

## BROMLEY COMMON.

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IN the parish of Bromley, as generally throughout England under the manorial system, there were certain waste lands, here called Bromley Common, which form the main subject of this paper. But before describing them a few words must be said about what were known as the commonable or half year lands,\* amounting to some hundreds of acres. These were originally either pastured or cultivated by the plough for the benefit of the Lord of the Manor, from the 5th April to the 10th October in each year, and then thrown open to the tenants of the manor to make what they could of them. As the science of agriculture advanced such a method could not be suitable, for land thus treated was of small value to anyone. It is not surprising therefore that in 1764 an Act of Parliament was passed "for extinguishing the right of common in, over, and upon, certain commonable lands and grounds within the manor and parish of Bromley," which gave up this land to the Bishop of Rochester, Lord of the Manor, or rather to his representative, the then lessee Mr. William Scott (the permanent rights of the Bishop being expressly reserved), on payment of a yearly sum of £40 to the churchwardens and overseers of the poor, "in full compensation of all manner of right of common, or common of pasture, of the freeholders and inhabitants of the parish, and all other persons claiming right of common." The half-year lands were afterwards let on lives, a not unusual system of tenure

\* Sometimes called by the older generation Lammas lands. On Lammas day (1st August) it was customary in Anglo-Saxon times to make a votive offering of the first-fruits of the harvest. Hence the feast took the name of hlaf-mæsse or loaf mass, afterwards shortened into Lammas.

at that time. The Wells family of Bickley Park became leaseholders of a large portion of them. They were finally enfranchised by payment of a sum of something like £13,000 to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. There were considerable dealings in them, chiefly by way of exchange, at the time of the enclosure of the Common. In various allotments of the award they are referred to as "old enclosed land." The half-year lands were scattered all over the parish; for instance, at the back of the house called the Rookery, the Water-House meadow close to the large pond, and Brook-Wood field formed part of them.

Bromley Common was enclosed under a subsequent Act of Parliament, namely, that of 6th April 1821; it is elaborate, containing more than 8000 words, and, like other long Acts of only local interest, has not been published. In this document the area dealt with is described as about three hundred acres of "commons and waste lands," and "a certain tract of commonable or half-year land called the Scrubs, containing by estimation fifty acres or thereabouts." It seems therefore that the Enclosure Act of 1764 was not applied to the Scrubs, which consisted of two pieces of rough woodland to the east of the Common. What is called the Upper Scrubs is still wood; the greater part of the Lower Scrubs, amounting to a little over twenty-four acres, was grubbed many years ago. In the Act it is stated that George Norman, Major Rohde, and divers other persons "are or claim to be entitled to rights of common on the said commons, commonable and waste lands." It must not, however, be assumed that these gentlemen favoured the enclosure; at least there is documentary evidence that Mr. Norman had opposed such a measure with success about twenty-five years before, and that he at length yielded with reluctance when he found that his opposition would have been of no avail.

Mr. Richard Peyton (described in a directory as "surveyor") of Cook's Court, Carey Street, London, was appointed Commissioner for carrying out the provisions of the Act. Among them the following should perhaps first be mentioned. He was to assign to the Bishop of Rochester, Lord of the

Manor, for his right to the soil of the "common, commonable and waste lands," so much as in his judgment should be equal to one seventeenth part of their value "after deducting thereout the public roads, drains, watercourses, and land sold for the purpose of paying the expenses of carrying this Act into execution, and the land to be set out for the site of a workhouse," which was to have garden ground attached to it. This garden was either to be cultivated or to be let by the parishioners through their vestry for periods not exceeding seven years, the money to be applied as part of the poor-rate. Ten acres were allotted by the commissioner for the purpose referred to and are marked on his map; in fact, however, they were not thus used. They lay between the "Keston public road," now Gravel road, and "Westerham turnpike road," now Oakley road. The vicarage of Trinity Church, with its garden, occupies part of the ground; so does the house called "Beechwood" near the Gravel road. At the south-west corner, opposite Bencewell farmhouse were formerly four or five one-storied cottages, let at low rents and known as the poor-houses. The present Bromley Workhouse Union in the parish of Farnborough, which was built after the passing of the Poor Law Act in 1834, superseded the various parish workhouses of our district. The old Bromley workhouse, close to the north end of the town on the west side of the London road, is marked in the map of 1769. It was a red brick building, still in existence within the memory of some now living, when it had long ceased to serve its original purpose.

