

Chapter I

WILLIAM BYNGHAM, THE FIRST FOUNDER

Most colleges have to be content with one founder, while some, like Gonville and Caius College, have two; Christ's College, however, has three. The earliest of the three is overshadowed by the royal splendour of his successors, but, though Christ's College owes most of its possessions to Henry VI and his niece, the Lady Margaret, it owes the fact of its existence to a plain parochial rector, William Byngham.

We could wish to know something of the source whence Byngham issued, but, though there may be indications that point with some probability to his family, there are no documents to enable us to replace conjecture with certainty. Peile, untiring pursuer of biographical detail, has to admit 'nothing is certainly known of his birth: he may have been one of the Bingham's of Carcolston, Notts.'¹ He gives no information concerning the basis of his supposition, but such straws as it has been possible to observe independently do seem to point in the direction of the Midlands.

In the first place, the initial solid fact in Byngham's life-history is found in his presentation to the rectory of Carlton Curly [*hodie* Carlton Curliu], Leicestershire, to which he was instituted 23 June 1423;² Carlton Curliu is near to Market Harborough and, in a direct line, lies about thirty-five miles from Carcolston. In the second place, a familiarity with the Midlands is indicated in his petition to Henry VI,³ where he seems to speak with knowledge of the country when he says 'your poure besecher hath founde of late ouer the Est partie of the wey ledyng from hampton⁴ to couentre and so forth no ferther North þan Rypon, lxx scoles voide or mo þat weren occupied all at ones within l. yeres passed, bicause þat þer is so grete scarstee of maistres of Gramer'. In the third place, in Hamond's plan of Cambridge, bearing date 1592,

¹ *Biog. Reg.* i, 1.³ *V. infra*, p. 356.² *Linc.* xvi, f. 98 d.⁴ I.e. Hampton upon Thames.

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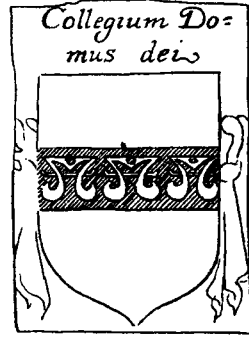
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Godshouse has attributed to it the arms of Bingham of Carcolston. This plan, of which the only complete copy is in the Bodleian Library, has a summary notice of all the colleges and shews their arms; while recognising the continuance of Godshouse in Christ's, it supplies a separate note, with arms, of Godshouse, which note has been translated as follows by the Master of Jesus:¹



The arms attributed to Godshouse by Hamond*

College of God's House, first founded by William Bingham, Rector of the Church of S. John Zachary, London, within the precinct of the present King's College, in the reign of King Henry the Sixth, in the year of Our Lord, 1442. It was founded for the second time by the same King Henry the Sixth in Preachers' Street, opposite to the Church of S. Andrew, in the 24th year of his reign, and the year of Our Lord, 1445. It is now incorporated in Christ's College.

The Master of Jesus adds:²

The College had no arms, but Hamond shows a shield bearing arms intended for those of Bingham, namely: *gold a fess gules charged with three silver water-buckets*; but Mr Hope³ points out that there is no evidence that these were borne by him.

The observation of the late Sir William Hope would apply to many other similar cases, and its general application would deprive heraldic bearings of much of their identificatory value. If there had been no great fire in the city of London, we might be able to find to-day a memorial brass in the church of St John Zachary with the arms of our Byngham emblazoned thereon, but it is doubtful if such a record would have more value than the testimony of Hamond, which, it is reasonable to suppose, reflected the traditional knowledge concerning Byngham, his family and arms, current in his college 140 years after his death. Hamond had no necessity for displaying a shield for Godshouse (which

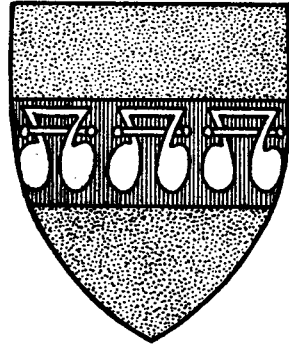
¹ Camb. Plans, p. 35. ² *Ibid.* p. 35 sq. ³ C.A.S. *Proc. and Comm.* viii, 118.

* The hatching used by Hamond does not bear any relation to the tinctures; he uses it as a scheme of decoration and it appears on his shields of the colleges generally. Hatching as a means of indicating tinctures was not evolved by heralds until the seventeenth century.

