

## **AVIGNETTE OF THE DE OSPRINGE FAMILY**

by Kenneth Jacobs

There were a number of families in Kent in the 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, not members of the baronage, who played a pivotal role within feudal society, whilst this was at its zenith. By the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the weakening grip of feudalism, many had lost their status. The vast majority of these families took their family names from their holdings in land. There is hardly a vill in Kent that has not given its name to a family - and one such were the Ospringes.

Their name continues up to the present day. The vignette which follows gives but an insight into the influence they wielded in our area. They were among the main benefactors of the hospital at Ospringe, granting it much land and rent over three generations.

The earliest reference we have to a member of the family is that of Gervase de Ospringe. In 10 Henry II (1163-4) he is shown as farmer of the manor of Ospringe. He paid the Crown £50 per year for its farm, later increased to £100, a substantial sum. He also paid 20/- for the old farm of Davington, a member of Ospringe. The sheriff paid £4 for the new farm<sup>1</sup>.

In 11 Henry II (1164-5) he was fined 40 Marks by the Crown. We don't know why. A Mark was a unit of account, equating by this period to 13s 4d. The only English coinage at that time was the silver penny. In 12 Hy II (1165-6) we find Gervase once again paying £4 for the new farm of Davington<sup>2</sup>.

He was probably a knight, or of a knightly class, appearing on at least two views. In the first, in 17 Henry II (1170-1), he appears together with Helye the son of Robert, Robert de Lucy and Simon de Criol - these three all being knights. The second view took place a year later in 18 Henry II (1171-2), with the same four individuals, but additionally Walter the clerk<sup>3</sup>.

In 24 Henry II (1177-8) Edward the clerk and Gervase de Ospringe render account of £4 5s 7d for the farm of the abbey of Faversham, which was in the hands of the King for 20 weeks<sup>4</sup>.

In 28 Henry II (1181-2) he was fined £200, as he did not have pledges, ie sureties<sup>5</sup>. We do not unfortunately know details of the legal case for which he could not supply these. This was a very substantial amount of money

for the period, and the fact that he managed to pay off the debt eventually, shows him to have been of some means. To facilitate this he probably had to sell other property he held. One such sale may relate to the only charter of his that has so far been identified.

In his salutations he greets his friends and neighbours, as also the men of France and England. He grants his lands in Methersham in Sussex, as also land called Smalew(o)de to William de St Martin. The deed also demonstrates that he was paying scutage to the King, not holding the land, which was assessed at one quarter of a knight's fee, by performance of military service. Scutage, or shield money, was paid in lieu of such service and was well established by the beginning of the reign of Henry I in 1106<sup>6</sup>. The deed was witnessed by fourteen individuals, most of whom, I believe to have been knights of Kent and East Sussex. The fourteenth witness was Ralph, clerk of Essex, who wrote the charter which, although undated, is of c1185<sup>7</sup>.

It took him some time to pay off the fine. In 31 Henry II (1184-5) he owed £46 6s 8d; by the following year this had been reduced to £34. In fact, it was not until the first year of Richard's reign (1189-1190) that he is quit. In this year he is no longer shown as farming the manor<sup>8</sup>.

Gervase was of some standing and attested charters not only of local, but of Kentish importance. For example, he was a prominent witness to the agreement reached in 1176 between the men of Thanet and St Augustine's Abbey, ending a long running dispute between them. The charter was witnessed by many Kentish individuals of note. His nephew Hervey was also a witness<sup>9</sup>.

There exists another important document dated. 14<sup>th</sup> January 1197, being an agreement, reached in court, involving Emma de Crevequer as plaintiff and Gervase as defendant, the latter represented in court by his son Henry. It related to 2½ marks in silver of rent in Hercaie ( Harty ), which Gervase granted her as her dower whilst she lived. In return she renounced all her claim to £10 worth of land and 30 marks sterling, which she had claimed against them as her dower<sup>10</sup>.

Her husband would appear to have been Bertram de Criol, who had died sometime after 1191. She was the daughter of Elias de Crevequer, also known as Elias de Blean, an important baronial family of the period. In the event, she lived at least until 1207. A sister, Regine, had married Hugh the

goldsmith of Canterbury, one of the city's leading citizens<sup>11</sup>. He had been commissioned to make a gold cup for King John<sup>12</sup>, but was also a prominent moneyer, minting the short cross pennies of the time<sup>13</sup>.

