



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

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(Continued from page 12, Vol. 12.)

THE charter which is dated 948, but which obviously took its present shape after the death of Bishop Æthelwold in 984, deals with ten of the fifteen hides of Eadwig's charter. It appears to embody fragments of a genuine charter of Eadred, awkwardly put together and filled up with later additions. It begins in Anglo-Saxon: "*This is the charter of the ten hides at Maccanie and at Suttunwylle which King Eadred granted to Æthelweard his thegn in each land.*" It proceeds with a prolix passage in Latin, stating that "*I, Eadred, King of the English, . . . have granted to Æthelgeard ten hides; five in the island commonly called Maccanie, of which the margins are approved on all sides by fixed boundaries, with the marshy brooks adjoining it; and also five hides at Suttanwille; and moreover outside the fortress (castellum) called from old times Wel-ingasford thirty-six acres of plough-land and ten acres of meadow.*" These last measurements are written first in Latin and then explained in Saxon. It concludes in Saxon: "*These are the five hides at Maccanige, which the stream Gybhild outside surrounds entirely on each side. Then there lie to the north of the town thirty-six acres of plough-land and ten acres of meadow and one mill; and within the town from the east gate on the north side of the street to the brook; and seven houses outside it, and three Churches. And I have [granted] it, both inside the town and outside, all as Æthelwold the Bishop had it before.*" An expert in the language states that there are numerous incorrect spellings in the passage (for instance *belith* "surrounds," is written *bæliþ*), and that at least one word (probably *gebocod*, "granted") must have dropped out of the last clause. Further, this charter has "from the brook" (*of thone broc*), where the next charter reads "to the brook" (*on thæne broc*); and the

sense shows that the latter is the true reading. All this proves that we have the charter from the hand of one who was but imperfectly acquainted with the language that he was transcribing. As the passage stands, the "town" must mean the hamlet of Mackney; but in the same passage appended to the next charter the town (*villa*) implied is Brightwell, and Sotwell is described as part of it (*particula villulæ*), while both charters merely speak of Mackney as an island. We must therefore infer that we have here only the beginning and the ending of Eadred's charter; and we may venture to read the opening clause thus: "These are the five hides at Mackney, [namely, those] which the brook Gybhild entirely surrounds on two sides." Then we must infer from the Latin version that a mention of the "five hides at Suttanwelle" ought to follow; and this gives us the key to the meaning of the town (*porte*) mentioned in the next clause, for it could only be Sotwell, or what is now the double village of Sotwell and Brightwell. Then there is a further obvious confusion; for the Latin passage specifies thirty-six acres of arable and two of meadow outside Wallingford, repeating the measurements in Saxon, and then the next passage in Saxon repeats them again as describing lands "north of the town"—north of Mackney in this place and north of Sotwell in the next charter. The allusion to "the fortress of Wallingford" is the more puzzling because the boundary of Brightwell is several hundred yards distant from the earthworks of the town, and it seems certain that the eastern end of Millony, as defined in Eadwig's charter, was further still. The passage seems to have been written by one who knew the locality under altered conditions, after the boundary had been brought nearer to Wallingford. It looks as if he misunderstood the words "outside surrounds" (*buton bæliþ*, which, as already noted, he has mis-spelt), and took them to mean "outside the bailey," rendering them *extra castellum*, and adding the explanatory clause, *quod ab antiquitus hoc usque tempus vocatur Welingaford*. The word *bailey*, indeed, has not been found to occur earlier than the end of the thirteenth century; and therefore if this explanation is correct, and if the true date is assigned to the chartulary, it shows that the word was known a century earlier than the authorities for it which we now possess.

