

THE HUNDRED OF GORE AND ITS MOOT-HEDGE

BY

HUGH BRAUN, F.S.A.

FROM the evidence supplied by Domesday Book, it is evident that the County of Middlesex was divided then, as to-day, into six Hundreds. The north-eastern portion of the county was the Hundred of Adelmetone or Edmonton. South of this, between the rivers Brent, Lea and Thames, stretched the large Hundred of Osulvestane or Ossulston. The south-western lobe of the county was occupied, on the west by the Hundred of Speltorne or Spelthorne, and on the east by that of Honeslauv or Hounslow. The western portion of the county was covered by the large Hundred of Heletorne or Elthorne. The remaining piece in the north of the county, between the last-named Hundred on the west: Hertfordshire to the north and east where this shire sends a tongue of land south-eastwards into Middlesex: and southwards to the river Brent and the Hundred of Ossulston; this area formed the Hundred of Gore (Fig. 1).

The area of the Hundred is about 45 square miles. To the north, it is bounded by Hertfordshire. To the south-east, the boundary is the river Brent, except where Hendon sends out an excrescence beyond the river towards Hampstead. On the western side of the Hundred it is bordered by the large parish of Ruislip, and further south, is a bight where the parishes of Northolt and Greenford thrust towards Harrow Hill from the south-west corner.

The northern portion of the Hundred, towards the Hertfordshire border, lies on a gravel ridge, and from

this, the ground slopes away southwards, past the isolated hill of Harrow and its own outliers, towards the valley of the river Brent. In earliest times, the whole area was covered with the dense Middlesex Forest, and, although penetration from the south by the Saxon colonists cleared the greater part of it, much of the northern portion remains to this day forestal.

The population, therefore, is mainly in the southern part of the Hundred. At the time of the Domesday Survey, four vills are noted within it, these being Harrow, Kingsbury, Stanmore and Hendon. In all four vills, land is noted as being in the possession of a priest. Harrow Church was commenced in 1087, the year after the Survey, and Kingsbury Church demonstrates by its pseudo long-and-short work its probable eleventh-century origin. The church of Hendon possesses a very fine early twelfth-century font, suggesting the existence of a *contemporary building on the site*. At Great Stanmore, the site of the medieval parish church is known, and its foundations were exposed at the end of the last century during the course of building operations and a very rough plan made of the structure before the remains were dug up and used for road metal. This plan appears to represent that of a small unaisled church of about 1300, having diagonal buttresses at the west end of the nave and the usual fifteenth century-western extension peculiar to the humbler Middlesex churches of this type. There is nothing in the plan which suggests that the church had a Norman origin; indeed the dimensions are against this. Nevertheless, it may have replaced a Norman building on the same site.

No mention is made in Domesday of any priest in connection with Little Stanmore, and the earliest evidence of a building on the site of the present parish church is supplied by its fifteenth-century tower.

In drawing the map of the Hundred, therefore, (Fig. 1) I have ignored Little Stanmore Church, (which is opposite that of Great Stanmore on the other side of

the old road and about the same distance from it), and have represented the four head Domesday manors by marking the positions of their parish churches.

