

## FACSIMILES OF EARLY CHESHIRE CHARTERS

SELECTED AND EDITED BY GEOFFREY BARRACLOUGH  
(The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1957)

ALL members of the Historic Society will join with the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire in giving a warm welcome to Professor Barraclough's *Early Cheshire Charters*, both as a fundamental contribution to the history of Cheshire and as a peculiarly fitting tribute to the president of both Societies, in celebration of his eighty-ninth birthday. It is a splendid piece of scholarship, and nothing less would have served for the occasion. The president's life and work have been an inspiration and a guide for local historians; and the span of his working life might serve as a warning to the incautious. Not only has he long passed the psalmist's term, but he has been active so long that historians of the future will argue that at least three men of the same name must have worked on the history of Cheshire. It is one of the many virtues of Professor Barraclough's book to have paid a fine tribute to the president: ". . . All . . . whose imaginations the history and the very scene of Cheshire life have kindled, who have lived within the boundaries of the palatinate on the confines of England and Wales, and wished to know more of the forces which shaped it, and rendered it different from its neighbours to east and west, and to north and south, will remember in this generation the name of William Fergusson Irvine, as in an earlier generation they remember that of George Ormerod, and in an earlier generation still that of Sir Peter Leicester".

The wealth of a county in medieval charters usually bears some relation to the number and size of its religious houses. The monasteries of both Cheshire and Lancashire were few and mostly poor: Furness Abbey and St. Werburgh's Chester were exceptions to prove the rule. But most of the Lancashire houses have left cartularies behind them, and in general the surviving early Lancashire charters, originals and copies, are not so few as one might fear. Cheshire may be said to have four cartularies containing early material; but two of her three Cistercian abbeys fled early across the borders into Lancashire and Staffordshire, so that the Whalley and Dieulacres cartularies only have a percentage of Cheshire material, and St. Werburgh's



Plate 14. WILLIAM FERGUSSON IRVINE  
A photograph taken on his ninetieth birthday

two registers, so finely edited by Tait, contain only shrivelled abstracts of the abbey's muniments.

What Cheshire lacks in ecclesiastical charters, she in part makes up in secular charters. The wealth revealed in this book is not ostentatious, and most of the early charter collections have been used by earlier Cheshire historians. None the less, to many students of local history, and to English medievalists at large, this volume will come as a revelation of what is still to be found at Adlington Hall and Eaton Hall, at Tabley House and in the John Rylands Library, in the County Record Offices of Lancashire and Cheshire, as well as scattered up and down the country and in the national collections, of the ancient muniments of Cheshire. Thirty original charters of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been chosen as a representative sample, and they are published in facsimile, with transcripts and elaborate notes by the editor. The book is finely produced; most of the reproductions are excellent; and the Record Society is to be most warmly congratulated on the enterprise it has shown in enlisting so distinguished a scholar and allowing him to deploy without stint a lavish array of scholarship.

The local historian will find a wide range of interesting topics discussed, much precise information, and numerous corrections to Ormerod's great *History*. The general historian will find reliable texts of many charters either unknown or known only from inaccurate texts, and guidance on many problems of feudal and constitutional history for which the Cheshire evidence is crucial for English history as a whole; and if he regrets that there are no charters of the earls, he will be all the more impatient for the collection of the earls' charters which Professor Barraclough promises shortly to give us. The student of diplomatic will find precise discussions of most points which interest him, and a range of documents which sets this beside Sir Frank Stenton's editions as a guide to the private charters of their period. The present reviewer, who has been collecting details of English abbots and priors for a number of years, found welcome guidance with the obscure superiors of Combermere, Stanlaw (later Whalley) and Norton. The editor, in revising the list of early priors of Norton, has had the common experience of removing as many names as he has added to existing lists. His attempt to prove that the first abbot of Combermere had been succeeded by 1149-50 (p. 3) is not so successful. The document he cites cannot be so early as this. It is witnessed by William abbot of Radmore, whose abbey was transferred to Stoneleigh, as the editor points out, in 1155. But Radmore only became an abbey in 1153 and

the true date of the document is 1153-5.<sup>(1)</sup> I fancy that errors are exceedingly few;<sup>(2)</sup> and Professor Barraclough has laid out the evidence for all his statements so fully and so clearly that he never misleads us with unsupported statements of date and interpretation which mar so many English editions of charters and cartularies. In this he has set an example for us all; and in issuing his book the Record Society has set an example to all societies which publish historical texts, and paid a wholly appropriate tribute to its distinguished president.

C. N. L. BROOKE

<sup>(1)</sup> The conversion of Radmore from a hermitage into a Cistercian abbey and its date are discussed by Z. N. and C. N. L. Brooke in *English Historical Review*, Vol. LXI (1946), pp. 85-6 and n. It is there suggested that the foundation "may have been contemplated as early as 1149". The evidence for this is a letter which we dated to 1149; I would now date it to 1153, and in any case it is most unlikely that William called himself abbot before 1153. An edition of the Stoneleigh cartulary by Mr. R. H. Hilton is to be published shortly by the Dugdale Society; and we may hope for further light from him on the early history of Radmore.

Ranulf abbot of Buildwas also occurs in the charter referred to by Professor Barraclough. Since his predecessor Ingenulf occurs in a charter with Abbot William (*Great Register of Lichfield Cathedral*, ed. H. E. Savage, no. 301), the document cannot be very early in the period 1153-5.

<sup>(2)</sup> A rare mis-print on p. 9 places Bury St. Edmunds in West Sussex.