

**WARDON ABBEY
LANDS IN THE PARISH OF RAVENSDEN**

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WARDON ABBEY – LANDS AT RAVENS DEN

Grants to Wardon Abbey between 1135 and 1160/61

A charter issued by Henry II in 1160/61 documents the assets which had been granted to Wardon Abbey on its foundation (1135) and in the 25 years thereafter.¹ The benefactors' names are given, and, where appropriate, details of the overlord. It confirms that Simon, son of Payne de Beauchamp, had granted '*... grangiam quoque de Ranhale cum omnibus essartis et pertinenciis ...*' referring to Renhold Grange with all of its assarts and rights appertaining, however, there is no indication of size or exact location. William Picot had granted 15 acres of arable, which would have been scattered throughout the common fields, possibly at Tilwick in the parish of Ravensden.²

Ravensden 1160/61 to c. 1200

Acquisitions recorded in the cartulary (the book containing copies of the abbey's charters), document a transaction in the period 1170/90, when the monks paid 4½ marks (£3) to buy 15 acres (½ virgate) in Ravensden's *Benefeld* (Bean Field) from Eudo, son of Ralf Engayne. The arrangement was confirmed by charter of Simon de Beauchamp, baron of Bedford.³

At some time before 1187, Philippa de Trailli,⁴ wife of Hugh de Beauchamp, lord of Eaton Socon (d. 1187), confirmed a gift to the abbey by her husband, of 15 acres at Ravensden from her marriage portion.⁵ Between 1180 and 1200 Simon, clerk of Ravensden, granted ½ acre in *Godwinescroft* and 2 acres in the fields of Ravensden. Of the latter, 1½ acres at the back of his dwelling abutted on *Wildenmare* (Wilden pond), suggesting a location in the east of the parish. The remaining ½ acre lay next to the land belonging to Roger Kellebere, abutting the *Horsepool* (Horse pool) at one end and *le Heldestrate* (sloping road or way through a field) at the other.⁶

Apart from the home farms adjacent to the abbey precinct at Wardon, it would have been highly irregular for the Cistercians to establish two granges in close proximity to one another and it is likely that lands at Ravensden were managed from Renhold Grange until the Order permitted leasing to secular tenants in the 13th century.

Legal terms and conditions

The monks were required to cover the cost of having charters drawn up as this was a job for professionals and legal documents had to be watertight to ensure they were binding. In the earliest documents, affidation (sworn confirmation of a fact, promise, or obligation) was made 'in the hand' of a third person, which was an ancient and solemn formality. This meant that the benefactor placed his soul or honour in the hand of another, should he fail to comply. The affidation was only carried out in the hand of a man of equal standing to the contracting parties, and when Eudo, son of Ralf Engayne sold the 15 acres at Ravensden (1170/90), he made his affidation before the court of Simon de Beauchamp and his barons in Bedford, and in the hand of William de Alneto, before offering the gift on the high altar at Wardon Abbey. This was one of the

¹ The charter of Henry II (reigned 1154-1189) was reconfirmed by Henry III (reigned 1216-1272) and by Henry VII on 14 December 1508. It was published in full in *Cal. Pat. R., Henry VII, 1485-1509*, 2 vols. (London, 1914), vol. 2, pp. 613-618 (p. 616).

² The Picot / Pycot family occurs in Bedfordshire during the mid-thirteenth century, when Robert Pycot held land in Tilwick (parish of Ravensden) in 1262. *BHRS*, 13, 69-70 (93).

³ *BHRS*, 13, 135 (195).

⁴ Philippa de Trailli (d. 1190) was the daughter of Geoffrey de Trailli and Albreda, sister of the Walter Espec, the founder of Wardon Abbey.

⁵ *BHRS*, 13, 244 (325).

⁶ *BHRS*, 13, 129 (182) and (183). *Heldestrate* from the Middle English (ME) *hēlde* meaning a sloping path.

few occasions on which a member of the laity was permitted into the most sacred space of a Cistercian church, giving the donor a sense of prestige and privilege. Equally, it impressed upon him the seriousness and permanence of his gift.

