

HAMBLEDON AND THE FOREST OF BERE.

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The early history of Hambledon is shrouded in the mists of antiquity, and very little has yet been done to dispel those mists. Hambledon is not so much as mentioned in the largest history of this county which has yet been written, viz., that by Woodward and Wilks. The visit of the Hampshire Field Club to this interesting place is therefore a fitting opportunity for making a beginning in the collection of materials for its history.

I look at the early history of such a place as Hambledon from a geological standpoint. Here in the midst of the great forest land of this part of Hampshire is a place of well-marked natural features, with a good soil upon the chalk slopes which must have recommended the position to the early inhabitants of Hampshire, as its beauty commends it to ourselves to-day.

The great forest with which Hambledon was connected in pre-historic, and also in historic time, was that which became known as the Forest of Bere. That part of it which lay nearest the village was more particularly known as Hambledon Forest or Hambledon Chace. The tumuli which still exist on various parts of the downland near Hambledon and elsewhere in this neighbourhood show that this part of Hampshire was inhabited in ancient British time.

The situation of this little town is so remarkable that it could not have failed to attract their attention. In a paper on "The Celts in Hampshire" I have brought before the Anthropological Institute some circumstances connected with Celtic burial sites. These people in some instances in this county selected the sources of occasional springs as the place where they disposed of their dead. This is the case at the Seven Barrows in the north of Hampshire, where after long intervals, perhaps only once in ten or twenty years, the occasional spring

flows, and a stream rises close to the Seven Barrows. Many pre-historic burial sites have been obliterated, and there is reason to think that others in Hampshire were adopted as the sites of church and churchyards.

Here, in Hambledon, we see one of the most ancient churches in the county, having the most ancient orientation, and here also in the village and near this churchyard we have the sources of an occasional stream called the Lavant, part of which has been known to arise from the churchyard itself. The rapid rising of water in the wells at Hambledon at certain seasons is caused by its position among the chalk hills. The roads have occasionally been flooded by these springs. From the similarity of these conditions and its known Saxon antiquity it is not improbable that Hambledon churchyard was a pre-historic burial site.

Bere Forest formerly extended westward as far as the boundaries of Southampton. As late as the year 1253 the boundary of Bere Forest, part of which had no doubt long been cultivated, joined the boundaries of Southampton. In that year an inquisition was held by 24 lawful men before Sir Ernaldus de Bosco, the King's Justice of the Forest, at which part of the limits of Bere Forest were declared to be the present boundary of Southampton Common and the road from thence to the river Itchen. We have passed to-day one of the remaining portions of this most ancient forest, which was at one time so extensive. This forest had its Swainmote Court, similar to that which was established subsequently within the area of the New Forest by William I, and which has survived in a modified form there until our own time. In the grant of land made to Titchfield Abbey on its establishment by Henry III, the suit at the Swainmote Court and all the other pleas of the forest are mentioned as having an existence at that time in this forest of Bere.

Here near the northern part of the forest, among the beautiful hills and vales in the neighbourhood of Hambledon, several small forest village communities existed in the time of the Saxons, and how long before we cannot say. The name Hambledon is met with in old records as Hameldon or Hamuldon. Ham is the Saxon word for a homestead, hulle the

Saxon word for a hill, and don for an old fortified site of some sort. Hameldon probably meant therefore the hilly homestead by the old earthwork or fortified place. There are, I believe, no traces of any earthwork on the site of Bury Lodge at Hambledon, or only faint traces at the present time, but the name 'bury' which is the Saxon equivalent for a fortified site, still remains.

Hambledon is one of those places in Hampshire which grew in importance as the area of the forest land around it became diminished. Purprestures or enclosures of parts of Bere forest went on during the middle ages; for example, in 1338 King Edward III confirmed to Robert de Hoe and Lucy his wife, two purprestures in the manor of the Bishop of Winchester at Hambledon, containing 28 acres of land, and two other purprestures adjoining the same, containing 40 acres, with common pasture, for their animals and cattle in the waste of the same manor. Some of the existing place-names round Hambledon are forest names, which they first received when the forest existed. Denmead, Glidden, Chidden, Hoe Gate, Holt, and others are all forest names. The dens or deens were the boundaries of the forest at such places.

One of the chief architectural antiquities of Hampshire is the King's Hall at Winchester, built by Henry III, and the building of this hall is connected with a change in Bere forest, for that king issued a writ to Peter de Roche, Bishop of Winchester, ordering him to cut down and sell all the underwood in this forest, and apply the proceeds to the making of the great hall in the Castle of Winchester, which is now the County Hall. Bere forest was frequently drawn upon for timber for the repair of the royal houses—for example, King John in 1207 ordered the warden of the forest to supply wood for the repair of the king's house at Southampton, and at a later date a quantity of timber was ordered to be supplied for the repairs of the king's house and other buildings in the Castle of Winchester. In the time of Edward II a large conversion of forest land into cultivated land took place, for that king gave 80 acres of purpesture, then called the new purpesture, to Richard de Portsea, on payment of 7s. 4d. annually on the feast of St. Nicholas at the Castle of Winchester. In the

26th year of Edward III his Commissioners were authorised to sell 30 acres of underwood in the same forest of Bere. Bere forest thus became less and less in extent as time went on. In 1791 its limits south of Hambledon were marked by a boundary stretching from St. Clare Farm to South-end, thence to Hoe Gate, thence to Denmead Gate, thence to Barn Green, thence to Eastland Gate, and eastward to Forest Gate near Blendworth. The great part of this was open, but some of it inclosed woodland. Notwithstanding the extensive ancient inclosures which were made in Bere forest, it still consisted of 16,000 acres within the limits of its perambulation, as late as 1810, of which 10,000 acres lay open, and subject to the range and feed of the king's deer and the commoners' cattle.

