

SOME ASPECTS OF HAMPSHIRE LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

The customary rights in the forests and woodlands and other manorial commons, which the people had inherited from their Saxon forefather's were privileges of special value to the poorer tenants in this county during the middle ages. These customary rights of pasture, pannage, and other privileges had existed from time immemorial and were recognised in the West Saxon laws. These privileges were enjoyed by the manorial tenants through the medieval period and have survived in some parts of the county unto the present day. They were continued generally until their final extinction by the Enclosure Acts, and have greatly helped to make the peasantry of Hampshire a stationary population. There were in addition to the woodland customs, which varied considerably, but usually included firebote or the privilege of taking a reasonable amount of dead wood, and in some instances the lop and top of timber for fuel, in many places also haybote for making and repairing fences, and in other places housebote for building and repairing houses.

The firebote custom still prevails in the New Forest where many old tenements exist which are entitled by ancient usage to a certain amount of firewood annually, and in order to maintain this right the old chimney stacks are carefully preserved whenever the cottages or other ancient houses are rebuilt. In some parts of the forest these old chimney stacks may still be seen standing near the modern cottages in order to preserve this right in those cases in which it was inconvenient to use the old chimney for the new dwelling. When Copythorn Common in Eling parish was enclosed in 1812, sixty-three and a half acres were allotted to the poor for fuel in lieu of their ancient firebote, and when the common lands of East Woodhay were inclosed in 1818, forty acres were apportioned in lieu of this ancient custom, to buy fuel for the poor. As late as the beginning of the present century to take

snapwood or such dead wood as could be broken off trees by a hook or a crook, was a common manorial right widely exercised in Hampshire. The expression "by hook or by crook" probably arose from this ancient custom.

Another common woodland right which the tenants on many manors in this county had inherited from the Saxon period and exercised during the middle ages, was that of haybote or the right to cut thorns and other underwood for making the hays or fences. When Henry I. established the priory of Southwick, haybote was one of the privileges granted in the king wood of Hyngesdone. At the time of the Domesday Survey the privilege of haybote existed on many Hampshire manors and the copses for fences are mentioned in Domesday Book at Dean, Mottisfont, Tytherley, Combe, Crux Easton, Linkenholt, Clere, Church Oakley, Bramdean, and other places on the mainland, and also at Shorwell, Gatcombe, Calbourne and other places in the Isle of Wight.

A further ancient woodland privilege on some manors was that of housebote or the right of wood for building and repairing houses on the manor. There are references in Domesday Book to the prevalence of this custom at Broughton, Chalton, Southwick, and places in or near the New Forest. The woods on the episcopal manor of Bishopstoke were liable for timber to repair the bridges. This was claimed in 1889 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in whom the manor is now vested. A similar right existed at Havant.

In addition to these forest and woodland common rights, there were rights of turbarry, or cutting turf for fuel, which is still exercised largely in the New Forest, the right of digging gravel for repairing roads, and chalk, gravel, clay, sand, or loam for making the dob which was the material commonly used in building cottages. The digging of chalk for marling the land was also widely exercised and some of these ancient rights still survive.

A second aspect of Hampshire life during the middle ages, was that presented by its manufactures. Foremost among these was that of woollen cloth, which was carried on at Winchester, Alton, Andover, Basingstoke, Whitechurch,

Odiham, and other places. Winchester was the centre of this ancient trade and the name of Winchester cloth was a trade term for pieces of woollen cloth twenty-six to twenty-seven yards in length. Village medley cloth was another trade name for those produced by the handlooms in the villages. The blue cloth which in the middle ages was dealt in so largely at Winchester has been sold at the fair there within the last century. The weavers and fullers were important trade guilds at Winchester, and are mentioned there as early as the time of Henry II when each of these crafts paid £6 per annum for their guild. (1). The cloth made in Hampshire formed an article of commerce with the Venetians from the 12th to the 16th centuries and was bought by them and shipped at Southampton. The festival of Bishop Blaise, the patron saint of clothworkers, has been celebrated at Alton within the last 100 years, and also at Andover.

The manufacture of iron was another medieval industry in Hampshire. It was limited by the supply of the ore, but this was sufficient for the limited uses to which iron was put. Iron furnaces existed in the New Forest, at Hammer near Petersfield on the Sussex border, and in the north of the county. The Hampshire smiths were of considerable importance, and the manufacture of iron implements, horse shoe nails, and weapons was carried on by them in various parts. It was a New Forest smith who presented King Rufus with some arrows for the crossbow of his own manufacture at Brockenhurst on the morning of his last fatal hunting expedition (2) and as the king gave two of these to Walter Tyrell perhaps it was with one of them that he was slain. Cobbe, the smith, held land in the 13th century at Eling. The sheriff of Hampshire was ordered to supply horse shoes and nails sufficient for 2,500 horses in the crusade undertaken by Richard I. The price of horseshoes at Odiham in 1265, where they were sold in gross, was seven dozen for 5s. 6½d, the nails at the same time being quoted at 1s. 1d. per 1000.

(1) Maddox Firma Burgi. p. 26.

(2) Chroniques Anglo Normande by Geoffrey Gaimier I. p. 51, quoted by Freeman.

During the middle ages salt making was an important industry on the Hampshire coast. This was largely carried on at Dibden, Mengham, and Northwood in Hayling Island, Wymering, Bowcombe, Titchfield (probably at Brownwick) Lymington, Emsworth, Bedhampton, Marchwood, and St. Helens. In the taxation of moveables known as that of the fifteenth and tenth made in 1334 which was allowed to become a fixed amount at which places were subsequently taxed for centuries, these old salt producing places in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight were assessed at much higher values than their importance would otherwise warrant. Thus Mengeham and Northwood were taxed at £4 11s. 9d. and £4 5s. 6d. respectively, while the borough of Petersfield was only taxed at £1 14s. od., and Fareham only at 16s. 5d. In the Island, Bowcomb which had a saltern in 1086, was taxed in 1334 at £5 9s. 6d., while Carisbrook was only taxed at £1 2s. 2d. Several of the old country roads in Hampshire are still known as the salt ways along which the salt from the coast way conveyed inland.

During the middle ages also several towns in this county had an important trade in leather. At Petersfield a special official was appointed in connection with it who was known as the leather sealer and whose business it was to stamp the leather. He was appointed by the Court Leet after the ancient custom as recent as 1887.
