



MAP

showing the countries, cities, rivers and routes mentioned in the text.

Drawn by the author.

— — — Route taken by the Tultecs toward the North.

— — — Route taken on their return.

(—) Modern orthography of names.

New York, 1882.

Longitude West from Greenwich

AN ANCIENT DOCUMENT OF THE HOUSE OF WASHINGTON.

BY EDWARD G. PORTER.

DURING a recent visit to the North of England, I obtained access to some interesting original manuscripts at Durham, through the kindness of the Rev. Canon Greenwill, F.R.S., the accomplished librarian of the Cathedral Library, and author of the well-known work on British Barrows.

Among the early miscellaneous charters belonging to the Dean and Chapter, there is one (No. 1472) which appears to be the earliest document in existence relating to the house of Washington. It is a parchment indenture, with seal attached, containing the terms of a marriage settlement, and evidently belongs to the time of King John, (circa 1200.) Other Washington documents are held of about the year 1380 and later, but this one has never been mentioned by any of the writers upon the Washington family. It is supposed to have come into the hands of the Prior and Convent of Durham for safe custody with a number of deeds belonging to the family of Claxton of Horden in the County of Durham. A reduced fac-simile is herewith presented, showing the abbreviated Latin of the period, which is almost unintelligible to ordinary eyes, but which with care can be deciphered as follows:

C(H)IROGRAPHVM.

Sciant omnes hoc Scriptum visuri vel audituri quod hæc conventio facta est inter Thomam de Diuclestone et Walterum de Weissingtone generum suum de illa carrucata terræ in Villa de Milleburne quam habet in liberum maritagium cum Diana sorore præfati Thomæ quod si ipse Walterus vel heredes ipsius Walteri procreati a Diana ipsam terram de Milleburne in dominico habuerint quieti erunt de multura: sin autem et aliquibus illam tradiderint ad firmam tenentes ipsius Walteri et heredum suorum dabunt multuram sicut homines præfati Thomæ vel suorum heredum faciunt. His testibus: Otuelo de Insula, Roberto de Neuham, Roberto de Fenwic, Matheo de Witefeld, Wilhelmo de Fandona, Johanne de Tirtlingtonne, Johanne de Brentingham, Galfrido filio Galfridi, Reginaldo Basset, Roberto filio Thomæ, Jordano Hayrun, Wilhelmino de Latona, Ricardo Schireburne et multis aliis.

TRANSLATION.

CHIROGRAPH.

Know all men who shall see or hear this writing that the following agreement is made between Thomas of Diucleston (Dilston) and Walter of Weissington (Washington,) his brother-in-law, in regard to a certain carrucate¹ of land in the vill of Milleburne² which he holds by virtue of his free marriage with Diana, sister of said Thomas, to wit, that if said Walter, or the heirs of said Walter, born of Diana, shall hold said land at Milleburne in demesne³, they shall be free from multure⁴. But if they shall let it out to others to farm, then the tenants of said Walter and of his heirs shall pay the same multure as do the rest of the men of said Thomas or of his heirs.

Witnessed by Otwell of Insula, Robert of Neuham, Robert of Fenwic, Mathew of Whitefield, William of Fandon, John of Tirtlington, John of Brentingham, Alfred son of Alfred, Reginald Basset, Robert son of Thomas, Jordan Hayrun, William of Latona, Richard of Schireburne and many others.—

A large round seal is attached to the parchment, containing a lion passant, and, for the legend, the words + S I G I (L L) W A L T E R I F I L (I I) W I L L I D E W E S S I G T (O N)—Seal of Walter Son of William of Wessigton (Washington)—This chirograph, with Walter's seal was given to Thomas, and its counterpart with Thomas's seal was given to Walter. Copies of seals similar to both of them, and of the same period, may be seen at Durham.⁵

The special interest which this venerable document has to us lies in the fact that it takes us back nearly two centuries beyond any original Washington documents hitherto quoted, and brings us face to face with Walter, son of William, the first man in English history who bore the honored name of Washington. For it is well known that the progenitor of this famous house was William de Hertburn,⁶ a powerful knight

¹ Carrucate (sometimes spelled carucate) means plough land, i. e. as much as a plough could cultivate; an uncertain measure, generally understood to be about 120 acres.

