

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE ANTIQUITIES OF STAINES, COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX.

[Read before the Society at their Annual Meeting at Staines, Aug. 8,
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In a short paper on local antiquities I have expressed no new views on old questions, and shall be satisfied if I succeed in bringing together in a limited compass some of the leading events in local history.

It seems natural to say something of the invasion, when Cæsar crossed the Thames on his way to Old Verulam. In his march through primeval woods—in which he speaks of a perfect absence of beech and fir—he approached the great forest of Anderida, which stretched from the Downs and ended near Hounslow. The Barons who gained us the charter had a tournament after it was signed at a place described as Staines Wood, near Hounslow, and jousted for a young bear, a fashionable gift in the middle ages. This part of the forest was diswarrened by charter in the time of Henry the Third.

Antiquaries have contested with learning and fierceness the identity of their pet localities with that of the places Cæsar described, and the question where he crossed the Thames to meet the forces of Cassivelaunus has been as hotly fought as the passage itself.

Perhaps more so, for whether he passed at Cowey, near Walton, or at Laleham, or at Sunbury, as the Emperor Napoleon says in his *Life*, his account of his passage bears a wonderful likeness to a recent crossing of the Danube by the Russians.

A strong case can be made out in favour of Cowey, not so much from the discovery of stakes shod with iron as from the British entrenchments which crown the neighbouring heights, and extend at intervals as far as St. Anne's Hill.

And I will dismiss this topic by referring to a very interesting cause tried at Maidstone Assizes to decide whether the county of Middlesex or of Surrey was liable to the repair of Walton Bridge. Learned geologists and antiquaries, map in hand, contested the exact course of the old river before it had been diverted and straightened, and narrowed and deepened, by modern engineers, and it ended in a drawn battle after all.

We are nearer home when we reach the military roads of the

Romans, dotted by stations which grow into towns as the occupation grows older, and give to the moderns the relics which rarity renders valuable.

The claim of Staines to be identified with the station Pontes on the Roman road leading from London to Silchester is pretty clearly established by the survey of the students of Sandhurst. Its line crosses Ashford Ford, with a station at Staines, which it crossed at the point of the old bridge. Then it took by Egham through the yard of the "Wheatsheaf" at Virginia Water, through the lake, to near the Belvedere Tower. It loses itself in the forest, and re-appears at Bagshot. The description Pontes would readily suit either Staines or Colnbrook, where the river requires several bridges; hence, perhaps, it was that Camden gave the preference to Colnbrook and Stukely to Staines, and the latter even traces the Roman road to Staines Bridge. Old Windsor has been claimed for Pontes, and Bray for old Bibracte, but the Roman road and Roman remains found at Sunninghill strengthen the claim of Staines, and render their chances hopeless. Whether the old spelling Stanes adopted in Domesday Book suggests the stones used in a fordable river I know not. In old records the place is called Stana, which is Saxon for stone, and Camden thinks the name is derived from the boundary stone.

Mr. Thomas Ashby, who recently died lamented, not only by his own friends but by that wider circle who owed so much to his thoughtful generosity, was an intelligent collector of local relics, which have been liberally sent by his family for our inspection at this meeting.

Here in the bed of the Thames and in the red gravel the skulls and antlers of extinct animals have been found, and the tusks of the mammoth; various warlike instruments in bone and in bronze have also been discovered, and Roman tiles and pottery in various stages of decorative art.

Mr. Ashby's collection of coins of the later emperors has been mostly found on the site of the brewery, in the garden of Miss Pope's mansion, near the linoleum works, and while digging the foundations of Mr. Albert Curtis's residence. They will be illustrated by more exact knowledge than mine, and they tend to show Roman occupation of a permanent character.

Staines next rises to the view as the little Saxon town built on the site of the deserted station. Christianity has overcome the pagan gods,

and a little wooden church overlooks woods and moorland. Around it the huts of Saxon Staines cluster closely, in order to protect themselves from marauders, in which the bipeds are worse than their four-footed rivals. Gough speaks of Danish raids when under Unlaff they sailed up the river, burnt Oxford, and, taking Staines on their return, ravaged the country for a whole winter.

This fact at least attests the early prosperity of the neighbourhood, and there is other evidence that the northern bank of the river excelled its opposite neighbour in profitable tillage.

During the rule of the Saxon kings Staines had been held, together with Old Windsor, in royal demesne, and formed no doubt a portion of the royal hunting-grounds surrounding the Saxon palace of Old Windsor, which afterwards gave place to the Norman fortress on Windsor Hill.

Edward the Confessor (moved it is said by a special message from St. Peter himself) conveyed by charter both Old Windsor and Staines to the monks of the abbey of Westminster, his destined burial-place; and the manors appear to have been vested in the Church during Harold's short and stormy reign.