Charter of Richard I

On 11 November 1198 Richard I issued a charter confirming that the monks owned the site on which the abbey was situated, lands in Southill, Stanford and Chicksands, the Bedfordshire granges of Rowney, Park, Limbersey, Renhold, Putnoe with land in Milton [Ernest], and Millbrook with land in Priestley. Land in Dunton was managed from Odsey Grange (Cambs). Further afield were the granges of West Wardon (Northants), Livermere (Suffolk), Burden with land in Linton (Cambs), Bradfield with Fildene Wood (Herts), and Midloe Grange (Hunts). Beside Midloe Grange lay Ravenshoe, 100 fiscal acres of woodland granted by King Stephen, which the monks had cleared for cultivation.⁷ Despite evidence of the abbey holding lands in Ravensden, these would have been scattered throughout the common fields and, Cistercian statutes notwithstanding, posed a practical barrier to the creation of a typical monastic grange.

The Rufus family

A memorandum dated to about 1190/1200 shows that Wardon Abbey was liable to pay scutage (cash in lieu of military service) to the lords of Bedford on 15 acres in Ravensden, which the monks held from Alexander Rufus. It is unclear whether Rufus himself had granted land to the abbey, or whether scutage was due on one of the holdings listed above.⁸

Geoffrey Rufus had granted the monks of Wardon a rent of 3d per annum from 3 acres in Tilwick (parish of Ravensden) before 1204 and the cartulary of Newnham Priory includes an acknowledgement by Wardon Abbey that 3d was to be paid to the prior and canons annually on 29 September for the aforementioned land.⁹ The same cartulary mentions 2 virgates (60 acres) of land in Tilwick, which had been granted to Wardon Abbey by Geoffrey Rufus, and which were reconfirmed by his son Richard after 1225.¹⁰

On 8 June 1225 Brother Henry deputised for Abbot William at Westminster, where attorney Simon Triket acted on behalf of Alice, widow of Geoffrey Rufus, as she granted the abbey a portion of her dower in Ravensden; the acreage is not recorded. In return, the monks agreed to give Alice 4s annually for the rest of her life with the annuity to be paid in half-yearly instalments at the abbey gate.¹¹ The inclusion of a clause to specify the location is intriguing. On one hand, this may simply have been where these types of transactions were usually carried out, but on the other, was it perhaps to underline the exclusion of women from the abbey precinct?

Right of free warren (1252)

Granted by the Crown, the legal right of free warren was a valuable privilege which permitted the holder to take rabbits and other small game from a specified area. On 25 April 1252 the abbot of Wardon agreed to pay 200 marks to Henry III for a charter of liberties granting right of free warren in the woods belonging to the Bedfordshire granges of Rowney, Park, Limbersey, Renhold, Putnoe, Milton [Ernest], Millbrook, Meadow [Grange at Dunton], Risinghoe, Meppershall, Caldecote, Holme, and Henlow. The same privilege applied to the granges and woodlands of Odsey, West

⁷ *BHRS*, 13, 287 (344b) and 289-91 (344e).

⁸ *BHRS*, 13, 15 (11).

⁹ *BHRS*, 43, 82-83 (133) and (134).

¹⁰ *BHRS*, 43, 175-76 (342) and 177 (350).

¹¹ 'A Calendar for the Feet of Fines for Bedfordshire for the reigns of Richard I, King John and Henry III 1192-1272', ed. G.H. Fowler, *BHRS*, 6 (1919), 70 (270).

Wardon, Livermere, Burden and Ravenesholte (Cambs), and Bradfield.¹² Ravensden was not mentioned, further reinforcing its lack of grange status.

The de Beauchamps of Bedford (mid-13th century)

In 1257 William de Beauchamp of Bedford claimed service from the abbey on 8 virgates 3 acres (243 acres) at Ravensden, and on a total of 660 acres in Renhold.¹³ This is the last time that Renhold and Ravensden are known to have been recorded as separate entities in the same document.

