



Some Notes on the Parish of Ruscombe, Berks.

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(Continued from page 24, Vol. 12.)

In 1680 died Richard Aldworth, the second of Stanlake. He was a great man locally, and also of some influence at Court. During the Civil Wars he had steadfastly supported the Royal cause, and fought gallantly at the battle of Newbury and at the siege of Bristol. He married Anna, daughter and heiress (the Aldworths were always great at marrying heiresses) of Mr. William Gwyn, of Windsor, one of the Auditors of His Majesty's Exchequer, and by her had six sons and an equal number of daughters. He represented Reading in Parliament in 1673, founded the Blue Coat School in the town, and finally was buried in the chancel of his parish church of Ruscombe, where there is a marble tablet to his memory recounting his many virtues, and his portrait hangs in the Reading Council Chamber. Thenceforward, at Stanlake, Richard succeeded Richard with monotonous regularity. Of the next one all I can find is the following entry in the burial register:—"1706. Nov. 19. Richard Aldworth Esq. buried in linnen and ye forfeiture paid." This curious entry, of course, had reference to the Act for the protection of the woollen industry, whereby no one was allowed to be buried in anything but a woollen shroud without paying a fine. There is only one other entry of the same kind, and that is in the same year. It is that of Letitia, wife of Reginald Fellows, merchant, of the parish of St. Christopher the Stocks, London: "brought from Reading and buried in linnen and the forfeiture paid." She was the daughter of Nathan Knight of Northbury, was 21 years of age, and had been married to Mr. Fellows just a year. She is mentioned on the Knights' tablet in the church. The Knights probably had a town house in Reading.

About the year 1715 the next Richard Aldworth married Catherine, daughter and heiress of Richard Neville, of Billingbear, and in

1717 Richard Neville, the only child of the marriage, was born. In 1720 Richard Aldworth had the misfortune to kill Sir Owen Buckingham, M.P. for Reading, in a duel, which is said to have taken place in an avenue leading from Stanlake towards Hurst, and consequently had to fly the country for a time. In the same year his wife died, but whether before or after the duel I cannot say. Stanlake House appears then to have been let. In 1749 it was occupied by the Earl of Peterborough.

We find that Richard Aldworth, the duellist, was buried at Ruscombe in 1738, and Ruscombe continued to be the burial place of the family till the end of the century. In 1747 the young Richard Neville Aldworth, who had become Under Secretary of State, was elected M.P. for Reading, and a few years later, probably on his succeeding to the Billingbear estate of his mother's family, took the surname of Neville. In 1782 his son Richard Neville was elected M.P. for Reading, and continued to sit till his elevation to the peerage as the first Lord Braybrook in 1797. Stanlake then became the seat of Sir Nathaniel Duckinfield and others his successors. In 1840 it was purchased by George Barker, of London, whose grandson, Frederick Gresley Barker, of Winchfield, Hants, is the present owner. The manor of Hinton Pipard is still in the Braybrook family, having been kept by them when Stanlake was sold.

From 1710 till his death in 1718, William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, lived at Ruscombe. The house Penn occupied belonged to a Mr. Foster. The Fosters were small owners of property in the parish, but the house in which tradition says Penn lived was either built, rebuilt, or enlarged near the end of the 18th. century by Sir James Eyre, Lord Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, who had lately purchased some property in Ruscombe. Later it became the property of the Leveson-Gowers, of Bill Hill, Hurst, and was pulled down in 1830 by General Leveson-Gower. In dry seasons the foundations may still be traced among the grass in a field on the south side of the railway near Southbury Farm. Tradition says that it was pulled down to make way for the railway, but this is not correct, as the railway was not made till some years after, and was originally planned not to go near the site at all. Penn's residence at Ruscombe seems to have left no trace behind in the history of the parish—except that possibly some members of his second family, children of his wife Hannah, continued to live in the neighbourhood. In the registers of Ruscombe, Hurst, and Sonning

I have found entries of Penn, of John, William, and the very suggestive Philadelphia. If these were really his descendants, we may say that his family is still represented in the district.

During the greater part of the 18th century Ruscombe seems to have had a quiet, steady time, but towards the end of the century great changes took place in the ownership of the land. Not long before the death of the last Knight he sold Northbury to Richard Palmer, son of Robert Palmer, of Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, ancestor of the Palmers of Holme Park, Sonning. Richard Palmer also purchased other property in Ruscombe, but held it only for a short time, and sold it to Sir James Eyre, who occupied the mansion near Southbury Farm above mentioned, which was called Ruscombe House. He died in 1799, and the estate was purchased by John Leveson-Gower, of Bill Hill. His son, General Leveson-Gower, pulled down the house and otherwise altered the estate. Through his influence an Enclosure Act was passed in 1829, when the whole of the parish, half of which had been open fields and commons, was enclosed. In the Act he is described as Lord of the Manors of Ruscombe Northbury and Ruscombe Southbury, as lessee of the Prebendaries of Salisbury. One effect of the enclosures was the extinction of a number of small owners of land. With the exception of two or three small properties, the whole parish was made into one estate, and was subsequently purchased by Thomas Colleton Garth, of Haines Hill, who is the present owner. It is now mainly an agricultural and sporting parish, most of the land being occupied by members of the Cotterell family, whose ancestors have lived in Ruscombe from very early times.

The Barkers' lease of the great tithes was purchased by the Palmers, of Holme Park, Sonning, and held by them till towards the middle of the 19th. century, when it passed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The peculiar jurisdiction of the Dean of Salisbury was suppressed by the Queen in Council in 1846, and the patronage of the living vested in the Bishop of Oxford. In 1860, and again in 1880, the church was restored.