It is interesting to note that she used her maiden name, rather than that of her husband, presumably because it carried more weight than that of the Criols; this notwithstanding the fact that the Criols were descended from Robert Count of Eu, the brother of William the bastard, both grandsons of Richard the fearless, Duke of Normandy.

The information contained in this document is open to more than one interpretation. If taken at face value, then Gervase held the land referred to, and he may have been a Criol. He could have been a son of Simon de Criol who married Joan, daughter of Bertram fitzRafin and widow of Ralph Neville. There are however other interpretations and I do not at this stage wish to speculate. Further work needs to be done to establish his surname, as I very much suspect that de Ospringe was a quasi-name.

We have some limiting dates as to his death. A rental of Christ Church of c 1200 shows that he was paying 2d rent on a plot of land in Canterbury. Another rental of c 1206 shows his heirs paying this rent, so we know he had died in the intervening period<sup>14</sup>.

As far as the manor of Ospringe is concerned. in 2 Richard I (1190-1) the sheriff renders account of £12 of the old farm of the manor. In the following year Alan de Valoignes owes £10 of its old farm. It is stated that suit of court, however, is owed in Yorkshire<sup>15</sup>.

This brings in a possible Yorkshire connection. There was a family of the same name in that county who held land in - amongst other places - Oxspring, in South Yorkshire; in itself an odd coincidence. The earliest reference I have found to them is that of a Mathew de Ospringe, who was fined 20 Marks and convicted in 1212, once again, of what crime, we know not<sup>16</sup>. He had a son Robert and a skeleton pedigree continuing for three generations has been established. I have not come across the name Mathew in the Kentish family, only in that Henry, Gervase's son, married Margaret, the daughter of Mathew de Goodnestone<sup>17</sup>, and that they had at least one son John<sup>18</sup>. More work needs to be done to establish whether the families were related.

Only two references have been found to the Hervey de Ospringe mentioned above. He is mentioned in a suit between the abbot of Faversham and William de Insula ( de Lisle ) in 1214<sup>19</sup>. As Yruoy de Ospringe he is named as a witness to a charter of c1215, entered in St Gregory's Cartulary<sup>20</sup>. The family had connections with St Gregory's in Canterbury that span at least two generations.

Gervase had sons Henry, Michael, John and Nicholas<sup>21</sup>.

Whether Henry ever farmed the manor is not clear, although the Close Roll of 12<sup>th</sup> October 1215 states that lands which were formerly of Henry de Ospringe were granted to Russel de St Maxent. He certainly owned a considerable amount of land in Ospringe as numerous grants by him and his son John demonstrate. One such grant was of land called Bradefelde in Ospringe<sup>22</sup>.

The references to some charters to which Henry was a witness are given in this footnote<sup>23</sup>. In one<sup>24</sup>, part of a short run of charters of Christ Church, Canterbury, he is named as steward of Christ Church, this at some time prior to 29<sup>th</sup> December 1226, the year by which one of the witnesses Eudo Chiche is known to have died<sup>25</sup>.

Henry also held property in Canterbury. In the period 1213-1230 he and his wife Margaret granted 4 acres of land in Nackington, together with the right of transporting grain, to the prior and convent of St Gregory's; this in return for a yearly rent of 6d<sup>26</sup>. He had been steward of St Gregory's at some time prior to 1233, as its cartulary shows<sup>27</sup>. Like his father he was of standing within the community, having been appointed a juror, commissioner and justice on a number of occasions. In c1234, for example, he was a juror on an inquisition into the particulars of the farm of Canterbury<sup>28</sup>.

His interest in Nackington has been mentioned and we find his son John holding the manor at an unspecified date<sup>29</sup>. On 5<sup>th</sup> May 1268 he grants the manor to Master Hamo Doge, a Canterbury magnate, son of Roger Doge, for a consideration of 100 marks in silver<sup>30</sup>. In an undated charter, but patently of a date very shortly thereafter, Hamo grants the manor in free alms to St Augustine's<sup>31</sup>. John witnessed Hamo's charter. In view of the importance of this acquisition to St Augustine's, it is subsequently confirmed to them by John.<sup>32</sup>

