

ROCKBOURN AND ITS EARLY ASSOCIATIONS.

The name of Rockbourn has apparently been derived from the circumstances of its physical geology. The bourn stream is supplied with water from the chalk, by springs above the village and other springs along its course. It represents to the eye of the geologist a survival of the geological force by which the valley was formed. Along its course lie the evidences of the former greater volume of water which flowed down the valley, and of the former greater excavating power of the stream. The evidences are the blocks of rock which may be still seen here and there along its course, and which must, in the remote past, have been much more numerous than they are at present. These detached pieces of rock, or blocks of stone, which were so well marked as to give a name to the stream and to the parish through which it flows, are all natural to this district and are of three kinds:—

1. Iron sandstone, usually of a reddish tint, may be seen here and there in the neighbourhood as well along the stream.
2. Eocene conglomerate made up of pebbles strongly cemented together so as to form a hard mass.
3. The fine-grained sandstone known as Greywether or Sarsen stone.

The occurrence of these stones along the course of the stream and in other parts of the neighbourhood are the remains of the Tertiary beds, which formerly, at a remote period, covered the chalk in the higher part of the Rockbourn valley, as they do at the present time in its lower part towards Fordingbridge. The bourn is very variable in regard to the volume of water flowing down it, and during very wet seasons, floods still occur. This western corner of Hampshire comprising parts of Breamore, Whitsbury, and Rockbourn, was certainly inhabited in pre-historic time. The Giant's grave on Mizmaze Hill and the tumulus at Duck's Nest on Rockbourn Down are long barrows of the Neolithic or

newer Stone Age, and the round barrows on these downs mark the sites of interments which probably took place on these spots after cremation during the Bronze Age. The great earthwork at Whitsbury was the castle of refuge for the people inhabiting this district to which they could drive their cattle and take refuge, probably before the Roman period, and was, without doubt, one of the long line of fortresses used at a later date, in the defensive war which the British people waged along the west of Hampshire during their great struggle with the Saxons, whose progress westward, was arrested for a century.

That the Romans occupied this neighbourhood is proved by the hoards of Roman coins which have been found, some of which are in the possession of Mr. Morrice, of Whitsbury. The traces of Celtic and Romano-British occupation have been found all round Rockbourn. Bokerly Dyke lies to the west of it, and the Grims Dyke, part of which lies to the north.

A great part of the parish boundary of Rockbourn is the county boundary between Hampshire and Wiltshire, and has been so probably from Saxon time. In the time of Edward the Confessor the greater part of Rockbourn was held by the king as part of the demesne land of the crown. It was not assessed or divided into hides, a privilege possessed by many royal manors. Two other parts of Rockbourn were held in the time of the Confessor as separate manors by thanes named Ulviet and Sawin. They held their lands allodially or by thane service, their only obligations being the repair of local defences (such as the castle or earthwork at Whitsbury), the repair of bridges, and military service in case of invasion.

At the time of the Domesday Survey, the royal manor of Rockbourn was held by King William. That which had been held by the Saxon thane Ulviet was in Norman time held by Alwi the son of Torber and it was worth 20s. annually instead of 40s. Sawin who held his land under Edward the Confessor, continued to hold it under King William, and its annual value was reduced. The reduced annual values probably point to the substitution of feudal tenure for the

easier thane tenure of the Saxon period. After the Norman Conquest the king's manor of Rockbourn continued to be held by the Crown probably until the time of Henry II., when we find it held under new feofment.

An interesting circumstance is recorded in Domesday Book concerning the two small manors or holdings in Rockbourn, which were held separately from the royal domain. A question was raised as to whether these lands were rightfully held by Alwi and Sawin. Apparently there had been no confiscation as a result of the Norman Conquest. Two thanes, Ulivet and Sawin, were the free tenants in the time of Edward the Confessor, and Alwi, who had succeeded Ulivet and Sawin, held the same lands at the time of the Norman Survey, but not by the same tenure. The subject of these holdings was referred to a Jury of the Hundred Court—a rare procedure as regards the Domesday Survey of Hampshire. The jury declared that one yard-land of the hide claimed by Alwi had been freed and discharged of tax or geld in the time of King Edward, and that Alwi had the seal of that king as his title. The jury of the Hundred, and also of the County likewise, confirmed Sawin's title to his land by declaring that King Edward gave it to him, and that he was able to produce the King's seal in support of his claim. Evidently, the two Rockbourn thanes, Alwi and Sawin, had carefully preserved the documents with the King's seal, which were their title deeds.

