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## NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF SAXON OTFORD.

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THE Jutes landed in Kent about the year 440, and the Saxon history of the County came to an end in 1066. In these 600 years there were only six events in the history of Saxon Otford of which there is *documentary* evidence, in Saxon or early Norman chronicles, or in Saxon or mediæval charters.

My notes do not refer to other evidence which may exist. Place-name experts say that Kemsing on one side of Otford and Chevening on the other are names of Celtic origin. Celtic urns have been found near Sundridge; and Celtic coins near Sevenoaks. There were Roman settlements at Otford itself and elsewhere in the Darent Valley, and in the Holmesdale, and on the Upland, both to the east and west of Otford. The Pagan Saxons who settled on the south bank of the Thames had burying places by the Darent, but did not penetrate, it would seem, to Otford. The Saxon history of Otford is Christian, and begins with Offa King of Mercia in battle at Otford in 775, and his "terrible" slaughter of Kentish men whose names according to Kent historians were "enrolled in the register of Christians." Of the other five events in the history of Otford of which there is documentary evidence, one is the second battle of Otford of 1016, and the other four are grants of land to Christ Church, Canterbury, by Saxon Kings and a Saxon Priest.

I state shortly what is recorded as to these six events with full references to the authorities.

## I.—THE TWO BATTLES.

1. The first of the two battles of Otford was fought in 775 between the Mercians of middle England and the men

of Kent. The Saxon Chronicle<sup>1</sup> does not say who led the opposing armies, nor does Florence of Worcester<sup>2</sup> whose Norman Chronicle is nearest in date, but Henry of Huntingdon<sup>3</sup> says that Offa their King led the Mercians, and adds, as does Roger of Hoveden<sup>4</sup> and Roger of Wendover,<sup>5</sup> that there was terrible slaughter on both sides,—“*claudē autem horrenda utrinque peracta.*” Matthew Paris<sup>6</sup> writing somewhat later has an imaginative account of the fight and gives the dying speech of the Kentish King who “exhaled his last breath under the hooves of the horses,”—“*morienē extremum spiritum sub equinis pedibus exhalavit.*” His account, says Hardy,<sup>7</sup> is as legendary as his life of the mythical Offa, the First. Roger of Wendover adds that “the illustrious Offa shone bright with the successes of the war and retired in triumph”—“*belli tamen successibus Offa clairus refulsit et cum triumpho recessit.*”

Lambarde<sup>8</sup> in his account of the first battle of Otford does not go beyond what is told in the Saxon Chronicle and by the earlier Norman chroniclers, but later Kentish historians add legendary details. Kilburne in his *Topographie of Kent*<sup>9</sup> says that the leader of the men of Kent was their King Alrick, whom Philipot<sup>10</sup> calls Aleric, and Harris<sup>11</sup> and Hasted<sup>12</sup> Aldrick or Aldric.

The site of the battle, according to the map of the Ordnance Survey, was a field about half a mile west of Otford

<sup>1</sup> Plummer, *Two Saxon Chronicles*, 1872, vol. i, pp. 50 and 51; vol. ii., pp. xxvii, p. 53. The date in the Chronicles is 773 or 774, corrected to 775. The annal for 773 was probably written about 900.

<sup>2</sup> Florence of Worcester (died 1118). Edited Thorpe, 1848, vol. i., p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Henry of Huntingdon (died 1155). Rolls Series, edited Arnold, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> Roger of Hoveden (died 1201). Rolls Series, edited Dr. Stubbs, 1868, vol. i., p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> Roger of Wendover (died 1236). Edited Coxe, 1841, vol. i., p. 240.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Paris (died 1259). *Vita Offæ Secundi*, edited Wm. Wats, 1640, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Hardy, *Materials for the History of England*, vol. i., p. 498.

<sup>8</sup> *Perambulation of Kent*, 1576, p. 374.

<sup>9</sup> 1659, p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> *Villare Cantianum*, 1659, p. 263.

<sup>11</sup> *History of Kent*, 1719.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1795, vol. i., p. 21.

Church on the left bank of the Darent near the Pilgrims' Way, but it is improbable that the leader of a Kentish army would have awaited an enemy coming from the west or north in marshy fields with a river liable to flood at his back.

