

OVERTON AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

This place situated near the headwater of the Test, the longest stream in Hampshire, is one which must have been indicated by natural circumstances as a good site for a primitive settlement, and we find that two races of pre-historic inhabitants certainly settled in this neighbourhood. Pioneers in unknown countries at the present time commonly follow the courses of rivers up to their sources as a convenient means of exploration. So probably it happened when Hampshire was largely covered with forests, in that distant era, during which the Neolithic or Iberian settlers in this part of England coming from the continent along the coast westward to Southampton Water made their way up the river Test to its sources near Overton. The stone implements of these Neolithic or Iberian people have been found on the shores of Southampton Water and the Hampshire coast, and others have also been found not far from this place.

The weapons of this kind found in Hampshire are commonly made of native stone, ground smooth or polished. A stone implement of this shape made of a stone not found in Britain, resembling the mineral nephrite or jade, has, however, lately been found at Hordle Cliff, and, as far as I know, it is the only example of a Neolithic weapon made of foreign stone which has been found in Hampshire. Jade has not even been found in Europe. This weapon has certainly travelled far, and may have travelled very far—for the Neolithic or Iberian race can be traced by the dolmens they built over their dead, buried in a sitting position, and by the shape of their long skulls—backwards through France and Spain to North Africa, one of the lines of migration of our swallows. The date of the Neolithic long-skulled race in Hampshire cannot be less than about 1200 or 1400 B.C., the approximate date of the introduction of bronze into Britain. It will help us to realise that era if we remember that at that time Assyria and Egypt were still in the height of their power and of their influence as centres of ancient civilisation, while at the same time this part

of Britain was passing through its stone age. This is about the date we may safely assign to the earliest inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Overton.

The archæological interest of Overton is consequently of two kinds—1. That which is pre-historic, concerning which there is the evidence of the long barrows, and of the weapons of the Iberian or Neolithic race, and also the evidence of the round barrows reared by the later Celtic race, and their bronze weapons. This race, unlike the Iberians, cremated their dead, as the ashes found in the round barrows show. We have also traces of languages of both these races in existing place names of this neighbourhood. There is likewise another consideration which comes up here. Plenty of evidence exists to show that the early Celts, and probably their predecessors, were Sun worshippers, and also revered springs and water sources as the givers of fertility to mother earth. Viewed in this light Overton must have been a place of some reverence to them. 2. We have historical evidence connected with Overton in the Saxon and later medieval periods, concerning which there are records, and also some architectural remains, the chief of which we see in this church, but earlier work may be seen at Quidhampton. As regards the records, we must remember that Overton has been so long connected with the bishopric of Winchester that it is to the episcopal rather than to the national records that we must look for information concerning its history, and these episcopal records have not been published. Several waggon loads of these documents, books, and papers, were, I believe, removed from Winchester to London at the time when the estates became vested in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. A mass of information concerning Overton must be now in the hand of the Commissioners.

No part of Hampshire affords a better example of the survival of ancient water names and place names than this neighbourhood.

Overton has probably derived the first part of its name "Over," or "Ouer" as it is spelt in some old documents, from the language of the Iberian race, spoken here before the time of the Celts—for *oure* is a Basque water word, and the

Basques of Southern France and Northern Spain are the modern representatives of the long-skulled people who made the long barrows, reared dolmens over their dead, whom they buried in a sitting or contracted position, and who made the stone implements of the newer stone age in England, some of which, found in Hampshire, are exhibited to-day. Water names are the most enduring in all countries, and Overton, the water settlement, bears out its very ancient name.

The words "pwl" and "ac" or "ache" are Celtic water words, and it is from these words that the names Polhampton and Ashe have been partly or wholly derived. The early Celts of Hampshire were the people who first cremated their dead chieftains, and afterwards heaped up round barrows over their ashes, examples of which occur near here. The name Quidhampton, anciently spelt Quedhampton, is also partly a Celtic name, from coed, a wood.

Overton supplies us with some examples of the survival of Roman influence. The northern boundary of its ancient hundred is marked by the Roman road from Silchester to Old Sarum, and this road must have been a much frequented thoroughfare when the boundary of the hundred was first fixed. The old north and south roads of Overton, which are still used, were probably then used as branch roads to the great Roman highway. The name of that great road, "the Portway," is a word partly of Latin origin, one of the few surviving old Latin names in Hampshire. Also it is well known that, under the Romans, land was held by settlers called *coloni*, who could not remove, but held their land otherwise by a free tenure. As late as the time of the Saxons Overton had in the outlying part of its hundred on the north three thanes, who held their land by a similar tenure to that of the old Roman *coloni*, *i.e.*, they could not remove, but were otherwise free tenants.