The name John de Ospringe occurs in a number of undated 13<sup>th</sup> century charters, as grantor, as a witness or in the abutments. I am happy to accept that these relate to John the son of Henry de Ospringe. They too are listed in the following footnote.<sup>33</sup> Those in St John's College, Cambridge, could, for the most part, have tight limiting dates applied. The college has a good manuscript catalogue of these charters, compiled some time ago, but regrettably the names of witnesses were not added. Among those that can be dated is one of 30 Henry III (1246-1247)<sup>34</sup>. In another, in the Red Book of St Augustine's, John the son of Henry de Ospringe, grants to the abbey 12d rent which Roger Covenant pays him annually out of a messuage in St Margaret's parish in the burgh of Worthgate (1253-1254)<sup>35</sup>.

Another charter dated 42 Henry III (1258-1259) is a lease for twenty years between John and Cyronagius, the son of Nicholas de Ospringe, of a field (or headland) called vifhekere (five acre). The consideration was 32 marks.<sup>36</sup> We are for the period talking about substantial amounts of money in the vast majority of these transactions.

John died some time between 5<sup>th</sup> May 1268 and 2 Edward I (1272-1273), when his heirs are mentioned in a charter<sup>37</sup>. I have found no references to any children of his, if any.

Henry, his father, had died some time before 1247, when his heirs and Nicholas his brother owe 8d of rent to William Blake<sup>38</sup>. We can take this date back further to 1240, or before, when Nicholas's widow Dulcie was alive<sup>39</sup>.

Nicholas and Dulcie had sons William, Gervase, Richard, Henry, Peter and Cyronagius<sup>40</sup>. As stated, Dulcie was alive in 1240, when an inquisition into the state of the manor of Ospringe was held<sup>41</sup>. She complained bitterly of not being permitted to enclose part of her land, as her ancestors had been allowed to do, through which she lost 16 sheep. Furthermore, 24 pigs belonging to the King had escaped onto her fields and caused damage to her grain.

Nicholas was alive in 1235<sup>42</sup> and had died, as stated, by 1240.

Nicholas's sons occur in a number of documents. To give a few examples, William is mentioned in an undated charter<sup>43</sup>. Gervase was still alive in 1271 when he was receiving rent from holdings formerly his father's and

grandfathers, which had been granted to the hospital<sup>44</sup>. Richard acted as attorney for Geoffrey de Percy in a plea of debt<sup>45</sup>.

Another son of Gervase (d1200-1206), Michael, had been priest both of Ospringe and later Egerton (or Eythorne), dying as incumbent of the latter shortly before 1225<sup>46</sup>. In the period 29<sup>th</sup> September 1185 - March 1190 he witnessed a charter for the monks of Rochester<sup>47</sup>.

In 1191, in a plea of mort ancestor, Henry his brother acted on his behalf against Osbert the son of Hervey<sup>48</sup>. The action was still extant in 1199, the records stating that Osbert was in the service of the King as an itinerant justice. A knight, he was a justice of eyre in Richard's reign and sat on the King's Bench at Westminster between 1192-1206<sup>49</sup>.

In 1193 Michael de Ospringe presented his account to the Crown for £7 of his grain which the constable of Dover took to maintain Dover Castle<sup>50</sup>.

He witnessed a charter on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1208 or before. The charter is undated, but one of the witnesses is Terric the goldsmith, who had died on or before 1208<sup>51</sup>. We know the date and month because the monks of Christchurch prayed for his soul annually on that day<sup>52</sup>.

As far as Gervase's other son, John, is concerned, I have found him mentioned only once so far in an undated charter<sup>53</sup>.

De Ospringes are mentioned in many other public records. Further work is in progress to try and identify and place these within the skeleton pedigree so far established. To give some examples, we have Richard, the son of Robert de Ospringe, who had a son Gunceline. The Yorkshire family also had a Richard the son of Robert in the same period, although I have as yet found no reference to a Gunceline in Yorkshire<sup>54</sup>.

Two charters mention an Ernulfus de Ospringe,<sup>55</sup> one dated 1235-1236<sup>56</sup>. Another, a grant to the Maison Dieu in Ospringe by Amfrid de Ospringe is of a yearly rent of 7d and a hen, payable to him by Ernulfus the son of Yruey<sup>57</sup>. Could this same Ernulfus, the son of Hervey, be the nephew of Gervase mentioned earlier? Possibly.

