



The Saxon Charters of Brightwell, Sotwell and Mackney, Berks.

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(Continued from page 112 Vol. II.)

WE are now in a position to trace the boundary which Eadwig's charter defines. It begins "first from Maccaniges ford along the street out on Thames as far as mid-stream." The distance, curving out slightly westward, is three miles; the Roman street marked it without difficulty; and it is identical with the present boundary of Brightwell, with the exception that a projecting angle, already mentioned, has been added to the Brightwell lands at some later period. It continues "along the stream to the hollow pool direct; from the hollow pool up along the dike to Bridgeway; along Bridgeway one furlong; off Bridgeway to Mossdene." If we take what is now the eastern boundary of Sotwell where it leaves the Thames, we find it corresponding precisely with this description. We cannot expect to identify the "hollow pool" beside the river bank, which the charter mentions. It belonged, doubtless, to a former state of things, before the channel was as clearly defined as it now is. But we find that the present boundary passes from the river along a dike across the meadow till it comes to a lane, which it follows for one furlong. We thus identify Bridgeway (*Brycewege*) with the existing track—a footpath across the Brightwell part and a lane across the Sotwell part—leading between Wittenham Wood and Shillingford Bridge. That bridge is a thing of the nineteenth century; but this Bridgeway apparently preserves a reminiscence of a bridge which carried the Roman road across the Thames at the corner of Wittenham Wood. The boundary then proceeds "off Bridgeway to Mossdene (*Mossdene*). So the present boundary, after passing one furlong along the lane, turns again southward over the rising ground and descends along a "dene" or hollow in the hill-side, now called Monkadyne and in the sixteenth century Monkenden. We infer that the dene which had been noted for its growth of moss in the tenth century was named at a later date from the

monks who were its owners, for it became part of the properties of the Benedictine priory of the Holy Trinity at Wallingford.

Next we are to go "along Mossdene against the east of Meldanige as far as the middle of the moor." Along Mossdene or Monkadyne we have followed the boundary between Sotwell and Clapcot; but at the foot of it the Clapcot boundary diverges south-eastward and the Sotwell boundary south-westward, enclosing Slade End and its fields between them. Neither of these fits on with what the charter indicates. For Meldanige is readily identified with some meadows beside the brook in the Slade End lands, now known as Millony and distinguished as Long, Taylor's and Little Millony. After passing, therefore, down Monkadyne we are to continue in a direct course across the fields for about a mile until we reach the eastern end of Millony. The present boundary along this mile takes a zig-zag course, making a series of right-angles and so suggesting the inference that parts of Clapcot have been transferred to Brightwell at a later date. Thus, too, the eastern end of Millony is not so far east as the present boundary, for the parish now approaches several yards nearer to Wallingford. Meldanige or Millony, like Maccanige or Mackney, is distinctly an island; they are presumably Melda's isle and Macca's isle; for each is enclosed by brooks which flow into the Moreton brook on the south of them. It is therefore very possible that in the gradual drainage of the land these brooks have been altered, and that the Millony of to-day takes a different form from the Meldanige of the tenth century, part of it being now added to the arable land. In any case, the "moor" of the charter must be understood to be the low-lying lands which intervene between the Moreton brook and the slight elevation of the Slade End fields, and the north-east corner of Meldanige is regarded as reaching to the middle of this moor.

The remainder of the boundary is thus defined: "Up along the moor to Langanford, southward along Langanford as far as Maccanige, so by Maccanige across the land as the oxen go, and so to Maccanige's ford southward." Thus having arrived southward against the east of Millony at the middle of the moor, we are now to turn, as it seems, in a westward direction "up along the moor." Beside the hedge and ditch which bound the northern side of Millony there is a footpath which we can follow continuously at the present day until it brings us into Mackney Lane. The footpath will presently need a more minute description. Mackney Lane leads southward from Brightwell and Sotwell into Mackney. It must next

