

## The Descent of Belvoir.<sup>1</sup>

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The history of the important honour of Belvoir in the Norman period has been discussed by several historians, most recently by K.S.B. Keats-Rohan.<sup>2</sup> Missing pieces of the jigsaw have been filled in and, though gaps remain, most notably about the basis of Ranulf II earl of Chester's claim in Stephen's reign, the picture is now much clearer. It highlights the crucial role of women in the descent of honours, bringing us to the heart of politics and patronage under the Norman kings, and the crucial question of how much manoeuvre the king had in deciding in favour of one claimant rather than another.<sup>3</sup>

In 1086 Belvoir was held by Robert de Tosny. He is known to have had three sons. One, Berengar, is recorded in Domesday Book both as his father's under-tenant and as a tenant-in-chief.<sup>4</sup> Berengar inherited his father's estates in Normandy and it seems that William inherited Belvoir (the fate of the third son Geoffrey is not recorded).<sup>5</sup> By the date of the Lindsey Survey, which was probably drawn up in summer or autumn 1115,<sup>6</sup> some of the Lincolnshire estates held at Domesday by Robert de Tosny had passed to his son-in-law Robert de Insula, husband of Albreda.<sup>7</sup> Keats-Rohan has demonstrated that Albreda was the sister and not the widow of Berengar de Tosny as was previously thought.<sup>8</sup> Albreda had at least two sisters, Adeliza, the wife of Roger Bigod, and Agnes, the wife first of Ralph de Belfou and secondly of Hubert de Ryes.<sup>9</sup>

The next reference to Belvoir seems to be that in the 1130 Pipe Roll, when Adeliza accounted for an outstanding debt for her father's land of Belvoir.<sup>10</sup> The charters for Belvoir Priory suggest that the lords of the honour were Robert de Tosny, his son William, and William d'Aubigny the Breton.<sup>11</sup> There survives a survey of (part of) Leicestershire which is thought to have been very close in date to the pipe roll.<sup>12</sup> Most of Robert de Tosny's lands, including the manor of Bottesford on which Belvoir was situated, were at the time of the survey in the hands of William d'Aubigny (the Breton), whilst other estates were held either by Robert de Insula, or were held of Belvoir, or were in unidentified hands. This evidence, if interpreted literally (i.e. if names were all recorded at the same date), suggests that Robert de Insula was still living and in possession of some Tosny estates, and others were held by William d'Aubigny the Breton by virtue of his marriage to Cecily, Adeliza Bigod's daughter. Those held of Belvoir could have been held by Adeliza herself, or they were in the king's hands. The danegeld pardon of six shillings *in castello de Belveder* in the 1130 Pipe Roll might well indicate the latter. This would not preclude William holding the castle as the king's castellan.<sup>13</sup>

The third sister, Agnes, may well have been still living, as she and Adeliza Bigod witnessed the charter by which William d'Aubigny the butler, the latter's son-in-law, gave the manor of Happisburgh to Wymondham priory on the day of his wife's burial.<sup>14</sup> Agnes's share of her father's lands seems to have been limited to a marriage portion at Aslackby where she gave land to Belvoir Priory, later confirmed by her son Henry de Ryes.<sup>15</sup>

William d'Aubigny the Breton was a man who rose to prominence under Henry I. He is thought to have been the son of Main, probably Main of Saint Aubin d'Aubigné.<sup>16</sup> Father and

