

WILLIAM CAMDEN AND CAMDEN PLACE.

Some notes read to the Society at Camden Place, Chislehurst, on July 23rd, 1910.

BY ARTHUR BONNER.

IT is well known that Camden spent the last years of his life and died at Chislehurst, and that this house is named from that fact. It is hardly necessary for me to remark, after our walk through the house, that the present building is not the house he lived in, as it obviously dates in the main from more than a century after his time.

Before dealing with the house, however, I will briefly outline the main points in Camden's career, and this outline, in view of the fullness of our programme this afternoon, must be little more than a list of dates.

WILLIAM CAMDEN.

William Camden was born in the Old Bailey, London, in 1551. His father, Sampson Camden, was a Lichfield man who had settled in London as a painter: and he became a liveryman of the Painter-Stainers Company. Camden's mother was of the family of Curwen, of Workington. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, St. Paul's School, and Oxford: Magdalen, Pembroke—or Broadgates Hall as it was then called—and Christchurch. At Christchurch he was a fellow student of Philip Sidney.

In 1575, by the influence of Dr. Gabriel Goodman, Dean of Westminster, he was appointed the second

master in Westminster School¹ under Dr. Grant; when Dr. Grant resigned, in 1593, Camden succeeded him as Head Master—and in this position it may be noted that he was the first layman, as other “Heads” had been “Clerks in holy orders.” It was as layman that he also held the prebend of Ilfracombe, with which he was presented in 1589 by Dr. Piers, Bishop of Salisbury.

In 1596 he was offered a post of master of requests, which he declined; and in the same year, when the office of Clarencieux King-at-Arms had become vacant, he was appointed to it, through the influence of Sir Fulke Greville²—and this appointment he held until his death.

The Calendar of State Papers (Domestic) for this period has two entries which I quote bodily. They are official summaries of the originals:—

“1594, April 4. The Queen to the Dean of Westminster: Having used the Services of William Camden, schoolmaster, in things wherein he has attained skill, and intending to employ him again, wishes him settled somewhere near, and eased of the charge of living. Has therefore fixed on Westminster, and requires his admission to the Dean and prebends’ table himself, and diet for one servant among the servants, to be granted by writing for life, as it will be no great burden to the church., and he has long served in teaching.

¹ There were then only two masters and 120 boys (Sergeant’s “Annals of Westminster School,” p. 54). The Abbey Registers describe Camden in 1587 as “usher for the tyme present.”

² Then just knighted; later (1620-21) Lord Brooke.

Wishes the grant to be sent to her, that she may present it as a token of gratitude. [Draft, 1¼ pp.]”

“1596. Warrant by the Sheriff of Devonshire to the bailiffs, to give attendance on William C[amden], Clarencieux king-at-arms, who by the Queen’s commission is making his general survey throughout the country, and to direct him to every gentleman within their hundreds.”

In 1599 he retired from Westminster School, “having,” he writes, “gathered a contented sufficiency by my long labours in the School.” One of his pupils at Westminster was Ben Jonson, whose school fees appear to have been paid by Camden.

During his mastership at Westminster he was actively engaged on his antiquarian, topographical, and historical researches and writings, and despite the handicap of health that was clearly anything but robust, and several serious illnesses, his published output during the latter part of his life was considerable. The first edition of his great work, the “*Britannia*,” appeared in 1586, after ten years’ labour; it was published on his thirty-fifth birthday (May 2nd); its fourth edition was issued in 1594; the fifth in 1600; a sixth and much enlarged edition, in folio, appeared in 1607; and the first translation from the original Latin, by Philemon Holland, in 1610. Gough’s well-known edition of the great work (with Biography), was published in 1789; and its second and extended form (by Gough and Nichols), in 1806. Previous to 1586

³ “*Britannia, sive Florentissimorum Regnorum Angliæ, Scotiæ, Hiberniæ, et Insularum adjacentium ex intima antiquitate Chorographica Descriptio.*”

Camden had already completed a survey of the country of the Iceni in Norfolk and Suffolk (1578), but I have not been able to trace its publication in England.

His later works included a Greek Grammer for scholars at Westminster, 1597,¹ List of Epitaphs in Westminster Abbey, 1600 (enlargements in 1603 and 1606); Collection of Old English Historians (Asser, Walsingham, etc.), 1603; Remains Concerning Britain, 1605 (from "Britannia"; "the rude rubble and outcast rubbish of a greater and more serious work," as Camden described it); History of the Gunpowder Plotters, 1607; and Annals of the reign of Queen Elizabeth (to 1588), 1615.