² On the Tyne in the parish of Newburn above Newcastle.

³ Demesne land was that which was held in the lord's own hand (Dominico) and cultivated by himself and his villeins.

⁴ Multure (multura), was the tax, or proportion of grain paid to the lord's mill when the corn was ground there, all persons within the manor being obliged to grind there.

⁵ It is worth mentioning in this connection that the earliest seal of the family of Amandeville, well known in County Durham, is the same as the one here given, and their later arms were two bars and three stars, just like the Washingtons', showing a close family relation.

⁶ Two places in the original palatinate of Durham bear the name of Hartburn, one near Morpeth in Northumberland, and the other near Stockton-on-the-Tees.

of Norman blood, who, according to the Bolden Book,¹ purchased A.D. 1183, the manor and village of Wessyngton for the sum of four pounds with the added engagement to attend the Bishop with two greyhounds on grand hunts, and furnish a man-at-arms when needed. With the purchase of the new manor, William gave up the name of Hertburn and took that of Wessyngton, according to the custom of the time. In regard to the location of this place, there is happily no doubt whatever, for the name of Washington has clung to it down to the present time. It is situated just north of the river Wear, about ten miles from Durham, near Lambton Castle, the fine seat of the Earl of Durham, and about half way between Newcastle and Sunderland. It is accessible by the old line of the North Eastern R. R., which has a small station here called Washington, now chiefly known in the colliery interest. The country between the Wear and the Tyne is flat and smoky, and seldom visited by travellers.²

Like most early English names, that of Washington has passed through various changes, among which may be mentioned the following: Wessington, Wessyngton, Wessigton, Wessynton, Weissigton, Weissington, Quessington, Whessyngton, Whesshynton, Wassington, Washington, Washington.³

The estate remained in the hands of the De Wessyngtons until about the year 1400. Various members of the family appear in the history of Durham⁴ in the list of knights engaged in battle or tournament, or in ecclesiastic orders. Gradually they dropped the De before the name. Some of them established themselves in other parts of England, as in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, where they became numerous and influential. The pedigree, as traced by Baker and Sir Isaac Heard, claims George Washington, first President of the United States, as the ninth in descent from John Washington of Whitfield in Lancashire (temp. Richard III.) who was directly descended from William the first lord of the Wessyngton manor, and father of Walter, whose seal is attached to this ancient document.

I am aware that the late Col. Chester of London, was confident that he had detected a serious error in the existing pedigree, so far as relates to the Washingtons of Sulgrave, but that does not in the least vitiate the connection between George Washington and the De Wessyngton

¹ A survey record of Durham lands, made by Bishop Hugh de Pudsey, nephew of King Stephen, and called Bolden from the name of the first parish in the alphabetical order.

² The Newcastle Society of Antiquaries have developed several interesting points of historic and archaeological importance in this region, as e. g. specimens of fine Saxon architecture at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow, the home of the venerable Bede.

³ The name is pure Saxon, meaning the town on the marshy meadow, and was known before the conquest. It is mentioned in a Saxon charter as granted by King Edgar in 973 to Thorney Abbey.

⁴ See Surtees and Hutchinson.

family of Durham, which remains undisputed. In an interview which I had with Col. Chester three years ago, he examined with deep interest my copy of this chirograph and the notes which here accompany it, saying that they were in accord with his own theory and that it was his intention to pursue the subject further, and obtain, if possible, the few missing links in the later genealogy, the material for which he had long been collecting. It is much to be desired that some one who is equal to the task will take up the work where Col. Chester has left it, and obtain the necessary documentary evidence in proof of an exact and ample pedigree of the illustrious house of Washington.

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