



Swallowfield and its Owners.

By Lady Russell.

THAT quaint old author Fuller says "It is observed that the lands in Berkshire are very skittish, and often cast their owners, which yet I impute not so much to the unruliness of the Beasts as to the unskilfulness of the Riders.

"I desire heartily that hereafter the Berkshire gentry may be settled in their saddles, so that the sweet places in this county may not be subject to so many mutations."

Swallowfield certainly has been no exception to this proverbial skittishness, for from the time of Edward the Confessor, it has constantly cast its owner.

At the time of the Domesday Survey, Berkshire was divided into 22 Hundreds, and we find mention of 200 Manors, 46 of which were vested in the Crown.

Amongst the latter, in the Hundred of "Cercledone," or Charlton, was "Selingefelle," now Shinfield, of which "Swalefelle," now Swallowfield, formed a part; these two Manors not being separated till 1553.

1042—66. From this Survey it appears that in the reign of Edward the Confessor, 1042—66, Selingefelle belonged to one Sexi, a Saxon, who held it as a free manor of the King. Sexi is also mentioned as holding lands in Hants, Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, and Hertfordshire.

1066. At the time of the Conquest, Selingefelle and Swalefelle were given to William Fitz-Osbern, Lord of Breteuil (or Bretteville) in Normandy, who was the "Dapifer" or Steward of William the Conqueror. This William Fitz-Osbern was son of Osbern le Crépon, who had himself been Steward to William when Duke of Normandy.

Besides being the chief officer of his household, William Fitz-Osbern was related to William the Conqueror, and his greatest personal friend.—*Kelham*. We find the king addressing him as “cousin and councillor.” He was the chief organiser of the expedition to England, and commanded a wing at Hastings. He was rewarded for his services by being made Earl of Hereford, and was given many Manors, including Swalefelle, and in 1067 he was made Governor of the newly-built Castle of Winchester, that city being then second only to London.—*Planché*.

1070. In 1070 he was sent to Normandy by King William, nominally to protect Queen Matilda, but *Dugdale*, (*Monasticon*, vol. ii. 889) tells an anecdote to the effect that William Fitz-Osbern having set before the king the flesh of a crane half-roasted, the king struck out at him fiercely, which made Fitz-Osbern so angry, that he gave up his post. Anyhow he left the kingdom, and soon after, having married Richilde, Countess of Flanders, was made titular Count of Flanders. The following year William Fitz-Osbern was killed in battle near Cassell, and was buried “amid much sorrow,” at the Abbey of Cormeilles, in Normandy, which he had founded.—*Planché*. By his first wife, Adelina de Toeni, he had three sons. The eldest, William, succeeded him as Lord of Breteuil. He was the friend of Robert Curthose, and died 1099, leaving no legitimate issue.

The second son, Ralph, was a monk at Cormeilles.

1072. The third son, Roger de Breteuil, succeeded to the Earldom of Hereford, and “had all the lands his father held in England,” so that he was the possessor of Swalefelle in 1072.

He had a great position, and was the originator of the Domesday Survey, but joining with his brother-in-law, Raoul de Gael, Earl of Norfolk, in a conspiracy against William Rufus in 1075, all his possessions were forfeited to the king, and he died in prison.—*Dugdale*.

He left two sons, Raynald and Roger, neither of whom it is said, succeeded to his English lands, but five years later, in 1080. 1080, we find in the Domesday Record, that Selingefelle and Swalefelle belonged to one Gilbert de Breteuil (or Bretteville), and that the Manor was then accounted worth £viii per ann., and that it had viii villains, v Borderers, vii Carucates of land, ii slaves, a mill worth 5s. to the king, v fisheries of 550 eels, xvi acres of meadow-land, xx acres of woodland, and pannage or feeding for ten hogs.

Gilbert de Breteuil held the neighbouring estate of Great Bramshill in Hants. "Idem, Gislebertus tenet Bromeselle cum Manerio Regis de Swalefelle quod est in Berchesire."—*Domesday, Hants. f. 48, a.* Sir William Cope in his History of Bramshill, quotes as interesting, the disclaimer of the jurors of Great Bramshill of all dependance on the King's Manor of Swalefelle.