HIS FAMILY

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so far as is known had no arms of its own), since he recognises its position as the nucleus of Christ's in his description of the College of Christ, the shield of which he also gives. The gratuitous inclusion by him, on his map, of a notice of Godshouse bearing, for lack of a corporate shield, the arms of Byngham, in an age when heraldic bearings were an open book to educated men, should be regarded as possessing authority at least equal to any such display by Byngham himself; short of an official record in the College of Arms, it is probably as good a piece of evidence as could be expected.



The arms of the Bingham
of Nottinghamshire

Whether or not this was in Peile's mind, when he inclined to the possibility of Byngham's connection with the Nottinghamshire house¹ of that name, this third point is the foundation upon which that supposition must be based, the first and second points being subsidiary to it. Cole (Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 5846, f. 164 sq.) gives to Byngham the arms belonging to a Dorset family which it is impossible to accept; the matter cannot be treated in this place, but the confusion upon which it is held to be based is discussed in a note at the end of this chapter, under the heading Thomas de Bingham.²

The family name was Bugge, and Thoroton³ opens the pedigree in the reign of Henry III with Rad. Bugge de Nottingham, who settled in Bingham; his eldest son retained the family surname (so Henry III), but a younger took a territorial name as Richard de Willoughby. In the third generation, the eldest son has become Richard de Bingham, though a younger one is known as Galf. Bugg de Leek. Thereafter the name derived from the territorial estate is stabilised; the senior branch remained at Bingham and retained the form *de Bingham*, while the junior branch, hiving off to Colston, became Bingham de Colston,⁴ and when,

¹ Dr Peile's reference to Carcolston should be extended to cover the main stock at Bingham and any branch springing therefrom.

² *Infra*, pp. 17 sqq.

³ Thoroton, i, 272.

⁴ *Ibid.* i, 272, 242.

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in the second year of Elizabeth, a descendant of this Carcolston family is resident in the county of Rutland, he in his turn is Johannes Bingham de Glaston.¹ In Thoroton's day, the Bingham arms were still to be seen in an upper window of Carcolston church.

By marriages with heiresses, the Binghams obtained a footing in various parishes in Nottinghamshire and neighbouring counties; their pedigrees are to be found in the pages of Thoroton's *Nottinghamshire*, Nichols's *Leicestershire* and in the Visitations of Nottinghamshire,² but in none of the sources has it been possible to trace a scion of the house whom we could identify with certainty as the William Byngham of St John Zachary, London, and of Godshouse, Cambridge. Dr Peile³ thinks 'it is not improbable that he was the canon of Thurgarton (Southwell) who was instituted vicar of Granby, near Bingham, Notts. 8 Sept. 1447: resigned, his successor being appointed 26 Feb. 1448'.⁴ That identification, far from being probable, is impossible; Thurgarton priory was a house of canons regular of the order of St Augustine, while William Byngham of Godshouse and St John Zachary, London, was a secular priest. The man of that name who was vicar of Granby was probably the canon of Thurgarton who became prior of that convent in 1471;⁵ Austin canons often served the churches appropriated to their convents.

The most outstanding member of the Bingham family was Sir Richard Bingham, justice of the King's Bench. He was a contemporary of William Byngham, and a contemporary also, in his earlier years, of William Paston, the 'Good Judge', justice of Common Pleas. Sir Richard, whose daughter married Stephen Scrope, stepson of Sir John Fastolf, is several times mentioned in the Paston Letters, a long letter of his to Fastolf being included therein (No. 308). Like the Pastons, though of older standing, the Binghams were of the smaller territorial magnates of their own counties, and their names are found on the commissions of the peace for the county of Nottingham constantly during the reigns of Henry VI and Edward IV.⁶

¹ Thoroton, i, 242.

² Harl. Soc. vol. iv.

³ *Biog. Reg.* i, 2.

⁴ Cf. Godfrey, p. 193.

⁵ Cf. *V.C.H.* ii, 125, quoting Harl. MS. 6972, ff. 41-2.

⁶ *C.P.R.* *passim*.

HIS EDUCATION

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Of William Byngham's date of birth, and of his education, it has proved impossible to discover any definite evidence, but deductions may be made upon both matters from our certain knowledge of him in his later years; and first as to his education.

