Maidenhead Thicket.

By H. E. Bannard.

THE first thing that strikes the student when he examines early records that may yield some information as to the history of Maidenhead Thicket is that it was not called a thicket nor had it any connection with Maidenhead, save that of geographical proximity. Right down into the sixteenth century it was still called simply the "Frithe", with no topographical qualification whatsoever, but in the following century, in 1638, to be precise, the name Maidenhead Thicket definitely appears in the State Papers (Domestic). Of these references, however, we shall have occasion to speak in due course.

A glance at the meanings which have been attached to the term "Frithe," serves to indicate what sort of a place the Thicket was when our ancestors first named it the "Frithe." It is a word of both Celtic and Teutonic origin : you get for instance, the Welsh ffrid, the Irish frith and the Middle English frith, the Old Saxon fritha, and the Old Friesian fretho and the Anglo-Saxon frith. The term in every instance implies a certain security and peace and as applied to a place like the Thicket, it denotes "wood or wooded country," or "enclosed land, such as a park or forest," especially land enclosed for the purpose of the preservation of game. The medieval poet, Layamon, in his "Brut," has the line :—

> "Ye huntieth i the King's frithe"

and Piers Plowman has :—

> "Thenne shal Frith be forester here and in this frith walke."

Frith, indeed, belongs to the same group of words as that to which the words "free" and "freedom" belong.

There are other friths in different parts of the country. In Derbyshire there is Chapel-en-le-Frith, and Pirbright in Surrey is a name that derives by a devious route from "frith." Nearer home, across the Thames in Buckinghamshire, there is in the

parish of Hambleden a hamlet called Frieth, which retains with a very slight alteration in spelling the name as it was recorded in 1306.

The name clearly implies a certain number of shrubs and trees, and indeed something of the character of a woodland and something of that of forest.

Before, however, the days when the term the "Frith" is recorded were reached, man had already left his mark upon the ground now covered by what we know as the Thicket.

The Rev. Charles Kerry in the appendix to his valuable work "The Hundred of Bray," describes British pit-dwellings on the Thicket in the following terms :—"The pits on the Thicket are all circular and bowl-shaped, measuring from six to eight yards in diameter at the top, and varying from three to ten feet in depth. The greater number are arranged in the form of an acute angle, one of the sides of which runs along the north side of the Maidenhead and Reading road. The other side, consisting of seven pits, extends from the western extremity of the latter series to the north-east and is terminated by the large pit near the eight poplars on the east side of the Thicket. There is another row parallel to the first, on the south side of the Great Western road, but the pits (five in number) are not so regularly disposed. From the east end of this series another row diverges at right angles and terminates at Tittle Row, behind the cottage bordering upon the Thicket."

Certain of these pits may still be made out on the Thicket, but in the course of time since Kerry observed them, some have been filled up and others more or less obliterated in other ways.

There is yet in good preservation on the north side of the Bath road, opposite the "Coach and Horses," an indication of an earthwork which may mark the site of a British camp.

Kerry goes on to say : "About two hundred yards up the Maidenhead and Henley road . . . . is a bold embankment about five feet in height, ten feet in diameter and eighty yards in length." This, which he considers to be of British origin, cannot now be identified.

The Roman camps however can be traced. One, known for some unfathomable reason, as Robin Hood's Arbour, though there is no trace in record or tradition or legend of Robin Hood ever having frequented the Thicket, is still fairly clearly defined. It is close against the private road that runs from the Henley road to Stubbings House. It is in sight of the lodge and about three hundred yards south-east of it. It is in the angle of the road to Stubbings and the grass track which crosses it, and is barely thirty yards south of the latter. The fosse of this camp is 60 yards long on the north and south sides, and 80 yards long on the east and west sides.

Kerry considered that Robin Hood's Arbour was an outpost to a much larger Roman camp on the south side of the Bath road near the track that leads from Tittle Row to Woolley. He says that it was two hundred yards in diameter, which would make a really large and important camp. Unfortunately from the spread of bushes and undergrowth, and from various other causes, very slight traces only of this great camp are now discernible. Kerry goes on to say: "These earthworks are, perhaps, now the only evidence of the contest between the ancient Bibroci and the Roman power; and although we are informed that this tribe was among the first to lay down their arms at the feet of their conqueror, it is evident that it was not without a struggle for the defence of their liberties, and for the freedom of their hearths and homes."

