

Did the Countess Judith live at Kempston Manor?

The Domesday Book shows that, amongst the very many manors held ('of the king') by Judith, most entries show someone (presumably a local lord) holding that manor 'of Judith'. The DD book also lists several manors which are shown as simply a being held by Judith - ie they have no-one else's name attached to them. This got me wondering, who lived in those unattached manors?

One possibility, given Judith's very high status, and the fact that her husband Waltheof was Earl of Northumberland, Northampton and Hunts and that these otherwise unattached manors lay scattered around those counties, is that Judith may have maintained several homes - i.e. in those unattached manors - eg at Sawtry (Hunts), Kempston etc.

Judith founded local churches in several counties but Bedfordshire appears to be the only place where she not only founded a church (All Saints Kempston) but also an Abbey (Elstow). If the story that she founded Elstow Abbey in memory of Waltheof is true, one has to ask why - of all the lands she held - would she choose this particular location?

It would seem reasonable to think that Judith might want to site Waltheof's memorial Abbey near to their family home. If that were the case, then, whilst Judith appears to have had several homes, it could well have been that Kempston Manor was her and Waltheof's primary home.

After Waltheof's execution, King William tried to get Judith to marry Simon de Senlis, but she refused. William stripped her of all her properties and gave them to her three children. Judith fled back to France but later returned to England and married a Scot - Malcom of Gillocallum. She had a son by him - called Ughtred Waltheofson (it seems remarkably kind of Malcolm to permit that name!). Judith died, in Scotland, in 1086.

Judith's oldest daughter, Maud, also established a Scottish connection, when she married King David of Scotland. They had a son - Henry, Prince of Scotland. Remarkably, when King David died, Maud then married her mum (Judith)'s rejected suitor, Simon de Senlis!

Maud's son Henry also had a son - John le Scot. John was the last overlord of Kempston Manor (yet another family connection to this area). After John's death, Kempston Manor was split into three manors, one for each of John's sisters. (Daubeney Manor, Brucebury or Draytons Manor and Hastingsbury Manor, later known as Greys Manor.)

One might conclude that, whilst the claim that Judith lived at Kempston Manor remains unproven, it does appear probable.