# THE MEON COUNTRY.

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## THE HALL OF THE OLD COURT HOUSE.

It is historically interesting to consider that while we are constructing in England a system of local government at the present day, in which all householders shall have a voice through their representatives in a district council, here in what remains of this old Court House, we come upon the relics of an ancient system of local government. The parts which remain of this dilapidated hall are like the wreckage of some good old ship which has drifted down to us from the sea of time. Here was the place of the ancient Hundred Court of East Meon, an ancient seat of local government and also of justice, where the Bailiff of the Hundred and a jury in olden time administered both criminal and civil law in the Hundred Court. We may look on these ruins with respect, for they have voices of their own, which come to us from an obsolete system and from past centuries. The building itself is, I think, probably of Wykeham's time. This old Court House at East Meon has been for a long time popularly known as King John's House. This tradition connecting the place with King John must be very ancient, and some kind of authority has been given to it by the mention of King John residing at East Meon, when Earl of Mortain and Gloucester, in the well known local election petition and trial called the Petersfield Case. It is certain that John, when Earl of Mortain (not Morton, as erroneously stated in the Petersfield Case) and Earl of Gloucester, in right of his first wife, granted a charter to Petersfield, which I believe is still preserved there—at any rate a fac-simile is published. I have no wish to deprive East Meon of any of its ancient glories, but I do not think John ever lived here, and I will now explain how the Court House may, perhaps, have otherwise become connected in the popular

mind with his name. East Meon Manor, with the Hundred, was in 1086 held by the King. It had been held by Archbishop Stigand, but the Doomsday record does not say that it had always been Church land, as it states in connection with so many other ecclesiastical manors.

Stigand held it after his deprivation, while a semi-prisoner at Winchester, and at his death the Conqueror kept it as a royal manor. He held nothing in West Meon, and these places in Doomsday are called each of them Menes, and West Meon is mentioned also as Mene. East Meon appears to have been held as a royal manor for more than 120 years after the Doomsday Survey, for in the 9th year of Richard I the accounts of the Exchequer show that in that year the Sheriff of Hants was allowed so much off his account "for stocking the king's lands in Menes." This was in 1198, and the amount allowed was the value of 12 oxen at 3s. each, and 100 sheep at 4d. each.

No doubt the Bishops of Winchester between 1086 and 1198 were anxious to get this manor back, but I cannot find any record of its restoration until the 1st year of King John's reign, when a charter was granted by that king conveying the manor of East Meon to the Bishop of Winchester. In after years I can well imagine that the Court House might from this very likely get the local name of King John's House, and one of the royal heads here appears to me to be intended to represent that king.

In the year 2 Edward II, 1309, a plea was made before the King and his Council between the Bishop of Winchester and the men of his manors of Waltham, Merdon, Crawley, Twyford, Sutton, Overton, and Menes, and this probably followed on differences expressed in this Hall between the Bishop and his tenants here.

In 17 Edward II, 1344, there appears to have been another matter in dispute between the Bishop and his men of the manor of Menes, for the Patent Rolls show that in that year a plan or description of the land in the Manor of Menes was ordered to be made from the Doomsday Book, and was no doubt produced here.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME MEON.

Whatever may be the meaning of the word Meon, I think there can be no doubt that the name is as old as the British period. In Ireland there are at least 50 names of places of sufficient importance to be included in county maps compounded of the words mon, meeny, money, and these names appear to denote a pasture of some kind. If the name Meon as applied to this valley is from the same root word, it may be a Gaelic name denoting a pasture, or high pasture, near springs. I have shown in a paper read before the Anthropological Institute that Hampshire contains many examples of Celtic names derived from the Gaelic branch of the Celtic race, as well as others apparently more allied to the Cymric branch.

A distinguished scholar and antiquary has, however, given another explanation of the origin and meaning of this name Meon. It is certain that the early inhabitants of this valley—both the Celts and the Jutes, who succeeded them—were pagans. The Jutes were worshippers of Woden, Thor and Freya or Mother Earth, in which we must include water sources, all of the Teutonic mythology. We know less of the religion of the Celtic or British people who preceded them, but they certainly also reverenced the sun and moon, and also water sources. I think the name Meon as applied to this district is an older name than the date of the Jutish settlement, and the word may be very old indeed.