One of Camden's many distinguished friends was Sir Robert B. Cotton (1571-1631) who had been a pupil of his at Westminster, and who is now best known to us from his invaluable collection of MSS., etc., which was presented to the nation by his great-grandson, Sir John Cotton, in 1700. The Cottonian MSS. include a number of Camden letters and papers.

Camden's connection with Chislehurst seems to date from 1609, when, after an illness, he stayed two months (Aug. 15th to Oct. 23rd) here to aid convalescence; and a few years later he took up his residence here. It is not known what house in Chislehurst he visited in 1609; and the date of his removal here is uncertain. Gough places it at about 1617, but it may have been earlier. Camden himself, in a letter written from Chislehurst to his friend Ussher² in 1618, says that he

¹ Of which forty editions were published by 1691.—(Gough.)

² James Ussher (1581-1656), Bishop of Meath 1620, Archbishop of Armagh 1625; Biblical chronologist, etc.

had "retired into the country for the recovery of my tender health," and that he purposed to sequester himself "from worldly business and cogitations"; and his eighteenth-century biographer, Gough, tells us that he lived here in retirement and "amused himself with entering memoranda of events as they happened, which have been printed at the end of his epistles by Dr. Smith and called 'Apparatus annalium regis Jacobi I.'"

It has been suggested by Mr. G. W. Miller (*History of Chislehurst*, p. 239) that Camden's choice of Chislehurst was aided by the fact of the residence here of his friends, Sir Thomas and Lady Walsingham, who held the neighbouring manor of Scadbury; and this seems very probable.

The Calendar of State Papers (Domestic) for November, 1617, has the following condensed memorandum: "Segar, Garter King-at-Arms, and St. George, Norroy, Knighted, but Camden Clarencieux, 'inferior to neither of them in ability or learning, hath not put out his topsayles.'" Camden evidently did not desire knighthood.

One of the last public acts of Camden's life was his foundation of a historical lectureship at Oxford, in 1622, and this he endowed with the income from his manor at Bexley, which he had bought of Hy. Spilman, Jeweller to James I, and which brought in £400 per annum. This is Gough's statement; but the State Papers give the amount of the actual endowment at "£160 or £180."

In August, 1623, a paralytic stroke led to his last illness, from which he died on November 9th of that year; and on the 19th he was buried in Westminster Abbey.

One of Camden's bequests is of special interest to us in our close connection with the City of London, viz., the sum of £16 to the Painter-Stainers Company "to buy them a piece of plate in memorial of me." We saw the fine "Camden Cup," which resulted from this legacy, and had it described to us by our colleague Mr. W. Hayward Pitman, C.C., Upper Warden of the Company, at our visit to the Company's Hall in 1905; and we also saw there the excellent portrait of Camden which was presented to the Company in 1676 by the then Master.⁶

CAMDEN PLACE.

Nothing is known of the house in which Camden lived at Chislehurst. There is an interesting map or plan in the British Museum (Add. MS. Z31,323) showing Chislehurst at c. 1680. It is drawn to scale, at 12 inches to the mile; and a good facsimile is given in the excellent "History of Chislehurst" by Messrs. E. A. Webb, G. W. Miller, and J. Beckwith⁷—a carefully compiled and valuable volume to which I am indebted for much local information. The house there shown (with the plot and orchard which have since developed into the beautiful park attached to Camden Place) may well be identical with Camden's home. It is simply described, in the list of the holdings given on the plan, as "The House one (*sic*) the west side the Heath with the orchard garden and Barn stable outhouse yards,"

⁶ Mr. Hayward Pitman's paper on the Company and Hall in which the cup and picture are described and illustrated, appears in our Transactions, New Series, Vol. II, p. 62.

⁷ George Allen, 1899. 4to.

three roods, and "The Closs adjoining" 1 acre 2 roods 4 perches; so that the little estate comprised about $2\frac{1}{4}$ acres. Its then occupier was named Ellis. This house was rebuilt about 1717 by Robert Weston, who had purchased the property, and he then named it "Camden Place"; he also added about an acre to the estate.