son are mentioned in the *Liber Vitae* of Thorney Abbey.<sup>17</sup> The early stages of William's career are obscure. Belvoir priory was a dependency of St Albans abbey, and the tradition recorded there was that William had distinguished himself at the battle of Tinchebrai in 1106, which is by no means improbable.<sup>18</sup> William seems to begin to witness royal charters frequently after about 1120, but it may be that he had some earlier involvement with Belvoir, because he may have been the William d'Aubigny who attested two royal notifications dealing with the honour.<sup>19</sup> In the first of these, addressed to Ralph de Watnevilla, Ralph de Bosco Rohard, and Hugh de Hottot, the king gave the churches of Uffington and Barkestone to Robert bishop of Lincoln. The dating limits are 1107 and 1116 because of the attestations of William de Tancarville and Queen Matilda and the reference to the king's crossing. William only began to attest for Henry after the battle of Tinchebrai and the king's last crossing to Normandy before the queen's death was in 1116. The second, addressed to Ralph de Rehart [*sic*] and his associates, ordered him to put the bishop in seisin of Barkestone and Uffington. The address suggests that the honour was in the king's hands at the time, possibly after the death of William de Tosny, and the attestation of William d'Aubigny (if this is the Breton) perhaps points to him as custodian. The advowson and parsonage of Uffington as of her own inheritance' were subsequently given by Cecily and her husband to Belvoir Priory.<sup>20</sup> William next occurred as the sole witness of the king's charter for St Dogmael's.<sup>21</sup> In 1130 he held at farm Rutland, which may have been in the king's hands since the death of Queen Matilda, and the lands (here unidentified) formerly held by Otuel FitzCount, who had been drowned in the White Ship, plus Ketton, and Geddington.<sup>22</sup>

Adeliza was the mother of Hugh Bigod, for Hugh is known to have inherited the Yorkshire lands of Berengar de Tosny, which must have come to him through his mother's family.<sup>23</sup> She may have been the mother of Roger Bigod's other children, as Keats-Rohan has also suggested, and if she was, the singling out of Cecily as her heiress was noteworthy.<sup>24</sup> How and when did this happen? We have seen that some of the Belvoir lands had passed to her sister and her sister's husband by 1115, and it would appear from the Leicestershire Survey that Robert de Insula was still living after the marriage of Cecily and William. Hugh Bigod inherited his father's estates, Robert de Tosny's Norman estates, and the English estates of his uncle, Berengar, but he was not to inherit Belvoir, where the claim of his sister was preferred. We cannot be certain of the exact timing and order of events, but it looks as though Adeliza was substituted as the principal heiress of Belvoir, perhaps with the intention of making her daughter Cecily, and Cecily's husband, the next heirs. Yet in the Leicestershire Survey Robert de Insula held land at Muston and Stathern which in 1086 had been held by Robert de Tosny. Robert de Insula also held land at Eaton (probably omitted from Domesday Book) and Eastwell (held in 1086 by Aschill the king's serjeant) which were subsequently held by Albreda's successors, the count of Aumale and Hugh Bigod.<sup>25</sup>

How did Hugh Bigod feel about the fact that his claim to Belvoir had been sidelined? If it was the norm for a mother's land to be used to endow a daughter in this way, then arguably Hugh had little ground for complaint. Yet, as Andrew Wareham has pointed out, Hugh's paternal estates had already been diminished to provide a generous marriage portion for Matilda, wife of William d'Aubigny the butler, and the shrievalties of Norfolk and Suffolk, which had been held by Roger Bigod, had passed out of the family's control by the middle years of Henry I's reign.<sup>26</sup>

When he succeeded his brother William, Hugh had reason to hope both that his losses would be made good and for further advancement, but as Henry I died and was succeeded by Stephen, neither was forthcoming. Yet Stephen had good reason to be grateful to Hugh who had sworn that on his deathbed Henry I had nominated Stephen as his heir.<sup>27</sup> In 1140 Hugh is recorded as having rebelled twice.<sup>28</sup> Stephen may have granted him the title of earl, though it is not until the following year, when Hugh was found at the Empress's court, that he attested with this rank.<sup>29</sup>

William d'Aubigny the Breton was and remained a loyal supporter of king Stephen, who presumably confirmed him in succession of Belvoir when his mother-in-law finally died. It used to be thought that the castle of *Galclint* which Count Alan seized in 1140 and which was taken from him by Earl Ranulf could have been Belvoir, but recently Paul Dalton has argued persuasively that *Galclint* was a castle of William count of Aumale in Yorkshire.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless at some point Ranulf of Chester began to lay claim to Belvoir, a castle of strategic importance close to the earl's territorial interests. A grant of the castle, the honour, and all the land of William d'Aubigny was included in Stephen's charter for Ranulf. The timing of the charter is hard to establish, but there are reasons for dating it to 1140 rather than 1146.<sup>31</sup> No hereditary basis for Ranulf's claim to Belvoir has been clearly established, and from the terminology used in the charter it may well have been the case that Ranulf was asserting personal overlordship over William d'Aubigny the Breton. The earl also asserted a claim to act as advocate and defender of Pipewell abbey, four miles north of Rockingham, and twenty-four miles south of Belvoir, founded in part on land belonging to Belvoir.<sup>32</sup> His position was strengthened by the appearance of a key member of his following, Robert Basset, at Redmile near Belvoir. Robert gave the church of Redmile for the foundation of a priory there, which Earl Ranulf confirmed.<sup>33</sup>