This, of course, is purely conjectural, but if Kerry's diagnosis be correct, the time of this contest of which he speaks, would be about 43 A.D., when Aulius Plautius was sent by the Emperor Claudius to complete the conquest made by Julius Caesar eighty-seven years earlier. It is possible, however, that the great camp near Tittle Row may have been made to guard the Roman road, the Camlet Way, or at any rate, in the first instance, to guard those who were making it. This road, the Camlet Way, has not yet been thoroughly surveyed, and consequently does not appear on any of the recognised maps of Roman Britain, such as those made by that great authority on the Roman occupation of this

island, the late Francis Haverfield. It was, however, traced out for some miles in this vicinity by the late Mr. James Rutland and the late Mr. Henry Arrowsmith, whilst in the neighbourhood of St. Albans it was identified for some distance by Mr. C. H. Ashdown. These students came to the conclusion that the route of the road was from Caister-next-Yarmouth in Norfolk to Calleva Atrebatum or Silchester, and they thought that it passed through Beccles, Halesworth, Framlingham and Ipswich in Suffolk, and then entering Essex went to the great Roman city of Camulodunum or Colchester. Thence it went by Canorium (now Coggeshall) and Braintree to the Villa Faustini, near Dunmow, and then proceeded into Hertfordshire, passing Bishop's Stortford, Much Hadham, Wade's Mill (where it crossed the great trunk road of Ermine Street), by Ware and Hertford and Hatfield to the city of Verulamium (now St. Albans). Here it crossed the Watling Street. From St. Albans its course was by Bedfont, King's Langley and Chorley Wood. It entered Buckinghamshire near Chalfont St. Peter, passed through Bulstrode Park (where a Roman camp has been found) and then through Hedgerley and Hitcham to Taplow, where it crossed the Thames at a point near Taplow Mills. Mr. Rutland found traces of it in the Back Lane at Maidenhead, and it appears to have gone thence up Castle Hill, past the site of the house called Etruria, where the late Mr. Richard Silver found a Roman villa about forty years ago, and thence by Tittle Row and the Thicket, and over the fields of Feens Farm, by Weycock Field at Waltham St. Lawrence, through Hurst and Bearwood and over Farley Hill, and thence by Swallowfield to Silchester. The big camp of which Kerry speaks as being near Tittle Row must have been very close to this road. A mile south-west of the Thicket in a field on Feens Farm, and about half way between Littlewick Green and the Great Western Railway, there are indications of a villa or some other Roman building, for Roman bricks and tiles are turned up there whenever the ground is ploughed. Close by where these bricks are found, the Camlet Way has been traced. It is noteworthy that this building was about midway between the villa which Mr. Silver found on the

site of his house "Etruria" on Castle Hill, Maidenhead, and the remains of a Roman building which were discovered long ago at Weycock Field, Waltham St. Lawrence.

It seems unlikely that the Camlet Way was a military road in the strict sense of the term, though naturally the Roman legions would make use of it when any occasion arose for them to do so. But Silchester at least was not a military town, nor indeed was Verulamium, though Camulodunum (Colchester) certainly was. Consequently, the Camlet Way, at any rate that part of it which connected Verulam and Silchester, would be mainly used by civilian travellers. Such a road no doubt needed some protection, and camps like that on the Thicket would serve well for a garrison whose duty might be to furnish patrols for this section of the Camlet Way, in order that the travellers on it might be safeguarded against attack.

If the camp on the north side of the Thicket, known in later times as Robin Hood's Arbour, were indeed an outpost of the great camp close to Tittle Row and the Camlet Way, it may well have been specially designed to guard against possible raids by Britons coming from the Chiltern Forest on the Buckinghamshire side of the Thames, and crossing the river by way of the ford at Hurley—Hurley Ford—now known as Harleyford.

