

The Lost Manor of Mestesforde.

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HERE has probably been no more scholarly historians of Derbyshire than the Lysons, and none who had at disposal more original sources of information, and yet when the volume on Derbyshire in the "Magna Britannia" was written, on coming to deal with Mestesforde—now Matlock—they said the site of it was not now certainly known.

It is superfluous to say that a manor could not be substantially lost—the land of which it was composed must remain; therefore it could only be the title of the manor which had been lost or changed. The parish of Matlock, which stands on the site of Mestesforde, is an interesting piece of territory, not alone because, as the late Mr. William Adam so aptly termed it, it is "The Gem of the Peak," but also because it was in this parish that was settled for generations the interesting family which gave to the county Mr. Adam Wolley, the man who collected and left such a priceless legacy of manuscripts in elucidation of its history as is now deposited in the British Museum. From an antiquarian point of view, the Manor and Parish of Matlock must also be regarded as interesting, because since the time of the Domesday Survey their name has been changed, the old designation having disappeared so mysteriously, and so far so inexplicably, as to create a definite and attractive archæological problem for solution.

To begin at the beginning. The official translation of the record in Domesday as to this manor is as follows:—

“In Mestesforde King Edward had two carucates of land without geld. It is waste. There are eight acres of meadow and a lead work. Wood, pasturable in places, three miles long and two wide. Adjoining this manor lie these berewites: Meslach, Sinitretone, Wodnesleie, Bunteshale, Ibeholon, Teneslege. In these are seven carucates of land paying geld. Land for seven ploughs. There, eleven villeins and twelve boors have six ploughs and twenty-two acres of meadow. Wood, pasturable, two miles long and one mile wide. Underwood as much.”

As to the origin of the name of Mestesforde, the Rev. Dr. Cox, in his *Churches of Derbyshire*, Vol. II., page 517, quotes the following note from Ll. Jewitt's extension and translation of the *Domesday Book* of Derbyshire (1871):—

“Mestesforde, or Nestesforde, I believe to have been near what is now called Matlock Bridge, which was formerly a ford. ‘Nestes,’ ‘Nestus,’ or ‘Nesterside,’ are names of the mountain now known as the ‘Heights of Abraham,’ on which is situated the Nestor Mine (now called the Rutland Cavern), which is undoubtedly a Roman mine, and was probably the one alluded to in the *Domesday Book* as ‘one lead work.’ The little village at the foot of the hill has always been known by the name of Nestes or Nestus.”*

There is a note to much the same purport in Adam's *Gem of the Peak* (1838), though that of Jewitt is fuller, and for a time I regarded the late Mr. William Adam, of Matlock Bath, as the author of the idea it contains. Further search, however, has convinced me that this was a misapprehension,

* What village is here referred to it is difficult to say, as that at the foot of the south side of the hill, the side on which the Rutland Cavern is situate, never bore any recorded name but Matlock Bath. On the north-east side of the hill there is no great mine.

for, in Lysons' book, which bears the date of 1817, it is stated that Mestesforde "is supposed to have been at a place now called Nestes or Nestus, a little mining village at the foot of a high hill on the north side of the old bath"; *i.e.*, Masson. But even Lysons' book was not the first to promulgate the idea, for in Davies' *History of Derbyshire* (1811) there is the statement that although Mestesforde "was the head of the manor in the time of the Conqueror, it is not now known," and that "there is a hill near Matlock Bath called Nestes, which was formerly celebrated for having several rich lead mines upon it, from whence it is supposed there was a ford across the river Derwent, which was at the foot of the hill, which ford, or the houses of the miners—which were built near it—probably gave the name to the Manor of Metesforde or Netesforde."*

Step by step, the supposition about the word Nestus has been converted into an assumed fact. It is true that there is a mine on the south side of Masson Hill, the name of which is given as "Nester's" or "Nestus" mine,† and which, during living memory, has been known as the Rutland Cavern, but Matlock Bridge, where there might have been, and probably was, in ancient times, a ford, which furnished the second half of the name of Mestesforde, is on the east side of Masson Hill, and a distance of a mile away. Further, if we were to accept the view of Messrs. Jewitt, Adam, Lysons, and Davies, there would still be the difficulty of the difference between the initial letters of Nester's and Mestesforde to be overcome. On the whole, I am inclined to the view that the name "Mestesforde" originated from the fact that the first part of the place name, that is Mestes, was originally applied to a restricted locality about the ford at Matlock Bridge on the west side of the river.