As Edmund King has shown the earl may never have ousted William d'Aubigny the Breton, an impression strengthened by the terminology used in the charter Henry FitzEmpress issued in the Ranulf's favour in 1153, when Henry promised to do Ranulf right concerning Belvoir as soon as he could as if it were of his inheritance'.<sup>34</sup> Belvoir thereafter descended to the son of William and Cecily.

On at least two occasions in the early twelfth century Belvoir passed via women. On the first occasion Albreda succeeded to the lands of her brother Berengar, and, for a time at least, to William de Tosny's land. The former passed to her nephew Hugh Bigod, and the second occasion the latter ultimately passed to her niece Cecily. A third sister, Agnes, had only a restricted inheritance from her father. Although at first sight the descent of Belvoir and the marriage or marriages of Roger Bigod might be dismissed as technicalities, the issues they raise provide important illustrations of the circumstances in which women inherited, and of the amount of land assigned to daughters in the Norman period.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The original stimulus for this article was K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, 'Belvoir: the heirs of Robert and Berengar de Tosny', *Prosopon*, 9 (July 1998), pp. [1-2]. She has been particularly helpful in supplying references and comments on earlier drafts; thanks also to Andrew Wareham for his comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Round, who calendared the documents at Belvoir castle for the Historical Manuscripts Commission, supplied a pedigree of the family: see *The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland*, 4 vols (1888-1905), IV, pp. 106-7. Round pointed out that the Leicestershire Survey showed William d'Aubigny the Breton in possession of Belvoir land before the death of Adeliza Bigod.

<sup>3</sup> This ground was also covered in J. A. Green, 'Aristocratic women in early twelfth century England', in *Anglo-Norman Political Culture And the Twelfth Century Renaissance*, ed. C. Warren Hollister (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 70-1; see also, my *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge, 1997), ch. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Berengar was a tenant-in-chief in Oxfordshire, Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, and an under-tenant in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire: *DB*, I, 159, 291b, 314-314b, 352-353b.

<sup>5</sup> Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, III, 289.

<sup>6</sup> For a revised date of the Lindsey Survey, see T. Foulds, 'The Lindsey Survey and an unknown precept of king Henry I', *Historical Research*, 59 (1986), pp. 212-5.

<sup>7</sup> Lindsey Survey, 3/8, 4/3, 6/5, 7/5, 10/1.

<sup>8</sup> Keats-Rohan, 'Belvoir'.

<sup>9</sup> Adeliza Bigod was addressed in writs of Henry I and Stephen concerning tithes at Bradley, Suffolk: *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, II, nos 1485, 1495; III, no. 82. Agnes confirmed land and tithes at Aslackby *de matrimonio suo*: *Mon.Ang.*, III, 289; see Keats-Rohan, 'Belvoir'.

<sup>10</sup> *PR 31 Henry I*, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> See the charter of Henry I and the confirmation of Pope Adrian IV: *HMC Rutland*, IV, pp. 109-10. Cf. the charter of Cecily de Belvoir' daughter of Roger Bigod, confirming an advowson and parsonage to Belvoir Priory for the souls of King Henry I, Robert de Tosny her grandfather, William d'Aubigny her husband and William her son: *ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> *The Leicestershire Survey*, ed. C.F. Slade, Univ. of Leicester Dept. of English Local History, Occasional Papers, 7 (1956), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *PR 31 Henry I*, p. 121.

<sup>14</sup> *Mon.Ang.*, III, 330. This grant was confirmed by Henry I: *RRAN*, II, no. 1481.

<sup>15</sup> *Mon.Ang.*, III, 290.

