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Monday, 31 January, 1910.

The Rev. Dr STOKES, President, in the Chair.

ARTHUR GRAY, Esq., M.A., read a paper, illustrated with maps and plans, on

THE FORD AND BRIDGE OF CAMBRIDGE.

The name Cambridge, or Grantebriġe, has long been a fruitful ground for speculation, to which I have contributed some share myself. It has been the first element in the name about which controversy has gathered. It is the second to which I invite your attention now. The suffix "bridge" is sufficiently common in place-names; but it has been remarked before now that the names—those at least which have any antiquity—in which it occurs are of unimportant places situated on insignificant streams. Cambridge is the only parliamentary borough, Cambridgeshire the only county whose name contains it. This is not merely a singularity. It has a historical significance. We shall be helped to an understanding of this significance by a consideration of the origin and primary use of the word "bridge." It has no relations in the Graeco-Italic or Celtic branches of the Indo-European speech. It is purely Teutonic, and in one form or another it belongs to all the Germanic and Scandinavian languages. When our Saxon forefathers first came to Britain they found everywhere monuments of Roman civilisation—paved roads, military camps, walls of brick or stone and lofty piles of masonry—things with which they were altogether unfamiliar in their North-German home. For such unfamiliar things they borrowed Roman names—street, chester, wall, tower. But they had no need to borrow a word for "bridge," for the thing and the name were Teutonic. The primitive Teutonic bridge, it is needless to say, was a thing of wood. Arched bridges, called in medieval times "bow" bridges, were not generally introduced into England until after

the Conquest. The celebrated bridge of Stratford atte Bow was erected in the twelfth century.

It has sometimes been surmised—I do not know for what reasons—that the bridge which gave Cambridge its name was not a bridge carried across the river but a hithe on its bank. There is no ground for such a supposition. A reference to *The New English Dictionary* will show that “bridge” never at any period of the English language meant “hithe.” It will show further that the original meaning of the word in English, and of the related words in other Teutonic languages, was simply “bridge” in its ordinary acceptation—a structure carrying a road over a river or ravine. Even if there could be a doubt as to the meaning of “bridge” there is none about the Latin *pons*. The *Liber Eliensis* (p. 135, ed. Stewart) mentions the *pons* of Grantebriige as existing in the tenth century. *Pons* means “bridge” simply, not “hithe.”

At the time of the Saxon invasions Roman bridges of masonry were in existence and in use in all parts of southern Britain. Baeda (*Eccl. Hist.* i. 11) speaks of the cities, temples, bridges and paved roads which in his day testified to the Roman occupation. One bridge, that at Verulamium, he mentions as existing at the time of St Alban's martyrdom, A.D. 305. But it is practically certain that Roman bridges were either destroyed by the Saxons or went into decay soon after their arrival, and it is almost equally certain that for at least three centuries after their invasion no bridge of any importance existed in England. Baeda mentions no bridge that was in use in his time and no place-name that contains the suffix “bridge.” Equally clear is the evidence of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Many—indeed most—of the battles of early Saxon times were brought about by a disputed river-passage; never is there any mention of a bridge. In the annals of the period 449–875 the Chronicle mentions sixteen places whose names end in “ford,” but not one which ends in “bridge.” In all the record of that time I know but one mention of a bridge. It is in the *Gesta Pontificum* of William of Malmesbury (*Rolls Series*, p. 270), where a legend is told, on the doubtful authority of King Alfred, that Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, who lived about the year 700,

used to attract the people to his discourses by standing on the bridge at Malmesbury and singing to them glees in their mother-tongue. The river at Malmesbury is the infant Avon.

It is a noteworthy fact that the earliest use in English literature of the word *brycg*, a bridge, occurs in the proper name Grantebrycge, or Grantanbrycge, the old name of Cambridge. It is in the Chronicle, in the record of the year 875, when the Danes came to Cambridge from Repton and remained there for a year. The Corpus MS. of the Chronicle, which contains this passage, dates from the time of Alfred and is therefore nearly contemporary with the events of 875. To Baeda, who died in 735 and carried his *Ecclesiastical History* down to 731, the place was known as Grantacaestir, and Felix of Crowland, who was his contemporary, in his *Life of St Guthlac*, speaks of it as the *castellum* called Granta. It is therefore as certain as anything of that time can be that no bridge, unless it were a ruin dating from the Roman occupation, existed there in their day. The bridge must have come into existence between 731 and 875. In order of time the next bridge mentioned in the Chronicle is that at Brycge, or Cwatbrycge—the name is given in either form in various MSS.—which was near the Severn; the Danes made a “work” there in 896. The Trent bridge at Nottingham is next; it was “worked” in 924 by that great military builder, Edward the Elder. London Bridge is first mentioned by the Chronicle in the account of Cnut’s ship assault on London in 1016, but it had existed earlier¹. Brycestow, or Bristol, is mentioned in 1050. These are all the pre-Conquest bridges mentioned in the Chronicle.

