

THE EVOLUTION OF THE HOLMESDALE
(NO. 2)¹ THE VILLAGE COMMUNITIES.

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FOR a thousand years—more or less—the feudal and manorial systems have played their part in regulating the law and custom of land tenure in England. And just as the power of the Crown over the people has waxed and waned, so has the hand of the mediæval Lord of the Manor over the men within his Lordship been heavier or lighter in fairly well defined periods.

All students seem agreed upon a general tightening up from 1066 onwards—an improvement possibly in the lowest rank but a reduction in the status of the middle class of cultivator.

The upheaval of the Black Death onwards from 1349 may well have finally left the Lord of the Manor to make the best terms he could with the reduced supply of cultivators then available; and the ultimate outcome of the Peasants' Revolts and the New Learning following the Wars of the Roses may well have gradually produced a public opinion under which the Lord of the Manor found anything beyond the mildest of despotism impracticable.

Just as in 1660 public opinion endorsed the fact that the feudal system had outlived its usefulness, so in 1922 was the death-blow delivered to the Court Roll of the Manor and all for which its compilation stands.

But, unfortunately for the future student of Land Tenure, there are, or should be, in the mind of the Manor steward some things which cannot well find a place in the Rolls he prepares. And although the Record Office may some day call for his Rolls, no one has yet bidden him take pen in hand and give an account of the Manor within his

¹ The first article of this series appeared in Vol. XXXI, pp. 155, *seq.*

charge, and the practice of his stewardship at the moment of laying down his office.

It so happens that the writer can personally speak for many of the Manors in and near the Kentish Holmesdale.

We can omit for the purposes of these articles not only all deductions as to British village sites and their possible abandonment by the Saxon immigrant, but also such lessons as may be learnt from geological study, and comparisons with other valley areas divided up in similar fashion.

It is not without interest to select some particular Manor possessing an organisation more complete than is usually found in Kent as an indication of what may be sought in the Holmesdale.

Croydon—just over the Surrey border shall serve.

Here we find a great Upland Manor of some 10,000 acres coterminous with the parish of the same name, and with a severed wealden portion at Lingfield.

We have a manor House developed into a Palace with Hall and chapel lying near the headwaters of the Wandle. Hard by the Palace stands the parish church. The Lord's stews are but lately drained, the Lord's Park but recently built over.

There is one famous water mill standing and the record of another. There is land held in free tenure and by copy of Court Roll of more than one class. The tenants hold by fealty and suit of Court. The free tenants pay Relief. Certain of the copyholders under certain conditions pay fine. Some holdings are heriotable, some are not. Borough English tenure is found, and certain lands known as Reeve-wick and Beadlewick lands alone carry the obligation to serve those two Manorial offices.

As regards Court Leet jurisdiction the Manor was extra-Hundred and besides the Court Baron for the freeholders and the Customary Court for the copyholders, the Lord held his Court Leet embracing a number of tithings within the Manor. A Portmote Court is also recorded. A number of Manorial officers were appointed annually with differing titles and duties. To enforce order the Lord had his gaol,

gallows, whipping post, pillory and stocks as well as pounds for Estrays, and several Crown grants of fairs and markets were made to successive Lords.

Until the Croydon Enclosure award of 1801 the Manor wastes remained very extensive and traces of acre strips intermixed in the Common fields then survived. Pig culture was much in evidence.

A ring of outlying holdings had themselves evolved into sub-Manors, and there are traces of these sub-Manors having severed holdings grouped near the Lord's Hall and Market.

Croydon Manor still awaits adequate treatment. So complete a franchise must be very rare in Kent.

In this series it is not proposed to trace the titles of the Manor Lords, still less to furnish biographies, but some reference must be made to records not in the Steward's hands. It is to be presupposed that students consulting these articles have at least some general knowledge of Mediæval agricultural systems prevailing in England.

To proceed with the suggested enquiry as regards the Holmesdale—The three primary essentials of Lord's Demesne, Tenants' Services and a Court Baron are of course found in every instance. Brasted is perhaps the best example of the manor and parish being co-terminous, but there are many examples of the Manor extending over several parishes, as in the case of Otford, Sundridge and Wrotham, while instances of one parish embracing portions of several independent manors are the common rule in all the parishes in the Wealden Valley.

