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SAXON LYDD.

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It chanches that there still survive at least two Saxon charters relating to Lydd as well as other more or less direct references. It is the object of this essay to study the topography of Saxon Lydd in the light of these charters. But since no result can be satisfactory which is not in harmony with the peculiar geological features of the district, these also will demand some consideration. Nor can the shifting sands of place name study be altogether avoided. Indeed, these three—charters, geology and place names—must be the foundation of this disquisition.

Of the two charters, that of A.D. 774 is the later but the more important. The original is in the British Museum (Ashburnham-Stowe, No. 3) and a fascimile has been published by the Ordnance Survey Office, being No. 4 in Part III of the Anglo-Saxon MSS. It is from the latter that the following transcript is taken. It has been subjected to a word by word scrutiny and the expert will note that the result differs in some particulars from published versions (e.g. Birch. 214). These differences are not of any moment. The land given by King Offa to Archbishop Jaenbert is described as :

"aliquam partem terræ trium aratrorum quod Cantianice dī threora sulunga in occidentali parte regionis quæ dī Merscuuare. ubi nominatur ad hlidum. Et huius terræ sunt haec territoria. mare in oriente et aquilone. et ab austro terra regis aduui. ubi nominant denge mersc usque in lapidem adpositum in ultimo terræ. et in occidente et aquilone confinia regis ad bleccing."

The charter is endorsed "To Hlidum," "Lyden in marisco de Romenal," etc.

To those whose education omitted the monkish latin of the eighth century a translation may be offered but they are

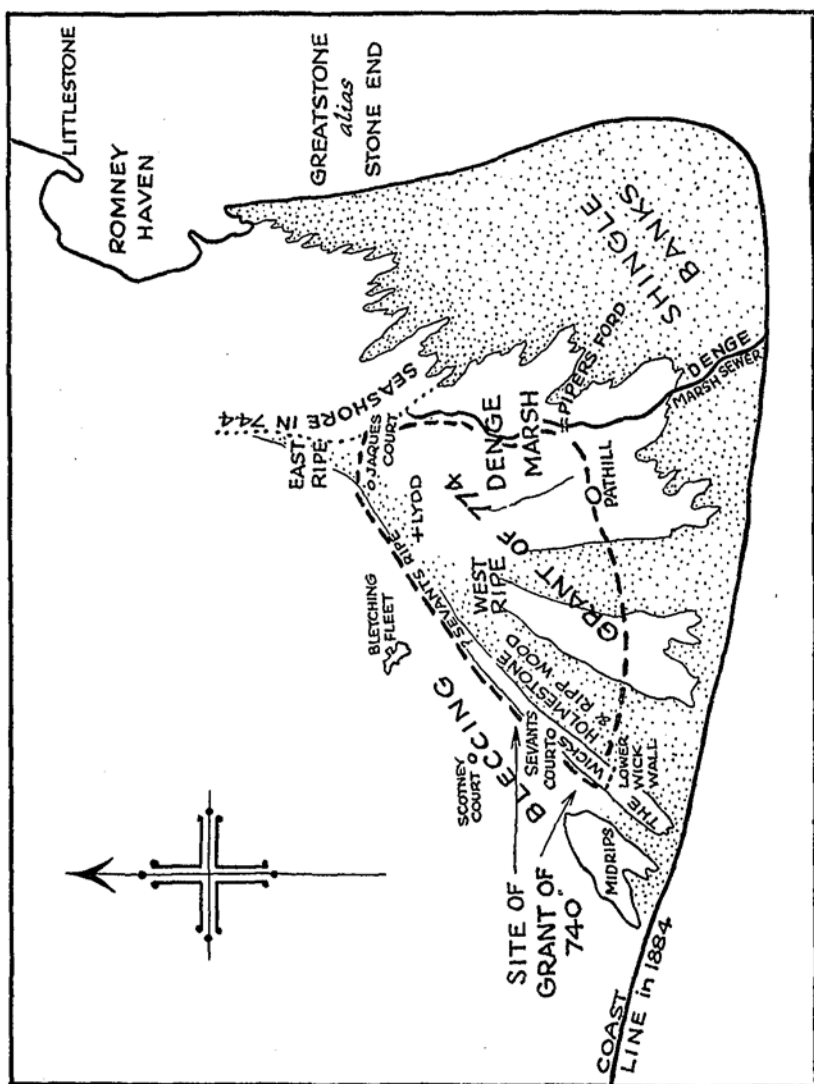
asked to believe that there are experts so fierce that one may by no means omit the original nor yet expect that any translation will meet with universal acclamation. This is what the Latin conveys to this present writer :

“ some part of the land of three ploughs (which the men of Kent call three sulungs) lying in the west part of the region which is called the Marsh, where it is named Ad Hlidum. And these are the boundaries of this land. The sea on the north-east. The land of King Adwy on the south where they call it Denge Marsh as far as the stone situate at the end of that land. And on the north-west the king’s boundaries at Bleccing.”

