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## NOTES ON A SAXON CHARTER OF HIGHAM.

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THERE is in the Cotton Manuscripts at the British Museum a grant of five ploughlands at Hehham by Offa, King of Mercia, to Jaenberht, Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>1</sup> Although the grant is dated A.D. 774 it is written in a hand that is obviously later than the eighth century, and on good authority it has been dated as much as two centuries later; nevertheless the fact that it is a copy of an original does not in the least detract from its topographical interest. It has been well published by the usual authorities,<sup>2</sup> and Birch's reading has been checked with a photostat copy of the original. The topographical particulars have been discussed in some detail by Wallenberg,<sup>3</sup> who correctly identifies several of the places named.

The following is an extract and translation of that portion of the text which deals with land boundaries :

"aliquam partem terrae in loco qui dicitur hehham et huius terrae estimatio. v. aratorum esse uidetur his notissimis confiniis circum cinota. a circio maed ham. hinc per confinia ac leage, et sic iuxta waeterlea. dehinc ad colling. sic per uiam quae ducit ad eohinga burh in terram sancti andreae. et sic per confinia merse tunes hinc tenditur ad bulan ham. et sic in mere fleet.

" . . . which parcel of land is situated at the place called Hehham and the assessment of the land (for taxation) seems to be V aratra, by these most well known boundaries enclosed about: from the neighbourhood of Maedham along the boundary of Ac leage, and so next to Waeterlea, from there to Colling, then along the road which leads to Eohinga burgh in the land of St. Andrew, and then along the boundary of Merse tunes to Bulan ham, and so into Mere fleet."

A study of the 6-inch map (Kent, sheets XI, N.W., and S.W.) will enable some of these boundaries to be identified at once, and we may unhesitatingly follow Wallenberg when on very satisfactory evidence he recognizes Ac leage as the present Oakleigh, and Merse tunes as the long-vanished parish of Murston, the site of which was close to Green Farm.<sup>4</sup> We have then to start with two known points, the one on the eastern boundary of the piece of land and the other on the west.

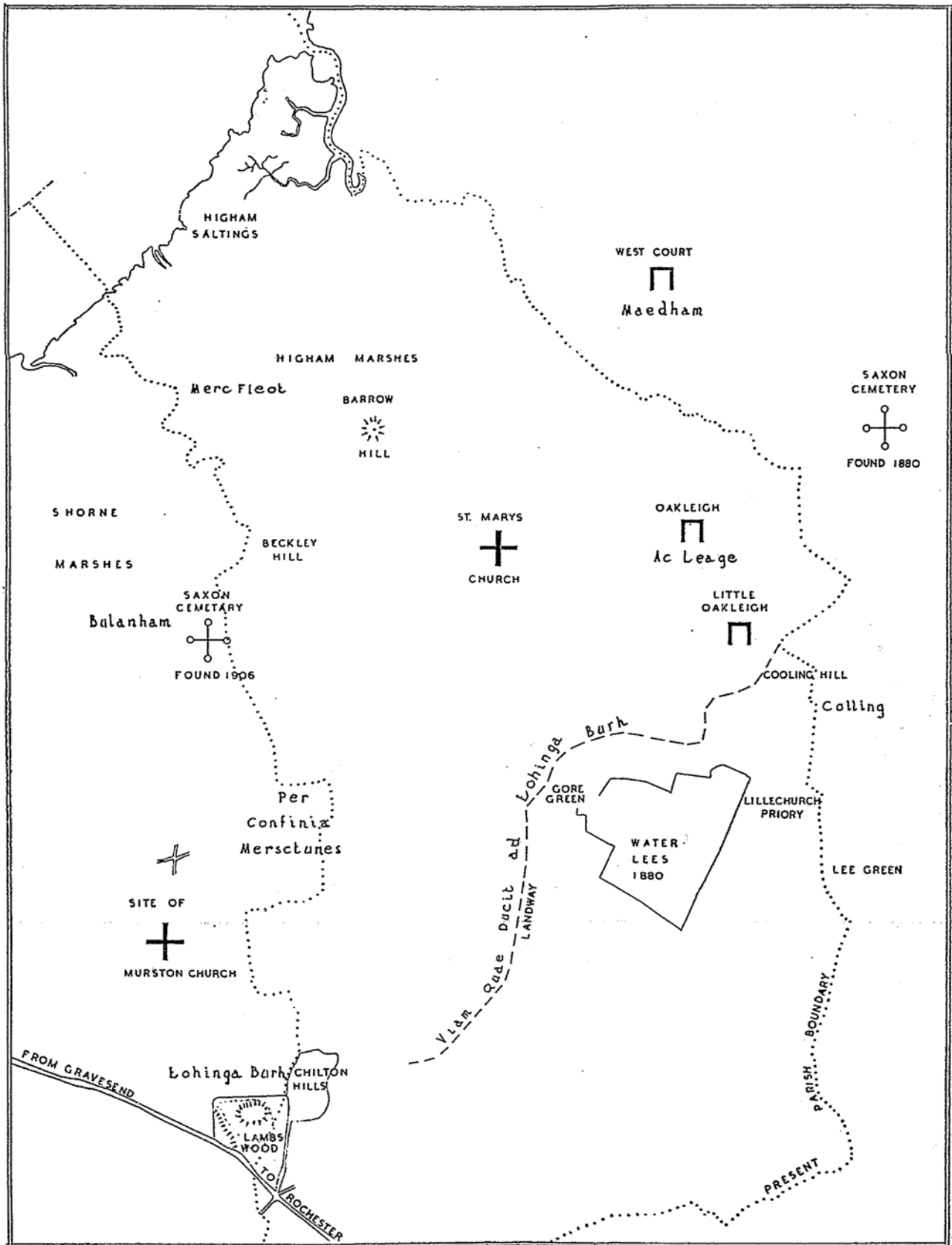
The first place to be mentioned is Maedham, and we may assume