A Robert de Ospringe, clerk, was proctor of John Ive, abbot of Faversham in 1327-1328<sup>58</sup>.

A Snelman de Ospringe, who had been on the third crusade to the Holy Land, granted in 1192 land to his nephew John, which he held of Gervase de Ospringe, at a yearly rent of 20d. Perhaps the nephew mentioned is John the son of Gervase. The grant was confirmed by a charter of King Richard on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1192, given by the hand of Master Philip, keeper of the seal<sup>59</sup>.

There is one important caveat to all this and that is that not necessarily everyone called 'de Ospringe' is a member of this family. In references of the 12<sup>th</sup> century this would almost always be the case, but not by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup>. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century land was all. It represented your wealth and your status. Those records of the earlier period relate for the most part to land held of the Crown under the feudal system. Those who held the land, apart from the Earls, the Barons and the Church, were for the most part knights. It is interesting to note that they were not often described as such in the majority of documents, it was assumed that that is what they must be. There were exceptions to this of course, particularly where land was held by the Church, by men who excelled in the military field, by financiers, merchants and artisans of the highest rank. But it was not until the reign of King John that the bourgeoisie began to flourish and land was incessantly sub-infeudated.

By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century we have to view names derived from places in a different light. For example, there exists a grant of a John de Ospringe called Taverner in 19 Edward I (1291-1292)<sup>60</sup>. Now, it may well demonstrate the falling status of the Ospringe family, or it may simply relate to a John Taverner of Ospringe. Great caution has to be exercised.

A great many of the deeds mentioned in this text relate to grants of land to the hospital of St Mary, commonly known as the Maison Dieu, in Ospringe. It has always been assumed that it was founded by King Henry III in 1234-1235. Both the name of the founder and the date are wrong, and it begs the question as to who did found it and when. I would like to put Gervase de Ospringe forward as someone who may well have founded the Maison Dieu; this for the following reasons.

That the hospital was patently in existence prior to 1234 is quite clear. I will not give the sources here, as that is beyond the scope of this article, but I will give the earliest proof of an earlier foundation that I have so far found.

In the pipe roll of 1191 it is stated under the hundred of Faversham that a murder had been committed and that it had been amerced at 5 Marks. In the exchequer were 45s 8d and for charters of pardon the brothers of the hospital paid 7s, the church there 20d and the monks of Faversham 12s 3d.<sup>61</sup> The reference to the brothers of the hospital can only relate to the Maison Dieu. Why should they need charters of pardon? Another entry for the same year may supply the answer. It states that the vill of Ospringe is amerced 10 Marks for not raising hue and cry for the murder of a jew<sup>62</sup>. I am sure these two events are linked and point to the expediency of the brothers of the hospital needing a charter of pardon.

A file in the St John's College Archives typescript catalogue<sup>63</sup>, is shown to contain a number of manuscripts, including one, a parchment sheet in a 15<sup>th</sup> century hand ? (sic), which ascribes the foundation to Henry II. I find it hard to believe that had Henry II founded the hospital there are no other references to this to be found anywhere, at least so far. I would suggest that the hospital was not of a royal foundation, but was founded by someone of a lesser social standing. Henry III undoubtedly re-founded, possibly completely rebuilt or at least had building work carried out to the hospital. Enough evidence exists that he became to be regarded as and, who knows, even came to regard himself as the founder of the Maison Dieu. It is likely that the hospital, built probably in the third or fourth quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was originally of a base, vernacular structure, perhaps built entirely or largely of timber.



*Maison Dieu*

Gervase de Ospringe, as farmer of the manor of Ospringe, and of some, albeit limited, means, as has been demonstrated, may well have established the hospital. He has as much right to be put forward as a candidate as I am sure others will be in due course.

