

# ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS TO THE COMPLETE PEERAGE

## Robert de Welle and the Honor of Haughley (Suffolk)

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The Complete Peerage<sup>2</sup> states that "*Robert de Welle [son and heir of William fitzWalter de Welle by his wife, the sister of Gilbert de Gant, and father of William de Welle] farmed the Honor of Haughley, Suffolk, alias the Honor of Constable, 1184-8*".

In the *Baronage of England* Sir William Dugdale (1675) introduced his genealogy of the family of Welles with a statement that "*the first mention I find of this family is Adam de Welles 6 Rich I (1195)*"<sup>3</sup>. In the CP Adam is replaced by Robert de Welles (see above). The justification for this is not certain. Among the possible reasons, the claim that Robert was Constable of the Honor of Haughley<sup>4</sup> is examined in this note.

The wife of William fitzWalter de Welle, Matilda<sup>5</sup>, was named probably after her mother Matilda, daughter of Count Stephen, Lord of Richmond, who had married Walter de Gand. She was a sister of Walter's heir, Gilbert II de Gand, Earl of Lincoln, and a granddaughter of Alice de Montfort. According to Farrer (1915), "*During the reign of Stephen (1135 - 1154) Gilbert held for some years the honor late of Robert de Vere, known as the honor of the constable, or of Haughley (Haganet), and while in possession made several grants from the demesne with the king's consent, including £41-worth of land in Ripe, in Sussex, to Leon de Arceles, his vassal.*"<sup>6</sup> Gilbert died in 1156. He had clearly exercised control in the honor at some time during Stephen's reign, but in 1142 Robert de Vere and Adelina de Montfort, his wife, were still living (DD p.596) and the honor had passed by 1152 to Henry of Essex who was a descendant of Hugh de Montfort (DD pp.449-450). That there were rival claims arising out of the de Montfort connection does not seem in doubt. The honor was created by William I after the conquest and given to Hugh de Montfort for military services (in particular the submission of Dover Castle). The de Montfort connection to Matilda appears to have misled the writer of the CP genealogy into believing that it was the Robert de Welle, son of William fitzWalter de Welle, who farmed the honor in 1184.

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<sup>2</sup> CP, 12(2): 437 - Welles

[See inside rear cover of the journal for standard abbreviations of frequently cited sources.]

<sup>3</sup> "*The first mention I find of this Family, is in 6 Rich I (Rot.pip.), Adam de Welles then paying ten Marks for his adherence to John Earl of Noreton [sic], who at that time took more Authority upon him (whilst the King, his Brother was prisoner in Almaine) than he could justifie*" Massingberd (1901) wrote that "*Sir W.Dugdale, in his Baronage, only traces the Welle pedigree from William de Welle...*" Tatham, in *Notes on the History of Well*, states that William fitzWalter was succeeded by his son Robert de Welle and "*a certain Adam de Welle. was perhaps Robert's brother or cousin.*"

<sup>4</sup> Haughley is referred to as Haganet in contemporary records.

<sup>5</sup> DD p.781. Keats-Rohan's basis for the name Matilda is not clear, as none of the primary citations in DD under the William de Welle entry appear to support this directly.

<sup>6</sup> Pipe Roll, 15 Hen.II, 111.

The Robert de Welles to whom, with Willellmus de Essetford, "*the manor of Haughley was placed out to ferme by Henry II in 1185*" (Copinger, 1905-1911), was the son of Gervaise de Welles<sup>7</sup> (Palgrave, 1835) who originated in Saint Valery en Caux (Veules or Welles) Normandy (Beaurepaire, 1982). It was from Henry of Essex that Gervaise had obtained the land which was in dispute in the *Curia Regis* of Richard I; and he was a warden of Dover Castle (Hall, 1896). The family described in the CP is of Flemish origin, with interests and influence principally in the county of Lincolnshire (Given-Wilson, 1987). A Pipe Roll entry for 1194 (Stenton, 1928) for the *Tallagium de Honoris de Haganet* stated that Robert de Welles and William de Essetford "*debet scutagio militum eiusdem honoris. Set requirendi sunt in Kent.*"

The Honor of Haughley (Haganet) was given after 1194 to Count Thomas de Perche (Copinger, 1905-1911) and when Robert de Welles died, before 1212, the Count was guardian of his heir and lands (Fowler, 1971).

Robert de Welles and William de Essetford (Ashford) were both of Norman origin with estates in Kent (Eastwell Manor). In *Interdict Documents* (Barnes and Powell, 1960) relating to Inquests in 1213, William of Ashford was named as of "*Kentish origin, a member of the Welles family from Eastwell, and a Bailiff attached to the Sheriff of Kent, Reginald of Cornhill*". That William de Essetford had Norman antecedents is shown by the witnessing of a *Monks Horton Charter* in 1140-1144 (Scott, 1876) by "*Normanno de Essetf*". The Sheriff, Reginald de Cornhill, bought the wardship of Robert de Welles' heir and lands before 1212 from Count Thomas (who died in 1217).

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<sup>7</sup> "*Herevic de Raimes... says that Henry of Essex by force and unjustly in time of war took that land....Robert comes and denies the force and injustice and he says that the Lord King H., father of the Lord King, gave to Gervase de Welles his father that land for his service who is of his constableness...*"