These then were the boundaries of Lydd in 774. At this time Lydd was given to the Archbishop of Canterbury. That does not mean that he was given a freehold property. He only acquired whatever rights King Offa had in this district. We do not know exactly what they were but they would probably include such perquisites as the fines in the local courts, the right to wrecks of the sea and to stranded sea monsters (e.g. debilitated porpoises) and—if Lydd was a royal manor—the rent-services of its tenants. These rights were jealously guarded by succeeding Archbishops and, as might be expected, the rather vague boundaries of Offa’s charter gave rise to disputes. We have a record of the boundaries as defined about 1460 in connection with a dispute with the Corporation of Lydd and I am indebted to Mr. Charles Stokes for permission to make use of it (as also for many other kindnesses). This record is in the form of a late transcript or translation of an original which was in the hands of Richard Mascall, Town Clerk of Lydd. It runs as follows :

“ The Bishopprick Bounds ”

“ Be it known this particon made between the Archbishopp of Canterbury and the Tenants of Lide, which particon beginneth at a place called Sevant’s Ripe, and it goes over to a Court called Jakys Court, Also to another place called the Grynwall. And boundeth from the said Greenwall unto a place called Denge-marsh Watergoing. Also the said lands lyeth alength by the said watergoing unto a place named Pypersford. Also the Arch-bishoppes Franchess’s and the Abbot of Battles lyeth together



SKETCH MAP.

from the said Pypersford unto a place called Pathill, and so through the Holmestone to a place called Gorswall, and so down by a watergoing called Little Wick and from thence to a place called Smallbrooks and endeth at the end of Sevants Ripe before rehearsed."

Judging from the analogy of other properties it is likely that the area thus demarcated about 1460 was intended to be the identical area specified in Offa's charter. We may therefore use one to elucidate the other. The place names mentioned have been identified as far as possible. It would probably have been possible to identify them all except for the unfortunate fact that the Lydd Tithe Apportionment makes no mention at all of field names. Moreover the men of the marsh are usually satisfied with purely descriptive names, such as The Seven Acres or Pathway Field, and seldom enshrine in their field names the lingering remembrances of their past history.

It will be seen from the accompanying map that the area of the three sulungs was approximately triangular in shape. The north-east boundary runs through Jaques Court (Jakys Court) which is a Manor house, and passes south-eastward, to Dengemarsh Sewer (or Watergoing). The remains of old sea beaches in this area suggest that the seashore in Offa's time must have followed the line shown on the map and warrant us in supposing that the Greenwall—which has yet to be identified—must have been situated somewhere south-east of Jaques Court and between that and Dengemarsh Sewer. If it was not there, the Archbishop had probably managed to exceed his proper boundaries. The line along Dengemarsh Sewer to Pypersford (Pipsford in 1617, now represented by a bridge in Piper's Pen) is easy to follow but it has to be remembered that this Sewer runs southward now but ran northward in 1460. Its course was altered prior to 1706 and restored to the old bed in that year; the record remains in certain documents relating to Dengemarsh Manor now in the hands of Mr. Herbert Knocker, to whom my thanks are due. It is apparent that we cannot therefore be sure that the course of Dengemarsh Water-going

in 1460 is accurately represented by the existing Sewer. We must take this boundary as approximate only.

The southern boundary has many features of interest. It is described in 774 as the land of King Adwy called Denge-marsh. Nothing seems to be known of King Adwy or Edwy and since Offa was making free with the land of Kent (which he had conquered at Otford a few years previously) it is unlikely that King Adwy was a person of much importance. He may have been a titular king of West Kent, possibly deceased. But it is interesting that Dengemarsh should be described as king's land because, when we next meet with it, the owner is no less a person than William the Conqueror, who bestowed it upon the Abbey of Battle, whose Franchise has already been mentioned.

This southern boundary is further defined in 774 as reaching as far as the stone at the end of that land and in 1460 as following the line Pypersford-Pathill-Holmestone-Gorswall. The latter is probably the lower Wick Wall of modern maps and the other three can be identified. We are thus obliged to conclude that the "stone at the end of that land" was not a single stone or boundary mark but the million stones of the Holmestone shingle ridges. This use of the word stone is seen also in the names Greatstone, Littlestone and Stone End (1617).