## **SOURCES**

This paper has been extracted from Mr Jacob's unpublished Faversham Biographical Register (Second Edition). His extensive list of sources used during his research are as follow:-



- 1 PR, PRS, Volume 7, p40.
- 2 PR, PRS, Volume 8, p103-4.
- 3 PR, PRS, Volume 16, p137 & Volume 18, p135
- 4 PR, PRS, Volume 27, p 124.
- 5 PR, PRS, Volume 31, p 154
- 6 From Domesday to Magna Carta, Austin Lane Poole D Litt, 2nd edition, p 16, Oxford University Press, 1955.
- 7 Lord de Lisle and Dudley MSS, Volume I, p 41, Historical Manuscripts Commission, HMSO, 1921..
- 8 PR, PRS, Volume 41, p169
- 9 English Lawsuits from William I to Richard I, Vol 2, p 531, Edited for Seldon Society by R C Van Caenegem.
- 10 Feet of Fines, PRS, Volume 20, Fine No 65.
- 11 Bunce's Charity Book, charters C1175 and C1192, Centre for Kentish Studies, Canterbury.
- 12 CAK
- 13 British Numismatic Journal XXXIII, 1964, article: Some Short Cross queries, p 65-66, J H Brand.
- 14 CAK, p 315 & p 341.
- 15 PR, PRS, Volume 40, p145
- 16 PR, PRS, Volume 30, p 39
- 17 CSG, charters 141a & 142a.
- 18 BL, RBSA, m 104a & 104b.
- 19 CRR of King John 15 & 16, p 56, London HMSO, 1935
- 20 CSG, charter 107
- 21 SJCA, D9.91, 92 and 93, and vide footnote 48.
- 22 PRO, CR (C53) Roll of 31 Henry III, m8.
- 23 SJCA: D9.93, D9.124; BL: Stowe MS 924. charter 965; Add Charters 16381, 16406-12; CAK: Charter LXVIII, p440; CSG: charters 210 and 105.
- 24 BL Add Charter 16381 and CAK charter XXXVIII, p 415
- 25 COC, pp 14 and 18
- 26 CSG, charters 106 and 107.
- 27 CSG, charter 139
- 28 CAK, p 443.
- 29 Black Book Of St Augustine, part I, p 197, edited G J Turner MA and the Rev H E Salter MA, London, published for the British Academy 1915.
- 30 BL, RBSA, m 104a and b
- 31 BL, RBSA, m 104b
- 32 BL, RBSA, m 104b
- 33 BL: Stowe MS 924, charter 287; RBSA: m76b, m77a and b, m78a, m91b, m104a and b, m299b; BL: Harleian Charter 79.A.11; SJCA: D9.126, D7.276, D7.277 and D7.268.
- 34 SJCA D7.276, D7.277
- 35 BL, RBSA 142 b.
- 36 SJCA D7.15
- 37 SJCA D7.268

- 38 PRO, CR (C53) Roll of 31 Henry III, m8.  
 39 Testa de Nevill tempus Henry III – Edward I, p 217-218, printed by command of His Majesty King George III, 1807.  
 40 SJCA D8.238 and D7.15  
 41 Testa de Nevill, p217-218.  
 42 SJCA D9.129  
 43 SJCA D8.330  
 44 SJCA, D8.254  
 45 CRR, Volume 19, No 339  
 46 CRR 9-10 Henry III, p 179.  
 47 English Episcopal Acta 1162-1190, No 303, edited by C R Cheney and Bridgett E A Jones, for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1980.  
 48 CRR p79 HMSO 1922 & p94  
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 50 PR, PRS, Volume 41, p 170.  
 51 BL, RBSA, m 260 b  
 52 CAK p 175 & COC p 12/13  
 53 SJCA D9.91  
 54 Catalogue of ancient deeds in the PRO, Volume I, No. C712, HMSO, 1890.  
 55 SJCA D9.127 and D9.129  
 56 SJCA D9.129  
 57 SJCA D8.71  
 58 Calendar of Papal letters Volume I, edited by W H Bliss, HMSO 1895, p 279.  
 59 SJCA D8.200 and D8121.  
 60 SJCA D9.120  
 61 PR, PRS, Volume 40, p 146.  
 62 PR, PRS, Volume 40, p 147.  
 63 SJCA D9.254

KEY

- BL = British Library  
 CAK = Canterbury under the Angevin Kings by Dr William Urry, University of London, the Athelone Press, 1967  
 COC = Chief Citizens of Canterbury by Dr William Urry, Canterbury City Council, 1978.  
 CR = Charter Roll  
 CRR = Curia Regis Rolls  
 m = membrane  
 MS = Manuscript  
 PR = Pipe Roll  
 PRO = Public Records Office  
 PRS = Pipe Roll Society  
 RBSA = Red Book of St Augustine's, BL Cotton MS Claudius DX.  
 SJCA = St John's College Archives, Cambridge

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