About 1760 the property was purchased by Chas. Pratt, the Attorney General. He was a notable man. The third son of a former Lord Chief Justice, he himself attained the position of Chief Justice (common pleas), with Knighthood, in 1761; three years later he received a peerage, and took the title of Baron Camden of Camden Place; then he became Lord Chancellor; and finally his rank was raised with the titles Earl Camden and Viscount Bayham⁸. As Sir Chas. Pratt, C.J., he distinguished himself in connection with the case of John Wilkes, which twice came before him: the City Corporation made him a freeman of the City, and had his portrait painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds and hung in the Guildhall (1764). He died in 1794 at the age of 80. His wife was daughter and heiress of Nicholas Jeffreys, of Brecknock Priory, who had a considerable estate near Kentish Town and Holloway.⁹ He built the present main building here,¹⁰ incorporating Weston's house as

⁸ The second title is from Bayham Abbey, Frant, Sussex, which Lord Camden's father, Sir John Pratt, had purchased in 1714. Sir John is credited with wantonly disroofing the ancient Abbey Church, of which the ruins still stand and are well known.

⁹ The Jeffreys estate developed c. 1790 into Camden Town, where the names of Pratt Street and Camden Road are further mementoes of Miss Jeffreys' marriage.

¹⁰ His arms and motto, "Malo mori quam foederi," are still on the front of the house, above the main entrance.

kitchens and offices; he acquired land on the western side and formed the Park (Camden Park); and he also induced the Chislehurst authorities to allow him to enclose $3\frac{1}{4}$ acres of the Common—a narrow strip on the east and a patch on the north of the house. His son, the second Lord Camden, became Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and, in 1812, Marquis Camden and Earl Brecknock.

The second Earl, and first Marquis, Camden sold Camden Place early last century; and among several successive tenants of the house a little later on one notices Prince Esterhazy, who seems to have lived here about 1820.

The next owner who left his mark upon the house was Mr. N. W. J. Strode, who bought the estate in 1860. He added the dining room at the north end—the handsome room in which we are now assembled—the fine eighteenth century fittings of which are said to have graced a Bourbon hunting lodge, whence Mr. Strode purchased them; and the ceiling is reproduced from the same house. Mr. Strode made some alterations to the house, and put in the good French fireplaces we see in other rooms, and the elaborate mantelpiece of Dresden China in the drawing room; and the interesting panelling in the vestibule is attributed to his time.

In 1870, after the fall of the Emperor Napoleon III, Mr. Strode offered the house to him. Mr. Strode had for many years been on terms of friendship with the Emperor; and his timely offer was accepted. The ex-Emperor and Empress took up their quarters here; and here Napoleon III died in January, 1873. The Empress

Eugenie remained until her removal to Farningham in 1880—a few months after her son's death in Zululand, which is commemorated by the granite cross erected by the Chislehurst folk upon the Common, in view of the house.

Mr. Strode then resumed his residence here until his death in 1890. The property was then sold to Mr. Willett, the well-known developer of building estates, and he laid out some roads at the south end of the park; but a large portion of the park was laid out as a golf links, and the mansion became the Club House, and the course was opened in 1894 by Mr. A. J. Balfour. A local syndicate was formed which, in 1899, purchased the links and mansion "to preserve them in their present state," as Mr. G. W. Miller tells us in the "History of Chislehurst." It is to the courtesy of the Golf Club—the present tenants—that we are indebted for our visit here to-day.

THE SITE OF CAMDEN'S HOUSE.

(Additional Note, 1913.)

Since the Society's visit I have made a careful examination of the plan of Chislehurst of c. 1680 (as reproduced in the *History*), which was drawn to the scale of about twelve inches to the mile, in comparison with the large scales (25 inches and six inches to the mile) Ordnance Survey, editions 1863 and later. It seems clear that the house shown on the 1680 plan—which was probably the one Camden had inhabited—stood near the north-east corner of the present buildings. This would imply that Weston's building

(c. 1717) was erected clear of the earlier house and to the west of it. Sir Chas. Pratt's house was added to Weston's—which was utilised as domestic offices, etc.—on its south side, and on the south-west of the earlier ("Camden's") house, which had evidently been cleared away after Weston had superseded it.

With the help of the 25-inch Ordnance Survey I have drawn a diagram showing the present buildings, with the approximate position of Camden's house indicated. The 1760 building (Sir C. Pratt) is shown in outline; that of c. 1717 (Weston) has horizontal hatching; Mr. Strode's additions have perpendicular hatching; and the approximate position of Camden's house is shown by a dotted outline which follows the shape indicated by the 1680 plan—which, although it may not be exact, is probably a suggestion of the actual shape of the earlier house.