<sup>1</sup> *Ms. Cott.*, Augustus, II, 99.

<sup>2</sup> E. A. Bond, *Facsimiles of Ancient Charters in the British Museum*, iv, 4. W. de G. Birch, *Cart. Saxonicum*, I, 300, no. 213. Kemble, *Codes Diplomaticus*, no. CXXI.

<sup>3</sup> Wallenberg, *Kentish Place-Names* (Uppsala, 1931), 53-5.

<sup>4</sup> Hasted, *History of Kent* (8vo ed.), III (1797), 477-81.



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that it was somewhere north of Oakleigh, that is between Oakleigh and the River Thames. No such name or any variant of it is now known, and Wallenberg's tentative suggestion that it may linger on in the name of Redham Mead, a piece of marshland north of Cliffe, is not at all likely on topographical grounds. Moreover in a grant of land at Bromehege, Cooling, dated A.D. 778, that name already appears well established as Hreodham.<sup>1</sup>

The ambit passes from the neighbourhood of Maedham southward to Ac leage which as we have seen may be identified with the later manor of Oakleigh, and so to Waeterlea which still existed as the name of the field immediately west of Lillechurch as late as 1850, and was possibly the name of the estate upon which Lillechurch Priory was founded with the result that the place-name became degraded to a field-name. Lee Green, a hamlet a quarter mile to the south-east, doubtless took its name from the same source. The next name, Colling, is not the present Cooling, as Wallenberg has pointed out, and although after several suggestions he leaves its identification open, had he an opportunity of knowing the countryside he would scarcely have failed to discover Cooling Hill, the tree-covered knoll south-eastward of Oakleigh which rising to a height of some 50 feet is easily conspicuous in this flat landscape. It now serves as a trigonometrical station, and is a point at which the present boundary of Higham parish changes its course through a right-angle. The flat land between Oakleigh and the Buckland road, part of it at one time a golf course, may well have been included in the Waeterlea of the charter, and to-day it is crossed by the parish boundary. Wallenberg's suggestion of Lee Green seems to have been made merely on the inspection of the map for a suitable name in the vicinity, and as we have already noted, that name has a convincing explanation.

We have now arrived at the approximate eastern extent of Offa's grant. Its further boundary on its way to Murston passes southward along the road leading to Eohinga burh in an estate belonging to the monks of Rochester. There seem to be four clues to the position and nature of Eohinga burh. It is likely, by the evidence of its name, to be some sort of earthwork, possibly a grave-mound, and to lie close to a road which travelled somewhere to the south of Cooling Hill towards a property owned by the monks. There are two sites, each of which satisfies some but not all of the conditions, and it will be convenient to discuss the least probable first. In 1889, Mr. George Payne, the Secretary of the Society, excavated a large prehistoric barrow of interesting form situated on the parish boundaries of Shorne and Chalk, some three-quarters of a mile westward of the Crown Inn at Shorne.<sup>2</sup> There would be no purpose in describing its archæological