We come finally to the "King's boundaries at Bleccing," the north-western limit in 774. The alternative description is Gorswall—Little Wick—Smallbrooks—Sevants Ripe. The two latter have yet to be identified. Of Bleccing we know something but not very much. It probably included Bletching Fleet, a small lake shown on the Tithe Map due west of Lydd. Hasted states that it is to be identified with Scotney Court which is still upon the map. In other records we find "the fee of Bletching" and a borough with the same name. Evidently it was a considerable area and occupied approximately the position indicated on the accompanying map. We have yet to find the Smallbrooks and Sevants Ripe. This leads us to consider the word Ripe which we shall presently meet once more in a charter of 740.

Ripe, Rype, Rhip or Ripp occurs in such names as West Ripe, East Ripe, and Midripps as well as by itself. No one seems to suggest for it a Saxon origin nor yet a derivation from our pre-Saxon aborigines. It is usually connected with the latin "ripa" meaning a bank. That it is really this word is supported by the fact that it is actually applied only to old sea shores which take the form of ridges of shingle. One series of such ridges (the geologists call them "fulls") stretches from the Holmestone to Jaques Court. This carries the town of Lydd and is still divided into the East and West Ripe. These names ought to be North and South Ripe but it is very hard to keep a proper sense of orientation in Romney Marsh. There is always a mental picture of Dungeness pointing out into the sea and, since it is on the south side of Kent, one feels that it ought to point to the south. Probably the scribe of Offa felt this occult influence; certainly many other people have felt it since. At the present day the East and West Ripes cover the whole of the southern boundary of what we are calling Bleccing. Presumably Sevant's Ripe is an earlier name for some part of these. There was once a house called Sevants Court (a euphemism for Septvans Court) and its site is shown on the map of 1617. There still lingers a faint memory of it in Lydd itself. But there is no trace whatever of the house. The position of this house hardly agrees with that which we seem to require for Sevants Ripe. One would expect the latter to be considerably to the northward of Sevants Court.

However, in spite of various failures in identification, we may confidently assert that Offa's grant of 774 covered the area outlined on the map. Furley publishes a map which suggests that this area was only rescued from the sea about this time. Offa's charter certainly negatives this suggestion. One may also note other points which speak of Saxon influence in the area. Firstly, we have the known existence of a Saxon stone church at Lydd, a fair part of which still remains. And secondly we have hints of the common field system of cultivation, which may well have been of pre-Saxon origin. These hints are few but, in the writer's

opinion, sufficient. In certain transcripts from the records of Lydd Corporation which were made by Mr. Arthur Hussey and which the late Mr. Arthur Finn intended to publish, there are various references to scattered acres in the East Field and to holdings in the South Meads. These must certainly refer to the persistence as late as the fifteenth century of common fields and common pastures. The Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* tells us that Earl Godwin "arrived at the Ness south of Romney on Midsummer's eve" in the year 1052. This is a late record but makes the record of Saxon topography conveniently complete.

There remains the charter of 740. There are really two charters referring to the same land. Of the first we have both the original (Cotton MS., Augustus II, 101) and a facsimile reproduction. In this, Aethilberht King of Kent grants certain lands and rights to the Monastery at Liminge. But there is also a manuscript at Lambeth (1212, p. 308) which seems to record a grant of the same lands and rights in the year 741 by "Eadbriht king" to Christ Church, Canterbury. The lands are in different parts of the marsh. That part with which we are now concerned is described as :

"alterā partem iuris mei ad pascendum. cl. iumentorū juxta marisco qui dicitur biscores uuic usq : ad silbam qui apellatur ripp et at terminos suth saxonie sicut olim habuit romanus p̄r ad ecclesiam beatissimi virginis marie quod est in limin Iaeae."

This version is taken from the facsimile and may be translated :

"a further part of my right to the pasturing of 150 cattle next to the marsh which is called Bishop's Wick as far as the wood called Ripp and to the boundary of Sussex, as Romanus formerly had it, who was prior to the Church of the most blessed Virgin Mary which is in Liminge."

