

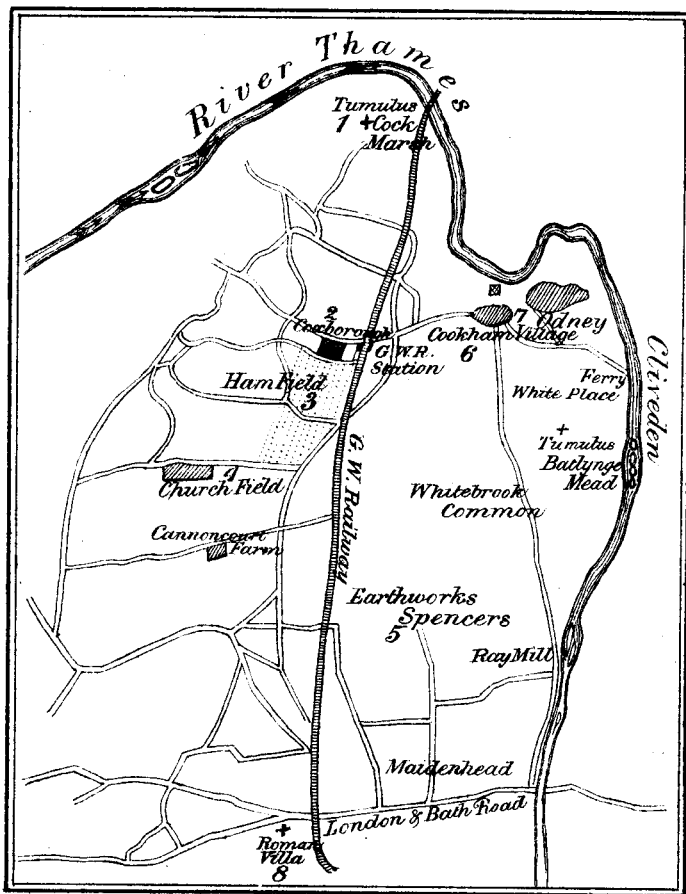


Cookham; its Name and History.

By Mr. Stephen Darby.



HENCE and how does the name of Cookham arise? Does the present village of Cookham occupy the site to which the name originally belonged? or, has it acquired its name from some other settlement long since obliterated and its site forgotten? That the site on which the present village of Cookham stands was a settlement at a very early period, is certain. Remains have been unearthed which go to prove that a settlement existed here during the Roman occupation, but the present name, or at any rate its suffix, is clearly Anglo-Saxon. The name Sutton, i.e., South Ton or Town, by which a portion of land immediately south of the village is yet designated, would imply that in very early days another Saxon ton or town existed between Sutton and the river, and this must have occupied the site of the present village of Cookham. In later Saxon times Cocheham or Cok ham had its church with its priest, Reinbald, who—as Domesday Book tells us—held one hide and one half hide of land, with two other clerks, each having half a hide. Also there was a market held there, worth 20s. for tolls; it also possessed two fisheries of the value of 13s. 4d., and two mills of 22s. 6d., all in the time of the Saxon King Edward. But, for all that, is this the spot where stood the Ham settlement, to which the prefix Cok or Coche was appended? If it be, how comes it that the Ham field lies so wide apart from it? Plenty of ground, which would have been equally suitable for such purpose, lay close to it. The “Ham field,” which lies at some little distance beyond the railway-station, instead of being a “home field,” would really have been an outlying field, separated from the settlement by a tract of low-lying, and doubtless then swampy ground—that now known as Cookham Moor, which must at times have been impassable, except that there was an artificially-constructed path or roadway. For a “home field” the Ham field would have been most inconvenient, and its choice appears inexplicable. If it be not the old Ham settlement, there arises the



