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Two Vanishing Berkshire Glories.

BILLINGBEAR AND HEYWOOD.

BY HENRY E. BANNARD.

IT is a strange and sad coincidence that within the last three years, the two great estates of Billingbear, in the parish of Waltham St. Lawrence, and of Heywood, in the parish of White Waltham, have been sold by representatives of the families which have owned them for centuries, and are now in process of being broken up for building and other purposes. It seems a fitting moment therefore to place on record some account of the history and nature of these ancient Berkshire houses, and some of 'the people of some importance in their day' (to quote Robert Browning) who lived in them.

The Nevilles of Billingbear and the Sawyers of Heywood have played no small part in the making of the history of England during the past three centuries. Both estates are in the Forest Hundreds, Billingbear in the Hundred of Wargrave, and Heywood in that of Beynhurst.

In late Anglo-Saxon times the Manor of Waltham St. Lawrence, including Billingbear, was in the hands of Queen Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor; it was one of the manors which William the Conqueror kept in his own hands, which is so recorded in the Domesday Record. Before the end of the Thirteenth Century the Bishop of Winchester was holding the Manor, as appears from the following entry in the Testa de Neville:—

'The Bishop of Winchester holds Wereg'ave, Waltham and Warefold, which King Richard restored (reddidit) to Godfrey, Bp. of Winchester, by the fine which he made

with him, that the right belonged to the Church of Winchester as it is said.'

Various entries in the Thirteenth Century indicate that misunderstanding and disagreement not infrequently arose between the Crown and the Bishops of Winchester as to their respective rights in this Manor. The Hundred Roll, f. 14 b., has this record :—

‘ HUNDRED OF WEREGRAVE.’

Of all the Encroachments (Purprestures) ‘They (the Jurors) say that the Bishop of Winchester (Adomarus, 1260-62) first encroached (purprestabit) upon the great place of the Forest, which is called *Pullingbere* and made many other encroachments, that is to say in Sterling, Wydenstrode, Bere, Rocholt, Ruges, and in other places throughout the whole Hundred of Wargrave, to the great damage of the beasts of Chace of the Lord the King.’ [This ‘*Pullingbere*’ is one of the earliest references to Billingbear, though there is mention of the hedge of Billingbear, in 1208, as quoted on page 25, of Mr. Hubert Hall’s ‘*Pipe Roll of Bishopric of Winchester.*’]

The Hundred Roll, f. 17 b., states that the Jurors of the Hundred of Beynhurst ‘say also that the Bishop of Winchester has warren in the Hundred of Weregrave, but they know not by what authority and that he claims to have free chase in *Pillingbere* and throughout the whole of his land of Weregrave to the injury of the Lord the King.’

This statement was fully confirmed at the time by the Jurors of the Hundred of Wargrave. A compromise was arranged by 1284 when the Crown quit-claimed Billingbear to the Bishop of Winchester (Hundred Rolls) (quoted in the *Victoria History of Berkshire*).

After the Reformation had been accomplished, Billingbear again became Crown property, with the rest of the Manors of Wargrave, Waltham St. Lawrence, and Warfield being surrendered to the King, Edward VI, on July 4th, 1551. In the

following year the King made a grant to Henry Nevill, as recorded in the Patent Rolls as under :—

‘ The King in consideration of the good, true, and faithful service rendered to him by his beloved servant Henry Nevill, Esquire, one of the gentlemen of his Privy Chamber, grants to him and to Wenefrid Losse, daughter of Hugh Losse, Esquire (which same Wenefrid the same Henry with God’s favour shall take to wife), all those manors of Wargrave, Waltham Lawrence, Warfelde alias Warvilde, Colham alias Culham, and Pillingbere, and the advowsons free dispositions and right of patronage to the Churches of Wargrave, Waltham St. Lawrence, Warvelde alias Warvilde, Colham alias Culham, and Pillingbere in county Berks, lately parcel of the possessions of John, Bishop of Winchester. To hold to them and the heirs and assigns of Henry, of the King in chief by the service of the 40th part of one Knights fee.’

In those days of swift and drastic political and ecclesiastical changes, it was one thing to be granted an estate, and quite another to retain possession of it. The year after the grant above cited, Edward the Sixth died, and Queen Mary, who succeeded, took steps to have the grant annulled, and the estate restored to the See of Winchester.