The second battle of Otford of 1016 was fought between the English under their King Edmund Ironside and the Danes under Cnut. The Saxon Chronicle<sup>1</sup> is silent as to the place of the fight, but Florence of Worcester<sup>2</sup> says that it was "near Otford,"—"juxta Ottafordan."

Henry of Huntingdon<sup>3</sup> is also silent as to the place of battle, but the other early Norman Chroniclers<sup>4</sup> follow Florence.

Shortly before the battle Edmund and his army were north of the Thames, near Brentford, while Cnut, having raised his siege of London, had been looting and slaying in Suffolk. Cnut moved his army from the Orwell to the Medway, while Edmund crossed the Thames into Surrey and marched into Kent. The two armies met near Otford, and at the first onset the Danes broke, and fled towards Sheppey. Edmund pursued as far as Aylesford, slaying all he overtook.

The movements of the Danes before the battle are obscure. Florence says that the foot soldiers were carried in their ships to the Medway, but the horse soldiers drove their living booty by land—"esquestres vero vivam praedam per terram minantur."<sup>5</sup>

The contemporary account of the war between Edmund and Cnut does not mention the battle of Otford nor any fighting in Kent (*Encomium Emmae*, Maseres, 1807, pp. 16, 17).

<sup>1</sup> Plummer, *loc. cit.*, vol. i., pp. 150, 151; vol. ii., p. 197 (notes), and xxv. (dates of MSS). The account is said to have been written in 1120 *circa*.

<sup>2</sup> *loc. cit.*, vol. i., pp. 176, 177. Note: Florence died in 1118.

<sup>3</sup> *loc. cit.*, pp. 183, 184.

<sup>4</sup> Simeon of Durham in Twysden, *Decem Scriptores*, col. 174; Roger of Hoveden, *loc. cit.*, p. 83; Roger of Wendover, *loc. cit.*, p. 455.

<sup>5</sup> "Minantur" in this sentence is hard to construe; in my translation I have substituted "minant"—"they drove (of cattle)"—which is the reading in Simeon of Durham, who otherwise copies Florence. As to the Danes carrying horses in their ships, see Asser's *Life of Alfred*, edited by Stevenson, p. 50, under the year 884.

Lambarde<sup>1</sup> in his account of the battle of 1016 follows the Saxon chronicle and Florence. Kilburne<sup>2</sup> says that the Danes lost 4,500 men to which number Harris<sup>3</sup> adds 500. Hasted is silent as to this legendary slaughter.

According to the Ordnance Survey map this battle was fought on high ground though in a deep sunk field, which the map labels Dane Bottom, close to the London Road and near the hamlet of Twitton, more than a mile west of Otford, and half a mile west of the supposed site of the earlier battle of Otford of 775.

Hasted calls the field Dane Field, but similar names are frequent in this neighbourhood and may have nothing to do with Danes, or may relate to some other of the many raids of the Danes in West Kent.

This site, however, is more probable than that assigned by the map to the earlier battle as Edmund coming from the west would place his army on the higher ground and force the Danes to cross the Darent and fight with it and its marshes behind them.

The illustration reproduced of a hand-to-hand fight on horseback between Edmund Ironside and Cnut is taken from a thirteenth century MS. of the *Chronica Majora* of Matthew Paris which is preserved in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.<sup>4</sup>

*Note.*—The battle of the Holme of 902 or 904 between men of Kent and Danes was not fought, as Harris alleges, near Otford. Perhaps the name Holme suggested the Holmesdale in which valley Otford lies. The better opinion is that it was fought near Swaffham in Norfolk, though the Holme stone near Dungeness has also been suggested. (See Plummer: *Two Saxon Chronicles*, Vol. ii, p. 296.)

<sup>1</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 374.

<sup>2</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *loc. cit.*, pp. 230, 231, 414.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. James, *Catalogue of MSS.*, 1912, vol. i., p. 52, MS. No. 26, page 160.