In the early nineties, Mr. Rutland and Mr. Henry Arrowsmith made an exhaustive investigation of Robin Hood's Arbour by digging there, but the results were disappointing, very few remains of any interest and none of any great importance being found. It is possible that if a similar search were made on the site of the great camp near Tittle Row, better results might be obtained. Of course, permission has to be obtained from the Lord of the Manor before digging can be undertaken on the Thicket, and the soil must be replaced after digging. When, during the war, troops in training at Maidenhead dug extensive trenches on the Thicket, it might have been expected that some interesting remains would have been found, but nothing very special was then found as far as is known.

It is interesting to speculate whether these Thicket camps were made use of by the Romanised Britons against the Saxons when they invaded the Thames Valley. It seems certain that there was a battle in the immediate vicinity of the Thicket, for the original name of Littlewick was *Hildleage*, which the late Professor Skeat of Cambridge interpreted to signify the battle ley or meadow. It seems fairly safe to assume that such a name would not have been given to this spot if a battle of sufficient importance to be long remembered by the Saxons were not fought there. A glance at the map renders it obvious that this particular tract of the country, filling as it does the great northern loop of the Thames as it winds its way from Windsor to Reading, must have been of considerable strategic importance. It must have been vital to the Saxons to occupy this territory so strongly that they had a firm control of all the crossings of the Thames between Windsor and Reading, for they would for a long time need to safeguard themselves against raids launched by the Britons from the dense Chiltern Forest across the river. Furthermore the Thicket, or the Frith, partaking itself of much the same character as the Chiltern Forest, must have impressed the invaders with the need of conquering and occupying it themselves, if only to prevent it from being held by their enemy. There were thus cogent military reasons for the Saxon efforts to make a strong and determined and well-directed effort towards obtaining a definite decision in this district.

When the Saxons got settled firmly in this district, and as they always did, began to cultivate the country, the Frith appears to have remained uncultivated. Here and there perhaps on its fringes, reclamation was effected, but the great bulk of it was left in its natural condition. The history of it is a complicated matter to trace, as it lies in more than one parish, and in more than one Hundred. Much the greater part of it lies within the parish and Hundred of Cookham, but a small portion is in the parish and Hundred of Bray, and some of it is in the parishes of White Waltham and of Bisham, which are both within the Hundred of Beynhurst. Naturally the distribution

of the Frith among the Manors is similarly complicated. The earliest extant written record of the transfer of land, part of which must have been the Thicket, is the Charter granted to the Benedictine Abbey of Chertsey by King Eadmund in 940. Among the lands granted by this Charter were some in White Waltham, and the Charter is of special interest as it gives the boundaries of White Waltham parish at that time. One of the boundary points is *Hildleage*, which, as we have already noticed, is Littlewick. From there in an easterly direction the boundary goes to *Swaefes heale*, which is represented by the modern Hollow Way. From there it goes to *Wufa leage*, which is Woolley, the estate on the very edge of the present Thicket, and thence in a southerly direction to Caweldene, which has not been precisely identified, but which is probably somewhere near Waltham siding on the edge of the Heywood estate. Heywood itself was not part of the grant to Chertsey Abbey, and a century later it was owned by Harold, who gave it to Waltham Abbey in Essex.

The Chertsey Abbey grant was confirmed by Edward the Confessor, and an Inspeximus of it of the reign of Henry III speaks of the "*boscos de Lidlegewyk.*" These woods of Littlewick were presumably a part of the Frith or Thicket. In the parish of Cookham, we find that the Manor of Cookham was included in the estates of the Ealdorman Aelfheah, who bequeathed his lands by will to his royal lord about 975. Henceforth, the Manor becomes Crown property, and remained so right down to the year 1818.

With the exception of a period of forty-eight years from 1399 to 1447, when it was held by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, it was part of the dowry of the Queens of England from the time of Edward the First to the death of Henry the Eighth.