Grantabrycge, the name which the town bore in 875, is in strictness a locative case and means “at the Granta bridge.” The town owed, if not its origin, at least such importance as it possessed to its position at the bridge. The bridge, as I have said, was built after 731 and before 875. Is it possible, within

¹ In a charter of Bishop Aethelwold, 963—975 (Thorpe, *Diplomatarium*, p. 230) there is a curious reference to the drowning at London Bridge of a woman who had been detected driving an iron pin into one Aelsie, *i.e.* apparently into a waxen figure of him, a kind of witchcraft.

those years, to fix a more closely approximate date for its construction? With a moderate degree of probability I think that it is. In my paper on *The Dual Origin of the Town of Cambridge* I have collected evidence from a variety of sources which points to the conclusions—that Cambridgeshire was parted between the kingdoms of Mercia and East Anglia up to the time, about 827, when both kingdoms fell under the supremacy of Wessex; that the Cam, below Cambridge, and the old Ouse, or West River, served as the boundary of the kingdoms; and that the town of Cambridge was debatable ground and occupied in its south-eastern and north-western parts respectively by either people. A significant circumstance led me to conclude that the bridge belonged exclusively to the Mercians. From very early times down to the middle of the eighteenth century the bridge was maintained by a tax levied on certain estates in the county, and these estates were exclusively situated in the parts of the county which my evidence showed were always Mercian. If the bridge had been erected after 827, when both peoples were subject to Wessex, there could be no reason for imposing the burden exclusively on the Mercians. I infer that it was built before 827. On the other hand the anarchy and political depression of the Mercian people before the accession of Offa make it improbable that they would have undertaken such a considerable engineering feat as the bridging of a river on their border, nor had they any motive then for attempting it. The building of the bridge must be referred to a time when the Mercians were so confident of their superiority over their eastern neighbours that they wished to establish an easy communication with East Anglia. That time we may conjecturally refer to Offa's reign (758—796). Offa put to death the East Anglian king, Aethelbert, "pervaded," as William of Malmesbury says, the whole East Anglian country and annexed it to his dominions. When he erected a new archiepiscopal province for Mercia, with its seat at Lichfield, he included in it the two East Anglian sees of Elmham and Dunwich (*Gesta Regum*, Rolls Series, i. 85). After his death East Anglia recovered its independence, and if the bridge-tax had been levied by him on East Anglians as well as Mercians, it then, no doubt, ceased to

be paid by the former. To Offa, then, I think that it is likely that Cambridge owed its bridge and its early importance.

Having let our imaginary forces work thus far we may next ask what was the motive which suggested to Offa a mechanical feat so remarkable at the time as the bridging of the Cam. It is hardly too much to say that Cambridge was the key to the strength of Mercia, without which it was impossible to assert that overlordship of England to which Offa aspired and ultimately attained. The constant struggle of the Mercian kings was to obtain an outlet to the eastern sea. Before Offa's reign their only seaboard was in Lincolnshire, which offered few facilities for over-sea communication. Owing to its inland position Mercia under its earlier kings was far inferior in civilisation to its neighbours, Wessex, Northumbria and East Anglia. In a well-known letter addressed to Aethelbald, Offa's predecessor, Boniface stigmatises the Mercians as more savage than the heathen Saxons and Wends of Germany. Under Offa Mercia becomes rich and civilised. He is a great builder. He creates the two monasteries of Bath and St Albans—the latter extolled as the largest and most beautiful of its time in England. He negotiates with Charlemagne on terms of equality a treaty for the protection and taxation of merchants trading over-sea. This implies the possession of a seaboard. And the seaboard which Offa gained was that of East Anglia with its ports at Burgh Castle and Dunwich, as well as the Essex river ports, of which the chief was Colchester.