The death of Queen Mary in 1558, and the accession of her sister, Elizabeth, turned the wheel of fortune in Nevill’s favour again, and the original grant from Edward VI was confirmed to Henry Nevill by Act of Parliament in the first year of Elizabeth’s reign. Henry Nevill had been Knighted by Edward VI, in 1549 (Shaw, *Knights of England* II—65), and was Sheriff of Berkshire in 1570, and was a member of three Parliaments. He died in 1593, and was buried in Waltham St. Lawrence Church. On the north wall of the north chapel of that Church there is a monument to his memory and to that of his wife, Elizabeth, who had predeceased him by twenty years. The monument has representations of the knight himself, his wife, Dame Elizabeth, his wife’s mother, Dame Frances, and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth. The inscription on the monument reads thus :—

‘ Here lyeth buried Sir Henry Nevill Kt, decended of the Nevills of Abergavenny, who were a Branch of the House of Westmorlande, he was (Besyde Martial Services) of the Privie Chamber to K. Henry 8 and Edward 6, he died 13 January 1593, Issue, He Had Only By Dame Elizab, Sole Heyer To Sir John Gresham, Kt, by Dame Frances, Only Heyer to Sir Henry Thwaites, Knight, Which Dame Elizabeth Died, 6th November A°, 1573, Dame Frances (date not now decipherable) And Are Both Here Buryed With Elizabeth Nevill The Eldest Daughter.’

His son Henry, who succeeded him, was born in the same year as Shakespeare, 1564. He went to Merton College, Oxford. Very soon after leaving the University, he entered upon a political career, and became Member for the Royal Borough of New Windsor, in the Parliament of 1584-5. He changed his constituency somewhat frequently, representing in rapid succession Liskeard, Kent, and Lewes, but later he became more settled in this respect, and was member for his native county of Berkshire from 1604 to 1611, and again from 1614 until his death in 1615. He had business interests, too, and for a short time was an iron founder in Sussex. In 1599, however, he was sent to France as Ambassador, but, unfortunately, diplomacy was by no means his forte, and he was glad when deafness gave him a favourable excuse to ask for his recall. He had scarcely returned to England from France, ere he became involved in very serious trouble, as being a great friend of the Earl of Essex, he was implicated in the foolish and abortive rising which was engineered by that nobleman against Queen Elizabeth.

Henry Nevill, like Shakespeare's patron and friend, the Earl of Southampton, was imprisoned in the Tower, and on July 8th, 1601, was put on trial for his life. He was lucky to escape with dismissal from his office and a fine of £5,000 payable in equal yearly instalments of £1,000. On the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, he appears to have been pardoned by her successor, James I. He had marked Puritan sympathies, and upheld them to his own hurt, as he might have succeeded to the Earl of Salisbury's offices on that nobleman's death in

1612, if he had not offended the King by advocating the calling of a Parliament. He was brimful of ideas, amongst them that of an overland route to India. He died in 1615 and was succeeded by his son Henry, who had received a Knighthood in 1609. On Henry's death in 1629, his son Richard succeeded. Richard Nevill seldom lived at Billingbear, as his father's widow, who subsequently married Sir John Thorowgood, had the estate settled upon her for life. She resided at Billingbear until her death in 1669. Richard Nevill sided with King Charles I, in his quarrel with the Parliament, he was a Colonel in the Royal Army. He compounded for his estates under the articles of surrender. On his death in 1674, his son John succeeded, but only lived three years more, dying without issue, the estates passed to his brother Richard.

It is interesting to note in passing, that the Nevills, like so many other families, were divided in political sympathies during the Civil War. Whilst Colonel Nevill, as just stated, was serving in the King's Army, Henry Nevill was very active on the Parliamentary side. This Henry Nevill, who was born in 1620, was educated at Eton, and at Merton College, Oxford. After he left the University, he spent some years on the Continent, returning in 1645, to find the King and Parliament at death grips. Always a Puritan, he naturally sided with the Parliament, and recruited at Abingdon for their Army. His abilities were speedily recognised by the victorious Parliamentarians, and he was appointed, in 1649, a Member of the Committee which sat at Goldsmith's Hall to deal with the estates of 'Notorious delinquents,' and, in 1651, he became a member of the Council of State. He had not however the favour or confidence of the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, who banished him from London in 1654, on account of his open support of the Republicans Henry Martin and James Harrington, the author of 'The Commonwealth of Oceana.' Colonel Richard Nevill came to the fore again after Cromwell's death, and entered Parliament as Member for Reading. His return, like that of Charles Bradlaugh for Northampton two centuries later, was disputed on the ground that he was guilty of atheism and blasphemy.