In Domesday Book the Manor of Cookham is recorded as having land for 25 ploughs, and also "there are 32 villeins and 21 cottars with 20 ploughs and there are 4 serfs and 2 mills worth 22 shillings and 6 pence and 2 fisheries worth 13 shillings and 4 pence and 50 acres of meadow. There is woodland to render 100

swine, and another moiety of it is in the forest of Windesores. The whole T.R.E. was worth 50 pounds, afterwards 50 shillings, now 36 pounds, yet it pays 45 pounds." The woodland for a hundred swine may well include much of what is now the Thicket and Cookham Dean Common.

There is, however, another Manor which was included in the Hundred of Beynhurst in Domesday Book but was later transferred to the Hundred and the Parish of Cookham. This was the Manor of Knight Ellington or Spencers, and it is now one of the secondary Manors of Cookham, as explained by the late Mr. Stephen Darby in his useful work "Chapters in the History of Cookham." It comes under the heading in the Domesday record of "The Land of Ghilo, brother of Ansculf," and it is stated that: —"The same Ghilo holds Elentone. Siward held it T.R.E. Then, as now (it was assessed) at 3 hides. There is land for 4 ploughs. Two men hold of Gilo, Hugh and Landri. They have there 2 ploughs, and there are 6 villeins and 4 cottars with 1 plough. There are 16 acres of meadow and woodland to render 10 swine. It was worth 60 shillings, now 40 shillings."

The man whose name is given simply as Ghilo was Ghilo de Pincquiny, and from his holding of the Manor is derived the name of Pinkneys Green. He had estates also in Northamptonshire, in which county the village of Moreton Pinkney also derives its name from him. The Manor of Ellington was in fact held of the Manor of Moreton Pinkney, as is proved by records in the Testa de Neville and in the Close Rolls.

In the twelfth century, the century which followed immediately that of the Domesday Record, there was land held in Cookham parish by some members of the de Pinkney family that was definitely called the Manor of Pinkney. These lands were held of the lords of Ellington, and the de Pinkneys who then held them are believed to have been a younger branch of the family which held the Manor of Ellington. Simon de Pinkney was holding the Manor of Pinkneys in 1199, Henry de Pinkney in 1318, and John de Pinkney in 1411 and 1412, in which years he increased the Manor by acquiring some additional and adjoining land.

The Pinkney family parted with the Manor of Ellington and Spencers in 1445, when it was conveyed by Nicholas Pinkney and John Clyre to John Norreys who, in the following year, began to build Ockwells in the adjoining parish of Bray. The family retained the Manor of Pinkneys for another decade, and about 1455 Agnes, widow of John Pinkney, conveyed it to Robert Beaumont. Thus the Pinkneys held land which was a part of the Thicket for nearly four centuries, and it is fitting that the memory of their long connection with the place should be perpetuated in the name of Pinkneys Green.

The part of Bray parish which touched on the Thicket was the Manor of Altwood, and probably also part of that of Lowbrook.

The portion of Bisham parish that included part of the Thicket was, and is, the Manor of Stubbings. At the time of the Domesday Record it was then included in the Manor of Bisham and was held by Henry de Ferrers.

In White Waltham parish, the Thicket no doubt comprised a considerable portion of the Manor of Woolley or Feens, and this was certainly part of the lands included in the grant by King Eadmund to Chertsey Abbey.

The first recorded use of the term Thicket as an appellation, is in the fourteenth century, when the Thicket and Bigfrith were mentioned in the same document. It would seem that at this period the names of Frith and Thicket were both in use, but that they referred to different parts of what we call the Thicket. Mr. Stephen Darby, in his "Place Names and Field Names of Cookham," quotes the description Bigfrith as "an open wood and common, by estimation 200 acres, well set with young beech which the tenants preserve in their own right." This is culled by him from the Survey of 1609, and in the same document the Thicket is stated to be "an open common of pasturage for freeholders of the Manor; in area about 368 acres."

In the sixteenth century, Leland, in his Itinerary speaks of a visit he paid to Maidenhead in 1538 and goes on to record :—

"From Maidenhedde town a ii miles by a narrow wooddy way to the Frithe. And so through the Frithe iii miles and more. And then to Twyford a praty townlet a ii miles."

