

THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE WEALDEN IRON INDUSTRY.

BY

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AN interesting and useful little book on this subject by Miss M. C. Delany has been already noticed in our *Collections*.¹ I venture to take up the consideration of it again, not to criticize it unfavourably, but to point out a few places where it touches Surrey in which it may perhaps be corrected.

The author, on p. 21, attributes the growth of population in the Weald of Surrey to the spread northwards of the iron industry from Sussex. It seems to me that the growth of population indicated by the appearance of new parishes and manors in the Wealden area of Surrey after the date of the Domesday Survey is too early to be put down to this cause. *Testa de Nevill*, the Red Book of the Exchequer, the Taxation of Pope Nicholas and the earliest Episcopal Registers tell us of separate manors and parishes, first heard of in the 12th and 13th centuries, in places which in 1086 were part and parcel of manors and parishes based on the chalk downs and their fringe of Green Sand in the centre of the County. Ockley is the only Domesday Manor named on the Wealden clay—Horley existed, I believe, but is not named in 1086. Only at Horley, and at Burstow, which was an outpost of a far distant manor, Wimbledon, is there certain evidence of the old system of common fields on the Wealden clay. There were none on the Wealden part of the big Dorking manor. It is possible that they existed elsewhere, but the only positive evidence for this existence is in the area really inhabited fully in 1086. In the big Farnham Manor the area beyond this, still on the sand, not on the clay,

¹ S.A.C. xxxiv, p. 118.

but taken into cultivation after 1086, is called *terra nova*. This growth of new manors and parishes looks to me like an extension of population southwards for agricultural objects. Settlers, backwoodsmen we may call them, took up new ground as small farmers in separate enclosed farms, to provide for the increased demand for room and food when masons and carpenters, men-at-arms, priests, monks and canons, tradesmen and craftsmen, flocked into the country under the Norman and Angevin kings. By their architecture it is certain that at least one third, probably two thirds, of the Surrey churches were built or rebuilt in the 150 years after the Norman Conquest. Almost all the few monasteries, and all the castles, were built then. Chertsey Abbey is the only pre-Conquest monastery in Surrey, and that was rebuilt. The builders of all these, and the inmates, had to be provided for; the elder sons of *villani*, in the very numerous cases in which Borough English left the youngest son upon his father's original holding, had to be provided for. There is no evidence of any increase of the iron-industry so early as to account for the consequent erection of the old outlying forest portions of the old manors and parishes into new and distinct districts, such as appears to be going on between Domesday and the reign of Edward I.

The earliest mention of Surrey iron has been found by Sir Henry Lambert at Horley, in 1371.¹ Hereabouts the Surrey and Sussex ironfields were really one; iron ore disregards county boundaries. It is impossible to prove that iron was not worked for local needs much earlier than that, but in the County of Surrey there is no positive evidence that it was. Further west the record of Surrey iron is very much later. The earliest positive evidence is that the iron-works at Ewood, near Newdigate but on the confines of Dorking Manor, existed in 1553 (they were older, for they were sold in that year by Lord Abergavenny to Christopher Darrell, as a going concern). But it is only in the latter half of the 16th century that we have any full and continuous record of Surrey iron-works, east or west. The Wealden area had been populated three or four hundred years before then. If any works added to its population, the record of the Chiddingfold glass-works is three hundred years older than 1553. It would be absurd to deny

¹ S.A.C. xxxiv, p. 105.

that the working of Surrey iron, and working for commercial not merely local consumption, may not be older than the 16th century. I rather think it was, though this is merely a supposition. There are a great number of very substantially built farm houses in the Surrey Weald, some seeming to date from the 15th century. Were they all built merely on the resources of agriculture in stiff clay? Did not something else contribute to the purses of their builders? Fuel, wood and charcoal, perhaps, for it certainly came from this district to Kingston, and so no doubt to London; but perhaps also iron. The fine 16th century house at Burningfold was certainly built by an iron-master. But old though they may be, these houses are much later than the era of the first population of the Weald.

The want of communication was no doubt a serious drawback to the commercial development of the iron-works. Miss Delany is not quite correct in her description of the means of transport. On p. 23 she speaks of the Stane Street (it should be spelt Stone Street) being the only road up to 1756. It had gone out of use in long stretches centuries before 1756. The old *Via Regia* was about on the line of the modern Horsham and Dorking road (the Dorking Court Rolls mention it often), but it was not a good road for wheels. Another *Via Regia* left the line of the Stone Street north of Ockley and went over a shoulder of Leith Hill to Dorking, but was quite impassable for wheels till the 19th century. From about the neighbourhood of Frensham water carriage on floats could be used in the upper branches of the Wey; from about Dunsfold streams run into the Arun, which could be reached from parts of Cranleigh, Ewhurst and Ockley parishes (for the Arun is not, as is often asserted, a purely Sussex river). Witley and Thursley, whence there is no direct water way, were the last foundries mentioned in Surrey in 1767; but Abinger Hammer was the last forge: it was rated by the overseers as 'iron-works' down to 1797.

With regard to the extinction of the iron works in Sussex, something more than 'a whisper of tradition' (p. 31) condemns the Sussex iron-masters. In 1779 (not, as is here stated, 1785) the Admiralty transferred its contract for iron guns from Sussex to the Carron works in Scotland (hence 'carronades') because the Sussex iron-masters were selling to

the French in war time. As far back as Elizabeth's reign there were complaints that the Wealden iron-masters sold to pirates and the Queen's enemies; and the Loseley papers contain references to the practice. But the last furnace at Ashburnham was not put out till 1828.

Miss Delany is not quite accurate with regard to the forest in Surrey. On p. 18 she says that none of it (Surrey) 'came under Forest Law.' The whole county was afforested by Henry II. In the first year of Richard I it was disafforested, for a consideration, with the exception of the district north of the Hog's Back and west of the Wey, which remained purlieu of Windsor Forest. The exemption had to be further paid for under John, and the Close Rolls of 9. Henry III. record the final enfranchisement of the rest of the county.¹ But this district left in the purlieu of Windsor Forest, and treated as Forest under Elizabeth, was well outside the Wealden area. I should demur to the statement that 'the Weald was a centre of early population' (p. 10). It was in the centre of an area of early population, but itself sparsely inhabited, with people on its fringe, and here and there only in its interior parts. Prehistoric stone implements are almost unknown on the Wealden clay. But Tonbridge must not be excluded from land settled at the date of Domesday (p. 17). Richard de Tonbridge had his castle there, and founded a Priory. The story of the building of his castle before 1086 is very well known. The statement therefore that the site of Tonbridge was virgin forest in 1086, cannot stand. Coursley, which is queried in the text (p. 31), was in Mayfield parish. Another very small matter; armorial crests are not common, but seldom appear on cast-iron fire backs (p. 40). I do not remember ever seeing any, which is no proof there are none. What is meant is that shields of arms on fire-backs are very common.

¹ *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum*, p. 56.