## II. THE FOUR CHARTERS: 791, 821, 822, 832.

1. *Offa's Gift of Otford to Christ Church in 791.*

The Kent historians say that Offa King of Mercia gave Otford to Christ Church, Canterbury. Lambarde gives<sup>1</sup> no date, Philipot<sup>2</sup> says 785, Kilburne,<sup>3</sup> Harris,<sup>4</sup> and Hasted<sup>5</sup> say 791. There is, however, no charter known by which Offa gave Otford to Christ Church.

There is only an undated statement at the end of a charter of Offa of 790, and a dated note in certain lists of donations which were made to Christ Church. None of these are charters, nor copies of charters. They are, however, evidence that in the 12th and 13th centuries it was believed at Christ Church that Offa did give Otford to Canterbury.

The extent of this evidence is this:—

(a) *The undated statement*: This is appended after the conclusion of a charter of 790 by which Offa gave to Christ Church *not* Otford, but three manors in Middlesex. The statement comes *after* the attestations of witnesses which end the charter. This statement is not added to the original charter (which is at Canterbury), nor to two copies in Canterbury Registers, but is added to three other MSS. of this charter.<sup>6</sup>

The statement is as follows:—

“The same Offa gave to Christ Church, Canterbury, a manor called Otford”; or in Latin, “Idem Offa dedit ecclesiae Christi in Dorobernia villam nomine Oteford.”

<sup>1</sup> Second edition, 1596, p. 509.

<sup>2</sup> *Villare Cantianum*, p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> *Topographie of Kent*, p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> *History of Kent*, 1719.

<sup>5</sup> *History of Kent*, 2nd edition, vol. iii., p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> See Reg. A. Cant., i., f. 189, Reg. C. i., f. 69 (late fourteenth or early fifteenth century). The other three MSS. are C.C.C. Camb. MS. 189 (1130 *circa*); Lambeth MS. 1212, p. 311 (1200 *circa*); Cotton, Cleo. E. i., f. 67 (seventeenth century). See also Twysden, *Decem Scriptores*, 1652, col. 2219. The Cambridge MS. is that of Thorne's Chronicle which includes the cartulary of the Evidentiæ.

In the Cambridge MS. of the *Evidentie* the charter which immediately follows that of 790 is one of Offa, dated 791, granting to Christ Church lands in Kent at Yocham,<sup>1</sup> Perhamstede, Rokinge, Sandhurst, &c., while the charter of 790 grants lands in Middlesex at Linganhese, Geddinges, and Twiccanham.

(b) *A dated note in certain lists of donations to Christ Church.* This note dated 791 states that Offa gave to Christ Church, Canterbury, Otford (Ottefort) and land at Ikham,<sup>1</sup> Perhamstede, Rokinge, Sandhurst, &c. This note *as a whole* is not a note of any known charter. It is a composite document formed by adding to the undated statement (a) a *précis* of the charter of 791, with the date of the latter prefixed to the whole.

The note therefore, so far as regards the gift by Offa of Otford has no more authority than belongs to the undated statement (a).

This composite document or note is found in one form in two lists of the 13th century, one printed in Dart's *Canterbury* from a MS. in the British Museum,<sup>2</sup> and the other printed in Sprott's *Chronicle*<sup>3</sup>; and also in another form in five lists<sup>4</sup> of donations which are in MSS. at Canterbury, Lambeth, and Cambridge, three of which were written about 1400 and the other two about 1500; it is also in the Catalogue of Donations printed by Somner and by Dugdale.<sup>5</sup>

The note in the lists of donations in MS. Cotton Galba and in Sprottiana combines the undated statement (a) with details of manors taken from the two charters of 790

<sup>1</sup> *Jocham* or *Ikham*. This name is also spelt *Iecham*, *Socham*, or *Lecham*.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Cotton Galba, E. iii, 2, f. 31. Written between 1200 and 1250.

<sup>3</sup> *Thomae Sprotti Chronica*. Edited by Thomas Hearne, 1719. The list referred to is in "Fragmenta Sprottiana," in the same volume. The MS. of it is not known, but the list was clearly compiled from the Cartulary of Thorne's *Evidentie*, which latter was written at Canterbury about 1130.

<sup>4</sup> MSS. Cant. C. 156, 157, 158; Lambeth MS. 303; C.C.C. Camb. MS. 298; C. 157 and 158, and the Lambeth MS. were written about 1400, the other two about 1500.