As he says, "the town of Maidenhed stondith a praty distance from the Tamise side," he presumably calculated his distances from somewhere near Chapel Arches. This would make the Frith to begin just about where the Thicket begins now, at Thicket Corner. But if from that point it took him more than three miles to get out of it, the Frith must have extended westwards to beyond Knowl Hill. This very probably was the case, and Bottle Green and Knowl Hill Common with their bushes are no doubt relics of the great Frith, and if the Frith did extend as far as this, it must have been partly in the parish of Hurley, and partly in that of Wargrave, as well as in the parishes already mentioned. The picturesque story given currency by the "Quarterly Review" some years ago, to the effect that the Vicar of Hurley, who served the cure of Maidenhead, was allowed an extra salary for the danger of passing the Thicket has no evidence to support it, as Mr. Walker has pointed out in his "History of Maidenhead."

The Thicket in medieval times was chiefly within the jurisdiction of the Hundred of Beynhurst. This Hundred comprised the parishes of Bisham, Hurley, Remenham, Shottesbrook and White Waltham, and also included that of Cookham down to the 13th century, when it became a separate Hundred of Cookham. It is curious that the other two parishes in the Hundred of Cookham, Binfield and Sunninghill, did not abut on Cookham parish at all. The Hundred of Bray never had any parish but Bray itself in it.

In 1086, when Domesday Book was compiled, the Hundred of Beynhurst consisted of Cookham, Bisham, a lost parish called Bras (which may possibly, however, have been an error of a Domesday scribe for a portion of Bray), Hurley, Shottesbrook, White Waltham and Waltham St. Lawrence and Elenton. Remenham was not transferred from the Hundred of Charlton to that of Beynhurst until the thirteenth century, about the

same time that Waltham St. Lawrence was transferred to the Hundred of Wargrave. Each Hundred had its own court, and the rule throughout the country was that every Hundred was responsible for any injury or crime done against person or property within its jurisdiction. This it was that gave rise to the practice of Hue and Cry, for naturally when a crime was committed within any Hundred, every one belonging to the Hundred was eager to assist in detecting and capturing the perpetrator, as if he were not caught, all in the Hundred were liable to be called upon to pay their quota towards the sum at which the damage done might be assessed. In view, however, of the wild nature of the Frith or Thicket and the natural shelter which it afforded to evildoers, persons who lived within the Hundred of Beynhurst were exempted from collective liability for crimes committed in the Frith.

The governing factor of all the medieval history of this district was the Royal Forest of Windsor, it being part of the Seven Forest Hundreds, for it is recorded in the Assize Rolls of 1268 that Roger de Fryht (a significant enough name in connection with the Frith or Thicket) was "Bailiff of the Seven Hundreds of Beynhurst, Ripplesmere, Charlton, Bray, Cookham, Sonning and Wargrave." The area of these Seven Forest Hundreds covered practically the whole of East Berkshire, as it included the parishes of Bray, Cookham, Binfield, Sunninghill, Bisham, Hurley, Remenham, Shottesbrook, White Waltham, Waltham St. Lawrence, Wargrave, Warfield, Arborfield, Ruscombe, Sandhurst, Sonning (with Earley, Woodley and Sandford), Wokingham, Barkham, Finchampstead, Hurst, Shinfield, Swallowfield, Clewer, Easthampstead, Old Windsor and Winkfield. It seems probable, but not certainly proved, that these separate Hundreds gradually yielded the powers of their courts to be merged in one general court for the whole of the Seven Hundreds. At any rate as early as 1260, a special coroner was appointed for the "Liberty of the Seven Hundreds." No doubt this rather unusual procedure came about through the desire of the Crown to have a fairly uniform administration for the great forest area, with its Royal game and creatures of chase. In fact

it was the hunting and the desire for the preservation of game which determined the mould of local administration in this district throughout the Middle Ages, and we have to regard the Thicket or Frith as being at that time not a separate entity, but as an important integral part of the Royal Forest of Windsor.

As a matter of fact, William the Conqueror had made practically the whole of Berkshire forest, but as a result of a perambulation made by the Forest Justices in 1225, all was disafforested with the exception of the Windsor district, and it is probably about then that the jurisdiction of the Seven Hundreds was constituted.