In 1262 William de Beauchamp's son, William, quitclaimed his right in a virgate at Tilwick which Robert Pycot held from the abbot. This may be the 15 acres of land granted by William Picot between 1135 and 1160/61. The grant came 'free from all service except scutage and the Aids for the knightng of his eldest son and for the marriage of his eldest daughter'.¹⁴

The Picot family

Entries in the feet of fines indicate that Wardon Abbey was deeply ensconced in establishing rental agreements from the late 1220s onwards. According to the cartulary, scutage or forinsec service (feudal service due to some person other than the tenant's immediate lord) were demanded from all of Wardon's free tenants. Furthermore, they owed either suit to (attendance at) the abbot's court every three weeks, or attendance at the two tourns for view of frankpledge, but never both services.¹⁵ The tourn refers to the circuit made by the sheriff of a county twice in the year, in which he presided at the hundred-court in each hundred of the county. Frankpledge was a feudal system of mutual security and communal responsibility for good behaviour.

On rare occasions land was held from the abbey by military service, one such example being Robert Picot's tenure in Tilwick. The terms of his tenancy were confirmed in court at Westminster on 3 February 1258, when Brother Roger de Blakemore represented Abbot Geoffrey of Wardon, and Picot called upon to pay 3s yearly for the free tenement he held at Tilwick, as well as doing homage and military service. He was also to pay suit at the abbot's court in Renhold on two law-days (specified as the first court sitting after Easter and the first following Michaelmas), as well as on 'special' occasions, namely whenever judgement was to be given in court on a plea moved by the king's writ, or when a thief was to be judged. Robert had not previously acknowledged that these duties formed part of the obligations of his tenancy, but agreed to pay the abbot and his successors 3s yearly, and 6d every year at the first court held at Renhold after Michaelmas for the view of frankpledge. He also agreed to pay suit of court on the 'special' occasions mentioned, and when he or his heirs might have committed a transgression against the abbot, which had to be dealt with by the court. Furthermore, he undertook to carry out the military service.¹⁶

Just over 30 years later, in 1290/91, an inquiry was held in the abbot's court at Renhold to formally establish if Richard, son of Robert Picot of Tilwick, was of age and whether or not he was Robert's heir. (It is unclear whether Richard was the son or grandson of the Robert mentioned in 1258.) This followed the usual process whereby a man who took up a hereditary tenement could only do so after proof of age and of legitimate heirship. He would have had to pay the abbot either entry money or relief (payment made to the overlord by the heir of a feudal tenant on taking up

¹² Charter dated 25 April 1252 in *Cal. Chart. R., Hen. III*, vol. 1, p. 385; reconfirmed by Edward I and recited in *BHRS*, 13, 291-94 (p. 293), (344f).

¹³ *BHRS*, 13, 249 (335).

¹⁴ *BHRS*, 13, 69 (93).

¹⁵ *BHRS*, 13, 349-51 (N/336).

¹⁶ 'A Calendar for the Feet of Fines for Bedfordshire for the reigns of Richard I, King John and Henry III 1192-1272', ed. G.H. Fowler, *BHRS*, 6 (1919), 166-67 (590).

possession of the vacant estate), but not both. Those carrying out the investigation were Simon Ball, William Porter, William of Staughton, John Picot, Bartholomew Porter and Walter Quarel; the inquiry was conducted in the presence of Father William de Legh, rector of the church of Crick in Northamptonshire, Father Flor' rector of the church of Bletsoe, Hugh Oyldebouf, Walter of Hay, William Harper and John, son of John de Colmorde. Each man declared on oath that Robert Picot held a messuage, 60 acres of land and a croft containing 10 acres of land with appurtenances (rights appertaining to the holding) in Tilwick by military service. They reiterated that he was required to attend two sittings of the abbot's court at Renhold annually and pay rent of 3s yearly as well as 6d at the first session of the court after Easter for the view of frankpledge. It was confirmed that Richard was the lawful heir of Robert and would be 21 years old on the eve of the feast of St Francis (3 October).¹⁷

***Taxatio Ecclesiastica* (1291)**

When the monks of Wardon submitted their return in 1291, they declared taxable income from Ravensden and Biddenham, combined. Land, rents, meadows, and manor court had brought in £6 8s 0d with a further £2 19s 2d from produce and livestock. There is, however, no entry for Renhold Grange, which means either that it had been lumped in with Ravensden (unlikely) or retained in demesne with no profits generated.¹⁸

Tax return (1297)

The 1297 taxation rolls include an entry for 'Renhold: manor of Wardon Abbey', but nothing for Ravensden.¹⁹ Livestock at Renhold grange was listed as 2 carthorses, 6 affers (draught horses), 12 oxen, 1 bull, 4 cows, 2 heifers, 4 calves, 50 sheep, 2 sows, and 8 piglets.