Bere Forest and Hambledon Chace have since been inclosed, the commoners' rights have been extinguished by appropriations made to them, and many modern cottages, homesteads, and modern hamlets which you may see over parts of this ancient forest land have come into existence as a result of these appropriations.

Hambledon was more particularly connected with that part of this forest land which was known as Hambledon Chace, all the ripe timber of which had been cut down before 1807, and which was, I believe, to a large extent situated to the north of Hambledon. [The earliest historical reference to any part of Hambledon, as far as I know, is a charter by King Edwy in A.D. 956, in which he grants land at Chidden to Prince Æthelgeard.] The early history of Hambledon is closely connected with that of East Meon. Like the Meon valley, it was probably occupied by the Jutes, who assisted the West Saxons in the conquest of what is now called Hampshire. The entry in Domesday Book relating to it is as follows :—

William de Percy holds Hambledon. He received it in right of his wife and Alwin held it of King Edward. It was then as now assessed at 1 hide. There are 3 ploughlands, 1 in demesne and 6 villeins and 6 borderers with 2 ploughlands. Here are 2 slaves and a mill worth 12d. There is a wood for 4 hogs. In the time of King Edward it was assessed at £4, its present value. When the tenant came into possession it was worth only £3.

Under the land of Roger Earl of Montgomery and Arundel it is stated that Edward holds a hide in Hambledon. He held it of Earl Godwin and he could not remove without his permission. It was then in Chalton as it is now. It was then assessed at one hide as now. Here is a ploughland in demesne with 2 borderers. Here is a wood for 6 hogs. It was and is valued at 20s.

This entry contains no mention of the Bishop of Winchester, who was subsequently, as is well known, the chief landholder at Hambledon, but this is probably explained by its connexion with East Meon. The extent of land mentioned at East Meon is very great, and it had been taken into the King's hand from the bishopric on the death of Archbishop Stigand—so that as a far greater quantity of land than can be otherwise explained was entered under East Meon, it probably included part of what was subsequently known as the Hundred of Hambledon, which the Bishop held later on.

At the time of the survey, Hambledon was included in the Hundred of Meonstoke, an entry in favour of the view that its people were of Jutish descent. Its inhabitants would be known as the Meonwara or people of Meon, as well as those living at East Meon. The great manor of East Meon, including perhaps the manor of Hambledon, remained in the hands of the Crown from 1070 until 1199, when King John granted it to the Bishop of Winchester.

Hambledon was part of the Hundred of East Meon more than 200 years after that date. In the record known as the *Nomina Villarum* made in 1314, containing the names of the hundreds and manors throughout England, the four tythings of Hambledon, viz., Hambledon, Chidden, Glidden, and Denmead, are all entered in the hundred of East Meon, and were held by the Bishop of Winchester. Up to this time the Bishops' Hambledon tenants would have to do their suit at the Hundred Court of East Meon, where this club viewed the remains of the court house last year. Then between 1314 and 1334 came a change, for the Hambledon tythings were made into a hundred of their own, and Hambledon hundred appears in the record of taxation of the tenth and fifteenth made in the latter year, 1334. The manor court house at Hambledon, parts of which still remain, was probably built about that time.

The entry in Domesday Book which states that one of the early manors in Hambledon was held by William de Percy is very interesting. It tells us that he received it through his wife, whom we know from other records was Emma de Port, a lady of the great baronial family of the de Ports, whose

burial place the club viewed in September last at Sherborn Priory, near Basingstoke. William de Percy was one of the favourite followers of the Conqueror, who gave him a barony of 30 knights' fees in his new kingdom. This Domesday lord of one of the Hambleton manors joined the first Crusade under Duke Robert of Normandy, and he died in 1096, at Mountjoy, near Jerusalem, that eminence from which the pilgrims to the Holy Land obtained their first view of Jerusalem. William de Percy was the ancestor of the Percys, Earls of Northumberland, and the founder of that great English family. The male line became extinct with his grandson, but the family was continued in the female line, his great granddaughter having married the brother of Queen Adeliza, the second wife of Henry I, who took the name of Percy. Their grandson William de Percy, who died in 1245, was still the superior lord of the manor at Hambleton, which his ancestor, who came over with the Conqueror, held in 1086. This land was held of William de Percy by Radulf de Punda as a knight's fee. This Percy estate in Hambleton must have been far away from the main property of the family. Its tenure in the time of Henry III is a good example of the feudal system. It was held by Radulf de Punda, who probably lived here. He held it of William de Percy, who held it of Robert de St. John (the successor of the de Port family who originally held it), and the St. John family held it of the King. The bishop's forest land about Hambleton was called a chace. A chace differed from a forest in being administered not under forest law, but common law, and the privilege of free chace was a very high franchise only held in Hampshire by the bishop, the Earl of Arundel, and the Duke of Lancaster. In the year 1201 the bishop paid 300 marks scutage or tax to the Crown on account of his woods, warrens, hundreds, and chaces. No privilege was more carefully guarded during the middle ages than that of hunting. The privilege of a free chace, which the Bishop of Winchester possessed over his woodland and forest areas, was only granted to the highest nobility in the kingdom. It was not even enjoyed by the great family of de Port, the Lords of Basing, the most extensive barony in Hampshire. The de Ports and the St Johns, who succeeded them, only had the franchise of a park, *i.e.*, they could hunt