The commissioner was to allot to the Bishop the half-year lands called the Scrubs, on condition that he compensated those who had common rights over them, by allotments of land assigned to him on the Common. If these were not enough, part of the Scrubs was to be allotted to them. After all the special requirements of the Bromley Common Act had been met, the remainder of the land was to be allotted to the Bishop as rector of the parish in right of his glebe, and to others who at the time of the division should be entitled to common rights.

Among the powers granted to the commissioner was one which, if the "Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society" had then existed, would have been subject to severe scrutiny. He could "stop up and discontinue, divert and turn, and set out and appoint, any public roads, ways or paths," not alone over or to and from the Common, but anywhere in the parish of Bromley. The roads seem to have been laid out well, the chief of them following with slight variations the lines of previous main roads along the Common. These were the "Tunbridge Turnpike Road," 60 feet wide, commencing at Mason's Hill, and continuing in a southerly direction over Shooting and Bromley Common to the Plough Inn at the extremity of the latter, and the "Westerham Turnpike Road," of the same width, branching off in a south-west direction from the last-named road near the twelfth milestone on Bromley Common till it adjoins the parish of Keston. The new roads, public and private, were to be 30 and 20 feet wide.

Many public footpaths were stopped up, and we learn from the award that this was done subject to the rules and regulations contained in an Act passed 58 George III. (1817), and under orders signed by the commissioner and two justices of the peace, namely, the Rev. Sir Charles Farnaby, Bart., and Mr. Benjamin Harenc. The closing of some of the paths would certainly not now be allowed, at least not without the payment of compensation. For instance, a footpath was closed which ran from Sundridge Park towards Chislehurst for the length of a thousand and forty yards, entirely through the land of Samuel Scott and Thomson Bonar of Camden House, son of the gentleman who was murdered there in 1813. A path between Elmstead Green and Chislehurst also disappeared, as did others from Blackbrook and Southborough. In each case, as far as one can judge, owners alone must have benefited. It should be borne in mind, however, that the population was scanty, and we are not told of any objection being made.

The soil of the Common varied not a little, being chiefly gravel and sandy loam, while towards the south there was

and is a tract of stiff clay. The task of draining it was entrusted to the commissioner, and in aid of this an open channel was made from a field near the "Plough" to a pond adjoining that inn. Two rivulets from Holwood park, flowing through Hollydale, feed this channel. The overflow from the Plough pond runs north, in a limpid and often copious stream, mostly below ground, along the west side of the high road, to the Cherry Orchard ponds, which it supplies with water. It then passes under the road and some distance east, when turning north, at the back of Cooper's farm, it joins a branch of the Ravensbourne, which is eventually spanned by a bridge carrying the high road immediately to the north of Mason's Hill.

An allotment for public purposes, not yet mentioned, was that of two acres for supplying landowners and their tenants with sand and gravel for the repair of the roads in the parish. This piece of land called the Gravel Pit allotment, between the Keston and Westerham road, and south of the land assigned for a workhouse, was long used for its original purpose. It retained rather the appearance of a common, until some years ago it was levelled and made into a recreation ground, when the natural vegetation disappeared.

To turn now to the various arrangements for the disposal of land apart from those already referred to. It was obvious that the expenses incurred in carrying out the provisions of the Act, among the rest the making of roads, ditches, fences, drains, etc., would amount to a very considerable sum. This was met by selling many pieces of the Common by public auction or private contract, the proceeds being paid in to Messrs. Grote, Prescott and Co., the bankers appointed pursuant to the Act. Those landowners having frontages which abutted on the Common were allowed to buy the land adjoining them at what the Commissioners considered a fair price, and full value seems to have been charged. It should be added that the chief partner in the banking firm was Mr. George Grote, father of the historian of Greece. He then lived at the house called Shortlands. There was pro-

vision for exchange of land, of which owners largely availed themselves.

On examining the awards one finds that, apart from the Bishop, no one got any considerable portion by allotment without purchase owing to the possession of common rights. Among such allottees the following may be noted, several of whom were also purchasers: Sir Thomas Baring, the Trustees of Bromley College who still own a small plot of ground a short distance south of Trinity Church, Richard Cooper, Sir George Farrant, the Rev. Booth Hibbert, William Isard, John Lascoe, Edward Latter, Sir Charles Long, the parish of St. Mary Aldermary, London, George Norman, Robert Booth Rawes, Major Rohde, members of the Shorter family, and John Wells of Bickley. Altogether, excluding the Scrubs, there were apparently 239 allotments, the extent being 316 acres 3 r. 20 p.