Grant in Ravensden (1357)

Although the days of substantial grants had long gone, small donations trickled in, and on 3 June 1357 Geoffrey, the prior of Wardon, accepted a deed of gift from Walter Rolt of Ravensden for '3 selions of land lying in length and width as far as 1 acre and 1 rood of land with its appurtenances, in the fields of Ravenesdene in the furlong ('cultura') which is called Longehul between the lands of Richard, son of Nicholas Engayne, and it extends in length a which is called 'le port slade' as far as by 'le in made'. For the purposes of land measurement, one or more selions was considered to constitute an acre irrespective of how much they really measured. Prominent local landholders witnessed the transaction including Richard Picot, Hugh Pippard, Roger Engayne, Richard Pippard and William Fraunceys.²⁰

¹⁷ *BHRS*, 13, 266 (338t).

¹⁸ *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae Et Walliae Auctoritate P. Nicholai IV, Circa A.D. 1291*, ed. T. Astle, S. Ayscough and J. Caley (London, 1802); W. Dugdale, 'Wardon Abbey, in Bedfordshire', in *Monasticon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, 8 vols. (London, 1846), vol. 5, pt. 052, p. 369.

¹⁹ 'The taxation of 1297: a translation of the local rolls of assessment for Barford, Biggleswade and Flitt hundreds, and for Bedford, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Luton', ed. A.T. Gaydon, *BHRS*, 39 (1959), xviii.

²⁰ Deed of gift dated 3 June 1357, TNA, R 6/62/12/149, <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/6e4c05bb-1420-4b5c-8a2f-ae4377073cc8>.

Gentlemen and yeoman farmers

On 14 September 1522 Abbot Augustine London leased lands called Tulwyke [Tilwick] (except for the warrens) to Robert Bulkeley. The 80-year term was to begin at Michaelmas [29 September] 1527, the annual rent being 28s 4d plus three capons or 9d, and the outgoing tenant named as William Harte.²¹

Abbot Augustine was a canny businessman, and his forward planning saw a lease issued on 20 August 1525 to William More, yeoman of Ravensden, for a term of 40 years, also effective Michaelmas 1527. For rent of £13 10s annually, More would hold the 'manor or grange in Ravensden' and 3 acres in Gedsey mede (Gadsey Meade) in Rouhall [Renhold]. Terms included 20 acres of meadow in 'Kyngys mede near the river side in Bydenham-erga-Bromeham, Beds.'; 20 acres of arable and 8 acres of pasture with appurtenances in Thurleigh; a 3-acre close of meadow called Holmes and 2 acres of arable in the fields and parish of Wilden, with all land and tenements, meadow and pasture, woods, rents, services and reversions, and all rights appertaining in Ravensden, Renhold, Biddenham, Thurleigh and Wilden.²² The original lease is unavailable and therefore we do not know whether Ravensden was termed 'manor or grange' in 1525, or if this phrase, found in the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, merely recites generic language used in the post-dissolution accounts (1538). Irrespective of wording employed by the scribes, it cannot be taken as proof that Ravensden was anything more than a collection of disparate assets over which the abbot had full jurisdiction - a manor rather than a grange.

Records are scant, but it appears that a John Pyke occupied a messuage and 2 acres of arable 'called Castelmyllond, a grove called Shepecotegrove, and a parcel of pasture and wood called Tulwyke'. Another parcel of land in Ravensden and a close called Patmansclose were rented by abbot of Wardon to the prior of Newnham. The abbot had the right of common for sheep in 'Beeston lesue in Northill', which would occur later in conjunction with the aforementioned resources.²³