The importance of the bridge at Cambridge lay in the fact that over it was carried the only road, practicable for an army, which connected Mercia with the east coast ports. At Cambridge two great Roman highways crossed—the Akeman Street, running from Cirencester to Brancaster, and the road which in modern times has got the name of *Via Devana*: in medieval times the part of it which lies between Cambridge and Haverhill was known as *Wolvestrate*, the Wolf's street, later corrupted to *Wool Street Way* and *Worsted Way*. The *Via Devana* is supposed to have passed from Colchester to Leicester and Chester, and at Godmanchester it struck the *Ermine Street* leading from London to the shore of the Humber. The reason

the only entrances to the Isle of Ely before the draining of the fens were at Littleport, Stuntney¹ Aldreth and Erith. Traffic between Cambridge and Ely, down to very recent times, went almost entirely by water. In the Middle Ages Stretham bridge did not exist, and the ordinary land approach to Ely from Cambridge was by the difficult and circuitous route of Aldreth Causeway. As Mercia was barred from East Anglia by the fens to the north of Cambridge so to the south it was cut off from Essex by the forest in Hertfordshire. No road lay in that direction in Roman or Saxon times.

On its landward side East Anglia was assailable only by one route, that of Icknield Street, which in Cambridgeshire runs between Royston and Newmarket, crossing the upper Cam at Whittlesford and the Devil's Ditch at the edge of Newmarket Heath. Between Cambridge and the Devil's Ditch no military road existed. But the ten miles of intervening country were unimpeded by fen or forest and quite practicable for an army. By this route Offa must have made his assault on East Anglia.

That an army operating between the east coast and central England almost of necessity took Cambridge on its route is shown by the movements of the Danish armies in the ninth and eleventh centuries. East Anglia was their constant base. They land there in 866 and "were there horsed." Next year they go over the Humber to York, and it is manifest that they followed the Icknield Way, Via Devana and Ermine Street, passing through Cambridge. In 870 they return by the same route and winter at Thetford. In 875 a part of their army comes from Repton to Cambridge by the Via Devana. In 880 they come from Cirencester to East Anglia, and, as they must have gone by Akeman Street, they could not fail to pass Cambridge on the way. In 905 they leave East Anglia and go to Cricklade, which is only a few miles from Cirencester. Returning the same year they cut off a Kentish detachment which is raiding the country occupied by the Danes between the dykes and the Ouse. In 1010 the tale is repeated. The Danes land at

¹ Stuntney Causeway, carried across Soham Fen, was not made until the twelfth century.

Ipswich, burn Thetford and Cambridge, and then go southwards to the Thames. In connection with this raid Henry of Huntingdon tells the story of the brave man of Balsham who singlehanded defended himself on the stairs of the church tower against the whole Danish force; it is therefore evident that the Danes went by Wool Street¹. The conditions were not changed after the Norman Conquest. In 1215, when King John was ravaging Norfolk and Suffolk, Matthew of Paris tells us that the Barons hastily raised the siege of Windsor and marched to Cambridge in order to cut off his retreat to the north. The king, however, reached Cambridge before them and passed on to Stamford by the Via Devana. Next year he was compelled to take the Well-stream route because the Barons were in occupation of Cambridge.

Before there was a bridge there can be no reasonable doubt that a ford existed at the point where the Via Devana crossed the river. Essex, when he was digging the foundations of his bridge in 1754, discovered traces of it as "a very firm pavement of pebbles," but he did not put on record its exact position. It would appear that it was not quite in line with the present street, but a little below the bridge. Professor Hughes tells me that he has seen traces of a paved causeway, five or six feet under the present surface, in the Quay Side, near the S.E. corner of the bridge. From Mr Lofts, of the firm of Messrs Coulson and Lofts, I learn that a few years ago a paved way was discovered by his workmen when they were digging at the entrance of a courtyard, now belonging to Messrs Macintosh, on the eastern side of Bridge Street and opposite the Master's Lodge of St John's College. With this evidence we may compare that given by Professor Babington in his *Ancient Cambridgeshire* (p. 26), where it is stated that in the year 1823 a timber causeway was discovered "extending from near the Great Bridge to the church of the Holy Sepulchre, and occupying about half the width of the street on its eastern side. It was at about fourteen feet below the present surface of the

¹ At Hadstock, which is two miles south of Wool Street, the skin of a "Dane" was formerly nailed on the church door: the nails are still in the door. Possibly he was a straggler from the main force.

or below them; Whittlesford bridge is a case in point¹. If we assume that the bank in Magdalene garden is in the same position as the Roman *vallum*, and that the road left the *castrum* by its southern gate the ford must have been below the bridge. The Decuman and Praetorian gates in a Roman camp were placed at the middle points in the *vallum*. As the bank once extended from the eastern end of Magdalene garden to the corner made by Pound Hill and Northampton Street the middle point must have been very near the eastern end of St Giles' church.