He was a prominent member of the famous Rota Club. After the Restoration, he was imprisoned in the Tower, in 1663, on suspicion of conspiring against the King, but the evidence was insufficient for a conviction. He died at Billingbear in 1694, and was buried at Warfield. The Richard Nevill who succeeded in 1677, married Catherine, the only daughter and sole heiress of Lord Grey of Warke. In consequence of this connection, their second son, Henry, took the name of Grey. He represented Abingdon in Parliament in 1705, and Wallingford in 1708, and later became Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. He was a zealous Whig, and followed Walpole, and was very popular with the Non-Conformists, and by his Will he bequeathed money to one Jeremiah Hunt, a Nonconformist minister, on condition that Hunt preached his funeral sermon without mentioning his name. Grey Nevill voted for the impeachment of Dr. Sacheverell. On his death, in 1723, his brother Henry succeeded. The new owner was notoriously impecunious, and soon disappeared. His wife, Elizabeth, was co-heir of the third Lord Griffin of Braybrooke, and the estate was settled on her for life. On her death, in 1716, Richard Aldworth, a nephew of Henry Grey, succeeded, he took the name of Aldworth-Nevill. His successor, his son Richard Aldworth-Nevill, followed his cousin as Lord Braybrooke. From that time the Nevilles seldom resided at Billingbear, as they made their home at their famous Essex seat of Audley End. The last Neville to reside in the parish was the Hon. and Rev. W. Grey Neville, who was vicar of Waltham St. Lawrence for some years, at the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the present Century. During the Nineteenth Century Billingbear was generally let, but there has been no tenant since the death of Mr. C. T. D. Crews, who had there one of the finest collections of old musical instruments in the world. The estate was put up for sale, but a purchaser for it was not found. The fixtures of the house were sold by auction, and the mansion itself is in process of demolition, many of the wonderful old trees in the extensive and beautiful park have been cut down for timber.

There seems to have been a house prior to the grant to the Nevills in 1552, and an inventory taken in 1593, and long preserved by the Nevill family, indicates that in essentials the house was then as it has been known to later generations, although many improvements were made by Sir Henry Nevill in 1599 and by Henry Grey in 1724-6. There is an interesting print of it published by R. & J. Snare of Reading in 1798, and drawn by W. Poole. The writer possesses a copy.

HEYWOOD.

The first record as to Heywood that we have seen is in the Domesday Book, where it is said that :—

‘ The Bishop of Durham holds of the King, Waltham in almoyn. Ulwin, a canon held it of Earl Harold, and it belonged to the Church of Waltham. Then as now . . . at 3 hides. There is land for 6 ploughs. On the demesne are 2 ; and 8 villeins and 3 cottars with 4 ploughs. There are 3 serfs, and 3 acres of meadow and woodland to render 6 swine. T.R.E. it was worth 60 shillings ; afterwards 70 shillings, and now 100 shillings.’

This Manor is styled West Waltham in Harold’s grant to Waltham Abbey (in Essex) in 1060. It is also called West Waltham in a charter of Henry II, confirming it to the canons, as it is also in a charter of Richard I, granting them the liberty of enclosing the ‘ woods of Witeparroch ’ (White Paddock) and Heywode with a hedge and ditch, and in one of Henry III dated 1227, giving them permission to take fox, hare or woodcat there. The term West Waltham can hardly refer to the geographical relation of Heywood to the rest of the Parish of White Waltham, as it is actually its most easterly portion. Probably the term was used to make clear the distinction between it and the Essex Waltham.

In 1275, according to the Hundred Rolls, it was deposed that the Abbot had put up a gallows in Heywood and hanged a woman there without warrant. The Close Rolls of 1339 record an order from Nicholas de la Beche, Governor of the Tower, to the Abbot, to deliver six oaks from his wood of Heywood

to be used on works in the Tower. In 1541, after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Manor was granted to John Norreys of Fifield, a member of the family which had formerly held the adjoining Manor of Ockwells. The Norreys family were connected with the Manor until 1623, when it was conveyed to Dame Elizabeth Craven, Sir William Whitmore, and Sir Edmund Sawyer. The last named was an auditor of the Exchequer. Sir Edmund, who was born in 1576, evidently desired to have a fine country residence at no very great distance from the City of London. He spent the remainder of his life at Heywood and died at the advanced age of 91. He was buried at White Waltham. The stone which covers his remains is near the font, and bears the inscription:—‘*Hic Jacet Corpus Edmundi Sawyer Militis Unus Septem Auditorum Curiae Scaccarii. Domini Regis Caroli Secundi Qui plenus Dierum Diem Suum Clausit Extremum Decimo Sexto Die Junii Anno Domini Millesimo Sexcentissimo Septuagessimio Sixto Anno Ætatis Suæ Nonagessimio primo.*’