But after the battle of Hastings the grim Conqueror took back Windsor by exchange, and with a coarse irony built on land which had once belonged to the conquered Harold the fortress which has become the pride of Englishmen and the home of the grandest order of knighthood in all Europe.

Henceforth Staines becomes part and parcel of Windsor Forest, so rich in woodland beauty and legendary lore.

At this era Domesday book affords us a picture of the condition of the district, and as we turn the pages which modern art has made familiar we observe how completely wealthy manors were transferred from Saxon owners to Norman soldiers. Time, however, has avenged the Anglo-Saxon; he is now everywhere, whilst a genuine Norman pedigree has vanished from the peerage.

It is rather within our province to compare the condition of the Staines of that period with that of its neighbours, and to note how slowly in agricultural districts places change their names and occupations.

On turning to the local references, we should have been surprised at the absence of a church or a priest in this manor, for I am informed by our vicar that Staines had its church in the ninth century, a date

corresponding with the building by Bishop Erkenwald of the great Benedictine Abbey of Chertsey. There is, however, this peculiarity in the Domesday return for the county of Middlesex; it omits in many instances to record the churches of the time, and leaves London out altogether. It is also evident that in this important county the quantity of wood and waste land was immense, whilst now it is cultivated on principles of high garden farming.

Assuming that local value may be estimated from the quantity of plough land, mills, weirs, and labourers, Staines was at the head of the old hundred of Spelthorne. The references to the reeve of Staines are numerous, and the reeve was the head of a hundred.

Its annual value was six times greater than any other manor in the hundred, and as it contained forty-six burgesses we may infer that it was already a walled town or borough, with four berewicks (or small manors) and two acres of vineyard.

The manor belonged to the Abbot of St. Peter at Westminster, but the hundred of Spelthorne had for the most part passed to the Earl of Mortmaine and Earl of Cornwall in England, the Conqueror's half-brother, from various owners, house attendants of Edward the Confessor.

During the long middle ages we gain glimpses of the little town holding its own in the great life-struggle. In 1228 an annual fair was granted to the monks of Westminster, to be held on the morrow of Ascension Day and the three following days; its market was on Fridays, and its bridge was declared by Lysons to have been one of the most ancient in the county. In 1262 three oaks from Windsor forest were granted for its repair.

It was afterwards sustained by various grants of pontage, and subsequently the bridge and Egham Causeway were maintained by tolls received under the authority of Parliament. The Act for building the new bridge passed in 1791. The work was opened in 1797, but, one of the piers having sunk, the work was much retarded. It was finally opened in 1832, and has been made free very recently.

There is a tradition that the first bridge was erected by a public-spirited west-country clothier for the use of his pack-horses carrying his goods to London. Across it, or over the river, the silent highway beneath, have passed historic personages to a throne or a prison—sometimes to sleep after life's fitful fever in the grand old chapel of St. George at Windsor. So passed in long funeral pomp Edward the

Fourth and Henry Tudor, and so passed to half-forgotten graves Elizabeth Woodville and Charles, the ill-fated Stuart.

In 1276 the manor vested in Christian, wife of Robert de Pykney, and after her death the reversion fell to Thomas de Arderne. But the freehold remained in the monks of Westminster, and at the dissolution of the monasteries this manor passed to the Crown. In 1613 it was granted by James the First to Thomas, Lord Knyvet of Eserick. In 1629 it was conveyed by Thomas Knyvet to Sir Francis Leigh, from whose family it passed to Sir W. Drake. It has remained in the Taylor family since 1678.

It is said that the parish church was built by Inigo Jones, the father of classical architecture in England, but it would be difficult to find in the sacred edifice any evidence of the ability of that eminent architect. It was probably work executed in his later years, when ruin threatened his patrons the Stuarts, and poor Inigo was hiding his hard-earned savings in Scotland Yard.

It will be interesting to compare Lysons's description of the church in 1800 with its present condition.

The parish church, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, stands about a quarter of a mile west of the town. It is a Gothic structure, consisting of a chancel, nave, and north aisle separated by circular columns and pointed arches. The door of the chancel is of Saxon architecture, and one of the windows is of the lancet form. The nave has been in part rebuilt of brick. At the west end is a square embattled tower, built in 1631 by Inigo Jones, as appears by an inscription on the south side. The font is square, and its sides are ornamented with plain circular arches. At that time there were monuments to Thomas Eyre and the Rev. Joseph Eyre on the floor; the tombs of Ann, wife of Samuel Vicars, vicar of Staines; John Chase, apothecary to the queen, and his wife, daughter of Dr. Some, canon of Windsor; Thomas Hams and Tillam Hammond; Charlotte, wife of Samuel Hartley; John Royle; Mrs. Rebecca Taylor, his mother; and a handsome monument to Henry Barham and his widow. The registers in the church commence in 1538, but are imperfect at various periods. There is no visible increase in the deaths during the years of the plague and it is believed it escaped that great calamity.

