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Medieval Cirencester

by E. A. Fuller
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MEDIEVAL CIRENCESTER

by REV. E. A. FULLER

[The following paper supplements the valuable series on the history of Cirencester which the Rev. E. A. Fuller contributed to our *Transactions* between 1878 and 1896. It is printed from the original ms in the possession of Mr St. Clair Baddeley, who has added foot notes. The paper gives in detail certain matters which are only generally dealt with in one of Mr Fuller's papers and for that reason, and also for the worth of everything which he wrote, it is now printed. The opportunity is taken to record a paper by Mr Fuller printed in *Wills Arch. Mag.* 1874, xiv, 216-28, entitled 'Ancient Cirencester and its Streets and Hundreds', which may not be generally known. Our Society had not been formed at the time or the paper would surely have been included in its *Transactions*. EDITOR].

WHEN authentic records of it begin with Domesday Book in 1086 and are contained in a series of surviving documents that commence not long after that date, we get thereby increasing insight into the condition of Cirencester after the Norman Conquest; but we find there a population, all-told, with the exception of the families of the secular canons (whose number is not recorded) of no more than 360 persons. This includes whatever population there might then be in the outlying hamlets of Wigwold and Baunton; that is to say, there are described 65 separate tenants holding either of the king in chief, or of the king as lord of the manor, or of his tenants, by various kinds of villein-service. The amount of arable land is set down as 1320 acres, employing 19 plough-teams, besides certain meadows (the average of which is not given), and woodland. There were three mills.

If Achelie (Oakley) formed part of the present parish of Cirencester, we must add to the above figures 420 acres

of arable land with $10\frac{1}{2}$ plough-teams and 31 tenants, which would bring up the population to about 550 besides the canons. But, if this Oakley was co-extensive with the present Oakley tithing (which does not commence for above a mile from the town), the hamlet soon disappeared, for there is no later mention of church or tenants. Oakley in after years appears sometimes merely as a great wood called the 'forest of Cirencester', in which Henry II reserved the hunting to himself when he gave the profits of the wood to the abbey. Was the forest formed or increased by the Norman kings after their manner with the New Forest? At the highest estimate the population of the town was but small, and cannot have contained much above a fifteenth of its present inhabitants: and Cirencester presented the appearance of a small-sized modern village.¹ As one entered by Cheping street, about a third of the way up on both right and left hand of it were the houses of two free men of the manor, Archebald, and de Pirie. Around the market-place, and along the streets centering there, were some thinly-grouped tenements of the various other inhabitants. Outside the north gate the present Gloucester street was merely part of the high road to Gloucester, having but a few tenements here and there standing along it. Gosedich street in all probability ran straight into the market-place; the houses in the west-market representing later encroachments by the canons, and the church not occupying above a third of its present space. Behind the church

¹ Whether this was the normal condition of the town, or exceptional as the result of the Conquest, we cannot tell. That the result of this incoming of the Normans had been to lessen the value of land in Cirencester we know. In four parcels of land where it is possible to compare the values between the times before and after the Conquest, there is only one where it had not been lowered: in the three others the king's rent had fallen from £11 to £8. There had been trouble in Gloucestershire a few years before, and the Normans often effected a pacification by making an actual desert: at the same time there is no mention of houses lying waste here as occurs in some places.

rose the College of Canons,—the Dole Hall, where they distributed their alms, standing by the present carriage entrance to the abbey grounds, whence the street became known as Dolehall street, now corrupted into Dollar street.²

The parish was held in six great divisions. First of these was the king's manor. This was given some relation in early days to the great earldom of Hereford; for William FitzOsbern (d. 1071) had dealt with it during his brief career as its holder, and he built its former castle (destroyed *c.* 1142). At the period of Domesday it had already escheated to the king (1095, through his son Earl Roger's rebellion), and when later the Empress Maud recreated this earldom for Milo of Gloucester, the Constable (d. 1143), we find the latter's son, with the assent of Stephen (though not of Henry II before he came to the throne), granting land in the king's demesne to St. Mary's abbey.