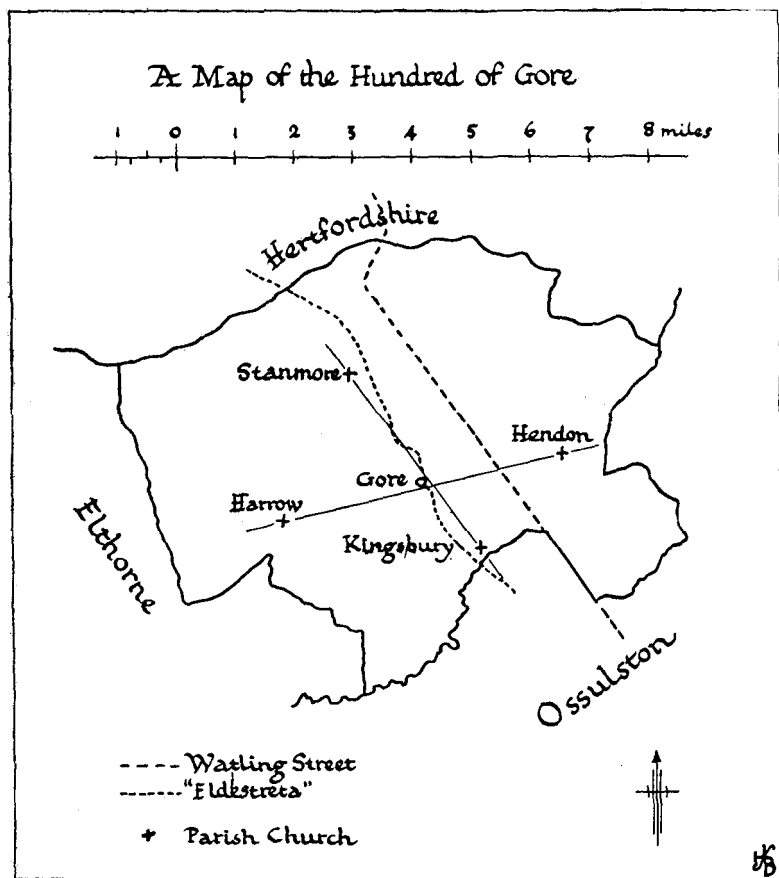


Fig. 1.

I do not propose to offer any suggestions as to how the Hundred of Gore was formed, on what principle the county was sub-divided and why the four villis of Harrow, Hendon, Stanmore and Kingsbury were

grouped together within it. It has recently been found possible, however, to locate the site on which the Hundred Moot assembled, and incidentally, to solve the problem of the origin of the Hundred's curious name.

Of the six Hundreds of Middlesex as noted in Domesday, one only is named after a vill within it, that of Adelmetone of Edmonton, which village is situated at, approximately, the centre of the Hundred and on the Ermine Street, which made it conveniently easy of access. Honeslauv, it seems reasonably certain, met at some old mound on the waste land—Hounslow Heath—through which ran the Roman road to Staines—Thamesis Street. Osulvestane would appear to have assembled at some stone called Oswulf's Stone, which may have been on the Watling Street or on some other ancient way leaving London for the north-west. The two western Hundreds met at thorn-trees, presumably on waste land not yet cleared. The Speletorne may have been on Thamesis Street and the Heletorne at some point along an old road crossing the Colne at Uxbridge. Thus the noticeable fact concerning four out of five Hundreds is that they are named, not after a village, but from their Moot sites, these being apparently, some landmark, mound, stone or thorn-tree, standing, presumably, away from habitation and probably on waste land not used for agricultural purposes.

It might reasonably be supposed that the place of the Moot of any Hundred would be found somewhere near its centre. At Edmonton, this is clearly the case, as that village is approximately midway between the other two mentioned in Domesday: Enfield and Tottenham. Hounslow can scarcely be described as being equidistant between the two vills of Isleworth and Hampton which comprised its Hundred, but on the other hand, the distribution of population within the Hundred may not be represented by the positions of the parish churches of the two Domesday vills, which occupy riverside sites on its extreme edge, whereas Hounslow is actually quite

near the centre of the Hundred area and is, moreover, on a Roman road, which would make it easily accessible. The sites of the Moots of Ossulston, Spelthorne and Elthorne are to-day unknown.

By reasonable supposition, and by analogy with the Hundreds of Edmonton and Hounslow it would seem that the point at which to search for the site of Gore would be at the centre of its Hundred and in the vicinity of a Roman road.

There is only one such road passing through the Hundred—Watling Street—and, if lines are drawn on the map, (Fig. 1) joining the churches of Harrow and Hendon: Stanmore and Kingsbury, they will be found to intersect at a point a mile or so away from the Watling Street on its south-west side. By this point of intersection, however, there passes another road of undoubtedly ancient origin, the last section of which remaining near that point is known as Honeypot Lane. It is clear from an examination of the route that this lane forms part of an ancient thoroughfare which, coming from the direction of Westminster, passes by Willesden Green, along Dudding Hill Lane to Neasden, and thence by Neasden Lane to the Brent (where, at its crossing, Roman building material was found during the last century). Crossing the river and entering the Hundred of Gore, it passes close by the old church of Kingsbury, (which has much Roman material, including hypocaust flues, built into its walling), and, by the name of Salmon Street, passes by yet another Roman site to the foot of Uxendon Hill. Here the present road turns away eastwards to Kingsbury Green, but the ancient road climbs the hill in a deep cutting, descends by a similar trench and, crossing the main Harrow—Hendon road close to our imaginary point, becomes Honeypot Lane. This narrow way, until recently a miry green lane, winds through the foothills towards Stanmore, passes across Stanmore Marsh between the two churches of Great and Little Stanmore, and, changing from Marsh Lane to