As I have shown in my communication on *The Dual Origin of Cambridge Town*, a variety of evidence points to the conclusion that the river Cam, from the point where it enters Cambridge township from Trumpington parish, served as the boundary between Mercia and East Anglia, and so continued below the town almost as far as the junction with the West River. But at two points in Cambridge this was not so. My evidence showed that at the Mills the border crossed the river so as to include Newnham hamlet in East Anglian territory. At the Great Bridge the converse happened. I was drawn to the conclusion that both banks there belonged to the Mercians, who claimed on the southern side the area now comprised by the parishes of St Clement and the Round Church. If we think of this part of Cambridge as it is to-day, crowded with dwellings on either bank, this seems a peculiarity. If we think of it as it was in Baeda's time—a desolate site whose only importance was that it was the approach to a river-passage of considerable military consequence—the arrangement was perfectly natural, and even inevitable. It was a military necessity of primitive days that where an important road crossed a river which was a tribal boundary the ford or bridge should be exclusively in the possession of one of the two peoples. The

¹ A ford was not necessarily disused when an adjoining bridge was built, as is shown by an incident recorded in the Peterborough Chronicle, cited by Dugdale. After the Danish army, in 870, sacked and burnt the monastery at Peterborough it started for Huntingdon. The main army crossed the Nene in safety, but two "chariots," laden with spoil, attempted to pass through the river on the left side of a stone bridge, and were lost in deep water. The existence of a stone bridge in 870 is noteworthy.

rule does not apply only to fords and tribal boundaries; an old mill occupying both banks of a stream which is a parish boundary generally belongs to one, not to both parishes. An investigation of the Ordnance Survey maps will show that the rule is pretty constant as applied to fords and tribal bounds. The best illustration of it is the Thames in its upper reaches. At most times and in almost all parts of it the river divided Mercia from Wessex, as it still divides the counties. But there are a few places where it is not a county boundary. The nearest above London is at Staines, where the Danes crossed the river in 1009. Here was the river-passage on the Roman road from London to Winchester. At Staines the Middlesex boundary crosses the river and includes a small plot on the southern bank next the road. The plot is just above the present bridge and marks the position of the ford. Just as at Cambridge, the straight course of the road on the Middlesex side is deflected before it reaches the bridge. At Streatley a branch of the Icknield Way crossed the river. On the southern bank of the river, just above the bridge, there is a small piece of ground, now occupied by an inn, which belongs to Oxfordshire. At Wallingford the Icknield Way strikes the river. King Svein crossed there in 1013. The Wessex boundary here encloses both sides of the road on the northern bank. At Oxford the Mercian boundary takes in a portion of the southern bank. King Svein crossed the Thames at Oxford in 1013, shortly before he was at Wallingford.

In Cambridgeshire besides the river-passage at Cambridge there was only one ford of any importance. This was at Whittlesford where the Icknield Way crossed the upper Cam. The other fords on the upper river were only of local use, but the importance of the passage at Whittlesford is indicated by the fact that the bridge there was the only "King's Bridge" in the county, except the Great Bridge at Cambridge. It is a significant thing that the ford at Whittlesford is the only point on the upper river which the East Anglian border touches. Between the parishes of Sawston and Hinxtton, both contained in the Mercian hundred of Whittlesford, the parish of Pampisford, belonging to the East Anglian hundred of Chilford, thrusts

a tapering wedge which just reaches the ford. On the opposite western bank, just below the bridge, there is a small patch of ground, just large enough to contain a cottage and its garden, which is carved out of the parish of Whittlesford and belongs to Pampisford. Doubtless it marks the position of the old ford, which, if my theory be correct, was in possession of the East Anglians.