He was succeeded by his son Robert, who was born in 1633, and was educated at Magdalen College, Cambridge, where he shared a room with Samuel Pepys, the famous diarist. He was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple, of which he was Treasurer from 1683 to 1688. Elected Member for Wycombe in 1673, he was knighted in 1677, Speaker of the House of Commons in April and May, 1678, and became Attorney General in 1681. He was largely responsible for the drafting of the Exclusion Bill. He was engaged in most of the important law suits of the time, conducting the Rye House Prosecutions in 1683-4, and was Counsel for the Crown against Lord Algernon Sidney, Titus Oates, and Sir Thomas Armstrong. For his conduct of the case against the last mentioned he was severely attacked and was expelled from the House of Commons in 1690, but was returned again for Cambridge a few months later. In the historic trial of the Seven Bishops in 1688, he was senior Counsel for the defence. He died in 1692, at Highclere. Roger North, the Historian, describes him as ‘a proper comely gentleman inclining to the red, a good general scholar, and perhaps too

much of that, in show at least, which made some account him inclined to the pedantic.' Macaulay, in his History, relates an incident which shows that Sawyer was no mere time-server, for when he was commanded to draw warrants giving authority to members of the Church of Rome to hold benefices in the Church of England, he is reported to have replied, 'Sir, this is not merely to dispense with a statute, it is to annul the whole statute law from the accession of Elizabeth to the present day. I dare not do it ; and I implore your Majesty to consider whether such an attack upon the rights of the Church be in accordance with your late gracious promises.'

One of the Sawyer ladies, Catherine, was married October 10th, 1684, to Sir Constantine Phipps, a very prominent lawyer and politician, who took an active part in the defence of Dr. Sacheverell. He died in 1722, and was buried at White Waltham and not at Bright Waltham which is stated in error—one of the very rare errors—in the Dictionary of National Biography. Near the west door of White Waltham Church is a marble mural monument bearing the following long Latin inscription to Sir Constantine Phipps :—

' Sis ve, Properes licet, quisquis es ;
Et qualis heic, quantusq, tumuletur Vir,
Paulisper contemplare.

Is Est

Honorabilis Constantinus Phipps, Miles ;

Regni Hiberniae Aliquot per annos,

Imperante Optimâ Principe, Anna Regina

Summus Cancellarius,

Ejusdemque Justitiarum Regentium Alter

Juris Angliæ peritissimus, præcipue vero in Curiâ

Dignus certe Cujus Fama posteris tradatur ;

Si quid habent Honesti

Multifaria Eruditio Eloquentia pressa, ac nervosa ;

In maximis Honoribus eximia Humilitas atq Modestia ;

Simplex morum, Candor politissimâ Urbanitate exornatus ;

Sapientia a Callidate abhorrens,
 Placidissima Indoles :
 Inconcussa Fortitudo :
 Probitas antiqua :
 Pietas verè Christiana
 Infinito tandem Forensium rerum labore fractus,
 Obiit Londini Oct 9. 1723 Ætat. 68.
 Uxorem duxit Catharinam filiam natu maximam Georgii
 Sawyer armig, filii
 Natu maximi Edmundi Sawyer Militis, de Heywood, in
 Comitatu Berks Exquâ
 Udenos suscepit Liberos, Robertum, Constantinum,
 Franciscum, Thomam, Annamjo ;
 Qui Infantes mortui sunt, Catherinam Nuptam Henrico
 Ingoldesby Armig ;
 e Regno Hiberniae adhuc Superstitem Thomam et Janam,
 defunctus :
 Gulielmum, Phipps, Armig qui Uxorem duxit
 Honoratism Dnm Catherinam Annesley Jacobi Comitiss de
 Anglesey filiam
 unicam, quique, obiit Feb. 1. 1729. Ætat 31. Mariam et
 Franciscam
 Nunc etiam Superstites
 Eodem Tumulo deposita est dieta
 Dna Catherina Phipps dicta Constantini Vidua ; quae in
 Supremis Tabulis
 Hoc Monumentum Dilectissimo Marito suis sumptibus
 poni Curavit. Obiit Dec. 30. 1728.
 Ætat. 68.'

The Manor remained in possession of the Sawyer family
 (though for many years the mansion was let to various tenants)
 until 1924, when it was sold, and a similar fate to that of
 Billingbear has now befallen Heywood.