1 Timulus Oak Marsh.

2 Croxborough.

3 Ham Field.

4 Church Field.

5 Earthworks Spencers.

6 Cookham Village.

7 Olney.

8 Roman Villa.

question, Where can this have been situated? Now on an upland slope on the south side of the Deanway, some 120 yards beyond the railway-station, lies an old enclosure—an enclosure, that is, when all around it were “common fields” unenclosed, and remaining so until their readjustment and enclosure took place in 1846. This enclosure is known as Coxborough (Coks Burgh), a name which seems to bear an important signification—“Burgh,” “Borough,” “Bury,” “Burg”—from the Anglo-Saxon “Burh,” “Buruh,” and “Byrig,” which suffix indicates an earthwork or fortified encampment or settlement. In touch with Coxborough, and stretching away towards the south and south-west, is ground known as the “Ham field,” which in this case would have been a veritable “home field.” Coxborough, unfortunately for our enquiry, does not contain any remains appertaining to a settlement; but at a short distance from Coxborough, on the north-east, is Rowborough, where many such remains were found.* At Cockmarsh there are ancient tumuli. In the *Times* of October, 1874, is an account of the opening up of some of these tumuli, conducted by Mr. W. D. Napier and Mr. A. Heneage Cocks. The large tumulus contained a British burial of a female by cremation, also portions of the skull of a so-called *Bos-longifrons*, which had probably served for the funeral feast, together with flint scrapers and flakes. So that we have here proofs of British occupation, as well as the many evidences of the Saxon subsequently. It is a matter of history, or at least of tradition, that the old road, which the present high road from London to Bath superseded, went along the higher ground above, and passed into Berkshire, near Cookham. Cookham was certainly a place of importance in ancient times. Here, in the closing years of the tenth century, a Saxon Gemot was held, at which a large number of Thanes of Wessex and Mercia were assembled. The roadway which descended through Clieveden is still visible, and reached the river at a spot some three hundred yards lower down than the present Babham Ferry, near Whiteplace house. Continuing thence, by a raised causeway, it skirted the old archery ground at the back of the present village, passed over Cookham Moor by another raised roadway, or causeway, and thence by what is now the Station-road, passed close to Coxborough; then through the Deanway and Bisham Wood to Bisham Ferry, where, crossing the Thames, it again entered Buckinghamshire.

* *Archaeological Journal*, vol. 15.

It may be objected that the site of the church indicates, if it does nothing more, that the present village was always the most important, and, therefore, from its name this must be the Ham settlement. But was this the first church erected in the neighbourhood? Now, Domesday book tells us that Reinbald, the priest, and the two clerks had between them two-and-a-half hides of land. Domesday does not specify its situation, but we have no indication that any priest's land lay near the present village. The living of Cookham formerly belonged to the Abbey of Cirencester. At the dissolution of this Abbey the living fell into the hands of the king. By letters patent of the 16th of January, in the 32nd year of his reign, Henry VIII. granted to Thomas Weldon—who was Chief Master of the household—the Manor of Canon Court, with the appurtenances in Cookham, and the Rectory and Church at Cookham. Now, the land at Canon Court abuts on the Ham Field, whilst a portion of it immediately adjoining Ham Field is known still as Church Field. This, doubtless, is where Reinbald's land lay. But the same objection—viz., the distance of the village from the Ham Field—applies also to the distance between the church and the priest's land. From the position of the priest's land, its contiguity with, and probably forming a portion of, the Ham Field, we may reasonably infer that the old Ham settlement had a priest assigned to it, and also that it possessed a church—though this was probably only an insignificant structure—and thus the position of the priest's land would become explicable. In the 9th century, about the year 871, we read, "the Danes swept up the valley of the Thames, ravaging and destroying with fire and sword as far as Reading." A village so near the river as that of the Ham would scarcely have escaped notice and consequent destruction. We know, also, that after this last great Scandinavian invasion many settlements were formed by the raiders. A tract of ground to the east of, and contiguous with, the present village is known as Odney—Odin's eye or island. It is an island enclosed by the back-waters of the Thames, and its name would indicate its connection with the heathen Danes. It seems but reasonable to suppose that this settlement, combined, no doubt, with the ton or town which probably existed between Sutton and the river, would outstrip and soon become of greater importance than the harried inland settlement of the Ham, and on the conversion of the Danes, when a Christian church became a necessity, the riverside ton would be chosen for its site, in preference to that of the Ham, whilst the glebe lands of

the latter would be appropriated for the benefit of its priest. As to the prefix in Coxborough, we have the Anglo-Saxon-English word Cock, signifying little, and Burgh, from Burg or Burh, a fortification on a hill ; or we have the British word Coch, meaning red, from the colour of the rock or soil. So that the first Cock Burgh would indicate the "Little Fort," whilst the second Coch Bury would give us the "Red Fortification." For Coxborough, as the ancient site, we may plead :—Its name and touch with Ham Field, its contiguity to Rowborough, and its position in respect to Cockmarsh and the Cogwell fishery, its position at a junction of the Roman way running north and south with the probably Celtic roadway running east and west—a position of sufficient importance to induce the erection of a military earthwork. On the Saxon conquest the red earth fort would give a name to the Ham settlement, becoming Cokham, of sufficient importance on the conversion of its inhabitants to Christianity to induce the erection of a Church, the priest being provided with land in or adjoining the Ham field. After the destruction of the Ham settlement, with its church, in an incursion of the Danes, the village was subsequently re-erected, in a more suitable locality, but still retained its former name.