Gilbert de Breteuil also owned Stratfieldsaye, and lands in Wilts, and Oxfordshire, as well as three houses at Southampton, of which the Conqueror granted him the customs.—*Woodward's Hants.*

1086. In the "Testa de Neville," we find that in 1086, Gilbert de Breteuil held "Thornhull in Wilts," and "Cholewarton, Hants," and that they were set down as the fee of Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford.

1090. Gilbert de Breteuil was probably still holding Swalefelle in 1090, for in the "Historia Monasterii de Abingdon," we have a Charter concerning the church at Sutton, dated 1090, which begins: "Willelmus, rex Anglorum, Gilberto de Brittevilla et omnibus fidelibus suis, Francigenis et Angligenis de Berkescira salutem." We find that when Henry I affianced Amicia de Gael, great-grand-daughter of William Fitz-Osbern, Earl of Hereford, to his illegitimate son Richard, he settled on her the Barony of Breteuil, "which had belonged to her grandmother's family." Richard was drowned in the wreck of the *White Ship*, in 1120, and Amicia married secondly Robert de Beaumont, Earl of Leicester.

We cannot exactly say into whose hands Swalefelle passed at the death of Gilbert de Breteuil, but it certainly was in the possession of the St. John's very shortly after, for among the Baron's 1167. Charters, we find one of 13 Henry II., in which William de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick, says, "Swalefeld and Sillingefeld, which should be ~~my~~ demesne, are held by Thomas de St. John and his mother."

This Thomas de St. John was second son of John de St. John, of Stanton St. John, Oxford, and grandson of William de St. John, the first of the name who came from Normandy to England. Wace, in the "Roman du Rou," mentions "the men of St. Johan," as taking part in the battle of Hastings, and tradition says that the Horse-hemes or collars with which Lord Bolingbroke's supporters are charged, perpetuate the fact that a St. John had charge of the transport of the Norman invaders.

Thomas de St. John succeeded his father as Lord of Stanton,

and was himself succeeded by his son, Roger de St. John, 1176. who in 22 Henry II., was "assessed £133. 6. 8. for trespassing in the King's forests in Com. Oxon."—*Rot. Pip. 22 H. II., Oxon.*

This Roger was succeeded by his son, Sir John de St. 1191. John, who accompanied King Richard I to the Holy Land, and was at the siege of Acre.

He was one of the Knights whom the King, "on the inspiration of St. George, had distinguished by tying a leathern thong or garter round the left leg to incite the wearer to greater daring," and this legend has been cited as the first institution of the Order of the Garter (*Kennet's Parl. Antiq. 147.*), but is not so accepted by modern authorities.

1230. Sir John de St. John died 1230, leaving a widow, Emma, and a son, Roger de St. John, and this same year Geoffrey Le Despencer, Lord of Marcheley or Marteley, Worcestershire, married the said Emma, and gave £100 for the wardship of her son Roger de St. John, the first and last Baron St. John of Stanton.—*Rot. Pip. 14 Hen. III., Oxon.*

Geoffrey Le Despencer "held $\frac{1}{2}$ a fee in Swalefelde of the fee and honour of the Earl of Warwick."—*Roll 26, Hen. III.* This Earl of Warwick was Thomas de Newburgh, sixth Earl, grandson of the aforementioned William de Newburgh. He married Ela, daughter of William Longuespée, the son of "Fair Rosamond," and she was a great benefactress to the monks at Reading.

Geoffrey Le Despencer was descended from Robert, the Norman follower of William the Conqueror, who held the office of "Dispensator Regis," Dispencer or Steward to the king.

He was brother to Hugh Le Despencer, Chief Justice of England, first Baron Le Despencer, and he was uncle and great-uncle to Edward the Second's favourites of that name.

1242. He died 1242 (*Visit: Northampton, an. 1617*) leaving his son, John Le Despencer in possession of "Swalewefeld," as we find it called in a Roll of this date. The said John married, first, Joan, daughter of Robert de Lou, with whom he received the Manors of Castle Carlton and Cavenby, co. Leicester.

1256. He was of full age in 1256, and holding 60*l* per ann. in com., Leicester, and 15*l* in com., Southampton, he was called to receive the honour of knighthood.—*Lib. MS. in Bibl. Cotton. Claud., C. 2.*

(To be continued.)