<sup>16</sup> Round pointed out that one of William's tenants came from Chauvigné near Saint Aubin d'Aubigné, *HMC Rutland*, IV, p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> C. Clark, British Library Additional MS. 40,000 ff. 1v-12r', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 7 (1984), p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H.R. Luard, 7 vols, RS (London 1872-83), II, p. 132.

<sup>19</sup> *RRAN*, II, nos 1152-3.

<sup>20</sup> *HMC Rutland*, IV, p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> *RRAN*, II, no. 1223.

<sup>22</sup> *PR 31 Henry I*, pp. 133-4. The lands of Otuel FitzCount included the manor of Sawbridgeworth, the church of which was granted to Westminster abbey: see *Westminster Abbey Charters 1066-c. 1214*, ed. E. Mason, London Record Society, 25 (1988), no. 469.

<sup>23</sup> *Early Yorkshire Charters*, I, pp. 466, 507-8.

<sup>24</sup> Keats-Rohan, 'Belvoir'; cf. *Complete Peerage*, IX, 578. Roger Bigod's charter for Rochester cathedral priory referred to his wife Adeliza and his sons and daughters. The charter was witnessed by William Bigod our son', Humfrey Bigod, and Gunnora and Matilda our daughters'. There was no mention here of Hugh and Cecily, nor of another unnamed child, parent of Roger FitzRichard, lord of Warkworth: C.T. Clay, 'The ancestry of the early Lords of Warkworth', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th ser., 32 (1954), 68. Hugh and Cecily were clearly the children of Adeliza de Tosny as each inherited Tosny estates, but was the latter a second identically named wife? Hugh described Gunnora as his sister in a charter for Norwich cathedral priory, *Complete Peerage*, IX, 578. Matilda could have had a claim on the honour of Belvoir, because her son William II d'Aubigny the butler for a short time held the title earl of Lincoln, a county where he otherwise had no interests, R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen*, 3rd edn (London, 1990), p. 134. Keats-Rohan argued that Hugh was provided for from the Bigod lands which he inherited after the death of his brother William in the White Ship, plus, at some stage, the Tosny lands of his uncle Berengar, and that Gunnora and Matilda had been provided for on marriage so that the honour of Belvoir could be used to endow Cecily, the youngest daughter. In 'Aristocratic women' (pp. 70-1), I accepted the likelihood that Roger married twice, basically because this seemed to make better sense of the fact that Hugh and Cecily but not their siblings inherited Tosny lands: see also Green, *Aristocracy*, pp. 374-5. After discussion with Keats-Rohan, I can see that the charter evidence is inconclusive, and if anything the presumption must be slightly in favour of one wife, not two, in which case the descent of Belvoir to Cecily is more striking.

<sup>25</sup> *Leicestershire Survey*, p. 51; *HMC Rutland*, IV, 3-7; for the contested succession to Hugh Bigod, see J.C. Holt, 'Politics and property in early medieval England', which originally appeared in *Past and Present* and has since been reprinted, most recently in *Colonial England 1066-1215* (London, 1997), pp. 151-2.

<sup>26</sup> A. Wareham, 'The motives and politics of the Bigod family, c. 1066-1177', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 17 (1994), pp. 223-42.

<sup>27</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), pp. 728-30 and n.; *Historia Pontificalis*, ed. M.M. Chibnall, corrected edn (Oxford, 1986), p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> 'Annals of Waverley', in *Annales Monastici*, ed. H.R. Luard, 5 vols, RS (London, 1864-9), II, 228.

<sup>29</sup> Wareham, 'Motives', p. 234, reviews the evidence; also Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. Greenway, p. 730n.

<sup>30</sup> John of Hexham, Symeon of Durham, *Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, 2 vols, RS 2 vols (London, 1882-5), II, 306, 308-9; P. Dalton, *Conquest Anarchy and Lordship. Yorkshire 1066-1154* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 164-5.

<sup>31</sup> E. King, 'The foundation of Pipewell abbey, Northamptonshire', *Haskins Society Journal*, 2 (1990), 167-77 (p. 171n).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *HMC Rutland*, IV, 146; King, 'Foundation', p. 176. Robert Basset witnessed nine times for Ranulf II: Green, *Aristocracy*, p. 213.

<sup>34</sup> *RRAN*, III, no. 180.