The Crown did not, however, directly control the detailed administration of the whole area covered by Windsor Forest, persons to whom Manors had been granted within it having the obligation to undertake that, a very special part of their duties being to see that the King's interest in the game of the forest took no hurt. Thus that part of the Thicket which lay within the parish of White Waltham was watched over by the Abbot of Chertsey, who appointed his own woodward to see after it. Similarly, the portion of it that was in Hurley parish was under the control of the Prior of the Benedictine house of Our Lady (now Ladye Place) at Hurley. The Bisham part was first controlled by the Ferrers family, then by the Knights Templars, and then by the Priory of Austin Canons at Bisham, which was founded in 1337 by William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury. The Cookham portion was presumably controlled by the de Pincquiny family, as they and not the Abbey of Cirencester held those secondary Cookham Manors which include the Thicket.

It is pretty well known that until about a century ago the road from Maidenhead to Henley ran on a line east of the present road which turns off at Thicket Corner. The old Henley road ran down what is now St. Mark's Road at Maidenhead, and thence across Highway Fields. Its course can still be discerned in the track which runs in a north-westerly direction from the Highway Field to Camley Corner, where it merges in the present Henley Road.

Perhaps the earliest recorded reference to the Manor of Altwood, which would be that secondary Manor of Bray which included parts of the Thicket, is the note in 1335 of 32s. 3d. for "Agistment of pigs in Altwood."

In 1359, Thomas de Foxle who held this Manor and the principal Manor of Bray was placed under a distraint to account for cutting down three beech trees in Altwood. This would appear to be a case in which the holder of the Manor infringed or was alleged to have infringed the Crown's rights in the Forest. This Thomas de Foxle was Constable of Windsor Castle. Incidentally it is interesting to note that from 1272 to 1302, one Geoffrey de Picheford held this office.

The great Abbeys, and probably most individual Lords of Manors, also were accustomed to appoint an officer, called a woodward, to look after their woodlands. He seems to have had general powers which combined the functions of a forester and a gamekeeper. He usually obtained his office through election by the suitors in the Manor Court.

A Forest Return of the reign of Henry VII states that there were nineteen woodwards of Windsor Forest, four of whom looked after the woods which were part of the Queen's dower. Among those woodwards the following must have had control of parts of the Thicket :—Andrew Wynch, woodward of the Queen, of her wood called Altewood ; William Mattynglee, woodward of the Abbey of Chertsey, of his wood called Lytell Wykwood ; Thomas Fennynge, woodward of William Nores, Knight, of his wood called Thyket and Knightlo ; Richard Warner, woodward of the Queen, of her wood called Inwood and Bigfrith ; John Shepard, woodward of the Bishop of Winchester, of his wood called Wargrave and Waltham ; John Penvey, woodward of the Abbot of Waltham, Holy Cross, of his wood called Heywode ; Robert Nores, woodward of the Prior of Hurley, of his wood called Hurley Wood ; and Thomas Clers, woodward of the prior of Bisham, of his wood called Bisham Woods. We can thus get a good general idea of the distribution of the Thicket among different holders in early Tudor times.

Altwood, comprising that part of the Thicket adjoining Tittle Row, and probably also the land through which Altwood Road now passes, and the common towards Cookham Dean, were in the hands of the Queen as part of her dower ; Pinkneys Green and the greater part of what is now the Thicket were in those of Sir William Norris of Ockwells ; certain portions near what is now Cannon Lane were held by Waltham Abbey ; and Lytell Wykewood and part of the Manor of Feens by Chertsey Abbey. Stubbings was held by the Prior of Bisham, the eastern part of the Knowl Hill section of the Thicket by the Prior of Hurley, and the western part by the Bishop of Winchester.