Then we may attempt to read the meaning of the Saxon fragment appended to this second charter. "The five hides at Mackney," as we found them described in the charter of Eadwig, form a triangle, the footpath which we traced being its south-eastern base. Kibble Ditch curves round its western side, and that name seems to be

taken here to designate also the ditch which meets this from the east and forms the north side of the triangle, for along each of these ditches we have found a Roman street. The description of Mackney then states that "the stream Gybhild altogether surrounds it without, on each side (*on ælce healf*)," though obviously not on the third side. Next we read of the forty-six acres north of the town, which we have already found to be north of Sotwell and Brightwell; "and one mill," for each of these villages had its mill at the Domesday survey, and the charter doubtless refers to one of these. Something is wanting to complete the sense of the next clause; but it implies that the grant includes all "within the town, from the east gate, on the north side of the street, as far as the brook." The brook must be the Gybhild mentioned at the outset, and the street we have found already. Then the east gate must be some point upon this "street" where it enters the "town"—possibly the point where the existing portion of the old road ends close to Slade End, or possibly further west. Therefore in addition to Mackney, which is south of the street, the charter bestows all that is included in the Brightwell and Sotwell villages on the north side of the street from the eastern entrance as far as the brook at the western end. Next it bestows seven houses outside the town; but it seems useless to speculate what these may be, unless we are to understand that they are in the five hides at Suttunwylle which the heading of the charter mentions. Finally it notes that the grant includes three churches. Sotwell Church still retains relics of a very early building, probably of the period of this grant. Brightwell Church, hardly half-a-mile to the west of it, retains nothing earlier than late Norman work; but there was a Church at the Domesday Survey, and we may presume that it was one of the three. Then we must infer that the third Church was at Mackney.

We need not doubt that the five hides in Suttunwylle are the same land that forms the northern and principal portion of Sotwell parish. Thus we conclude that Eadred bestowed on Æthelgeard the town which now comprises Sotwell and Brightwell, with the five hides of Sotwell north-east of it giving access to the Thames, and the five hides of Mackney south-west of it giving access to the great highway to Winchester (and very probably Æthelgeard's grant of the reversion was in view from the first); to all of which Eadwig added, nine years later, the lands north-west of these, extending the territory as far as the Roman street which bounded the lands of Abingdon Abbey at Wittenham as they had been granted nearly a century

before by King Ethelred.\* Afterwards, when the Convent of Hyde parted with the chief parts of this estate, retaining the five hides in Sotwell of Eadred's original grant, they found it advisable to retain with it a line of approach to the brook southward in the form of a narrow strip of marsh land between Mackney and Millony; and this narrow strip widens out at its southern end so as to include the ford of the primitive track which we have noticed at the point where Millony meets "The Evils."

The early forms of the name of Sotwell deserve notice. It is Stottanwille in Eadwig's charter; and this recalls the fact that a family named Estoteville or Stutville, derived from a town in Normandy, were settled at an early period at Latton in Wiltshire, and a branch of them, called Latton, settled afterwards in this neighbourhood at Upton.† It may be a mere coincidence of name, but Sotwell is originally "Stotta's Well." We may infer that the name, when its meaning became obsolete, afterwards assumed a more familiar form, Suttanwell, and then Suttunwell or South-town-well, as we have it from the hand which gives us Eadred's charter. But the original form was not wholly lost, for the *Inquisitio post mortem* of the estates of Thomas Stonor in 1429 states that he held half a knight's fee in Stotwell.‡ In Domesday it appears as Sotwelle, and has so continued to the present day, though from the 17th to the early part of the 19th century it was often written Satwell.

Brightwell has not yet been mentioned in the charters, but, as already stated, it first appears (*Beorhtanwille*, from *beorht*, bright or clear) in the remaining one, and Sotwell is part of it.

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\* Compare *Abingdon Chronicle* (Rolls series), I. 134, 135.

† Ashmole, *Antiquities of Berkshire*, III. 330.

‡ Esc. 7 Hen. VI., 69, p. 124.

(To be continued.)

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CONGRESS OF ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETIES.—This annual Congress was held at Burlington House on July 4th, when the Berks Society was represented by the President and Secretary. Amongst other proposals it was suggested that all Churchyard inscriptions should be copied and preserved in local museums. Here is a task which might well be accomplished by local antiquaries. Inscriptions fade, and memories fade too; hence it is important to genealogists that these inscriptions should be recorded and preserved.