Rockbourn was held in feudal tenure for more than 200 years by the Bisset family, whose name still survives in that of Combe Bisset in Wiltshire a few miles distant. In the time of Henry II. we hear of Manasserus de Bisset, who was Dapifer or Seneschall to that king, and was probably the first of that family who was lord of Rockbourn. He was one of the benefactors of Breamiore Priory, as is shown by his charter existing, by which he gave certain lands to the priory that prayer should there be offered for his lord King Henry, for himself, his wife, and all his ancestors. He appears to have had a daughter, whose life was blighted by the disease of leprosy, so common in the middle ages, and this circumstance led to the establishment of

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at Maiden Bradley, which place, according to Camden, the historian, acquired the first part of its name from this circumstance. It also, afterwards, apparently led to the establishment of a lepers house or hospital at Rockbourn, as a branch of that at Maiden Bradley. The remains of this hospital still exist on the north of Rockbourn Church. The Bissets were lords of the manor of Kidderminster, in Worcestershire, as well as of Rockbourn, and the other manors I have mentioned in Wiltshire. Kidderminster Church, as well as this of Rockbourn, was also held by the Leper's Hospital at Maiden Bradley, in 11 Henry III., i.e., in 1226, the great tithes of both places were part of its endowment. The Great Pipe Roll of the 3rd John shows that Henry Bisset paid to the Exchequer £20 and 20s., on account of his manor of Rockbourn which was of new feofment. A later record states that Yfold Bicet held Rockbourn as part of the barony which belonged to Henry his father. To him succeeded John Biset, who died in the 35 Edward I. He is also certified by an *inquisitio post mortem* as having been lord of Kidderminster manor as well as of Rockbourn.

In the 9th Edward II., 1316, when the Nomina Villarum record was made, the manor of Rockbourn was held by the heirs of John Byset, but, as they were under age, it was in the custody of John de Drokensford, who was keeper of the Wardrobe temp. Edward I., and made Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1308. There may have been a smaller separate manor at Rockbourn up to this time, as there was in Norman time. Certainly in the 28th Edward I. a manor at Rockbourn was held by John de Wootten as part of the inheritance of Ela Biset, apparently his wife. Another, John Bisset, who died in the 8th Edward III., held Rockbourn manor and also Kidderminster manor. On his death the manor apparently reverted to the Crown. Three years later, we read that Robert Martyn paid a fine of a hundred shillings for the king's licence to enable Robert de Ho, to enfeof him, Robert Martyn and Margaret his wife, in the manor of Rockbourn. On his death, in the 29th Edward III., his widow apparently married Walter Romesey. It was certainly held by Margaret de

Romeseye in the 47th Edward III. The next Lord of Rockbourn was Sir Walter Romesey, a noted man in Hampshire in his time, who died 5th Henry IV., 1404, and it was held also by his widow Alice, who died in the same king's reign.

Another 15th century lord of Rockbourn was Sir John Beynton who also held Chilton Candover and who died in the 5th Edward IV.

On a map of Cranborne Chase dated 1618, preserved in the Exchequer, Sir John Bulkley's name occurs in connection with Rockbourn. The manor about that time was certainly acquired by the Cooper family, but I am not aware under what circumstance. By the marriage of John Cooper of Rockbourn with Anne, daughter of Sir Anthony Ashley, about 1620, their son, Anthony Ashley Cooper, who was subsequently created Earl of Shaftesbury, inherited it. He was the first Earl of that line and inherited Rockbourn when a minor in 1631. The manor has belonged to the Earls of Shaftesbury since his time. As shown by the entries in Domesday Book Rockbourn comprised the large manor held by the king and two smaller manors. There are records relating to more than one manor in subsequent centuries.

Henry Bisset paid to the Exchequer £20, and also 20s., apparently on account of a smaller separate estate. At the time of the dissolution of the monastic houses, Rockstead belonged to the priory and was not part of the manor of Rockbourn, but a separate manor in the parish. The manor of Rockstead now known as Rockstead farm, was one of the Hampshire manors given by Henry VIII. to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, for her life. In 1670 Robert Tregonnel, Esq. held the manor of Rockbourn for his life, and Robert Pope also held 170 acres of freehold land.

The family of Pope is an ancient one in this parish, Walter Pope, Capellanus, being mentioned in a document as early as 1337.

The low window on the south side of the chancel in many old churches, and which are commonly known as lepers' windows, occur in a considerable number of old churches in Hampshire, and the laws which forbade lepers to enter

churches support the popular explanation. There is no such window here, for in a place where a lepers' hospital with its own chapel existed a wandering leper would naturally go to the priest of the lazar house. The remains of this building at Rockbourn show that it must have been a hospital of considerable extent. The building now used as a cattle shed was probably the chapel, and that used as a barn part of the domestic buildings. This was clearly a structure of two floors, and part of its roof at least is probably as old as the 13th century. The stonework and walls point to the same date.