It was the practice of gentle families of standing to send their sons to the universities, as is seen in the case of the Pastons, whose sons were sent to Cambridge and even to the much more distant Oxford. The candidates for orders were subject to episcopal ordination and, if the necessity arose, bishops did not hesitate to postpone admission to the order of the priesthood until and unless the candidate had satisfied their requirements. But there is no need to labour the fact of Byngham's education, for the man who made it his main purpose in life to provide additional schoolmasters throughout the length and breadth of the land, and who became with his sovereign's approval the head of a college founded for that purpose, must clearly have enjoyed himself the benefits he sought to confer upon others. It is impossible to make a definite statement of the place of Byngham's education, for the records of the universities had not begun to preserve either matriculations or graduations in the early years of the fifteenth century, but the fact of his founding his college in Cambridge is in itself sufficient to justify the assumption that it was in Cambridge that Byngham took his own degree. And it may with equal probability be assumed that he did so as a member of Clare Hall, which would explain his association of the Master and fellows of that college with himself in the various royal licences he sought and obtained. Their friendship for him was so marked as to be extended to the college of his foundation, as he acknowledges in the tribute he pays to them when proposing that these be appointed with him to make statutes:

William Millyngton, William Gulle, Robert Wodlark, and John Tylney, lately fellows of the College of Clare Hall, Cambridge, whom together with the master of the same, now deceased,¹ he always found prompt to aid in promoting the College of Godeshous.²

¹ William Wymbill, Master of Clare, was living 6 July 1443 (Chr. Gh. K), but was dead before 10 May 1445 (Crosby, p. 231). Cf. Lloyd, pp. 1 sqq.

² Chr. Gh. 3.

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Passing to consideration of Byngham's date of birth we find the first mention of him in a deed on the husting roll (151(7)), dated 26 August 1422, where he is described as 'clerk' in a grant to him and seven others of the reversion of lands and tenements in the parish of St Michael le Quern in Westchepe. All that can with certainty be deduced from this document is that in 1422 he was of age and standing sufficient to justify his inclusion with responsible citizens as a trustee.

Our earliest knowledge of him as priest is derived from the entry of the institution of William Byngham, priest, to the church of Carlton Curliu on 23 June 1423.¹ The identification is established by the entry of his institution to the church of St John Zachary, London, where he is described as William Byngham, rector of Carlton Curliu.² A clerk could not be received into priest's orders according to the canon law until he attained the age of twenty-five; if Byngham became priest at the canonical age and was immediately presented to Carlton Curliu, his birth must be placed in the year 1398. Byngham was admitted to the rectory of St John Zachary in the city of London in May 1424, by the dean and chapter of St Paul's, and recognition of a very young man in the rectory of a city church by these powerful ecclesiastical patrons seems unlikely. It would appear to be more reasonable, in view of these fixed dates for important responsibilities, to regard Byngham's birth as occurring about 1390, which would make him,

(a) on his appointment to the rectory of Carlton Curliu, thirty-three years old;

(b) on his appointment to the rectory of St John Zachary in London, thirty-four years;

(c) on his earliest activities as a college founder,³ forty-five years.

In dealing with the questions of Byngham's family, date of birth and place of education, conjecture and inference based upon the facts of his later life have alone been available, and the soundness of the conclusions reached must be judged accordingly. With his institution to the

¹ Linc. xvi, f. 98 d.

² He exchanges with the previous rector John Barnesley upon the authority of a commission of the archbishop of Canterbury, 25 May 1424 (St Paul's, W.D. 13, f. 95).

³ I.e. 1435; *v. infra*, p. 11 sq.

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rectory of Carlton Curlieu, the firm foundation of contemporary record is available: 'William Byngham, priest, presented by the prior and convent of the house of Jhesu of Bethlehem of Sheen, to the church of Carleton Curly, on resignation of Sir William Lychefeld, was instituted on 23 June 1423'.¹ Nichols, in his *Leicestershire*, names no rectors of Carlton Curlieu between one of 1274 and one who died in 1472, and it seems desirable to place upon record in a note at the end of this chapter² such additional information as various documents have yielded. Here it is sufficient to remark that William Lychefeld, whom Byngham succeeded at Carlton, was in close association with Byngham in later years both in London and in Cambridge.³

Byngham's stay at Carlton was a short one, for on 25 May 1424 he became rector,⁴ by exchange, of St John Zachary, London, a church burnt down in the great fire. It was situated in Maiden Lane, and after the fire the parish was annexed to that of St Anne, Aldersgate.⁵ Its churchyard still remains; it lies, almost surrounded by buildings, on the corner formed by Noble Street and Gresham Street, not far from the General Post Office, St Martin's le Grand. Stow says the monuments of the church were well preserved in his time, but, though he mentions Byngham, 'founder of Christ's College, Cambridge', as rector here, he makes no reference to a Byngham monument. Besant⁶ makes the statement that the church of St John Zachary was built by a monk named Zachary, for which the nearest approach to authority

¹ Linc. xvi, f. 98 d.² *Infra*, p. 20 sq.³ *V. infra*, p. 397 sq.