With the Dissolution of the Monasteries great changes took place in the ownership of the Thicket. Chertsey Abbey was dissolved less than a year before the general Dissolution, namely, in 1537, and about the same time the Priory at Bisham was dissolved, but a new Abbey of the Benedictine Order was founded at Bisham and was endowed, among other lands, with those which had belonged to Chertsey Abbey. Thus the part of the Thicket in White Waltham parish came in December, 1537, into the possession of Bisham Abbey. It only remained in the hands of the Monks for seven months, however, for in July, 1538, Bisham Abbey was dissolved with the rest of the monasteries. The Manor of Bisham was granted by Henry VIII in 1541 to his fourth Queen, Anne of Cleves, for her life, but this was exchanged by her for another, and the Bisham estates became the property of Sir Philip Hoby. The Hurley Priory lands were granted to Charles Howard, who almost immediately sold them to Leonard Chamberleyn, who in turn sold them to John Lovelace. The lands of the Bishop of Winchester in Wargrave parish were granted by Edward VI to Henry Neville with rights of parks, warrens, chases, purlieus and wild beasts ; which would cover the game rights in that portion of the Thicket which lay in the western part of Knowl Hill.

The process of alienation of Crown lands to private owners moved apace. There were frequent quarrels as to boundaries, and it is probable that the bitterness of the long-standing dispute

between the parishes of Bray and White Waltham, to which Hearne, the eighteenth century antiquary refers, was envenomed by questions as to game rights on the Thicket at the points of junction between the two parishes.

Meanwhile, though the Crown rights in many things had been purchased by private owners, the Forest representatives of the crown still retained some jurisdiction over the Thicket, for in the reign of James I the whole of the country between Wokingham and the Thames was constituted one particular " Walk " of the Forest, and was styled alternatively Binfield Walk or Feens Bailiwick, the latter name evidently being derived from the Manor of Feens, and thus clearly indicating that the Thicket was within this Walk in Bailiwick.

With the close of the Middle Ages, among other great changes, came the period of enclosures. Obviously bearing in mind the extent of the Frith or Thicket in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a great proportion of it must have been later enclosed or we should still find the Thicket stretching beyond Knowl Hill. About 1589 there was considerable perturbation and anger in the parish of Cookham, one witness before a Commission of Inquiry complaining that much common land was enclosed " to the great undoeing of the poorer soarte." This was owing to the enclosure of an area covered with fir trees that had been available to all tenants of the Manor for pasture, and where they had been accustomed to the right of taking a " tithe braunde " for their Christmas firing.

Later there were historic struggles by the Cookham commoners, but these seem chiefly to have concerned Widbrook and Cockmarsh and the commoners successfully defended their rights there. The rights of the commoners on the Thicket proper do not seem ever to have been challenged so seriously. There must have been, however, a gradual process of reclamation and enclosure of great portions of the Thicket or Frith in the other parishes in which it lay to account for the fact of its replacement by corn fields and houses. In Hurley parish there are no commons in the legal sense, the open spaces such as Bottle

Green, Birchett's Green and Knowl Hill Common (so-called) being technically Waste of the Manor.

An Enclosure Act was passed for White Waltham and Shottesbrook parishes in 1810, and by that Act the Green at Littlewick was definitely established as a Common.

There is a record in a letter from Sir James Harrington to the Earl of Northumberland in 1638 of a concentration of 3,000 troops on Maidenhead Thicket. So far as we know this is the first recorded reference to the Thicket as Maidenhead Thicket.

Among the old documents which were examined and reported on at the Poor Law Institution of Maidenhead in 1918, was one of some date between 1840 and 1850, which proved to be a draft of evidence produced by the parish of Bisham in a dispute they had with Cookham parish, as to which Robin Hood's Arbour belonged. The Bisham people relied chiefly on statements of aged inhabitants as to traditions that early in the eighteenth century a man was murdered at Robin Hood's Arbour and was buried at the expense of Bisham parish, and that another man who was robbed there successfully sued the Hundred of Beynhurst for the amount of his loss.

With the advent of the coaching era, the Thicket, traversed as it was by the main road from London to Bath, attained eminence as a haunt of highwaymen, an equivocal distinction which it shared with Hounslow Heath and Bagshot Heath.

