

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF WENDOVER.

[BY LEONARD H. WEST, LL.D., &c.]

The substance of descriptive remarks by him on the occasion of the Annual Excursion of this Society in July, 1911.

The earliest recorded mention of Wendover is in the form of *Wændofron* about 100 years before the Norman Conquest; the preponderating opinion also appears now to be that the name Wendover is Saxon in origin, being derived from the stream which rises near the Church and flows through the town, such stream probably being called *Wend*, and the town lying along its bank or shore, *ofer*, *over*. Another suggestion connects the name with the particular situation of the town. The Icknield Way runs east and west through it, and *wends over* the stream above referred to, while the road from London to the Midlands *wends* more or less north and south through or *over* the gap in the Chilterns which here rise to a height of some 800 feet. But it is scarcely likely that this derivation will satisfy the members of the Bucks Archæological Society. The near proximity of Wendover to the Chiltern Hills has given it a rather unfair reputation with regard to altitude—situated, says one writer, “in a low bottom among the Chiltern Hills,” and another styles it “low and mirey,” while in reality it lies from 400 to 500 feet above sea level. Particulars of Wendover (*Wandene*) are recorded in Domesday Book, and if we might judge from the rents payable to the Crown, it was as important as Aylesbury, and more so than Buckingham. It also possessed woods for a larger number of hogs than any other place in Bucks.

Though a place of great antiquity, we have not very much visible evidence of its ancient character, except the Church. The Church of St. Mary may have been either a Royal foundation or founded by the Lord of the Manor. We find a grant of the advowson in John's reign to the Prior and Convent

of St. Mary Overy, Southwark, and the Registry of the Diocese of Lincoln furnishes us with a complete list of Vicars from the reign of Henry III. Mr. Durston, of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, who is kindly going to describe to us the architectural features of the Church and the history they indicate, will tell us that there are some remains of 13th century work in the present Church, though most of it is 14th century. As in other instances when a church is some considerable distance from the town or village to which it belongs, there is a quaint legend of the inhabitants wishing to build it nearer to the town than its present site, and of the witches or fairies each night removing the foundations to where the Church now stands, until, in despair, the contest was abandoned. In an old map of 1620 the abandoned site is called Which Well, and even now Witch Hill. On the same old map we have both "Vicaridge" and "Parsonage" or "Personage" side by side, the former presumably the residence of the incumbent supplied by the Prior and Convent, the latter of the Prior or other representative of the Convent—the *persona ecclesie*—and after the suppression of the Monasteries and regranted by the Crown, becoming the Manor House of modern times.

In 1557 Philip and Mary made a grant of the Chapel of St. John. This Chapel has generally been supposed to have stood to the north of the Icknield Way, near where it crosses the stream, and there is a well-preserved *piscina* built into the wall of Bosworth House in High Street which may originally have come from the Chapel, but the representatives of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments have recently brought to our notice the remains of a fine open timber roof of the 15th century in a house on the South side of the Way, which possibly may be the real site of the Chapel, and examination of the 1620 map appears to give some confirmation.

Apart from the Church and possible remains of the Chapel, Wendover possesses a few houses with some sixteenth century work, including moulded ceiling beams, and there are a considerable number

of early seventeenth century houses, among them being the *Red Lion*, where we are to meet for lunch. The house is mentioned in an assessment made for raising money for building "Shippes of Warre" in 1677.

The parish of Wendover formerly included the *Borough* concentrated along the Icknield Way, Aylesbury Street, and the London Road, and the *Forrens*, consisting of the outlying districts, and even to the present day we sometimes hear people speaking of so and so as living "in the foreign." Originally Borough and Forrens had separate rights and customs, the former enjoying Parliamentary representation as early as 1300, and before either Aylesbury or Buckingham. The privilege, however, does not appear to have been appreciated—possibly owing to the financial obligations it then involved—and was allowed to lapse until revived through the instrumentality of John Hampden in 1623. He was member for Wendover on five occasions, and a member or members of his family on 16 others, the last being in 1747, yet we have here no memorial of either him or his family, except the "Hampden pond" near the Church, which is not shown on the map of 1620, and was probably opened out while the Hampdens were Lords of the Manor.

Other distinguished members for the Borough were Sir Richard Steele, 1721-7; Edmund Burke, 1765-74; George Canning, 1796-1802; and Francis Horner, 1807-12.

We still have a slight relic of Burke's representation in "Casualty Row" or York Buildings, along the Icknield Way. The second Earl Verney was then Lord of the Manor, and in 1768 the electors, while accepting Burke, rejected Earl Verney's other nominee, with the result, it is said, that the offenders were turned out of their houses within the Borough and compelled to erect huts along the Icknield Way, and these thus came to be called originally Casualty Row or the "Casselt" of to-day. Canning became member for Wendover through Pitt's influence with Lord Carrington, who in the meantime had become Lord of the Manor, and it is said to have been

Canning who affixed to the front door of Wycombe Abbey the lines:

“Bobby Smith lives here;
Billy Pitt made him a peer,
And took the pen from behind his ear!”

Horner is described by the late Leslie Stephen as “a typical representative of those solid indomitable Scotchmen whom one knows not whether to respect for their energy or to dread as the most intolerable of bores!” The Wendover voters numbered about 120 at the time the Borough lost its Parliamentary representation in 1832.

There is a most unfortunate lack of old prints of Wendover or its buildings—even the old Tudor Market House has passed away without any print of it existing.