be noted, in passing, that the printed edition of the charter is punctuated to read "up along the moor to Langanford southward;" but a knowledge of the locality makes this utterly unintelligible and compels us to connect the word "southward" with that follows. Thus we are to proceed "southward along Langanford (or the Long Ford) to Mackney." When the footpath that we have taken brings us out into Mackney Lane we stand at once at the head of what must have been in those days a long ford. We are on the brook that we have followed from Millony, and some quarter of a mile to the south, close to Mackney village, is another brook, feeding the moat of Mackney Court; while a series of cross ditches joins the two brooks together, thus admitting of a roadway. Down Mackney Lane there was until lately a bridge constructed of large slabs of stone and perhaps of great antiquity, but it was condemned as unsafe and a bridge of brick has now taken its place. Here the marshy ground and the water-courses on either side of the road show what the way into Mackney was before the days of drainage and road-making. The lane, however, leads down to the eastern end of Mackney, and we must turn at a sharp angle westward across the village and then turn off again at another angle to take the required line which will bring us to our destination at Mackney Ford on the more distant Moreton brook. No such angles are implied in the charter; for it seems to indicate a direct course by Lang-ford through Mackney to Mackney Ford. And such a direct line is not far to seek. When we emerge upon Mackney Lane and are to turn southward along the ford, instead of following the lane in its slightly south-eastward course, we can take a footpath which gradually diverges from it south-westward, bringing us to the western part of the hamlet and near Mackney Court. It is worthy of notice that the enclosures on either side of Mackney Court are Great and Little Culbery, and we gather that here was the *bury* or fortified spot of Saxon Mackney. The line of the footpath has been twisted and broken by the cottages and farm-buildings of the hamlet and the gabled Elizabethan mansion known as Small's House, now occupied by cottagers. But opposite this we take up the direct line again in the footpath already mentioned, leading over Mackney hill to Tadsey bridge. This, then, is the track described in the charter as "Athwart land so as the oxen go (*Wirthland swa swa oxa went*, or, as the fourteenth century version reads it, *overtwert lond so as the rytheryn geu*); and so to Mackney ford southward."

We may note the striking contrast between the two tracks which meet at Mackney ford, bounding these five hides of land on the west and on the east. The one is the military road, a well-made "street" protected with ditches; and in the name of Gibhild ditch,* whatever the *Gib* may be, we may take the *hild* to be either the Saxon word for battle or else akin to *hield* or *hold*, a fortified place. The other is a mere undefined track of the cattle drovers; and we can follow it back northward up Mackney Lane and between the Brightwell and Sotwell villages; then, bearing the name of Green Field Lane, it passes over the hill near Brightwell Barrow, and down the other side towards the river. For nearly two miles northward from Mackney it forms the western boundary between Brightwell and Sotwell. And within living memory it was the usual track for droves of cattle going long distances. Further than this, we can trace it on in a direct course over the river, where broken channels still show that a ford in old times was easy; for on the Oxfordshire side it reappears in a footpath, of which the first portion was destroyed at the enclosure but the second portion still remains, forming the boundary between the Saxon Bishop's land of Dorchester and the King's land of Warborough; and beyond this a ditch still marks the line, which can be traced on northward, now a highroad and now a footpath, up the eastern side of the Thame tributary, to cross over it at last into Buckinghamshire.

Returning to Eadwig's charter, the boundary line "up along the moor," beginning along the north side of Millony and continuing as far as Mackney Lane, must be noticed more fully before we pass on to the charter of Eadred. But there is a cross track, which it will be well to notice first, forming the western boundary of Millony and separating it from the next meadow which bears the curious name of "The Evils"—whether this be a corruption of some ancient name, or whether it merely implies that the soil has long been notorious for producing sheep-rot. Leading up from the Moreton brook along the edge of Millony, and forming for a few yards the present eastern boundary of Sotwell, a broad grass track runs for half a mile northward. It is protected on either side by a bank and ditch, though a large portion of this on the west has been almost levelled away in recent times. When it reaches the arable fields at the northern limit of Millony it turns off at an angle westward along another broad grass lane towards Slade End. On this