<sup>5</sup> *Antiquities of Canterbury*, 1640, p. 212; *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 1655, vol. i, p. 19.



and 791, but the note in the five lists and in the Catalogue of Donations in Somner and Dugdale combines the undated statement (a) with details of manors in the charter of 791 only.

In the former case the note states that Offa Rex gave to Christ Church Lingenhese Geddinges and Tuiccenham (this so far is from the charter of 790). Ortheford (this is from the undated statement appended to that charter—"Ortheford" being a corruption of "Oteford") and Yetham, Berhampstede, Rokinge, &c. (this is from the charter of 791).

This therefore is the earliest form of the composite note and dates at least from the 13th century.

My object in this analysis is to show what evidence there is in support of the statement that Offa gave in the year 791 Otford to Christ Church, Canterbury. It will be seen that the sole ultimate authority is the *undated* statement (a); but that that statement of the early 12th century coupled with the composite note, which in its earliest form is 13th century, is evidence that in those centuries it was believed at Christ Church that Offa King of Mercia did grant Otford to the Familia.

The Kent historians who affirm the fact of the gift seem to derive their statements from the note in the Catalogues of Somner and Dugdale. These were not printed till the 17th century, and there is a difference of opinion as to their authorship. There is no known MS. I believe myself that the Catalogue in Somner was written about 1400. If so Lambarde's authority may have been the MS.,<sup>1</sup> but the other historians wrote after the publication of the Catalogue in the *Antiquities* of Somner. Philipot and Kilburne say that Offa made the gift in expiation for his slaughter of Christians in the battle of Otford of 775.

## 2. *Werhard, a priest of the Familia of Christ Church.*

A note in the Catalogue of Donations in Somner and in Dugdale states that Werhard, "a very powerful priest,"—"presbyter praepotens in Anglia," gave to the monks of

<sup>1</sup> *Perambulation of Kent*, 2nd edition, 1596, p. 50. Lambarde does not mention the gift in his first edition of 1576.

Christ Church, Canterbury, at the bidding of the Archbishop lands previously taken from them,—“*terras prius ablatas*” including “*Otteford C. hydas*.”

The historians of Kent, other than Lambarde and Philipot, interpret this statement to mean that Werhard restored Otford and other manors, which he had “taken away” from the Church, that is, stolen. Hasted says Werhard “found means to gain possession of” Otford, but restored it, “then estimated at ten (*sic*) hides,” by his last will. Kilburne and Harris call the Archbishop Feogild, Hasted calls him rightly Wulfred.

This accusation is mistaken, due to a mis-interpretation of the terms of the will. Hasted presumably read the will as he refers to it, while the other historians seem to have relied on the note in the Catalogues of Somner and Dugdale. Lambarde and Philipot in their histories do not mention Werhard.

The accusation appears first in these Catalogues. The earlier lists of donations written about 1400, on which the Catalogues are to some extent founded, do not contain the note as to “*terras ablatas*”; Werhard is referred to in the Cotton Galba MS. and in Sprottiana, but not as a despoiler of Church manors.

The true position of Werhard in relation to the Familia of Christ Church is in the life of his kinsman Archbishop Wulfred in the *Actus Pontificum* of Gervase of Canterbury.

Gervase says that the Archbishop handed to his nephew Werhard certain lands to take care of during his life, which Werhard, when near his death, restored to the convent—“*Tradidit idem quasdam terras nepoti suo Werehardo presbytero in vita sua custodiendas, quas ipse post obitum archiepiscopi Wulfredi, cum perductus esset ad extrema conventui restituit.*”<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, that Werhard was a “custos” of some of the manors belonging to the convent, according to the later mediæval practice.

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Gervase*, edited Dr. Stubbs, Rolls Series, vol. ii., pp. 347, 348. Gervase became a monk of Christ Church in 1163 and died *circa* 1210.

His will or charter<sup>1</sup> simply says that Archbishop Wulfred had acquired lands for the use of the Familia of Christ Church, which lands Werhard by the gift of the Archbishop and with the consent of the Familia had held, and by his will gave (or gave back) to the convent.