Of the town-hall or market-house I have only been able to learn that it originally stood in the middle of the highway, and was afterwards removed to its later site. Yet there, in the autumn of 1603, a great Englishman stood upon his trial.

The plague was raging in London when Sir Walter Raleigh was indicted at Staines before Commissioners and a Middlesex jury. A page of English history, marked with blood, tells how, after thirteen years spent in the Tower, he died the victim of Spanish vengeance.

The scene changes when in the wars of the Parliament stern Puritan troops clatter through the dusty street from Windsor to London and Brentford.

And again, to the dull Georgian period, only enlivened by the grand old inns, with their long, dark stables, filled by scores of posters. One fatal accident of the coaching period has come down a local tradition. On the 5th December, 1708, five passengers in the Exeter coach were overturned and killed at New Year's Bridge, and buried in *Staines church*.

The charities mentioned in Lysons are—William Gillit, £4 per annum, to educate poor children; Nathaniel Lone 12s. a week, for bread for the poor; Thomas Steines 2s. a week for the same purpose; John Arwood £1 per annum to the poor of the parish; and William Steers the same sum.

Staines, like Colnbrook, has in its time enjoyed Parliamentary representation. Sir John Shorter, Lord Mayor of London, and ancestor of a lady who married Sir Robert Walpole, and became the mother of Horace Lord Orford, of Strawberry Hill celebrity—that lord amongst wits and wit amongst lords.

Amongst strange devises in the parish I may mention that the house occupied as the post-office and land in Laleham were devised to the parish of Wokingham, for the purpose of providing an annual bull-baiting. When I add that the line of houses which divided the High Street was pulled down in 1802, I have exhausted the materials at my command.

Much remains to be said of old houses, with their traditions, and of old families that have disappeared, never to return; but the shortness of time allowed me (forty-eight hours) must excuse my shortcomings, and I can only hope that what I have written may attract information from sources superior to my own.

“ In the year 1456 a licence was granted to John Lord Berners, Sir Henry Wenlock, and other parishioners of Staines, to found a guild or fraternity in honour of God and the Virgini Mary in the chapel of the Holy Cross, in the church of Staines, which guild should consist of two wardens and a certain number of brethren and sisters, who were incorporated by the King's letters patent of that

date. The lands belonging to this guild were valued in 1548 at £11. 17s. 6d. per annum, including 6s. 8d. for a chamber, called the Chantry Priests' Chamber. These lands paid quit-rents to the manors of Grovebarnes and Iveney Court."

APPENDIX.

Extract from a book of Acts, printed in black letter, by T. Berthelet. 1550. The printer was a workman of Caxton's.

Whereas the Chauncellour of Englande and his predecessours out of tyme of mynde have used to ordeyne and assigne ij. iiij. or iiij. certayne persons of the towne and parishe of Stanys, in the countie of Midd., to have the receite of tolle and custome concerning the making and reparacion of the bridge of the same towne, as well of cartes and horse laden with marchandises and other stouffe carried over and upon the same bridge, as of barges comynge underneathe the same bridge, with which tolle and custom the said bridge was repaired, and also a causey, extending a mile from the same towne in lengthe unto the towne of Eggehm, and encloseth the water of Thamys from the Kynges high waie, so that if the said causey and bridge be not well maintained and kepte, the Kynges subjectes shall not nor maie passe on horsebacke nor on foote by that waie, which shoulde be to the great noyaunce as well of the Kynges grace as of all his subjectes, that shall ride or go from London to the west partes of this lande.

And for as muche as the saide tolle and custome hath bene at sometye afore this desired of the Kynges highnesse to be given to certayne persones as of fee by his letters patentes; And sometye the saide tolle and custome hath not been well applied to the reparacion of the saide bridge and waye: Be it therefore ordeined, enacted, and stablished, by authoritie of this present Parliament, that accordyng to the saide olde usage the Chancellour of Englande (for the tyme beyng), or keeper of the Kynges great seale and their successours, have the deputation and assignement of ij. iiij. or iiij. certayne persons of the saide towne and parishe of Stanys, that they shall take and receive the saide tolle and custome, as before this time hath been used to be paied; And the saide tolle and custome so by them or any of them received to employ upon the reparacion and making of the same bridge and

waie, and thereof yerely to yeld accomptes to the said Chaunceller or keper of the Kynge's great seale (for the tyme being), or before suche persons as he shall depute and assigne and offer themself so to do yerely betweene the feastes of Saint Michael the Arcangell and all saintes. And that all letters patentes made or to be made by the Kynge's highnes, or by any of his heires or successours, to any person or persones of the said tolle or custome, or of the receite or imploying thereof, be from henceforth voide, and of none effecte.