The earliest historical reference to Overton I have met with is dated 940 A.D., and is a grant by King Edmund to the religious woman Etheldry of land at Polhampton in Overton, one of its early manors. This estate was granted free of all obligations except those of thane service, *viz.*, liability for

service or taxation in case of invasion, and taxation for the repair of bridges and local defences. This charter is signed by Edmund the king, Eadgifu the king's mother, Eadred the brother of the king, who afterwards succeeded him, Wulhelm the archbishop, eight other bishops, and other notable personages who sign as duces, *i.e.*, aldermen of counties. The account given of Overton in Domesday Book is necessarily short, but it affords us a graphic description of how the land was held here, and other particulars concerning it in the 11th century.

The connection of Overton with the bishopric of Winchester was ancient even in the 11th century, for Domesday Book tells us that the Manor always belonged to the bishopric. That probably means that Overton formed part of the original endowment of early bishops of Winchester, so that it has probably been held for ecclesiastical purposes for about 1000 years. At the time of the Domesday survey Overton was one of the largest manors held by the bishop. It had an agricultural community which comprised 50 villeins or husbandmen (whose successors afterwards became copyholders), 27 borderers or labourers, and 17 serfs or slaves, all with their families. There were two churches on the manor, one of which probably stood on this site, and there were four mills for grinding the corn produced by this great manor.

The demesne land which was cultivated by the community for their lord was small, only five ploughlands, compared to that which these working tenants cultivated for themselves, *viz.*, 27 ploughlands. The bishop must have derived his revenue not only from the produce of his land by the labour of the tenants of the Manor, but from other sources and dues, for Domesday Book tells us that the value of the manor in the time of King Edward the Confessor was £24, and that it had risen to £50, and actually paid at that time £61.

Although inhabited in pre-historic time Overton grew into a town as the centre of a great episcopal manor. Its history cannot be written until the collection of Court Rolls and other MS. documents and books relating to the manors of the Bishops of Winchester have been carefully searched. Here is a good field for a local historian with plenty of leisure.

As the Manor and Hundred belonged to the bishop, the national records contain but little concerning it. When, however, some dispute arose between the bishop and his tenants concerning the services they owed him, or other causes, as in the time of Edward I. and Edward II., we read of the bishop's tenants, including the men of Overton, making their pleas before the king, but such references are rare.

OVERTON HUNDRED.

Overton gave its name to one of the Hundreds of the county. At the time of the Domesday survey this Hundred included Ashe, Laverstoke, and Overton, with Polhampton. It was thus a centre of local government for its neighbourhood. Here the tything-men assembled in Anglo-Saxon time, at the view of Frank Pledge, and here was held the Court Leet for the Hundred, at which the assize of bread and ale was regulated and the ale taster sworn into office. There must also have been a gallows somewhere near here. Overton Hundred, as well as the Manor, was under the lordship of the Bishop, who held his view of Frank Pledge and Court Leet here, at, I presume, what is now known as Court Farm. There is a record of this Court under the name of "the View of Overton" in 35 Edward III., which is mentioned by Mr. Thoyts in his History of Ashe. In addition to its Court Leet, Overton had other courts which belonged to its several Manors. The days on which Courts Leet met were called Law-days, while those on which any of the Manor Courts assembled were called Hall-days.

Quidhampton has its hall, and Mr. Thoyts tell us that there is a house still known there as Halle Place.

There are some ecclesiastical references relating to Overton which are of interest. As we examine this church we cannot fail to be struck with the length of its chancel. Chancels of churches are commonly vested in the rectors, but Overton has this peculiarity, which is very uncommon. It had for centuries two incumbents, namely, an ecclesiastical rector, and also a vicar, both offices being at the present time held, I believe, by the present incumbent. In 1291 Overton Church was assessed at £46 13s. 4d., and the tax of one-tenth, £4 13s. 4d., paid, known as the tax of Pope Nicholas, for the

purposes of the last Crusade. In the taxation of 1334 the Hundred was assessed to pay £18 9s. 11d., the tything of Overton itself paying £3 12s. 8d., Southington and Northington £4 of this amount. In the taxation of the 15th Edward III., in aid of the French wars of that King, following the *Inquisitiones nonarum*, and known as the ninth of sheaves, wool, and lambs, the jury at Overton, consisting of four residents, named John Forest, John Horwood, John Woodberg, and Ralph Wyngam, declared *super sacramentum* the medieval form of oath, probably taken in this church upon sacred articles, that the ninth of sheaves, wool, and lambs of the parish of Overton in the 13th year of Edward I. amounted to the annual value of £16. The church at that time had a house, six virgates of land, pasture, meadow, garden, and wood. The small tithes, oblations, and mortuaries, *i.e.*, the church dues at that time, they stated were worth £14 1s. 7d. per annum. It is worth noticing that three out of the four jurymen on that occasion bore names derived from the forest land or woods which formerly existed in this neighbourhood. In the time of Henry VIII. the two incumbents of this benefice were John Claymond, Rector, the Rectory being valued at £30 6s. 8d. per annum, and Thomas Skelton, Vicar, the Vicarage being worth £14 12s. 3d. per annum.

