

*The Founders' Book: A Medieval History of Tewkesbury Abbey*. A Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Top. Glouc. D.2. Julian Luxford Ed. with contributions by Adrian Ailes and Susan Powell, (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2021). 216 pp, numerous colour ill. Hardback, £35. [ISBN 978-1-907730-89-4]

It may be unusual to begin a review talking about the last section of a book, but for anyone picking up *The Founders' Book* for the first time, attention will quickly be drawn to the 37 folios of beautiful reproductions from a manuscript held, as the title says, in the Bodleian Library. The folios are set out between page 135 and the Index on pages 211 to 216. The manuscript was written and illustrated by monks in Tewkesbury Abbey, as the Introduction to *The Founders' Book* demonstrates, and concerns its history and status. Many of the folios, both recto and verso, are embellished with bold, highly coloured paintings of the men, and some women, who were founders, patrons and benefactors of the Abbey. The artist is unlikely to have known any of those portrayed, and his art was not highly skilful but it was vivid, and the faces are homely. The illustrations are packed with symbolic meaning and are accompanied with numerous coats of arms. The folios also contain the Latin text which the monk was illustrating. They comprise parts 3 and 4 of the manuscript, starting on folio 6r, as they are considered of most interest to Tewkesbury; the selection is justified on pragmatic grounds, allowing concentration on the illustrations. This part of *The Founders' Book* is a visual delight.

*The Founders' Book* also contains 133 pages of scholarly text: an Introduction by Julian Luxford discussing many relevant points concerning the manuscript, a discussion and catalogue of the heraldry by Adrian Ailes, and a substantial section setting out both transcriptions of the Latin texts and translations made for this book by Sue Powell; this section also includes accounts of the aftermath of the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury in 1471, drawn from a copy of *The Founders' Book* in the British Library. There is a Foreword by the Reverend Canon Paul Williams. Altogether it is clear that this is a substantial contribution to knowledge of the manuscripts themselves and of the history of Tewkesbury Abbey.

*The Founders' Book* is a companion volume to *Tewkesbury Abbey. History, Art & Architecture* edited by Richard K Morris and Ron Shoesmith, published by Little Logaston in 2003, reprinted in 2012. Julian Luxford's essay on 'The Founders' Book' covered some of the ground in this latest volume, though the new publication gives opportunity to add and discuss different information. The earlier essay has a full account of the structure of the manuscript held by the Bodleian, for convenience of reference divided into five parts or chapters, summarised in this new publication. It is interesting that the manuscript was not generally known until 1892 (the date given in the earlier account), when it was offered for sale after 350 years in private libraries; an Oxford cleric, the Reverend Charles Henry Bickerton Hudson, was the purchaser and he subsequently donated the book to the Bodleian Library. In the Introduction to this latest publication Luxford summarises its post-Dissolution history as elucidated by Hudson in 1910, and published in the *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*; Hudson thereby established the title 'The Founders' Book'.

The historical account of Tewkesbury Abbey in *The Founders' Book* has been known for centuries: John Leland saw a version, though not entirely identical to the one now illustrated, and Atkyns translated one in *The ancient and present state of Gloucestershire*, but it is now made much more widely available. Several copies of the manuscript still survive, which Luxford suggests indicates that many more copies may once have existed. One in the British Library has pen and ink illustrations some of which, particularly the one of Robert Fitzhamon and his wife Sybil, have frequently been reproduced, including in this latest book. The existence of so many copies may indicate a major effort at publicity as well as the provision of information for those associated with the abbey.

There are indications that the manuscript was written and illustrated by monks in the abbey. The text refers several times to 'we': for example 'we have the prayer *Inclina ...*'. Luxford has also established that much of the imagery was based on sculptures in the Warwick chantry chapel (consecrated 1433) - a full page photograph shows the niches which once housed the sculptures ranked in threes vertically - but not every painting was based on a sculpture in the chapel. He has revised his opinion expressed in the first essay that John of Evesham was the artist, now suggesting that he commissioned the book ('*fieri fecit*' - caused to be made); in the first essay he noted that a John of Evesham was among the monks given a pension after the abbey's dissolution.

A discussion of the date or dates of the manuscript takes account of the two stages in which it was produced, the latest date it records, and the clothes and armour in the illustrations. The text may have been complete by the mid-1490s, with the illustrations added around 1500-1510 in lacunae left for them. The purpose of the illustrations is perceptively considered. The Founders were significant patrons, not founders in the modern sense of initiators of the abbey nor necessarily benefactors. Luxford suggests the manuscript 'was designed to express a close, deferential bond between a convent of monks and the aristocratic men and women to whom they were constantly beholden'. He also points out the value of the Abbey to prominent patrons, as in the deathbed illustration of Isabella Despenser. This point is further exemplified in the section on the heraldry.