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Mestesforde was a self-contained manor, with six berewicks, one of them called Meslach. The time occupied in the compilation of that great national record is usually designated as from 1080 to 1086.

* The name as written in Domesday is clearly Mestesforde.

† See Farey's *Derbyshire*, Vol. I., pp. 263-4.

According to the Rev. Dr. Cox,* there were a church and rectory at Matlock in 1291, but he had reason to believe that the church had then existed for some time.

It is proposed now to show that the present boundaries of Matlock are coterminous with those of Mestesforde, and its berewick of Meslach, which, since the change of name, has disappeared. Taking the Ordnance plan, and beginning on the north-east, we have—

1. Ashover.

2 Tansley (in Crich).

3. Dethick and Lea.

Here comes the river Derwent, which, for some distance forms the southern boundary. South-west of this is

4. Cromford.

Ascending, still on the west, to the north of Cromford, is

5. Bonsall,

which the boundary leaves to the west, going north over Masson Hill, and passing

6. Wensley and Snitterton (now one parish).

Crossing the valley of the Derwent and the river itself, the line runs to

7. Farley (then, as now, part of Darley) and

8. Darley.

Across Darley and Matlock moors it runs, north inclining to the east, till we come back to the place from whence we started, namely, the boundary of Ashover, at Canada Nursery.

In the *Domesday Book* we have all these places outside the boundaries of Mestesforde and its berewick Meslach, thus—

1. Essovre,

which belonged to Ralph Fitzhubert.

2. Teneslege (then, as now, in Crich), but a berewick of Mestesforde (i.)

* *Churches of Derbyshire*, Vol. II., p. 517.

3. (Dethick and) Lede,
as parts of Ashover, the former undistinguished by
the present title, but the latter identified as the
Lea of to-day.
 4. Crumforde,
A berewick of Wirksworth.
 5. Bunteshale (Bonsall),
a berewick of Mestesforde (ii.)
 6. Sinitretone, Wodnesleie.
- Berewicks of Mestesforde (iii. and iv.)
7. Farleie,
now, as then, part of Darley.
 8. Dereleie (Darley Dale).

The boundaries of Matlock at the present day and of Mestesforde (with Meslach) at the time of Domesday, have thus been traced and shown to be synonymous. But only four of the six berewicks have been accounted for. The fifth berewick was Ibeholon, easily identified as Ible, beyond Bonsall on the west; and the sixth, most important of all, was Meslach; most important of all because it seems beyond question that it was this sixth berewick that provided the foundation of the name under which the manor and parish have, since, at least, the thirteenth century, been known.

My hypothesis as to the change of name is this: The boundaries of parishes, as is well known, were, wherever possible, marked by watercourses. It might, therefore, well have been the case that the berewick of Meslach (which seems to have disappeared at the time of the adoption of the name Matlock for the manor and parish) was bounded by the watercourse known as Bentley Brook, which comes down from Tansley, by the corn mill, across the Green, past Knowlestone Place, below the rock on the north side of the church, and into the Derwent. As the name of Mestesforde, as I assume, was local to the crossing about Matlock Bridge, the berewick of Meslach might have comprised the whole of the present parish to the east of the

Derwent and the south of Bentley Brook. Thus Riber, Starkholmes, and Willersley—the latter subsequently erected into a separate manor—all local names of circumscribed areas, names which have come into being since the date of Domesday, or were then unrecorded, might well have been included in the berewick of Meslach.

The Church having been built where it is—that is in Meslach—that name would be appropriately given to it, and consequently to the parish allotted to it, and that is the parish which, with the manor, has come down to modern times.

My suggestion, then, is, that the name of Mestesforde was, if not purely local to the ford about the site of the present Matlock Bridge, at best limited to the parts of the manor on the west side of the river Derwent and to the north and west of Bentley Brook. The bridge having been erected—perhaps about the same time as the church—and the ford abolished, the old name was no longer appropriate, and Meslach, altered to the more euphonious Matlock, became the name of the whole parish and manor. Thus, the manor of Mestesforde is not lost, but still exists within the parish of Matlock.