within the park enclosure only. Free chase, as its name implies, gave the bishop and his agents liberty of chasing wild animals all over the whole manor whether cultivated or not. The Bishop of Winchester had chaces in Hampshire, at Highclere, Waltham, and at Hambledon.

The wild beasts of the forest were the red deer, the hare, the boar, and the wolf. These were reserved in forests for royal sport. The beasts which could be hunted on the free chase such as that of Hambledon, were fallow deer (the buck and the doe), fox, martin, and roe. Wild cats also abounded in the Hampshire woodlands in the 13th century. Several Hampshire records exist relating to these wild cats, and the persons who were empowered to go anywhere they chose about the county to kill them.

In 1256 Hambledon became possessed of a privilege which must have led to its growth and importance, viz., the right of holding a market. This it obtained under somewhat extraordinary circumstances. The Bishop of Winchester had died in 1250, and Henry III succeeded in forcing the monks of St. Swithun to elect as his successor his young half brother, Aymer de Valence, the son of the King's mother, by her second husband. This young man held the revenues of the see for ten years, but died before his return to England from Rome, where, after a long time, the Pope at last consecrated him to his office. Aymer or Ethelmar, the Bishop elect, held this manor of Hambledon, and he did a good thing for it, by obtaining from the king, his brother, the privilege of a market, and thus Hambledon took rank as a market town. In those days the privilege of a market included the privilege of opening shops, and the shops which we see in Hambledon to-day are the successors of those which were first placed on a legal basis by Aymer de Valence, the youthful bishop elect of Winchester, inducing his brother, King Henry III, to grant Hambledon that privilege. This grant of a market to Hambledon is curious, for usually where a market was granted a fair was also allowed once a year. Not so here at this time, for the Bishop had his own great fair on St. Giles's-hill at this time, and would not injure its revenues which he received. If the manor of Hambledon was not included in the grant by

which King John restored to the bishopric of Winchester the great manor of East Meon, it was certainly included in the bishop's possessions when Aymer de Valence got the grant in 1256.

Hambledon had a considerable ecclesiastical establishment. It had a bishop for its lord; it possessed a handsome and large church; its vicarage was an important benefice as early as the 13th century; the church had several chantries and presumably chantry priests, and it probably had a recluse living in apartments within the church itself. Hambledon had also, I believe, its hermit, whose cell was at Hermitage farm, and who guided travellers through that part of the forest.

In the taxation of English benefices by Pope Nicholas in 1291 for the purposes of the last Crusade the vicar of Hambledon was assessed at £13 6s. 3d., and paid a tax of £1 6s. 8d. In the taxation on movable property made in 1334, known as that of the tenth and fifteenth, Hambledon was assessed to pay 23s. 1d., Chidden 31s. 3d., Glidden 20s. 3d., and Denmead 32s., making a total for the ancient parish and then hundred of £5 6s. 7d., and this was the amount required to pay in similar taxations of movables for nearly 300 years.

In the early part of the 14th century some irregularities appear to have occurred both at Hambledon and East Meon in regard to the dues to the Bishop during the time when the see was vacant, for the Patent Rolls contain a record made in the first year of Edward III., *i.e.*, in 1327, ordering that the custodian of the spiritualities of Winton during the time of the vacancy of the see should alone receive all the dues which belonged to the bishop from the churches of East Meon and Hambledon.

On account of the great expenses of the wars of Edward III. in France Parliament granted the king in 1340 the ninth lamb, ninth fleece, and ninth sheaf of corn throughout the country for two years. The assessors of this tax were ordered to consider the 9th of corn, wool and lambs in 1340 to be worth as much as the tithes of corn, wool, and lambs in 1290. An inquisition was held at Hambledon for this valuation, and six men of this parish were sworn on a jury. Their names are interesting to us 550 years later. They were John Colemere,

John in la Dene, John de Rushmere, Robert le Stubbere, William in la Dene, and John le Murie. They declared *supra sacramentum* (the ancient form of oath), that the ninth of corn, wool, and lambs according to the order laid down must be valued at £14 13s. 4d., but that these did not amount to this sum, because in the valuation of the revenue of the church at Hambledon, was included a messuage, a garden, and a carucate of land, with pasture, which were of the value of £8 10s. 8d.
