An early Boston Charter

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When I examined the beginnings of the port of Boston\(^1\) I was able to find few original charters dating from the first century of the town's history. Now a hitherto unknown charter has appeared among the Phillippus manuscripts (Fig. 1),\(^2\) and has passed into private ownership, where I have been able to examine it. It is of some interest as one of the few acts of Geoffrey, fourth son of King Henry 11, who in 1181 married Constancie daughter of Conan IV earl of Richmond, and was the father of Prince Arthur. The editors of Early Yorkshire Charters\(^3\) found only one other charter of Geoffrey in England, although it seems likely that Tanner owned one, perhaps this example.\(^4\)

The charter records a confirmation by Geoffrey to Reiner of Waxham, steward of Ranulf of Glanville, of a wide plot in Boston which Adam son of William son of Edred of Richmond had granted to him. The earl gives Reiner liberty to make two steps before his house, provided that he maintains at his own charges the road in front of the house and does no harm to the fair, and if there is need he is permitted to lift the level of the road towards the water. The likely date is 1184, when Geoffrey is known to have been in England.\(^5\)

The extent to which the honoraire barony of Richmond was prepared to exploit the potential of the 'new' port of Boston, as owners, if not occupiers, of plots in the town, and the variations in plot sizes, to which I have already drawn attention\(^1\) are clearly illustrated by this charter. The plot was wide, with a road before it which seems to have bordered the river; it was partly built, and there was on the river frontage an entrance gate, for which steps were required\(^6\) and it looked out on the site of the fair.

Too few of earl Geoffrey's charters have as yet been available for detailed study to permit close dating: I have suggested 1184, since we know him to have been in England in that year,\(^4\) although it could have been assigned to the years 1176 to 1179, when he had received the earldom, but had not yet married Constance. The recipient Reiner of Waxham is known as the steward of the Justiciar Ranulf Glanville, and his deputy in the shrievalty of Yorkshire,\(^2\) he seems to have been an important figure in the household of the earls of Richmond. Most of the witnesses appear regularly in Richmond charters: Alan the twin is a son of Lambert of Mouton; he, Alan of Bussingbourne, and Ralph Fen were household knights of the earldom.

G. Regis Henrici filius, Dux Britanniae, et Comes Richmunde, Dapiferus, Constabulario, Camerario suo, et omnibus ministeribus suis, et omnibus hominibus suis fratribus et amicis, salutem. Sciatis me concessisse, et hae carta mea confirmaisse, Reinero de Waxhamensi senescale domini Ranulfii de Glanvilla et heredibus suis hereditarie tenendum illum largum patentem in villa sancti Botuli quam Adam filius Willelmi filii Edredi de Richemundia ei dedit pro servicio suo. Redando predicto Ade annuitatem unam libram piperis ad festum sancti Botuli pro omnibus serviciis. Et preter hoc concedo predicto Reinero habere binois gradus iunctos dominii facte super predictam placeam. Et Reverendus predictus servabili viam ante domum ad custum suum, uit quod feria mea detrimentum non habeat, et concedo ei si opus fuerit ut crescat viam in aquam. Testibus

\(^1\) Lincolnshire History and Archaeology Vol. 23, 1988

\(^2\) Fig. 1 Phillippus ms 33360.
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Alano Gemello, Osberto de Glanville, Nigello filio Alexandri, Radulfo cannerario, Alano de Bassigburn, Gykello filio Alani, Radulfo de Fenne, Henrico de Fleg', Willelmno Volant. Aput Lond'.

G. son of King Henry, duke of Brittany and earl of Richmond, sends greetings to his steward, constable, chamberlain, and all his servants, and to all his men, both French and English. Know that I have granted and confirmed to Reiner of Waxham, steward of Lord Ranulf Glanville and his heirs, to be held in hereditary, that wide plot in the town of Boston given to him for his service by Adam son of William son of Edred of Richmond, he paying annually to Adam for all dues, one pound of pepper at the feast of St. Botolph. I further grant to Reiner that he may have two steps joined to the house built on the plot. He is to maintain at his own charges the road before the house, in such a way that the fair suffers no damage from it, and if there is need he may raise (?)build up) a road to the water. Witnesses Alan the twin... At London.

NOTES
4. R. Gale, Registrum Honoris de Richmond (London, 1722), includes illustrations of the seals of the earls 'from the collections of Thomas Tanner': no. V is the seal of Earl Geoffrey.
6. It seems that the steps give on to a road, but it is possible that a landing stair or water gate is intended.