⁴ Byngham is sometimes styled person, sometimes priest, sometimes rector, sometimes clerk, sometimes Sir [William Byngham], which last is *dominus*, a title constantly given to parish priests down to a much later date than Byngham's but strictly the style then, as now in academical surroundings, of a bachelor. It is desirable to bear in mind that in medieval times, and in formal documents down to modern times, *person* or *parson* (as it was also spelt in exemplification of its pronunciation) was the complete equivalent of *rector*. Blackstone says: 'A parson... is one that hath full possession of all the rights of a parochial church... He is sometimes called the rector'. Later, the term became debased and was used to signify any vicar, curate, chaplain or minister, but the earliest illustration of this less exact use given in *N.E.D.* is Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, 1588. In the muniments of Christ's College, however, 'parson' is used of a vicar as early as 1532.

⁵ W. Besant, *The Survey of London (Mediaeval London, vol. i)*, p. 28. The parish of St John Zachary, though united with that of St Agnes and St Anne, still has its own churchwardens.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*

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seems to derive from documents preserved in the chapter records, where there is mention of the church under the name St John Zachary in a visitation of 1181.¹ There is a chirograph deed granting the church of St John Baptist to one Zacary in alms for the term of his life, provided that he visit the mother church [St Paul's is meant] at Christmas and at the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul every year, offering in charity forty-two pence each time. There are fifteen or sixteen witnesses and the chirograph is countersigned by John, treasurer.² This deed is of the twelfth century and there is also a contemporary enrolment.³ There is no foundation for the inherently improbable 'monk' of Besant, and so far is the name of the church from being due to this Zacary that it appears to be the obvious alternative to its dedicatory title of St John Baptist, as in the Cambridge church of that name formerly in Milne Street, which was removed by Henry VI to enlarge the site of his college. There can be no objection to the proposal that this St John Baptist church was called St John Zachary to distinguish it from the St John Baptist of Walbrook,⁴ so long as that is not connected with the grant of it to Zacary, who may have been led to apply for the living by the appropriateness of the already established colloquial name.

The years 1424 to 1435 were fruitful years for Byngham, years during which he was forming a wide circle of friends, and making acquaintance with the management of affairs which, whether that was his purpose or not, proved to be of great service in the setting-up of the College of Godshouse.

The fifteenth century was a period when, owing to the state of medical science, short final illnesses were the rule, and when too, for the greater part, men postponed giving form to their testamentary wishes until they were conscious that the hour of death was nigh. To prepare for the next world meant, also, taking fitting leave of the present, and the priest called in to minister in spiritual things was at the same time frequently the dying man's guide in the final ordering

¹ St Paul's, W.D. 4, f. 85.

² *Ibid.* A. Box 12, No. 1137.

³ *Ibid.* W.D. 4, liber L.

⁴ F. Bond, *Dedications and Patron Saints of English Churches*, p. 193.

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LEGATEE AND LITIGANT

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of his temporal affairs. Of the will drawn under the confessor's direction, who could be a more fitting executor than he whose duty it was to take care that the testator made proper provision for the house where his devotions had been paid in this world and for the welfare of his soul in the next? And so we find that by the will dated 28 May 1425 William Byngham, rector of St John Zachary, and the wardens of the same church take a share of the estate of William Hope, goldsmith, in return for their prayers;¹ and it appears that a few years later they do the same under the will, dated 25 July 1431, of Bartholomew Seman, 'goldbetere', who also, by will dated 12 March 1429,² leaves a certain tenement and rents to Michaelhouse, Cambridge, for two poor scholars to be known as 'Turkeschildren' (to pray for Sir Robert Turk, knight, his two wives and others). Herein we may perhaps see the influence of Byngham in the provision that, failing proper observance of the conditions by Michaelhouse, the bequest with its obligations shall pass to Clare Hall. Throughout his career as a London rector, duties of this character were discharged by Byngham and, especially in the cases of the larger estates, they often involved him in litigation. Thus, his name appears frequently in the proceedings of the Court of Chancery:

William Byngham, parson of St John Zachary, is a defendant along with his co-executors of Nicholas Conyngston.³

William Byngham, clerk, is plaintiff as executor of William Flete, merchant, in an action against Alexander Mede, respecting lands in Lincolnshire.⁴

William Byngham, with other executors of Thomas Horley, late of Biggleswade, is defendant in an action brought by William Warboys, respecting messuages in Dunton, Bedfordshire,⁵ and

William Byngham, with other feoffees of William Crosse, is defendant in an action brought by George, son of the said William, respecting lands in Bedfordshire.⁶

We see him, in 1428, as defendant in an action brought by the dean and chapter of St Paul's concerning an annual payment of twenty shillings due to them out of the rectory of St John Zachary,⁷ where he

¹ Sharpe, ii, 436.

² *Ibid.* ii, 459. Seman was buried in St John Zachary (Stow, i, 305).

³ *E.Ch.P.* Bdle 11, No. 216.

⁴ *Ibid.* Bdle 19, No. 195.

⁵ *Ibid.* Bdle 35, No. 75.

⁶ *Ibid.* Bdle 24, No. 56.

⁷ W. McMurray, *The Records of Two City Parishes*, p. 269.

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was, perhaps, only defending a friendly action to put upon record in a court of law an already agreed position.

Amongst the friends made by Byngham at this period was John Carpenter, town clerk of London from 1417 to 1441, member of parliament for the city in 1436 and again in 1439, and founder of the City of London School. The bond between the older man and the younger is probably to be found in their interest in education. Carpenter died about 1441, and his biographer says upon this matter:¹ 'Master William Byngham, another distinguished promoter of learning, had this friendly notice taken of him by Carpenter', and he quotes the following passage from Carpenter's will: 'Also I give and bequeath to Master William Byngham, as a memorial of me, that book which Master Roger Dymok² made, *contra duodecim errores et hereses Lollardorum*, and gave to King Richard, and which book John Wilok gave to me'.

Mention has already been made of Lychefeld, Byngham's predecessor

¹ T. Brewer, *Memoir of the Life and Times of John Carpenter*, pp. 66 sq. and 139.

² For this writer and the treatise here named *v. D.N.B.* xvi, 293. The work is known in three manuscripts, one in Paris in the Bibliothèque Nationale, another in the University Library, Cambridge, the third in the library of Trinity Hall, Cambridge. The copy in the University Library (li.4.3) is in a hand of the middle of the fifteenth century and was of the gift of Archbishop Rotherham (1480). On f. 1 is written in a late seventeenth-century hand 'Cuius et alterum exemplar Ms. hoc multo vestustius, Et splendidius, in Biblioth. Aule Trin. vide'. The Trinity Hall copy is No. 17 of Dr M. R. James's catalogue of the manuscripts of that college, and is attributed by him to the late fourteenth century. It is written on vellum 10½ × 7½, ff. 160 + 1. On the first page the initial has a portrait of King Richard II throned, and the royal arms (France ancient and England quarterly) are blazoned in colours on the right-hand margin, while on the bottom margin is his badge, *two stags sejant guardant gorged crowned and chained or*. There are many illuminated initials and borders, and the writing is worthy of its frame. Dr James regards it as a copy made for presentation to the king and, since Carpenter refers to the copy he bequeathed to Byngham as the one given by Dymok to the king, there seems sufficient reason to conclude that the Trinity Hall MS. was once the property of Byngham. Robert Hare gave it to that college and he received it from Anthony Rooper, grandson of Sir Thomas More, 12 June 1588. This work of Dymok was published for the first time in 1922 by the Wyclif Society, edited by H. S. Cronin, with the title *Rogeri Dymmok Liber Contra XII Errores et Hereses Lollardorum*. Cronin speculates (p. xx sq.) upon the ownership of the MS. between Richard II and Rooper, but the *lacuna* of 189 years is left unfilled by him. It is now possible partly to fill in the gap and the complete known links in its chain of owners are King Richard II, John Wilok, John Carpenter, William Byngham with, *longo intervallo*, Anthony Rooper, Robert Hare (d. 1611) and Trinity Hall.