Dennis Lane on crossing the main Watford—Edgware road, climbs the hillside to pass by "Julius Caesar's Pond," on Stanmore Little Common near the Roman station of Sulloniacae and thereafter lose itself, either in the fields towards Aldenham or in the present main road to Watford, Berkhamstead and the Akeman Street.

The deeply cut track of this old way as it crosses Uxendon Hill: the presence of Roman remains along its course, and the fact that it forms the parish boundary between Harrow and Kingsbury, all point to the antiquity of the road and its proximity to Watling Street suggests that it either duplicated the latter as a side road, or, as seems more probable, was its precursor from prehistoric days.

The old road joins two of the four Domesday villas within the Hundred of Gore—Kingsbury and Stanmore. The hill villages of Harrow and Hendon—the opposite pair which go to make up the Hundred—would have been visible in antiquity, one from the other and, if a line is drawn on the map (Fig. 1), joining their parish churches, this line will cross the old road practically at the same point as it would a line joining the other pair of churches in other words, at the centre of the Hundred.

It is at this point on the old road, therefore, at which one might begin a search for the site of the Hundred Moot. And, as it so happens, where the modern road from Harrow to Hendon crosses the ancient way, there stood until recently a small and ruinous farmhouse known as Gore Farm, the site of which is now occupied by the Odeon Cinema, Kingsbury.

The land hereabouts was the property of Harrow School, having once formed part of Preston Farm, the ancestral home of John Lyon, who re-founded and endowed the school in 1572. Preston is a hamlet of Harrow, but the farm was extensive and included land on the east side of the old road in the parish of Kingsbury.

At this stage I must not omit to record my thanks to our member Mr. W. W. Druett of Harrow, who was so

good as to bring to my notice the existence of that very useful volume, published in 1886, entitled *Harrow School Records*. This is a collection of 550 documents, (the earliest of which dates from 1356), belonging to the school and arranged and catalogued by Mr. Edward Scott of the British Museum. A number of these documents are copies of entries in various Manor Court Rolls, relating to the exchanges of land which has from time to time passed through the hands of Harrow School. Several of these entries relate to Preston Farm lands, and one especially, has thrown much light on the subject of the Moot-site of the Hundred of Gore.

In several of these documents references are made to places in the district possessing the prefix of "Gore." (The numbers within brackets indicate the document number in *Harrow School Records*). Thus entries in the Harrow Manor Court Rolls referring to land on the Preston side of the old way mention "Goreslea," (17), "Goreden, Goredon" (31, 43), "Gore Lane, Gower Lane Gate" (103, 104, 160). On the opposite side of the old road, in Kingsbury parish, Edgware Court Rolls make mention of "Goormed" (42, 59), and "Goorfeeldes" (42). It would seem, therefore, that the site of some place having the name of "Gore" is clearly indicated as having once existed on Preston Farm at the centre of the Hundred.

The most instructive document in the Harrow School Series is No. 31, which is worth quoting in full.

"Extract from Roll of Court, held at Harwe (Harrow), on Tuesday next after St. Mark's Day, 23 Henry VI (A.D. 1445), when John Lyon surrendered to the use of Thomas Pernell thirteen acres in Preston, of which one acre lies in Northfeld, stretching towards Kentonfeld, one acre in the same place stretching over Moothegge, one acre in the same place stretching towards Gaderbrook, one acre in Hilfeld stretching over the highway from Preston to Kenton, one acre in Crouchefeld at Hilcroft-Hull abutting on Hillefeld, one acre in the same place

abutting on Hillefeld, one acre in Shornoltehull abutting on Westonhullefeld, two acres in Southfeld stretching over Crouchefeld, one acre in Estfeld abutting on Neldehacch, one acre in Le Motehegg abutting on Northfeld, one acre in Eldestreteshote on Goreden, and one acre in Northfeld in Brodelondes."