As regards early Manor Houses with or without Halls and Chapels still standing, the remains of Otford and Wrotham palaces among the greater and the houses of Ightham Mote and Knole among the lesser manors are perhaps the most interesting.

The propinquity of Manor House and Church is now most evident at Sundridge, Otford and Wrotham, but none of these are quite as obvious as Lullingstone.

Parks come into a particular category. Legally a Park is an area specially enclosed as a Park by License of the Crown

and few if any of our Holmesdale Manors still have their original Parks as such.

Of the Sub-Manors the writer has not traced any license for Knole Park—still less for Wildernesse, Montreal, Kippington, Squerryes, or any similar enclosures. Most of these are but groups of Farm fields thrown together within the last century or so, and grubbing hedges does not really make a "Park." To-day in most cases these Parks are already Building Estates.

The Manor Mill is more constant and in better evidence.

As regards Tenure the freeholder prevails. In some Manors nothing else has been traced. Brasted and Sundridge are examples of this. The copyholder is, or was, found principally in Westerham and near Shoreham in Otford, but not very extensively in either manor. The Westerham copyholds were subject to fine arbitrary, as were also those in the West Wickham group further north. Both areas significantly adjoin the County boundary, beyond which fine arbitrary is of common occurrence. In Otford Manor the fine was fine certain. Among the Westerham copyholders Borough English prevailed. Exemption from Heriots, limited to a special area, is found. This rule prevails in the "Ville" area of Brasted, and among the "Inland" holdings of Otford. No lands specially carrying office bearing obligations have yet been traced in West Kent.

Fairs and Markets, enjoyed under special Crown grants, are the rule rather than the exception in all Domesday Manors, and this is so throughout West Kent.

There is evidence of Lord's Gaols, Gallows, Stocks and Pounds, but only the two last figure in the more modern Rolls.

As regards Heriot, this is generally the best live beast, or, in default of any such, the sum of 3s. 4d. or 3s. 6d. for a dead heriot. These sums are peculiarly constant. The Heriot may be payable only on the death of the tenant and only one may be due however many holdings separately assessed to quit rent may have been held by the deceased. This is the simplest form of Heriot Custom. In other instances a separate animal may be due for each such holding

held. Claims for twenty or more heriots on one man's death are found recorded. Again the Heriot may also be claimed on alienation of any holding or of any part of any holding, or the claim may only arise when the tenant divests himself of all that he holds. Possibly the Heriot may be restricted to the best four-cloven-footed beast. This restricted custom is rare. It is found in the manor of Ridley near Ash.

As regards the Manor Courts, there are instances of several Manors to which the Hundred of a larger area has been annexed from an early date, such as Otford with the Hundred of Codsheath. Westerham Manor is another instance. In the case of Wrotham, the Manor was originally co-extensive with the Hundred.

Other areas had peculiar Court Leet jurisdiction, and lay outside any Hundred, such as the ville of Brasted and the Manor of Kemsing. These had Courts Leet of their own. At the Courts Leet whether for Hundred or Manor various officers were appointed.

When we turn to Holmesdale Manor wastes, we have large areas to consider, including that interesting woodland—the Whitley Forest, with traces of a swaimote Court. Throughout the Holmesdale pig culture prevailed.

The question of cultivated Common-fields is more intricate, but there are features to be noted. Hodsoil in Ash-by-Wrotham has peculiar interest. Enclosure awards were made for Brasted and Ightham, but cover wastes only.

Sub-manors figure largely and their possession of distant outlying portions within the Weald as well as near some central market occurs.

Lastly the Rolls of the several Holmesdale Manors may supplement each other. In one case there may be early Rolls and little else, in another the earliest documents may be Ministers' Accounts, while in a third a fourteenth century Extent may provide information lacking in the two others. It is proposed to work from the Surrey border Eastwards and commence at Westerham and to contribute an article on a different Manor each year.