This pasture was evidently on the Sussex border and it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the Bishop's Wick of 740 and the Little Wick of 1460 are the same place, particularly since the latter is mentioned as one of the "Bishop-prick Bounds." The conclusion is strengthened by the

mention of the Ripp Wood. The Ripp or Ripe includes the Holmestone, an area of infertile shingle, once the seashore. Yet, in spite of all expectation, there is actually a wood on this shingle and there is no other wood any where near. This wood is shown on the map of 1617 and is frequently referred to in Lydd Corporation records, e.g. :

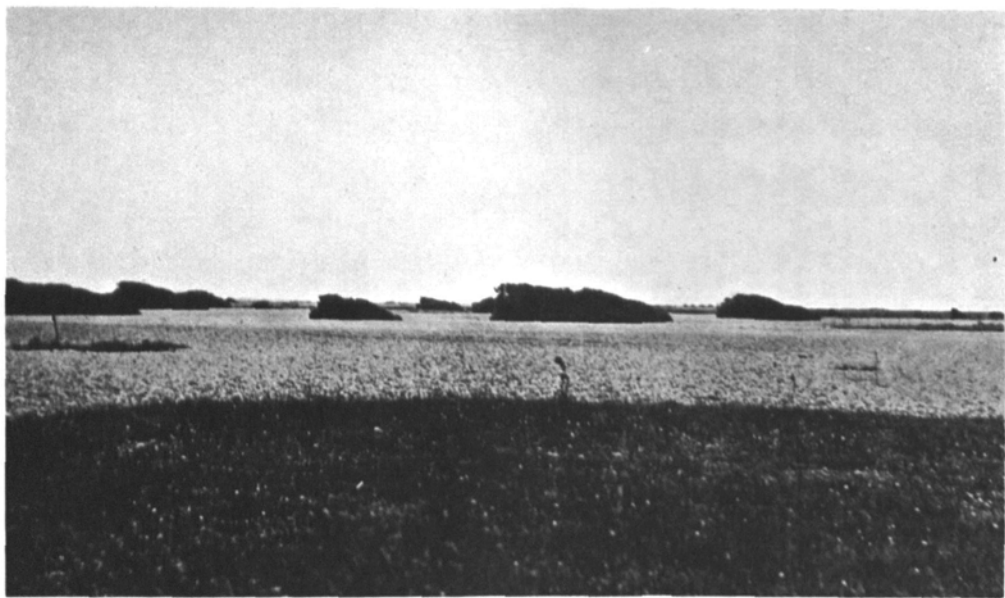
(1567/68) Item payde to Steuen Robynson for kepynge ye holmestone at Cristmas vi^s viii^d

(1568/69) Item payde to Thomas Cristofer for Gardynge ye Homestone at Cristmas ii^s

(1569/70) Item payde to John Harres for kepinge of ye wood at Homestone iii^s

These extracts are taken from the MS. of Mr. Arthur Finn to which his executors have very kindly allowed me access. It will be noted that the Holmestone needed particular attention at Christmas and the reason for this is clear. The Holmestone wood was a holly wood, as it is today. It has suffered certain indignities. In 1572 John Wynett was fined for "spoylynge ye Homestone." At a later period it is said to have been cut down because it served too well to hide the evil ways of smugglers. Of late it has been used successively for the exercises of howitzers and the perambulations of tanks. None of these things has done it any good but it still persists. That it is that same Ripp wood mentioned in 740 the writer feels no doubt. It may be that the syllable "Holme" preserves some memory of the Saxon "holen" meaning holly, or of "holm" in the sense of the tops of woodland trees. But this is doubtful. We have also in the district the Helmes at Romney, Cortehome (1498, Lydd records) and Wickmary Holme. All of these seem to have been shingle banks and point rather to analogy with the Scandinavian "holmr," i.e., land rising above the level of the water, an island, etc.

It will be noted that the land in which King Aethilberht grants pasturage rights in 740 is apparently the same as the king's land at Bleccing in 770, or at least continuous with it. One supposes that the pasture lay along the southern and eastern sides of Scotney Court, including possibly the Midrips.



RIPP WOOD.

Photo. by Miss Holt.

This view harmonises the two charters and does not seem to be contra-indicated by any available evidence.

To sum up, it appears that Lydd in the eighth century had long ceased to be an island, if ever it was one. Its bounds differed from those of today only in the presence of an extensive estuary on the north-east reaching almost to Jaques Court and in a different conformation of the Ness. Of this latter the charters give no direct evidence. It is a deduction made by geologists. It may be said that we have not achieved much of topographical interest, because we have not succeeded in throwing any light on this particular problem. This may be true but the writer ventures to hope that some learned critic may make wider deductions than he has dared, although he has not quite failed to see their possibility.