This document indicates quite definitely that the supposition as to the site of the Hundred Moot being on Preston Farm is accurate, as the actual place itself is referred to by name—"Moothege, Le Motehegg." In another document, (No. 43), describing the same land, in the same terms but with different spelling, it is written "Le Motehegg, Methegg." Clearly the site of the Moot was connected with a hedge of some sort. The entry does not make the circumstances quite clear, however, as "over Moothege" seems to suggest a linear hedge, whereas "in Le Motehegg" seems to refer to an enclosure. In this district "hedge" seems usually to refer to a linear hedge (such as the Downhedge which separates Kingsbury and Hendon), and a hedged enclosure is generally called a "hay." But it is obvious that the Moot must have been held in connexion with something having two horizontal dimensions.

Let us see if an examination of the site suggests an explanation. It is clear from the description that "Le Moothege" is directly adjoining the North Common Field of Preston. (See map, Fig. 2.) The 1818 Enclosure Award map of Harrow fortunately shows the Preston Common Fields and, with its aid and by working out the plots of land described in the 1445 entry and in subsequent references in other entries which want of space prohibits reproducing in this paper, the whole lay-out becomes clear. The north and east Common Fields of Preston both abut on the line of the old road which divides them from Kingsbury, and are themselves separated by a little stream—the "Gaderbrook." "Le Moothege" is the gore or triangle of waste land at the apex of the East Field separated from the North Field by

the Gaderbrook and abutting on the old road on the east. Possibly the southern edge of the gore was

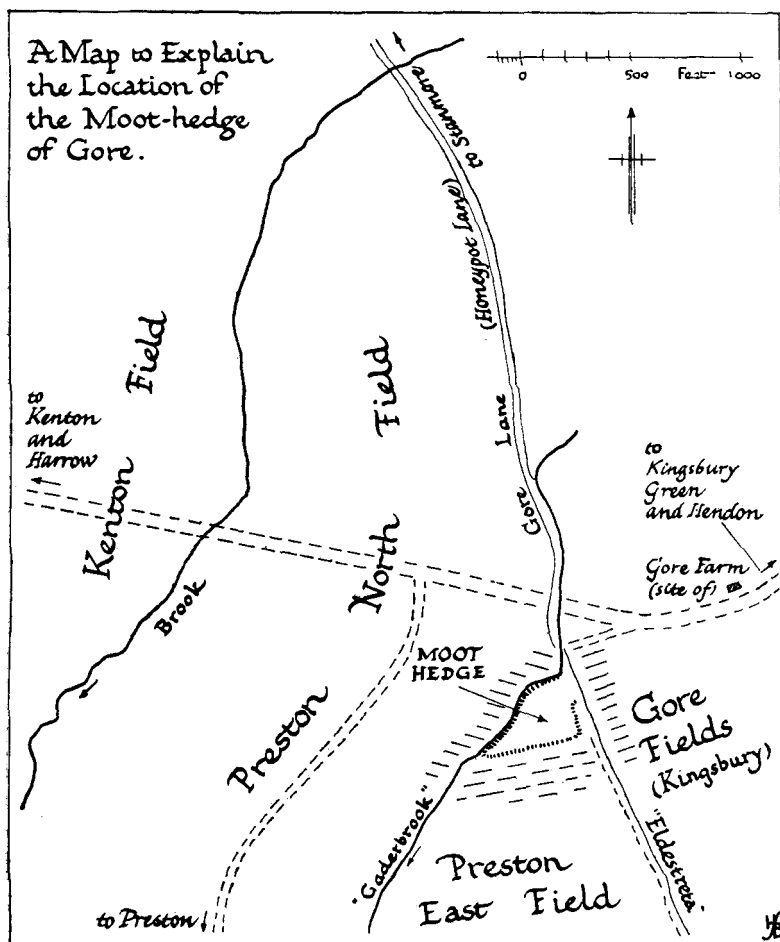
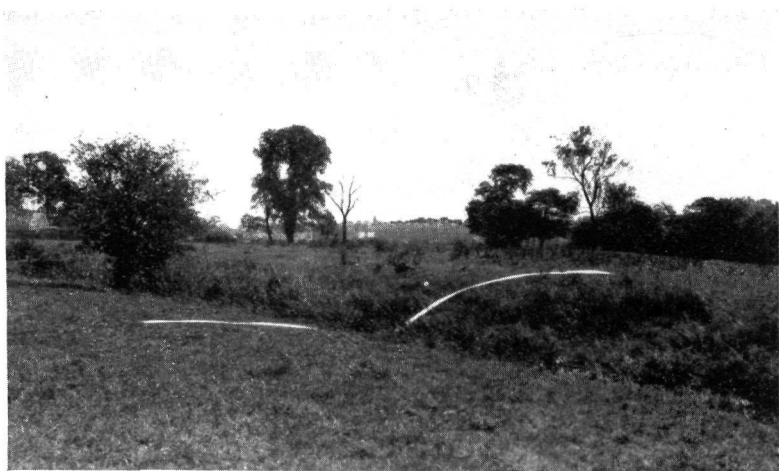