Although for long after Domesday that earldom retained certain connexion with both Chesterton and Wigwold, whatever that relation was it ceased when Henry II finally granted the manor outright to the growing abbey. Next there figured the ancient if modest estate of the secular canons. The third was William of Baderon's³ land, the history of which is lost, unless perchance it was the same with the Wigwold manor which, soon after, is found in

² Besides the four great cross-streets connected with the old Roman roads, the road from the west (or the Hampton road) came down Cecily Hill, then called Inchthrop (*i.e.*, the real town entrance) and turning to the right, under the name of Gosdich (now Park street and Blackjack street), passed into the market-place; to the left it ran inside the wall down Battle street (now Thomas street) to the north gate; passing through which it turned to the right outside the wall to the northeastern angle by the existing old hospital gateway of the abbey precinct, whence it travelled northward over the wolds toward Withington, Wynchcombe and Worcestershire. [As Wiggold-way, White-way, or Stanway. St. C. B.].

³ Hence, Monmouth Place.

the hands of the Bissets.⁴ In Achelie (Oakley), Roger de Lacy had held one of the three manors which his brother Hugh (*c.* A.D. 1112) gave to Llanthony abbey (*co.* Monmouth). Gilbert de Turolde having rebelled against William Rufus his lands had escheated to the king, and, unless re-granted to another (of which there is no record), they continued part of the demesne. Turstin FitzRolf's land (once Brictric's) 240 acres, in Achelie (Coates) cannot be traced. Chesterton is not mentioned by name in Domesday, but it was (in all probability) a part of the manor of Siddington, held by Hascoit Musard; but about 1270 it had passed to the family of Langley, Geoffry de Langley (died 1273) being Lord of Siddington⁵ and of Chesterton under the Honour of the earldom of Lancaster, before which time the abbey had acquired two hides there.⁶ As late as 1327 Chesterton is taxed along with the township of Siddington as a member of it. (There may here be some legitimate doubt whether FitzBaderon rather than Musard, was not the holder.—St. C. B.).

With regard to the condition and circumstances of the inhabitants, the Survey describes a freeman as holding two hides by petty-serjeanty, and two other freemen and 54 other tenants of different degrees, designated villeins (31), serfs (13) and bordars (10), all of them dwelling in the demesne. Then, in the abbey cartularies appear two lists of these tenants with their services individually described; one apparently of the beginning of the reign of Henry II; the other is of the reign of John. A third, which is almost identical with the latter of these two, is among the public records of 9 Henry III (1225), and this became thenceforward a standard of appeal. Whenever,

⁴ Certainly a portion of Cecily Hill and the Barton was Edith Bisset's as of the manor of Wigwold. FitzBaderon had 240 acres that had been Alwis's estate here. In addition he had Oswith's manor of Siddington (St. C. B.).

⁵ Siddington included no less than 4 manors. (St. C. B.).

⁶ The old mill in Watermoor was Langley's mill. (St. C. B.).

in after generations, the abbots had trouble with their tenants, they used simply to make a fresh copy of this record with a 'confirmation' added by the reigning sovereign. Besides these, there is a good deal of information in the voluminous pleadings of the suit by the abbot in 1413 for the recovery of his rights against his tenants. The land originally held by one man in serjeanty was soon divided into two properties, two freemen holding by that tenure by the keeping two or three greyhounds for the king's use, a service reckoned as equivalent to a marc, (*i.e.* 13s 4d) a year; and de Pirie held his by directing the king and his suite through the county, at his own cost, reckoned at a marc yearly, though when outside the county, at the king's own cost. When the manor was transferred to the abbey, these tenants became the abbot's men, doing fealty to him. The Archebald's estate was kept pretty much intact, four tenements being granted to Bradenstoke Priory under Henry II, but the rest remained with them until, in the 15th century, it passed into possession of another but related family named Gervays, who in the reign of Henry VIII sold it to Richard Osmund. Half of de Pirie's estate was, already even in the reign of John, alienated and parcelled out among a number of small tenants; the other moiety was afterwards granted to the abbey. The sub-tenants on these two properties were of course always as free as their lords, and no services attached to their land;⁷ but all the other 54 tenants on the manor⁸ were bound to perform some kind of farm labour. Some had to give all their labour, working as they were bidden for a certain number of hours every day; some worked only a certain number of days in the week; some were oxmen, some ploughed, some harrowed, some carried with their own waggons and