THE BOROUGH OF OVERTON.

Overton was one of the medieval boroughs of Hampshire. There is a document relating to the liberties of its burgesses in the Patent Rolls, dated 20 Edward I., *i.e.*, about 1292. Very soon afterwards, *viz.*, in 1295, Overton was represented by two burgesses in the same Parliament in which Winchester, Southampton, Portsmouth, Andover, and other Hampshire boroughs were first represented, a circumstance showing its early importance. For the early Parliaments which met between 1297 and 1306-7 Overton continued to receive writs, but afterwards it ceased to have Parliamentary representation. It is, however, an interesting circumstance that it was a Parliamentary borough nearly three centuries before the neighbouring town of Whitchurch first received its writ, in 1586.

The names of the burgesses of Overton who represented it in these early Parliaments will be, perhaps, of interest :—In 1295 it was represented by John Pistor and William Horn ; in 1300-1301 by Thomas Laurens and Walter Horn ; in 1306 by William atte Ford ; and in 1307 by William Laurens and John Horewood.

Overton appears to have been a prosperous place in the Early English period. It was about that time, as the architecture shows, that a considerable part of the church was built or restored, and it was about the same time that it was represented in Parliament. It was also in the Early English period that its chief fair appears to have been established, in the 31st Henry III., *i.e.*, about 1247. Overton sheep fair, in comparatively modern times, was second only to that of Weyhill. A writer in 1843 states that "100,000 sheep are sometimes penned at Overton Fair." Overton formerly had a local trade in silk manufacture. The silk factory is marked on Faden's map of Hampshire, published in 1791. Its abundant water supply was early used as a source of power for mills. It had four mills, and Polhampton had two at the time of the Domesday Survey. As it existed in the middle ages this place well illustrates the manorial system, then in active operation. The Bishop held the large manor, and was also lord of the Hundred, but other small manors within the Hundred were held by other tenants in chief, who held their own manor courts. Of these there were two small manors in Polhampton, one of which subsequently became known as Quidhampton. Both of these are mentioned in the Domesday Survey.

At that time a knight who bore a Norman name held one of the manors of Polhampton of the King, and a Saxon thane held another from the Bishop of Winchester. It is stated that the value of this in the time of King Edward was £8; afterwards £7 10s., and that it was for the support of the Monks of St. Swithun. This was the manor which afterwards became known as Quidhampton. There are many references to Quidhampton in the records preserved in Winchester Cathedral available for the future historian of Overton. The old chapel at Quidhampton is frequently mentioned in these

records. The Almoner's Rolls of the Priory in 1515 state that it was repaired in that year. The Obedientiary Rolls of the Priory, lately published by the Hampshire Record Society, contain a detailed account of the expenditure. The title of its manor went to the fund of the Almoner of the Priory. A chaplain was kept at Quidhampton by the Priory, and in the 14th century he was paid 30s. 4d. per annum.

In the time of Edward II (9 Edw. II) Quidhampton was held by John Cyfrewast, who had a dispute with the Abbot of Waverley, and whose name occurs in the Cathedral records as well as in the National record known as the Nomina Villarum. In 1334 it was assessed for the taxation of the 10th and 15th at 18s. 8d.

From these remarks it will be seen that Overton is a place whose history deserves to be written. Mr. W. W. Portal informs us that of the four mills alluded to in this paper three exist to this day; two are grinding mills as in olden times, and the third in the occupation of his family is used for the manufacture of paper for bank notes. The fourth is destroyed, but some cottages near still bear the name of Silk Mill Cottages. We would call attention to the fine old key of the church door, and the iron work on the door which are most probably of Hampshire iron. Two of the bells are very good, one being dated 1610. At Quidhampton, a stable is all that remains of what was once a chapel. On the southern side some herring-bone shaped flint work, of Norman or possibly earlier date may be observed; there are also traces of a small half-circle window. At Polhampton and Quidhampton the headwater and springs of the Test may be noticed. Ashe Church is apparently a new church, but it was built with much of the old materials. An old stone over the entrance to the church bore the date 1391, and a coin of 1280 was found in the mortar of the old building. One of the plates of the molar tooth of an adult elephant was also dug up near the church. Two tablets in the chancel inscribed with the names of the patrons of the living from 1309 and of the rectors from 1308, are interesting as showing the continuity of the church. The name Ashe is derived from Ac, a Celtic spring or water-source name.