One other ford there was in Cambridgeshire which gave passage over a river which was a tribal boundary. The Akeman Street between Cambridge and Ely, as I have said, was little used in Saxon and medieval times. But there was a river-passage where it crossed the Old Ouse, or West River—the ford whose name is perpetuated in Elford Closes, which are in Stretham parish and on the northern side of the river. Here again we find an overlapping boundary, as at Cambridge and Whittlesford. The West River from Erith downwards was the limit of Mercia and the East Anglian Isle of Ely. But when it reaches Stretham parish it ceases to be so. Stretham is the only parish on the southern edge of the Isle which is not entirely bounded by the river. At the point where the Beach Ditch and the modern road reach the river the parish extends itself to the southern bank. The old road crossed the river at some distance below the modern bridge. The ford was therefore exclusively in East Anglian territory.

At Stretham, at Whittlesford and at Newnham the fords seem to have been in the keeping of the East Anglians. That would warrant the belief that in early times they were the stronger people; and such a belief has confirmation in the facts to be derived from Baeda's History and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Raedwald, king of East Anglia, was Bretwalda between 616 and 632. Baeda tells us that he slew Aethelfrith, king of Northumbria, in a battle at the river Idle on the northern boundary of Mercia. The position of the battle-field indicates that he had a subject Mercia in his rear. But at the Great Bridge of Cambridge the position seems to be reversed. When the bridge was built both banks of the Can were held by the Mercians. If it was built in Offa's time that is just what might be expected. But in the Cambridge watercourse

we see evidence of a time when the northern bank was held by the southern people. The watercourse was, no doubt, originally a branch of the Cam; but the evidence is clear that it was straightened and diverted, so as to enclose a rectangular space which covered the ford. The object of this diversion can only have been the protection of the river-passage from an enemy attacking from the northern side. The Saxon name, *Armeswerk*, given to the rectangular enclosure tells us two things: first, that this *tête de pont* was the work, not of Roman or Norman, but of the Saxons; secondly, that it was one of those "works," designed either for the protection of a river-passage or the obstruction of the river to an enemy's ships, of which we hear so much in the Chronicle. The Danes "wrought a work" at Quatbridge, near the Severn, in 896, and another on the Ouse at Tempsford in 921: they stormed a "work" on the Limen, in Sussex, in 892; Alfred made two "works," one on either side of the river Lea, in 896. Southwark, Newark, Warkworth, were all such river fortresses. And such in East Anglian hands, I believe, was our Cambridge *Armeswerk*.

APPENDIX.

Since I wrote my communication on *The Dual Origin of the Town of Cambridge* my attention has been drawn by an article in the *Historical Review* (No. 93, January, 1909) to a passage in Gaimar's *Lestorie des Engles*, which is strongly confirmatory of the view which I took in the communication that Cambridge, either the town or the county, or both, was parted between the Mercians and East Anglians. Gaimar wrote his metrical Norman-French History about the year 1140. For his materials he drew largely on the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but his editor in the Rolls Series, Mr C. T. Martin, says that he also availed himself of other sources which are not now extant. He appears to have been connected with Lincolnshire and to have had considerable local knowledge of Eastern England, which is shown in his account of Hereward, a version of the story which is quite independent of that given in the *Liber Eliensis* and in

the *Gesta Herwardi*. The passage (lines 1605—1608) occurs in a context where Gaimar is describing the extent of Southumbria, or Mercia. As translated by Mr Martin the lines run:

Also the city of Grantchester
 Once belonged to it (Southumbria), and ought to do so.
 One king could well protect it
 If he could hold it in peace.

In the translation of the first line Mr Martin has adopted the reading *cited*, "city"; but in his text of the Norman-French he gives the reading of another MS., *meite*, "the half" of Grantchester. Whichever reading we adopt the expression "one king could well protect it if he could hold it in peace" is clear evidence that Gaimar knew that Grantchester—which, of course, is Cambridge, Grantacaestir—had at one time belonged to two kings who disputed its possession. If the reading "half of Grantchester" be correct it is a question whether Gaimar meant the town or county of Grantchester, *i.e.* Cambridge. It makes little difference if the meaning is the county of Grantchester, for if the county were divided between East Anglia and Mercia the only natural boundary was that of the Cam and the Old West River, and from a variety of indications given in my paper I inferred, I think not doubtfully, that this *was* the actual boundary, and that consequently Cambridge was situated on it. The fact that Gaimar uses the name Grancestre seems to indicate that in the passage in question he was using some very old source of information, for the name Grantacaestir had given place to Grantebrige before 875. Indeed in another passage, relating to 875, Gaimar calls the town Grantebrige, the name which he found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the record of that year.

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