⁷ The representatives of the two other freemen mentioned in Domesday paid simply a money-rent.

⁸ Whether they paid money-rent or not.

carts, some worked at the grange threshing, some few paid a money rent without any weekly work ; but one and all were obliged to work in hay-time and harvest-tide. In July they did $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 ' fenesones ' (*fenum*) : *i.e.* a day's haymaking, being duly summoned according as they held a cottage or a messuage, and they worked thus in the hayfield without any expense to the lord for food. In August they did $1\frac{1}{2}$ or 3 ' bederepes ',⁹ *i.e.* a day's harvest work, but, in this case, the lord had to provide meat and drink honourably, which in later times was changed for a money payment of $1\frac{1}{2}d$ a day.¹⁰ Personally the greater number of the men were always free, privileged villeins on the ancient demesne of the crown,¹¹ but the land was on villein-tenure ; they could not be sold off the land ; they could retire from the land if they liked, but while they lived there they were bound to pro-

⁹ OE : Bedrip, reaping, on request.

¹⁰ And these three bederipes were not confined to the tenants only, but every adult inhabitant who lived by his own labour was bound to do them ; even sojourners could not escape them. Anyone who was in Cirencester on Midsummer night and stayed there till the corn was ripe, man or woman, whether of free or servile condition, was bound to go into the lord's fields and do three days' work. Of course, too, all corn had to be ground at the lord's mills, and a merchet, *i.e.* a fine, had to be paid to the lord for leave to give a daughter in marriage, while at death the tenant's best animal or chattel went to the lord as succession-duty, the second best to the priest as mortuary. They attended the half-yearly halimot held in the ' kyngeshalle ' in the abbey, and as Cirencester was always a separate jurisdiction to the neighbouring hundred, as being ancient demesne of the Crown, the tenants did suit to the manorial court held every three weeks at the Tolsey, bringing there all suits of distress, or debt, or contract, and to the lord's half-yearly View of Frankpledge ; being ready to hold office as ale-taster, or inspector of meat &c., and whoever was not sworn into office paid 1d as hedepeny. Their lands and tenements they held of the lord for life only, who let them to whom he pleased without any writing or reservation of anyone's rights, and with a power of re-entry for waste, sub-letting, being a month in arrear with rent ; the tenant having no right of bequest, while the lord could exact an arbitrary fine for permitting a child to inherit.

¹¹ Gradually also a liberty of bequest and right of succession became customary, until the system of copyhold of inheritance supervened.

vide so much labour for the land which the lord kept in his own hands. As to the smaller number of the lower class, however much their liberty was originally restricted (for, in early days, they might not leave the land), their land was bit by bit transferred to the freer class. Gradually too the weekly work of all classes became commuted for increased money-rent—the lord paying for what ordinary labour he required. But the services of getting in the hay and corn continued well into the 15th century; but these too were presently commuted, and at the dissolution of the abbey in 1539 the whole value of the customary services in Cirencester was returned at only £1. At the weekly market (in early days held on Sunday; commencing apparently at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and continued on Monday), the ordinary tenants had liberty to buy and sell what they liked here, except horses, without paying toll, but they paid $2\frac{1}{2}d$ chepingavel at the halfyearly halimot. Beer, too, they might brew for their own consumption from their own corn, but if they sold it then they paid $1d$ as stakepeny for every brewing they sold, or they gave a 'tolcestre', *i.e.* four flagons of the best beer and four of the second sort. Tenants who were regular traders paid toll every market they attended; and everyone had to pay at the halfyearly fairs.