As a specialist in medieval art and architecture, Luxford analyses some of the particular details of the images and their symbolism. Dukes Oddo and Doddo are shown standing either side of a large tree covered in what appear to be pine cones. Does this have historical meaning? Gilbert de Clare and his grandson Richard de Clare are both shown holding a leafy branch, referring to the donation and confirmation of the gift to Tewkesbury Abbey of Mythe Wood. The 'red earl', Gilbert de Clare II, has a very ruddy face. Gilbert de Clare III, the last of the family, was killed at Bannockburn in 1314, and is shown with an inverted torch, indicating that the light had gone out, an unusual motif at that date. The references to the pages of the manuscript are quoted; it can be noted that each folio is numbered very unobtrusively in pencil in the top right-hand corner of the recto.

Discussion of the likely veracity of the details of the Abbey's early history was not appropriate to this publication. There is reference, however, to the foundation by Oddo and Doddo in 715, the date being compared with other monastic claims to much earlier foundation dates, without entering into the debate about who these two dukes actually were and whether one or both were associated with Tewkesbury Abbey. (In the earlier essay, it was noted that the earliest surviving account of the foundation, in the Bodleian library, gives the foundation date as 717.) All in all, it is clear that the Introduction requires careful study and also that it can with advantage be read together with Luxford's earlier essay on 'The Founders' Book'.

The second section of *The Founders' Book* on 'The heraldry of the Founders' Book of Tewkesbury Abbey' by Adrian Ailes is substantial. It begins on page 20 and runs to page 63, and contains an introduction followed by a Catalogue of the coats of arms and ends with a glossary of heraldic terms. As someone not versed in heraldry, I found this section particularly rewarding. There are 121 shields of arms decorating the margins of the illustrations, and there is at the end of the manuscript a key to the thirty quarterings in the shield of Edward Plantagenet, who was executed in 1499 and was the son of George, duke of Clarence. Coats of arms are also emblazoned on the surcoats and mantles of the 24 figures in part 4, and also on William earl of Gloucester at the beginning of part 3, the section containing the text of the Great Charter.

The heraldry can be quite fictional, notably for Oddo and Doddo; hereditary shield devices did not appear until the second quarter of the twelfth century, becoming the symbol of

nobility and gentility. Four coats of arms are particularly associated with the abbey: the cross, gold on a red background, technically engrailed though with only one point on each side and so distinguished as the ‘Tewkesbury Cross’; the gold lion on a blue shield attributed to Robert Fitzhamon; the golden ‘clarions’ or musical pipes attributed to Robert earl of Gloucester; and the red ‘chevronny’ of the Clares. It would have been helpful at this point if references to the manuscript folios were quoted; indeed the interest of the Catalogue essentially requires constant turning of the pages, to match up with the brief biography, description of the painting, and heraldic detail of each illustration. Unfortunately the illustrations are not included in the Index.

The monk who compiled the genealogy could draw on A Genealogical Roll of the founders and benefactors which existed at Tewkesbury; many of The Founders’ Book shields can be identified in this eighteen-foot long roll in the Bodleian Library which includes an abbreviated version of the abbey chronicle down to 1400, later continued up to the early 1480s. A second source was the Rous Roll, compiled by John Rous, a chantry priest in Guy’s Cliffe, Warwickshire; like The Founders’ Book this is an illustrated chronicle of the benefactions to Warwick and good deeds of the earls of Warwick, compiled for a member of the Beauchamp family. There were many links between Warwick and Tewkesbury. (The English version is in the British Library and the Latin version in the College of Heralds.) The roll was published in 1980. Both these probable sources contain an armorial key to the elaborate shield of Prince Edward, son of George duke of Clarence, as also does *The Founders’ Book*. Another source of the heraldry was the Abbey itself, especially the Warwick chapel, and other tombs and monuments; Ailes describes the late medieval Abbey as a ‘family mausoleum’. The stained glass windows were also a source. He concludes that the heraldry of The Founders’ Book was ‘a deliberate and revised attempt to record and celebrate in symbolic pictorial language a continuous history of the Abbey through individuals and families that reached back to pre-Conquest days’.

The third section, ‘Transcriptions and Translations’ by Susan Powell, starts on page 64 and runs to page 133. This is an important contribution to scholarship. It gives us the text of the Great Charter of William earl of Gloucester, which starts on folio 6r with a heading in red ink, a large painting of William and a start on the text, which continues on 7r and 7v. A blank page separates the charter from the start of the history of the Abbey in part 4 with Oddo and Doddo given a full page illustration on folio 8v. Powell’s transcription of the Latin is given on one page and on the opposite page the translation. She describes her editorial principles, but says that the transcriptions are not critical editions, since she does not give all the variant readings but she does give some of the more important variants. One incidental observation on the text is made by Luxford, albeit confined to footnote 12, which is the eleven variations in the spelling of the place-name Tewkesbury.

The text of these crucial sections of The Founders’ Book has not previously been available and here can be read with ease and studied in relation to the Latin. Powell’s transcription also acts as an index to the people in the illustrations, rather more compactly than the Heraldry section of the text, though as mentioned above, their inclusion in the Index would have been a useful facility.

The Friends of Tewkesbury Abbey and the Tewkesbury Abbey Publications committee are to be congratulated on supporting this splendid publication, and the Bodleian Library for making the scanned images available free of reproduction fees. It is a very worthy celebration of this formerly great Abbey.

ANTHEA JONES

Cheltenham