The will and Gervase's reference to it are the sources of the little that is known of Werhard, the Priest. A Werhard, perhaps the same priest, was a witness to several extant charters, either as "presbyter" or as "presbyter abbas."<sup>2</sup> When and where he was born and when he died is not known. His will, made Gervase says when he was dying, according to the usual practice of the time, is dated 830 for 832, but mentions Archbishop Ceolnoth who was not consecrated until 833. If Werhard was the "presbyter abbas" of later charters he was alive in 845.<sup>2</sup>

Like his kinsman the Archbishop he was a large land-owner in Kent and perhaps Middlesex, and by his will gave the Familia manors of his own patrimony.

A modern interpretation<sup>3</sup> by Miss Deanesley, late Bishop Fraser Lecturer in Manchester University, was that Werhard held the estates named in his will as a *stipend* from the Archbishop, as in Italy the senior members of a Benedictine Familia were given by their Bishop a piece of land or a vineyard in lieu of a weekly payment in money or kind. But it does not seem possible that Archbishop Wulfred would have allotted to his kinsman the produce or profits of 326 hides.

This immense estate is indeed a problem of Werhard's will. Maitland<sup>4</sup> noticed the "Ottefort C. hydas" and suggested that the name covered "many smaller estates each of which appears elsewhere with a name of its own." This explanation would be more acceptable had Werhard's will been made not in 832 but in 1032, when Otford probably

<sup>1</sup> The will is in MS. C.C.C. Camb., 189, Lambeth 1212, p. 319. Lambeth 582, p. 128. See also Twysden, col. 2216, and B.C.S. 402.

<sup>2</sup> "Presbyter abbas," 834 to 845 (B.C.S. 380, 412, 419, 421, 442, 448).

<sup>3</sup> *Essays in Medieval History*. Presented to Professor Tout, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Domesday and Beyond*, p. 466.

did embrace "many smaller estates" with names of their own. "Ottefort C. hydas" is not in the earliest 12th century MS. of the will, that in *Evidentie* (Cambridge MS.) though the words are in the Lambeth MS. 1212 which is a little later in date, and in *Evidentie* Otford is mentioned in connection with the alms given to poor persons ("pauperes"). Hasted curiously writes that Otford was estimated in Werhard's will at ten hides, a figure which would agree better with the little that is known of Otford of the year 832.

3. *The charters of 821 and 822.* These two charters, though they do not mention Otford by name, both relate to land close to Otford and taken together granted to Archbishop Wulfred the greater part of the lands between Shoreham on the north and Sevenoaks on the south and between the river Darent on the west and Kemsing on the east.

The charter of 821<sup>1</sup> is a grant by Cenulf King of Mercia of Greatness<sup>2</sup> together with Coppanstan and Scealdefordan,<sup>3</sup> while the charter of 822<sup>4</sup> is a grant by Ceolwulf the successor of Cenulf of other lands amounting to five ploughlands the boundaries of which are stated in the charter.

The lands near Otford which were granted to Archbishop Wulfred by the charter of 822 seem to have been in

<sup>1</sup> MSS. C.C.C. Camb. (*Evidentie*), 189; Lambeth, 1212, p. 316. Twysden, col. 2216. B.C.S. 367.

<sup>2</sup> Greatness is variously called: Greatenerse (charter 821), Greatnearse (*Evidentie* and Lambeth, 1212), Gretenerst (Cotton-Galba and Sprott both 13th cent.), Greteners (P.R.O. *Anc. Deeds*, vol. iii, A.4903), Gretamarse (Somner and Dugdale).

<sup>3</sup> *Coppanstan and Scealdefordan.* Cenulf by the charter of 821 gave Archbishop Wulfred Scealdefordan, the area not being stated, and by a later charter of 824 the same archbishop gave the Familia of Christ Church 4 ploughlands "æt Sceldesforda" with 30 acres of meadows. The boundaries stated show that this Sceldesforda was in *East Kent* near Eastry and Wingham (B.C.S. 380 from MS. Cott. Aug. II, 72 (an original charter). B.M. Facs., Pt. II, 17). As to Coppanstan see Hasted, who identifies the name with Copton in Preston, near Faversham, 2nd ed., vol. vi, p. 532. See also a note of the grant of Copton in Preston in Lambeth MS. 303 and the other Lists, and in the Catalogues in Somner and Dugdale. See also a paper by Dr. Gordon Ward in *Arch. Cant.*, vol. XLI, and Hist. MSS. Comm. Rep. 8, App. p. 336.