Some details of the merchandise brought here are found in a special grant for three years of certain tolls, for the purpose of paving the town, made by Edward II in 1321.¹² Animals, including stags, horses, goats, corn and bean and pea meal, with provisions of all kinds, the fish being salmon (fresh and salt), cod, conger eels, freshwater eels by the strike of 25, dried herrings, Aberdeen fish, 'lampreys before Easter', and stockfish; also timber and fuel (including coal) salt; tallow and oil; cloth-hides, canvas,

¹² Patent Roll, 27 December (*Calendar*, p. 42).

linen, Irish cloth, diaper of silk, wool, hemp, fleeces—as well as the minerals, iron, lead, tin, copper and alum.

Whatever may have been the original line of the Churn river-bed, which is said to have run behind Gloucester street, across Goosacre lane, through St. John's meadow and so through the abbey grounds to the end of Dyer street, the main streams thereof already ran through the town in their present courses—a mill by the Barton which belonged to the small manor of Wiggold, being given to Eynsham abbey by Manasseh Bisset in the reign of Henry II. The miller's name was Hugh Mace, from whom the mill afterwards became called Maz or Mayes-mille. The same mill, or another close by, was held in the next century by Richard Clerk, and the mill sometimes occurs as Clerk's Mille. Both these names survived for a long time after the mill became the Barton mill, as attached to certain adjoining parcels of land, Clerksmeade, and Mayesmill ground. Gosedich softened from Goose-dich, or Goggesdich, her earlier form (as the name for the stream passing behind Coxwell street, called also the Gumstool brook), shows that from early times the ancient discipline of the ducking-stool (called gogingstool or gougstool), was there administered. The house in Gosdich street, nearly opposite Coxwell street, was the old abbey mill. It has been supposed that, besides these streams, a channel ran all through the town from north to south. Leland seems to have been of that opinion. 'The likelihood', he says, 'in times past cutts were made that partes of Churne Streame might cum throw the cite and so to returne to their great bottom'. Such a channel remained in Gloucester street until the latter part of last (18th) century.¹³

The houses, though mean enough, were perhaps more of stone than in many places; but how usual timber was

¹³ We should here recall that the former castle's moat drew supply from one or other of the channels. But all the channels have suffered by 'improving' modifications of various kinds. (St. C. B.).

as the local building material in early days is plain from the frequent mention of extensive fires, by which half a town was sometimes burnt down. What poor structures the wooden houses were is clear from the provision of the Assize of Clarendon in 1168, which orders that the houses of heretics shall be taken outside the town and burnt ; but wrought-stone more than enough from Roman ruins was surely obtainable throughout the centuries in Cirencester to build her houses, two churches and one abbey. At the beginning of the 18th century, Stukeley says that cartloads of such stone were taken to mend the roads. Still, an early donor to the abbey specifies a house which he gives it as that which he himself had built from the foundation and covered with stone, as though it were somewhat different from the other houses.

[NOTE. Had Corinium been given the magnificent 'opus quadratum' walling that, since 1931, it is known that Gloucester was encircled with in the 2nd century, and from which supply the latter city's six or seven priories and thirteen parish churches have, over and over again, been built and rebuilt, it would surely (much of it) have survived. For, not only was Corinium far more extensive than Glevum ; but, mediævally, she owned but 2 small parish churches, one fine abbey, one very short-lived Norman castle (1070-1142), and a small industrial population with no magnificent houses. Yet, the only remains attributed (without exploration) by 16th or 18th century writers to Roman town walls, will, in reality, quite inadequately account for the four double-arched toll-gates of the town, which it must have had independently of such military-walling. That the ancient Celtic dry-wall and mound survived as the south wall through Roman days, was proven by the excavation in the Work-House Garden in 1921-2, when the Roman houses were found stopping inside and against it ; but not one Roman tooled wall-stone was anywhere met with. St. C. B.]