In cases where the common rights were of small value it was arranged that, in lieu of land, money could be paid; about fifteen people received such compensation, the amounts varying between £42 5s. and £3 7s. 2d. Among the recipients were Samuel Baxter and George Grote. The Norman family now own a good deal of what was common land, but by far the greater part of it was obtained by purchase at the time, by exchange, and most of all by subsequent purchase. Thus Oakley was bought soon after the enclosure, the Upper and Lower Scrubs were bought in 1846, Prince's Plain in 1851, Elmfield with the land attached to it including a little strip of the old common, some years later, and the frontage of Cooper's farm in the eighties of last century, as was the case with Cherry Orchard and the Gravel road meadows. The Commissioner, before undertaking his work, had on May 7th, 1820, at the White Hart Inn, solemnly sworn in the presence of Mr. George Grote, one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace for Kent, that he would do his duty "without favour or affection, prejudice or partiality, to any person or persons whomsoever." The terms of the award were not completed and signed until March 30th, 1826.

It is well perhaps to say a few words about the general

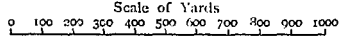
feeling at the time with regard to enclosures, and the appearance of the Common, and we will conclude by asking the reader to accompany us in tracing out the boundaries, a task which will be made easy with the help of a map prepared under the guidance of Mr. G. W. Smith, who has specially studied the subject.

Of late, owing to free imports and the vast increase in population, we have drawn by far the greater part of our food supply from abroad; and our chief cities having grown to such enormous bulk, dwellers in them, far more than their predecessors, crave for access to picturesque rural scenes where they can inhale pure air, and rest themselves in mind and body. This feeling has been rightly fostered by such associations as the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society and the National Trust. But in the earlier years of the nineteenth century the idea, now perforce again dominant, was that the greatest possible amount of food should be extracted from the soil for the benefit of the people. We find Dunkin, one of our local topographers, remarking in 1815 that "although in the summer months, when the heath is in bloom, the appearance of the common is extremely beautiful, it cannot fail of producing regret in the mind of the spectator that so large a tract of land is unproductive." Again, Freeman, writing after the enclosure in similar guide-book style, expresses his satisfaction at the change since the time when "from the Plough Inn there was scarcely a house to be seen to cheer the benighted traveller. There were, it is true, at the extremity of the Common a few scattered cottages; these may have served as a relief to the eye of the stranger while viewing so extensive a space of unproductive land." At that period there was clearly no demand for open spaces. As far as one can judge the popular feeling, it seems to have been in favour of enclosure.

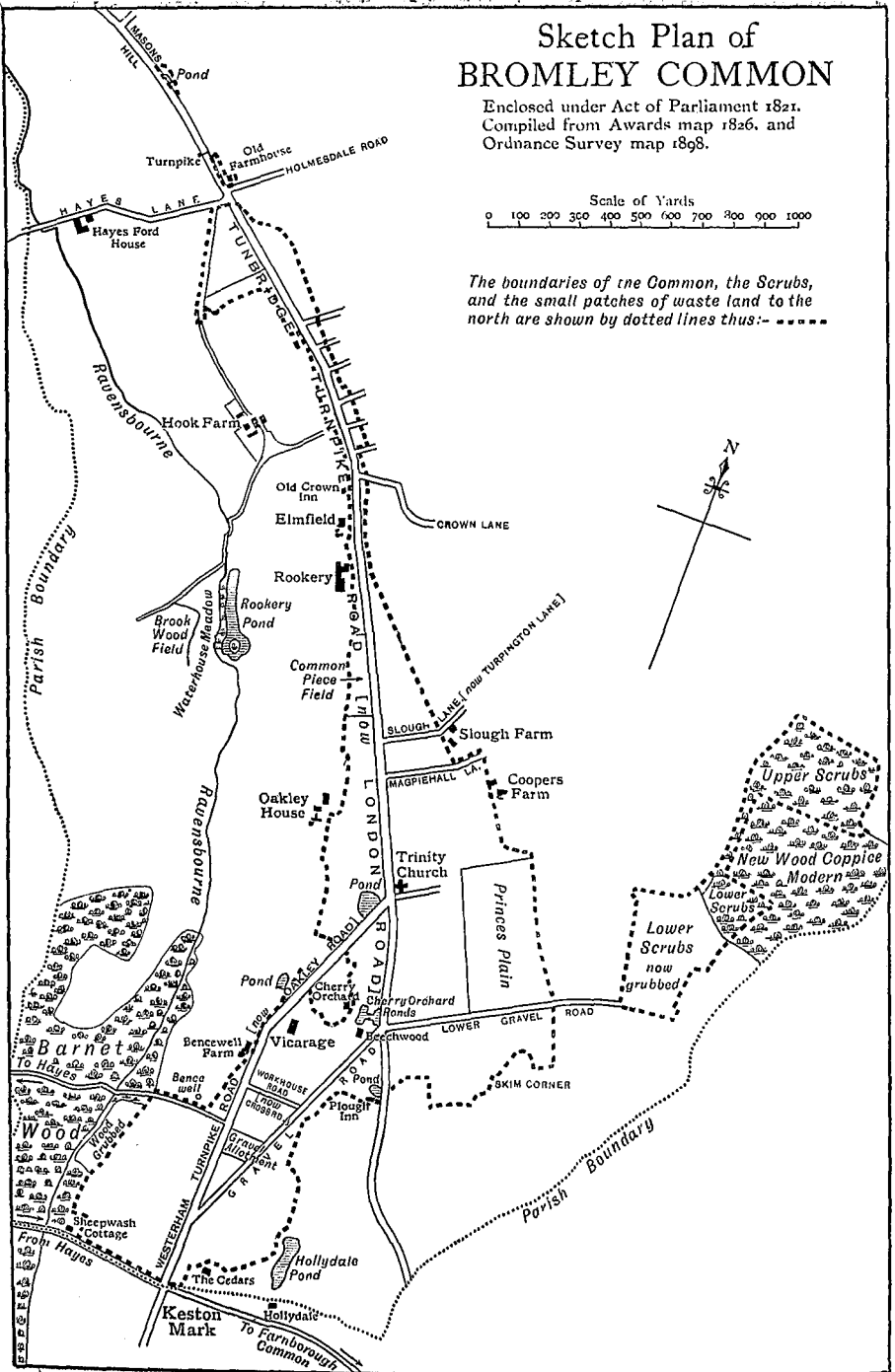
Apparently no picture of Bromley Common exists, but from the lie of the land and from existing commons in the neighbourhood its appearance can well be imagined. It was covered with heath, furze, fern and rushes. Doubtless there