<sup>4</sup> Cott. Aug., II, 75 (an original charter).

two portions, separated by the lands of Greatness granted to the Archbishop by the charter of the previous year. One portion was to the north of Greatness towards Shoreham, while the other portion was to the south towards Sevenoaks Common. Both portions were to the east of the river Darent.

The boundaries of the northern portion were :—On the north Shoreham (Scorham), on the west the Darent (Dior-ente), on the east Kemsing (Cymesinc), and on the south the hollow well or spring (se hole welle).

The southern portion is called in the charter “the wood which is called Chart (silba . . . qui dicitur cert). This portion had boundaries :—On the north and west Greatness (greotan edesces lond,<sup>1</sup> that is the land of the gravelly pasture or park), on the east Kemsing Chart (Cyme singes cert), and on the south Andred (Ondred).

Shoreham, the river Darent, and Kemsing perhaps in 822 were much in the same position as they are today. The hollow well may be the deep sunk and now deep-walled spring, perhaps sacred, later and today known as Becket’s Well, close to Otford ‘Palace.’ The wood called Chart south of the Greatness of 822 was perhaps in or near Knole Park of the present day. Kemsing Chart may be Seal Chart, for there is no chart-like land in Kemsing Parish and the mediæval manors of Seal and Kemsing were one. The northern boundary of the Great Forest of Andred in 822 is not known, but may have been Sevenoaks Common or more to the north and nearer to the Maidstone Road.<sup>2</sup>

The area granted by this charter was five ploughlands, while the area of Greatness granted by the charter of the year before is not stated, but it may be guessed that the total area granted near Otford under the two charters was

<sup>1</sup> Edesc or edisc is so translated by Professor Allen Mawer, Director of the English Place Name Society, who identified this description with Greatness (Place Name Society, Vol. i., Part i.).

<sup>2</sup> See also Dr. Gordon Ward’s paper in *Arch. Cant.*, vol. XLI, with an interpretation of this difficult charter, which is partly different from mine.

about ten ploughlands. This contrasts with the "Otford 100 hides" of the Will of Werhard of ten years later, and in a less degree with the forty-two ploughlands<sup>1</sup> of the Domesday Manor of Otford of 200 years after.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Terra est xlii carucarum," *Domesday Book of Kent*, edited Larking, p. 10. I have assumed that a hide, a ploughland (aratrum), and a "terra carucis" were equivalent areas of arable land.

<sup>2</sup> These two charters (821 and 822) are discussed by J. V. Wallenberg in his recent work (1931) on "Kentish Place-Names," but one interpretation of his seems to me doubtful. The southern boundary in the charter of 822, namely "se hole Welle," translated by him as "the spring lying in a hollow," he identifies with a pool in Greatness on the Maidstone Road. This pool does lie in a hollow and there are springs at one end of it, which no doubt partly feed it, but the main source of its water is a small stream which comes from a marshy hill-side a quarter of a mile to the south.

It is very necessary, I think, that charters should be interpreted with intimate local knowledge. Mr. Wallenberg's book has great merits and will be very useful to students of Kentish Place-Names, but it would be yet more useful had the writer had more intimate knowledge of Kent topography, maps, and MSS. His low estimate of the admirable first Ordnance Survey Map of Kent, 1801, called by him "Faden's Map," differs widely from that of the late Director-General of the Survey stated in "Antiquity," June, 1931.

The great map of Kent in twenty-five sheets, published in 1769 is not referred to by Mr. Wallenberg, nor does he mention the Kent Cartulary of the early twelfth century in MS. at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, which is earlier in date than the Lambeth Cartulary in MS. 1212. This latter he dates 1300, though high authority places it before 1200. Nor does he mention other MSS. at Lambeth, Cambridge, and Canterbury, which contain many early forms of Kentish Place-Names.