. Putative relationships of members of the de Belmeis family

Note: While there is good evidence for the parentage of the people in this pedigree, their position in the family is largely conjectural, as indicated by the square brackets.

[Ruffus de Belmeis].

b.1 Adelina/Avelina [married to Mareni].

[c.1] William de Mareni, Dean, 1111/2-1138.

[c.2] [brother].

[d.1] Hugh de Mareni, Dean, c.1162 – 1179.

[d.2] John de Maregni, Canon, c.1174/80.⁷⁸

[d.3] Roger de Mareni, fl.1166, held two fees of the Bishop of London.

[b.2] Richard de Belmeis, (cognomen Ruffus), Bishop of London, 1108–1123.

[c.1] Walter de Belmeis, Canon, c.1138; d. by 1162.

[c.2] William de Belmeis, Archdeacon of London, 1127-c.1150.

[b.3] Walter de Belmeis.

c.1. Philip de Belmeis, fl.1120/30s; d.1154.

[d.1] Philip de Belmeis, fl.1139-1154; dsp.1159.

[d.2] Ranulf de Belmeis, fl.1139-1159; dsp. c.1167.

[d.3] Adelicia de Belmeis, m. Alan de la Zouche.

[c.2] Richard de Belmeis, Bishop of London, 1152-1162.

[c.3] Ralph of Langford, Dean, 1142-1154.

[c.4] Robert de Belmeis, occurs c.1139.

[d.1] William de Belmeis II Canon, fl.1162-1184.

[d.2] Robert de Belmeis, fl.1152/59.

[c.5] Richard Ruffus I, Archdeacon of Essex, d.1167.

[d.1] Richard Ruffus II, Canon, d.c.1201.

[d.2] Richard Junior, Canon, d.1214.

[c.6] Sister married to Albi.

[d.1] Richard Albi fl.1160, worked at St Paul's.

[d.2] William Albi fl.1160, worked at St Paul's.

[d.3] Stephen fl.1180.

[b.4] William de Belmeis, fl. before 1150, Lord of Donington.

[c.1] Richard de Belmeis, fl.1152-1180, Lord of Donington.

⁷⁸ Brook, *Composition, op.cit.*, 116 - there may be some doubt about his role as canon.

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