The earliest coach that crossed the Thicket was one started in 1704 to ply between London, Henley and Wallingford. The unfortunate proprietor was in advance of his time: he dropped £200 over his enterprise in three years, and then the coach venture was abandoned. In 1752 a coach was started to run between Newbury and London. It was called the Flying Coach, as the people of that day seem to have been impressed with what was to them the immense speed of nearly five miles an hour. It took just twelve hours to run from Newbury to London.

It is interesting to note that in 1832 a *steam* coach actually used this road.

References to Maidenhead Thicket in literature are very scanty and hard to find. Lord William Pitt Lennox, in his work on " Coaching " has a pleasant description of driving a coach across the Thicket and calling at the " Coach and Horses " to renew acquaintance with one Sally Sadgrove, the pretty daughter of the landlord. Lord William received part of his education at the house at the top of Littlewick Green, known as Littlewick House.

William Black writes briefly of his passage over the Thicket in his " Strange Adventures of a Phaeton," and so does Gilbert Frankau in his novel, " Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant," which it is to be supposed is the only novel in which there is a reference to the clock at Nicholson's Brewery in Maidenhead. Internal evidence too, suggests pretty conclusively that it was somewhere about the Thicket that Soames Forsyte, in John Galsworthy's great work, had the misfortune to run over a pig with his motor car when, worried with the impending libel suit against his daughter, he was travelling back from London to his home at Mapledurham.

The Thicket still retains a shadow of its sporting glories, but they are mainly confined to rabbit shooting. Sporting rights are vested in the Lord of the Manor. How the curious custom and alleged right arose by which practically anybody may go with impunity to catch rabbits on the Thicket on one day a year, namely, Boxing Day, is not evident.

There are records of race meetings on the Thicket on a course near Tittle Row in the early years of the nineteenth century, but this meeting does not seem to have lasted long and certainly never attained any importance.

The connection of the Royal Hunt with Maidenhead Thicket, however, merits attention. For many years, Maidenhead Thicket was the northernmost of the Berkshire meets of the Royal Buckhounds, thus coinciding with the most northerly part of the ancient jurisdiction of the Royal Forest of Windsor.

The first of the Berkshire meets of the regular season used always to be at Maidenhead Thicket, the first meet of all being in the Buckinghamshire country at Salt Hill. They were always there on the first Tuesday of November and on the Thicket on

the following Friday. The final meet of the season was held on Easter Monday at the "Coach and Horses" end of the Thicket, and there the gipsies and their coconut shies turned this sporting fixture into the semblance of a fair. The Royal Buckhounds were abolished after the death of Queen Victoria, but the Easter Monday meets had been dropped for some years previously, though hounds still met there on other occasions in the season. The last meet of the Queen's Hounds on Maidenhead Thicket was on Friday, January 11th, 1901, just a week before the illness of the great Queen became publicly known, and only eleven days before she died. The meet was held by "Heathside" and the "Coach and Horses" as usual, and in due course hounds and field made their way along the track on the southern edge of the Thicket and down Cannon Lane to Heywood Farm, where the deer was uncarted and given its usual ten or fifteen minutes law.

Comins, the last of the Royal huntsmen, swung the pack round into the field of the turn-out, horsemen and pedestrians standing aside to make a clear path for them in response to his customary challenging shout of "Hounds, gentlemen, if you please." The pack was laid on and streamed over the hill at Waltham Place and away to the left to Holyport, and thence to the Forest. It was one of those bright mornings that one does get sometimes in January, with a foretaste of spring even in mid-winter. The sunlight picked out the scarlet and gold facings of the liveries of the Royal huntsman and whips, and the sober Lincoln green, symbolic of centuries of forestry and woodcraft, of the coats of the two men with the deer cart; and as the notes of the horn and the cry of the hounds died away in the distance, no one had any reason to suppose that the Royal Hunt had been witnessed for the last time. Yet, so it was, and in the circumstances, there was no formal ending or farewell, it just "ceased upon the midnight with no pain." And, with the end of the Royal Hunt, the last frail link that connected Maidenhead Thicket with the old Royal Forest regime was severed. On January 11th, 1901, the ancient history of the Thicket ended and its modern history began.