<sup>1</sup> Birch, *op. cit.*, no. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, XXIV (1900), 86-90.

significance here, but it may be noted that it stood by the side of an early roadway which in the southern part of its course may have joined another early road from the direction of Cooling Hill by Gore Green somewhere westward of Tunbrick Cross. At first sight, the identification of the barrow with Eohinga burh of the charter would seem attractive, but it would make it difficult if not quite impossible for the boundary of the grant to have run along any boundary of Murston, and further there is no evidence of this land having been in the hands of St. Andrew's Priory. The second possibility, one which has the support of topography although it also lacks any direct connection with the monks, is Lamb's Wood on Chilton Hills, an area immediately south of the third milestone from Rochester on the north side of the Rochester-Gravesend road. Through this wood the Shorne-Higham parish boundary runs in a north-south line, and with its fine elevated position with extensive views northward over the River, it forms like Cooling Hill a natural boundary-mark. There are distinct traces of a disturbed earthwork scarp on the north side of the Hills, particularly in the gardens of the bungalows on the north side of Walmer Avenue. The scarp presently trends southward and is lost in cultivated ground. In 1862, however, it was much more prominent, and could be seen making a large southern loop, and in the enclosure was a mound of some size.<sup>1</sup> In plan it had nothing in common with a Norman motte-and-bailey, and almost certainly could be regarded as Saxon or earlier, thus providing good evidence for the suffix of the place-name. The roadway, too, seems clear enough, running from Cooling Hill by Gore Green in a south-westerly direction by a track called Land Way and the forerunner of the existing bridle-way to Higham Upshire.

If this, as we suppose, was the southern boundary of Offa's grant, the following of the boundary of Merc tunes fits in very easily with the present western boundary of Higham parish which in part was that of Murston.

Towards the north the boundary of our piece of land holds to Bulan ham, and so into Merc fleot. Merc fleot is certainly one of the many creeks which empty into the Thames, but the considerable alterations which have taken place in the relative levels of land and river here make any attempt to define the creek more exactly a matter of difficulty. That creek which now bears the boundary of Higham parish on the west is more likely than any other, and by a detailed investigation of the river walls and consideration of the fact that the land was some 15 feet higher than at present, a case could probably be made out for its existence in Saxon times.

We are left with Bulan ham, which was situated between the fleot and the boundary of Murston. Boleham Meadow mentioned by

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the Director-General of the Ordnance Survey for permission to examine the original field plan of the 1862 Survey.

Hasted<sup>1</sup> was perhaps a late persistence of its name. It can surely be none other than the settlement which on archaeological evidence is known to have existed near Old King's Farm on the riverward slopes of a spread of gravel in the neighbourhood of the modern Hoo Junction. In the gravel workings have been found many relics of Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Roman and Saxon occupation, and in particular a small but well-furnished Saxon cemetery.<sup>2</sup> This cemetery and another  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles north-eastwards<sup>3</sup> can be dated by their grave-goods in the early part of the sixth century. No one would begin to suggest that there was a continued occupation of the site from the days of the early cemeteries, which probably represent at the best a temporary rather than a prolonged residence, until the grant to Canterbury, but the prominent geographical advantages of the site must always have appealed quickly to any people who made a landfall on the southern side of the Thames.

There are still many problems to be solved in the early history of this piece of riverside country, and it is in the hope that someone may be led to undertake the necessary field and library work that these notes are published. The roadways have already received attention in past years.<sup>4</sup> The Causeway to the important ferry at Higham, by which travellers came to the famous Councils of Hoo and by which the people of Higham went to their marshlands in Essex, is but little known apart from one tantalising reference in the Crown Pleas for the Hundred of Shamele, 21 Ed. I., and the small piece of its course yet remaining. A complete study of the Saxon land charters of the Hundred of Hoo would amply repay the long time which would need to be spent upon it. As a footnote it may be added that the large mound known as Barrow Hill is a naturally weathered mass of Thanet Sand. It was dug into in the lifetime of Mr. George Payne, and the scars of his excavation may still be seen.

(I should like to express my best thanks to Dr. Gordon Ward for help in preparing this note, and for so readily giving me access to his own MSS. when my own notebooks and library had been destroyed.)

<sup>1</sup> Hasted, *op. cit.*, III, 444.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, XXIII (1898), 22; XXVIII (1909), xc-xcii; Jessup, *Arch. Kent.* (1930), 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, XIII (1880), 562.

<sup>4</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, XIII (1880), 494; XXIV (1900), 90.