# Sketch Plan of BROMLEY COMMON

Enclosed under Act of Parliament 1821.  
Compiled from Awards map 1826. and  
Ordnance Survey map 1898.



The boundaries of the Common, the Scrubs, and the small patches of waste land to the north are shown by dotted lines thus: - . . . . .





was broom on it also, which grew freely in the parish to which it gives a name. In wet places on the clay soil snipe were plentiful; there are various references to them in an old game-book, which is almost worth printing to show the kind of sport which satisfied our ancestors a hundred years ago.

We will now point out the boundaries of the Common, which consisted mainly of two quite unequal portions joined by a narrow band. On the east side of the high road from Bromley there was an isolated piece, between the old forge on Mason's Hill, now destroyed, and the roadside pond the site of which is occupied by a garage. Further south a strip extended as far as the cross roads to Hayes and Widmore respectively. The latter road, then known as Brick-kiln lane on account of the brick-field near it, is now called Holmesdale road. At its north-west corner by the high road, was a farmhouse with a large barn, there less than half a century ago, when the owner, ready to adapt himself to any requirement, advertised its site as "suitable for a church or tavern." Thence southward the waste land widened out into what was called the Shooting Common, some twenty acres in extent, where in the eighteenth century famous cricket matches were played between Kent and England. Here in Tudor times archery was perhaps practised by the parishioners, a practice then enforced by law throughout the kingdom. At Eton College the ground called the Playing Fields was formerly the Shooting Fields, a name as old as the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The Shooting Common included what is now a more or less triangular field on the west side of the high road; on the east it stretched beyond the backs of the gardens of the modern villas now standing. The Common soon became narrow; its limit in front of Hook farm can generally be traced by a ditch near the present boundary of the high road. Several old elms which grew on the bank of this ditch have been blown down of late years. This narrow portion continued until reaching the front of the "Rookery."

Taking the east side of the Common from that point, we find that it began to widen out, making an oblique line to

the site of Slough farmhouse in Turpington lane formerly Slough lane, an outbuilding of which still remains; then, zigzagging slightly, it passed the front of Cooper's farm and took in the whole of Prince's Plain, once the ground of what is now called the West Kent Cricket Club. A short distance beyond this the boundary line went almost due south, including part of Skim Corner; then it turned to the west, touching the north part of Knowle Hill Wood. It crossed the high road to Farnborough at the Plough Inn, now rebuilt, the pond of which was on the Common. It extended almost to Hollydale pond, and traversing ground now in front of the house called the Cedars, built by Mr. Arthur Boosey, ran to Keston Mark. Thence it followed the cross road in the direction of Hayes Common as far as Barnet Wood, and continuing east of Bencewell orchard it passed the front of Bencewell farmhouse. From the corner of the Oakley grounds the boundary ran almost due north, and is still indicated to some extent by old elms. Most of the ground in front of Oakley House belonged to the Common, so did the field called the Common Piece and about half the land between the "Rookery" and the high road. There furze grew until the present approach to the house was made. From the Common piece to Elmfield the boundary was marked by an avenue of trees still partly in existence. The old road took a more westerly line than the present one from about 200 yards north of Bencewell farmhouse to the site of the old Crown Inn, which was on its west side just north of Elmfield, and is called Pye House in a plan of 1765.