On 10 August 1529 'Robert Bulkeley of Hampshire, esquire' sublet his Tilwick holdings to 'Richard Frankelyn of Bedford, yeoman' for a term of 30 years. Arrangements included 'A farm place called Tulwyke and lands thereto belonging in Ravensden (except a grove called Pycotts grove or Rolts grove); and all lands in Tilwick and Ravensden which has been leased from Wardon Abbey'. Certain conditions were to be met regarding maintenance of the property, specifically, 'The tenant will keep in repair 'al maner of howsys now bylded upon the seyd ferme ... and al dyches and heggys.' Frankelyn was to 'cause one soficyent tenant beyng an honest man to enhabite and dwel uppon the seyd ferme contynually'. He was also to 'kepe harmeles the seyd Robert [Bulkeley] agaynst the Kyng ... and any statute made for the mayntenans of husbondry'. He was granted permission to 'take underwood for fuel and hedging, 'yong standers of the elme and ashe only to be reservyd to grow for the mayntenans of the reparacon of the seyd ferme in tyme comyng', but he shall commit no manner of waste.'²⁴

Wardon Abbey and the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (1535)

The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* documents Wardon Abbey receiving gross (taxable) income of £14 19s 1d from Ravensden; it is not listed as a grange. Twenty shillings paid to the vicar of Ravensden for tithes were deemed allowable expenses for tax purposes. Likewise, the £4 9s 5d given to the Prior and convent of Newnham to cover tithes on unspecified lands are likely to have encompassed

²¹ *LP*, vol. 13 pt. 1, p. 240 (grant 3 (2)).

²² *LP*, vol. 13 pt. 1, p. 240 (grant 3 (1)); Acreages are listed in *BHRS*, 63, 109 (149).

²³ *BHRS*, 63, 109 (149).

²⁴ Lease for 30 years, rents 30s and 28s and 3 capons (or 9d): Robert Bulkeley of Hampshire, esquire, to Richard Frankelyn of Bedford, yeoman dated 10 August 1529, *BARS*, FN164.

assets in Ravensden and Tilwick. Biddenham was worth 12s in 1535, while Goldington, Cardington, and Renhold were valued together at £12 11s 11d. Interestingly, Renhold is not documented as either a manor or grange, pointing to a change in status.²⁵

Disposal of property after the suppression of Wardon Abbey

Wardon Abbey surrendered to commissioners of Henry VIII on 4 December 1537, and on 2 March 1538 John Gostwick and his wife Jane acquired a number of leases from the Crown on payment of one twentieth part of a knight's fee (£471 8s 4d) and annual rent of 52s 6d to cover tithes and other obligations to the king.²⁶ Assets comprised those lands leased by the abbot to William More of Ravensden in August 1525, '... lands called Tulwyke' let to Robert Bulkeley in 1522, Castle mills in Bedford, and other resources with a total annual rental value of £26 4s 5d.

On 4 April 1538 a new sublease was agreed for 'A farm place called Tulwyke and lands thereto belonging in Ravensden (except a grove called Pycotts grove or Rolts grove); and all lands in Tilwick and Ravensden which has been leased from Warden Abbey'; terms as per 1529, the lessor and lessee named as Robert Boulkley of Cople, esquire and John Franklyn of Thurleigh, yeoman.²⁷

John Gostwick (d. 15 April 1545) profited from the dissolution and in 1540, he sold certain assets acquired from the late Newnham Priory, Cauldwell Priory, and Wardon Abbey to William Butler of London, grocer. These included 'the meadow in Ibons alias Illam Mead containing 6 acres late in occupation of Sir William Butler deceased (father of William Butler), formerly of Warden Abbey (granted by letters patent dated 1539 to Gostwyke and his wife); also the meadow containing 20 acres called King's Mead next to the river side in Byddenham against Bromham, in occupation of William More of Ravensden, formerly of Warden Abbey (granted likewise in 1537/8)'.²⁸ However, assets in the parish of Ravensden remained in Gostwick hands. Two Williams, Sir John's son and brother benefitted from his will, but son William outlived his father only by 8 months.²⁹ On the death in 1549 of William, Sir John's brother, Tilwick Farm was included in the property which descended to his son and heir John,³⁰ who, in 1562, apparently alienated it to Richard Stonley.³¹

Possible location of the late abbey's 'farm place' at Tilwick

It is evident from the sublease of 1529 (Bulkeley to Frankelyn) that a dwelling and agricultural buildings were present at Tilwick, and according to the *VCH* 'the farm, comprising a message, cottage and lands, was in the hands of George Franklin, on whose death' in 1618 passed down to his eldest son Edmund.³² We might speculate that these were situated in the vicinity of Tilwick Farm at the north-east corner of Tilwick Wood [TL 0725 5686], less than 70m from the parish boundary with Bolnhurst & Keysoe. LiDAR, in combination with OS maps, points towards an area abutting the south-east corner of the wood [TL 0719 5666] less than 150m to the south of the present-day farm buildings, and which contains man-made ponds and ditches dating back at least 140 years.