The mythology of ancient nations had many resemblances. Seneca says "Where a spring rises or a river flows let us build our altars and offer sacrifices," and these water sources which were sacred places to the Romans, were reverenced also by the Celtic tribes of Britain. East Meon is just such a place as a primitive tribe would choose for the headquarters of their settlement from such considerations, and I should not be at all surprised if Roman or Romano-British remains were found at Oxenbourn or Fairfield, the two water sources above East Meon or near the spring south of Westbury, as the sites of Roman villas have been found in many similar situations in Hampshire and elsewhere. Oxenbourn I take to be a duplicated name, perhaps triplicated, partly Celtic and partly Saxon,

of which we have many other examples in this county—*ox* and *an* being Celtic syllables, both denoting water as much as the Saxon word *bourn*. It is difficult to imagine how the ancient pagan races of this part of the world could have been other than worshippers of Nature, of the visible heavens, and of the sun as the dispenser of life and fertility. If they had any religion at all they could not fail to be impressed with these phenomena, and our names Sunday and Monday testify how deeply rooted this widespread ancient mythology of the heavens really was. A distinguished writer on linguistic antiquities, the late Rev. Samuel Lysons, a learned Hebrew scholar, in his book on "Our British Ancestors," specially mentions the name of this district Meon as a name of extreme antiquity, which he traces from the far east, and as a name applied to those who worshipped the material heavens, and especially the sun as the dispenser of fertility and of life.

I have already, during this meeting, pointed out to the club the line of the Celtic tumuli at the Jumps, which are at the northern limit of East Meon Hundred. This line is the line of the mid-summer sunrise, and of the mid-winter sunset, as is the case with the chief lines at Stonehenge.

In support of his statement that Mone and Meon are ancient words of Eastern origin come into Britain by ancient migrations from the East, the late Rev. Samuel Lysons refers his readers to two texts of Scripture, viz., Ezekiel, xxv, 9, where the prophet denounces Baal-Meon, worshipped by the Moabites, and Jeremiah, xlviii, 23, where Beth-Meon, or the temple of Meon, is denounced.

Mr. Lysons also mentions that the name Menu is still used in India to denote the same worship, and he specially names this Meon country as one of the parts of Britain where this worship of the sun and heavens must have survived the longest. These are suggestions I point out for your consideration without being responsible for them, but I agree with Mr. Lysons that such a religion prevailed in Britain.

The earliest historical documents connected with this district of which I know, are the Anglo-Saxon records relating to Meon. These are—

1. Grant by King Beortric, A.D. 790, to Prince Hamele of

land at Hissaburn in exchange for land on the river Meona. (Cartularium Saxonicum, I, 359.)

2. Grant by Egbert, King of the West Saxons, to the Prefect Wolfheard of land on the river Meon. (Cart. Saxon., I, 514.)

3. In his will about A.D. 900, King Alfred bequeaths his land in Meon to his younger son.

4. Charter of King Edgar, A.D. 963 granted land at Ambersham, in Sussex, to the Church of St. Andrew, Meon (*i.e.*, St. Andrew's Church, West Meon). (Cart. Saxon., III, 340).

This refers to the strip of land south of Haslemere, in Sussex, formerly included in East Meon Hundred, which led to one of those geographical anomalies of a piece of one county being situated within another, now altered by a revision of boundaries, I believe.

## THE MANOR OF WESTBURY.

Westbury is probably so named as being a bury or defensive place, near the western boundary of the Hundred of East Meon. The earliest record we have, as far as I know, of the Manor of Westbury is that contained in Doomsday Book, when it was held by a knight named Gozelin, by feudal tenure, as part of the extensive domains of Hugh de Port, who held the Manor of Warnford, lower down the valley. The remains of the Norman house at Warnford are no doubt the ruins of one of the mansions of the de Port family. Another of this family, Adam de Port, is said to have rebuilt Warnford Church, for Camden records that towards the end of the 16th century there was an inscribed stone on the wall, and gives the inscription. The stone, now on the north side, reads as follows :—

Adam de Portu
Benedicat solis ab ortu
Gens cruce signata
Per quem sic sum renovata,

which has been put into English,

Good folks in your devotions every day
For Adam Port who thus repaired me, pray.[1]

[1] Canon Benham has more correctly paraphrased the inscription thus—

"Bless ye good Adam de Port,
Cross signed Christians of every sort,
By whom I was thus restored
For the worship of Christ your Lord."—Ed

The record of Westbury in Doomsday Book is as follows :— Hugh de Port holds Westbury, and Gozelin holds it under him, and Ulnod held it of King Edward. It was then as now assessed at three hides. Here are four ploughlands, two in demesne, and five villeins, and six borderers, with two ploughlands, also two slaves, three acres of meadow and wood for four hogs. Its value in the time of King Edward and now is £4 and when it came into possession 40s. This entry shows that the Manor was held as part of the fief or barony of Hugh de Port, in which connexion it remained apparently till the reign of Edward III, perhaps until the general decay of the feudal system.

The Doomsday account tells us that whatever its actual extent was, the manor was assessed for the purposes of taxation at three hides, the hide being the basis of early taxation.

There were four ploughlands, probably about 100 acres each, under arable cultivation, two ploughlands being held in demesne cultivated by the lord, by the services his manorial tenants, the villeins and borderers, were obliged to render him, while they held in community also two ploughlands, or about 200 acres of arable land, which they cultivated for their own support.