The house known as Cherry Orchard, still standing, south of the present Oakley farmhouse, with an adjoining field, formed a sort of island, doubtless an old encroachment on the Common. On the eastern side of the high road, between the "Rookery" and Oakley, or perhaps where some fine old trees still remain in front of the latter, stood two pollard elms known respectively as the large and small Beggar's Bush. There must have been a sort of thicket here, for Freeman, regardless of logic, mentions the Beggar's Bush as so called "probably from its being a place of secrecy for high-

waymen and footpads." He adds that the old road was "not only dreary, but afforded every facility for the commission of robberies." When James Norman came to the neighbourhood about 1755 the road was little more than a track along the Common, and he had posts put up and painted white to mark it out.

Dunkin, writing in 1815, says that there were twenty-five houses on the Common, meaning doubtless on its borders; of these a few remain. The most important of them is the "Rookery," the oldest part of which was built in or about the year 1718, but it has been largely added to, and finally remodelled by Norman Shaw. There was a previous house, probably much smaller, near or on the site. Elmfield is also an early eighteenth-century house, the name being modern. Oakley is thought to have been at first a farmhouse. The present building is chiefly modern, but a nucleus remains dating perhaps from the end of the seventeenth century. Cherry Orchard is modernised in front, but the high tiled roof rising at the back shows that it is of considerable age. Bencewell farmhouse is in part quite old, but has been doubled in size during the writer's lifetime. This was long in the occupation of Robert Taylor, who belonged to a family of tenant farmers. A brother, by name William, had Baston Farm, Hayes, and another, James, was tenant of Norheads, Cudham, at which farm they were all brought up, their father having held it before them. Robert's son, also Robert, succeeded him at Bencewell, but died when still comparatively young. A nephew had Keston Court Farm. There are still a few old houses at or near Skim Corner, and an old cottage exists on the north side of the cross road from Keston Mark to Farnborough Common, but it is hemmed in and overtopped by modern buildings. Here in the writer's boyhood lived Dicky Butler, who looked as old-fashioned as his dwelling. He used to attend cricket matches, with nuts and oranges for sale, and generally wore a smock frock, a garment almost extinct, though the "slop," a poor imitation of it, may sometimes be seen. On the north side of the road from Keston Mark to Hayes Common, close to Barnet

Wood, an old thatched cottage remains ; the material of the walls is what builders call wattle and daub, and it is known to some as the Sheep-wash cottage, for near it is an artificial depression in the soil, into which water from the Ravensbourne stream used to be turned for the purpose of washing sheep. This, although in the parish of Bromley, was generally called the Keston Sheepwash. The Cherry Orchard ponds, also adjoining Bromley Common, were used for a similar purpose.

In conclusion, a few facts may be mentioned which seem worthy of record, but could not conveniently be fitted into a previous page. A programme has survived of horse races on Bromley Common, August 26th, 27th and 28th, 1734. The chief prize was a purse containing 25 guineas for "any horse, mare, or gelding, that never won above that value at any time in purse or plate, fourteen hands to carry nine stone, all under or over to carry weight for inches. To pay a guinea and a half entrance, or three at the post." Such races are said to have been patronised by Frederick, Prince of Wales, hence perhaps "Prince's Plain." One is reminded of the modern flat races and steeplechases at the back of Cooper's farmhouse, which became a nuisance and were discontinued some years ago. The Common was also sometimes used for military purposes. Mr. George Warde Norman, born in 1793, remembered a camp there lasting for months, doubtless when Napoleon was threatening us with invasion.

The old Turnpike house was on the west side of the high road, a short distance north of Hayes lane, nearly opposite the present smithy, which once formed part of the premises of the Draper family, wheelwrights. On the abolition of turnpikes along this road it was sold to Mr. Gill, builder, and the wooden structure may still be seen standing on piers in his son's yard near the church of Holy Trinity.

A copy of the Enclosure Awards, and an Awards Map dated 1826, marking the original allotments, are kept at Bromley. The present writer has the Enclosure Act of 24th June 1764, and a transcript of the Act of 6th April 1821.