Fig. 2.

hedged off from the East Field and this hedge was afterwards extended round the whole area, thus giving to it its name of "The Moot-hedge."



THE MOOT HEDGE OF GORE

Fig. 3. Looking eastwards across the Gaderbrook towards the old road



THE MOOT HEDGE OF GORE

Fig. 4. Looking south-west along the Gaderbrook

A visit to the site discloses the remarkable fact that the whole of the gore has been elevated, apparently by artificial means, some three feet or more above the level of the surrounding Common Fields. (See photos, Figs. 3 and 4.) How this was effected and whence the soil was obtained, there is no visible evidence. The reason for it is possibly that the land is very low and tends to be swampy and the Gaderbrook may have had a tendency to flood.

The name "Gaderbrook" is of interest as it possibly adds another link to the chain of circumstances which would appear to point to this being the genuine site of the Hundred Moot. Bosworth's Anglo-Saxon Dictionary gives "gaderung" as "gathering, council, assembly, etc." So, presumably, this little stream is the "Gatherbrook," or brook of the gathering, at which the Moot assembled, and from which source water might have been obtained with which to assuage the dry throats of the speakers.

It will be noted that the site fulfils the requirements suggested at the commencement of this paper as being useful conditions for the site of a Hundred Moot. It is central, easily accessible from the old road, and, being on a gore of little agricultural value, may be said to be on waste land.

It has been noted earlier that the only section of the old road not in use to-day is that passing southwards from the Moot site over Uxendon Hill (Goreden), to the point where Salmon Street turns abruptly eastwards. This stretch may have fallen into disuse when the population moved away from old Kingsbury, where the church stands, to a newer site at Kingsbury Green, where is now the modern church.¹ As no one would require to approach the Moot place from the south, the old road over the Hill would disappear, the inhabitants of the new Kingsbury using the Hendon road, on which they were situated, for the purpose. This diversion may have taken place in very early times, for it seems probable

that by 1445, the northern, or Honeypot Lane, stretch of the old road—Gore Lane—terminated southwards at the Moot-hedge, explaining, possibly, the term “Nelde-hacch,” (? “an old gate.” In 1579, this spot is referred to as “Gower Lane Gate.”)

It would appear that the Moot-hedge of Gore has been discovered in the very nick of time, for it has been found only to be lost again. The land to the north and east is already built over. The site itself is situated to-day within the district coming under the jurisdiction of the Wembley Urban District Council, which has prepared a town-planning scheme for its area. A road of shops will take the place of the Gaderbrook and it will not be many months before the Moot-hedge will have passed into oblivion beneath the inevitable pall of bricks and mortar.

The Norman motte-castle of Ruislip, the discovery of which I had the honour of reporting in the last part of these *Transactions*, has now been scheduled as an Ancient Monument. To the less fortunate Moot-hedge of Gore we needs must cry—“Salve et Vale!”

NOTE.

1. The centre of population has now (1935) shifted southwards again, and yet a third church is in course of erection adjacent to the original edifice.