This Doomsday account of Westbury is interesting from another point of view, for it tells us that in the days of King Edward the Confessor it had been held by Ulnod, directly of the king. Ulnod was no doubt a thane who held his land by thane service, for the feudal system came in with the Conquest. Ulnod, as a thane, would only have three obligations to discharge in return for his land, viz., to take part in the repair of local defences, such as that no doubt of the Westbury itself and that on old Winchester hill, the repair of bridges of the hundred (that of Meonstoke), and the liability for military service. After the Conquest, Westbury Manor certainly became a feudal tenure, for it was held, not of the king directly, but of Hugh de Port as part of his barony, which he held of the King.

Gozelin, the Norman knight, would have many other obligations to bear, for the Manor of Westbury that Ulnod his predecessor had, such as wardship, premier seizin, escuage,

reliefs, fines, escheats and others for the benefit of his feudal lords. Its early history therefore affords one of the best examples in this country of the change in tenure introduced by the Normans.

In the latter part of the reign of Henry III the Manor of Westbury was held as a knight's fee by John of Westbury as part of the barony of Robert de St John and by him of the king.

The entry of this occurs in the record known as the Testa de Neville, compiled by Neville, one of the officials of the Exchequer in the 13th century.

In the next reign the manor was held by Robert Lewer, or Robert le Ewar. In the Nomina Villarum or return of manors and their holders, ordered in the 9th Edw. II, Westbury is stated as held by Robt. le Ewer and the Charter Rolls of the 15th Edward II contain a record of the grant of free warren made to him in Westbury and Pekelond.

There is another ancient record relating to this possessor of Westbury. After the time when castle building was prohibited and many of them destroyed, licenses were sometimes granted to knights and others to crenellate their houses, *i.e.*, place embattlements on them for defence. In the 15th Ewd. II Robert Lewer was allowed by Royal Patent to crenellate his house at Westbury. (Patent Rolls.) Some remains of the medieval house which Robert Lewer was allowed to crenellate may still be seen in the cellars of this mansion.

In 1334, at the time of the taxation of the 10th and 15th in Hampshire the amount of tax which this manor was assessed to pay was 42s. 4d.

The entry in the record of this assessment couples Westbury with a place called Stocke; both Westbury and Stocke being included within the Hundred of Meonstoke. Stocke was, I suppose, what is known as Stock farm, north of Peak farm, some three miles away.

This assessment in 1334 is interesting, seeing that it remained in force as the amount this manor would be required to pay as a tax on moveables or personal property for nearly 300 years—the amounts each hundred and manor was assessed at in 1334 not being revised for so long.

In the 27th year of Edward III an Inquisition was held which probably placed the tenure of Westbury manor on a different basis, and this appears to have been brought about by the death of Edmund de St John, son and heir of Hugh de St John, without issue. In that year an Inquisition was held for the partition of his lands among his two sisters, Margaret Philberto and Isabella de Ponynges—and it may be noted that this occurred a few years after the king had granted a licence to Robert Lewer to crenellate his house. The most interesting historical event connected with the manor of Westbury is one of national importance, for there is I think every reason to believe that it was the place of meeting of Henry I and his brother Robert, Duke of Normandy, early in the year 1102. You will find no mention of Westbury in connexion with the event in any books on the history of England, and so I will mention the evidence on which this supposed event rests. The old French chronicler, who is quoted by Professor Freeman in his history of the reign of William Rufus, narrates the circumstance that Robert Duke of Normandy landed at Porchester with his army and marched towards Winchester, intending to besiege that city, but hearing that the queen Matilda was there lying ill, and that his brother was elsewhere, he from motives of chivalry turned from Winchester and directed his march towards London. Henry was at Pevensey in Sussex apparently not knowing where his brother would land, but hearing of this and his march towards Winchester he moved his army also towards that city. In the meantime Robert had turned from Winchester eastward, and passed through the forest of mid-Hampshire, the wood of Hantone as the chronicler mentions twice, or the wood of Altone as he mentions once; he, hearing his brother was on the other side of the wood, arranged an amicable meeting, and a treaty was made between them early in February, 1102. Freeman puts the place of meeting at Alton, but acknowledges that he has not studied the country. Henry came, no doubt, as quickly as he could with his troops from Pevensey, through Lewes and Midhurst, on the shortest way to Winchester, and under these circumstances the place of meeting could not fail to have been in the valley of the Meon—and if Professor Freeman had studied the geography of this campaign, which he acknow-

ledges he did not, I think he would have come to this conclusion.

In this doubtful state as to where the meeting actually took place, this matter remained until about 1880, when Mr. Chester Waters discovered a charter granted by Henry I in the chartulary of the Abbey of Colchester, dated Feb. 1102, and stated as "made on the first day of the week after the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, after the concord made between me and my brother Robert at Westbury." The significant words are "apud Westbian," or "Westbrian," and this place, I think, must be this manor of Westbury, where we are now assembled, and where we have been so hospitably received.

References to this discovery of this charter of Henry I, tested "apud Wesbian" or Westbrian, may be found in *Notes and Queries*, Jan. 3, 1880, and in the *Athenæum*, Dec. 19, 1885.