²⁵ *Valor ecclesiasticus temp. Henr. VIII. auctoritate regia institutus*, vol. 4, ed. J. Caley (Eyre & Strahan, 1821), pp. 232-34; *Monasticon*, vol. 5, pp. 373-74.

²⁶ *BHRS*, 63, 109 (149); *LP*, vol. 13, pt. 1, pp. 240-41 (646) (3); Copy Letters Patent granting to John Gostwycke, esquire and wife Joan, the reversion of the lease for 40 years made by Augustine, abbot of Wardon, and the convent, to William More of Ravensden, *BARS*, WW314.

²⁷ Lease for 30 years, rents 30s and 28s and 3 capons (or 9d): Robert Boulkley of Cople, esquire, to John Franklyn of Thurleigh, yeoman dated 4 April 1538, 4 April 1538, *BARS*, FN165.

²⁸ Conveyance (Deed of Bargain and Sale enrolled) dated 1540: John Gostwyke, esquire (Treasurer to the King), to William Butler of London, grocer; for £428 2s 5d, *BARS*, WW243.

²⁹ H.P.R. Finberg, 'The Gostwicks of Willington', *BHRS*, 36 (1955), 48-138 (pp. 75-76).

³⁰ *Exch. Inq. p.m.* (Ser. 2), xlv, 8 cited by *Victoria County History, Beds*, vol. 3 (1912).

³¹ *Pat. 4 Eliz. pt. ix, m. 44*; *Recov. R. Mich. 4 & 5 Eliz. m. 899* cited by *VCH, Beds*, vol. 3, pp. 209-214.

³² *Chan. Inq. p.m.* (Ser. 2), ccclxxiv, 101 cited by *VCH, Beds*, vol. 3, pp. 209-214.

The old ‘Ravensden Grange’ (17th century onwards)

It is reasonable to suggest that the lease issued to William More in 1525 also included a dwelling and agricultural buildings. It is therefore proposed that these occupied the site of the old ‘Ravensden Grange’ [OS ref: TL 06709 55775], which occurs on the 1st edition OS map as a small complex of structures with three rectangular ponds on the north edge of Little Wood.³³

The ‘Ravensden Grange Estate’ was offered for sale by auction, freehold and tithe free, at 3pm in the Swan Hotel, Bedford on Tuesday, 8 September 1874. Auctioneer Henry Pulley described the property as 365 acres of ‘Arable, Wood & Pasture Land with Farmhouse & suitable Agricultural Buildings’, with the accompanying maps confirming the exact location and extent of each field etc. To be sold in two lots. The ‘commodious farm house’ contained 2 sitting rooms, 2 kitchens, a dairy, cellar, and 5 bedrooms with garden etc, while the homestall consisted of 3 large, double-mowed barns, bullock and cart hovels, horse shed with 2 loose boxes, cow houses and piggeries, stabling, sheep and wheat hovels, and chaff house.³⁴

With one small exception, the buildings were demolished 1884 and 1900. On the 2nd edition OS map ‘Ravensden Grange (*Site of*)’ is marked with a cross [TL 06709 55775].³⁵ No visible clues remain, but a possible circular ditch around the site (about 167m in diameter) is indicated by LiDAR and would be worthy of professional assessment to determine whether it might have been a moated enclosure, warren, or other, perhaps more ancient, feature.

³³ Six-inch 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of Bedfordshire XII.NW, Surveyed: 1882, Published 1884.

³⁴ Plan, Particulars and Conditions of Sale, 2nd edition.

³⁵ Six-inch 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map of Bedfordshire VIII.SW (revised 1900; published 1902).