* See above, Vol. II., p. 111.

latter is the pathway already noted as following the boundary defined in the charter, and we must presently return to it. But considering the interesting character of the trackway from south to north, a digression will be pardonable. Supposing that it continued in a direct course northward, where no track exists, we cross the modern high road within half a mile and meet the end of a footpath which for some distance again forms the eastern boundary of Sotwell parish. This leads past a farm called significantly the *Severals*, to cross the next high-road in Clapeot fields, and then it disappears; but its course, if continued, would lead us down to the horse-ferry above Benson Lock; and thus the line that we have been tracing identifies itself with a well-marked trackway beyond the river, leading up through Benson to the Chiltern Hills, the course of which has already been described with some fulness in this *Journal*.* The southward line of this same track, after crossing the brook from the corner of Millony, would follow on by Heathercroft Farm into Cholsey.

To revert, then, to the boundary from the east of Millony "up along the moor to the long ford," we shall find that the next charter speaks of a "street" which seems to identify itself with the same boundary. This can only be a Roman road westward from Wallingford. The present high road (which is doubtless ancient) runs north of Brightwell and Sotwell to Wittenham and Abingdon. Diverging from it at the exit from Wallingford is a second road, now merely a broad footpath for its first mile, but continuing as the village street through Slade End, Sotwell and Brightwell; and this we may safely take to be the high road of Saxon times. Was there a third track a little south of these, passing close to Millony and "up along the moor," as in the one charter, and mentioned as a "street" in the other? We have already followed it as a footpath along the edge of Millony, whence, as we have seen, it becomes a grass lane towards Slade End. Here is unmistakably the "street." It is a very wide trackway, with the ditch that bounded the north side of Millony continuing along it and a parallel ditch equally large on the south of it. We follow it nearly a third of a mile, with its thick hedges and large overshadowing elms, and it ends as abruptly as it began, or rather, it turns off at a sharp angle into the village, for a brook from Sotwell cuts off its westward course. But the ditch on the south of it continues: the footpath crosses this, still carrying

* Vol. II. p. 47, 48 (1896).

on the tradition of the street though it be the wrong side of the brook ; and it leads us along the northern edge of Sotwell Recreation Ground, till the footpath, hedge, and ditch together reach Mackney Lane. Here the boundary in Eadwig's charter turns southward, by a line which has been fully examined already, to its conclusion. We may, however, take note of the further course of the "street" westward. Crossing Mackney Lane and reverting now to the north side of the ditch, we are again upon an evident relic of the old roadway for a few yards. It is known as the Witches' Walk, and whatever this name may mean it is an evidence of antiquity. It is narrow, an old enclosure on the north of it having doubtless encroached ; and it leads out into the Cow Croft and is lost, for the footpath crosses diagonally to Brightwell Church. The ditch is now our only guide in the course that we are seeking, and it presently widens out into the large moat of Brightwell House. This is no doubt the site of the Norman castle, mentioned by Matthew Paris ;* and being on Winchester lands it is interesting to compare small things with great and to note that brook and castle and church stood here in the same relative positions that the river Itchen and Wolvesey Castle and the Cathedral occupy at Winchester. Then at Brightwell the Saxon highway had superseded the Roman-British, and a Norman lord could dig this away and make his moat regardless of it. But the line which the castle broke up can be resumed again westward, with ditch and hedge, only a few yards further north ; and in a quarter-of-a-mile we emerge upon the high road, which goes on in a direct course from the angle where we meet it, and then has been a little diverted before it ascends Haddon Hill ; and some distance further west it is known as the Portway. We thus have ample evidence of the existence of the "street," though of its two-mile course between the west gate of Wallingford and the point where we take up the Portway the only relic that remains complete is a length of some five hundred yards near Slade End.

* *Chronica Majora*, II., 191.

(*To be continued.*)