Leprosy was the greatest disease of the middle ages, and was the same as that which is known to have prevailed in Egypt and adjacent countries as early as 1400 B.C. There were many leper houses in England, but their number has not been ascertained. The most important of those which existed in Hampshire were dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen and were :—

1. St. Mary Magdalen's Hospital on Morn Hill, Winchester, the church of which was a fine building removed about the end of the 18th century.
2. St. Mary Magdalen's Hospital, Southampton, which stood in the West Marlands, Southampton, and which gave the name Magdalens or Marlands to the fields around it.
3. St. Mary Magdalen's Hospital at Christchurch.
4. St. John Baptist's Hospital at Andover.
5. The Hospital for lepers at Rockbourn, apparently a branch of the great hospital founded for the same charitable purpose at Maiden Bradley, in Wiltshire, was well endowed.

The history of the foundation of this religious house, as far as it is known, affords us an interesting glimpse of religious charity in the 12th century, to which the thoughts of Manasserus Bisset were apparently directed, through the affliction of his own daughter. The Charter Rolls of the 11th year of Henry III show that at that time Rockbourn Church, i.e., the rectory and great tithes of the parish, formed part of the revenue of the Lepers' House and Brotherhood at Bradley.

The *Placita de quo warranto* Rolls of the early part of Edward I. reign show that the Prior of Bradley was summoned to show his right to the privileges he claimed. The Prior by his attorney appeared, and proved by his charter that King John had granted to the hospital for leprous women at Bradley the right of holding a fair for two days at that place on the vigil and festival of St. Michael. This was no doubt the occasion when the necessaries for the winter were purchased, some of which probably were sent to Rockbourn. The prior also proved that Anselm Bisset had given the manor of Bradley with its manorial privileges to him and his successors.

The isolation of lepers was as strictly enforced as it could be by law and public sentiment. They had to wear a specially distinctive costume and carried a wooden clapper to announce their approach. They were forbidden to enter inns, churches, mills or bakehouses, to touch healthy persons or to eat with them, to wash in the stream or to walk in the narrow footpaths. They were in these respects cut off from intercourse with other people; but it is interesting to know that petitions for lepers are contained in some old Litanies, which I cannot doubt were used in this church for the community of leprous women who lived in this parish. There is evidence to show that this disease was most prevalent in this country in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the lepers' hospitals were for the most part established. Those in Hampshire date from the 12th century. The disease had much declined by the 15th century, and at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, the possessions of Bradley Lepers' Hospital in Rockbourn had become transferred to Breamore Priory.

A curious circumstance connected with Lepers' hospital, was the appointment of officials to collect alms for them. By Act of Edward I., each lazar house, or Lepers' Hospital, was allowed to appoint not more than two proctors to collect the alms of the charitable. Hence the origin of the personal name Proctor, or Procter. The final extinction of these officials is also interesting. After the decline of leprosy, these collectors still continued their avocation, and apparently with zeal

so that in the time of Elizabeth they had become a greater nuisance than the disease itself, and consequently in the Act of 39th Elizabeth proctors of this kind were declared to be "rogues and vagabonds."

The ancient parts of Rockbourn Church are of several periods, the earliest being the Norman doorway leading to the chantry chapel on the north. The north wall is also probably Norman, the doorway on that side being an insertion of later date than the wall itself. The arches and aisle are of the Early English period, when the church belonged to Maiden Bradley Hospital. The stone used in this part of the building is a sandstone of the upper greensand formation. It is not a local stone, but may have come from the Vale of Wardour. Rockbourn church was assessed at £10 13s. 4d. in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas, in 1290. In 1341, a jury declared that the ninth of sheaves, wool and lambs, amounted to £6 8s. 7d., and that the tithe of honey and other small tithes, with oblations and mortuaries, were worth 36s. 8d. They also declared that the ninth of the temporalities of the Prior of Breamore, in Rockbourn, amounted to 30s. The mention of honey shows that bees were of some importance in the rural economy of Rockbourn more than 500 years ago. At the time of the dissolution of Breamore Priory, in the reign of Henry VIII., the rectory of Rockbourn belonged to that priory, and was valued at £14. The priory also held land at Rockstead in this parish. The rectorial tithes passed to the Marquis of Exeter, and subsequently to the Dodington family, of Breamore.

It is a tradition that one of the Dodingtons of Breamore, reflecting on the tragedies which had happened in his family, restored the tithes of Breamore, Rockbourn, Whitsbury and Hale to their respective parish churches. Rockbourn was within the outer boundaries of Cranborne Chase from the time of King John until the rights of free chase over the wide extent of country formerly known as Cranborne Chase were abolished by Act of Parliament, 9 George IV.

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The inclosure of 1432 acres of commonable lands within the parishes of Rockbourn and Whitsbury took place under a special Act passed in 1798.

A copy of this Act, the copy owned by Mr. Richard Richardson, of Bath, the first Commissioner named in the Act for enclosing and allotting the common lands, is in the library of the Hartley Institution, Southampton. A portion of the interesting leper hospital, now used as a barn, and of the lazar chapel, now a cattle shed, may still be seen.
