

THE SAXON CHARTERS OF BURMARSH.

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THESE charters, of which there are several, contain much that is of great importance to students of the origin of Romney Marsh. The village and church of Burmarsh lie at the eastern end of the marsh in the Hundred of Worth. The parish is bounded on the north by the ancient course of the river Limen and on the south by the parish of Dymchurch. It is wholly within the marsh and its eastern extremity adjoins the shingle banks towards Hythe.

THE GAMELANWYRTHE CHARTER.

The original of this charter is in the British Museum (Cotton Augustus, II. 73) and is reproduced in Part III, Plate 11, of the Facsimiles. It is dated in the year 946 and records a grant by King Eadmund, King of the English, to two brothers named Ordhelm and Alfwold of land which is described as follows :

“ Aliquam portionem hereditatis meae in aeternam possessionem concedo. quod Cantigene secundum suam propriam linguam dicunt. an Ivolaete et insuper. x. segetes. ubi ruricoli appellativo usu ludibundisque vocabulis nomen indiderunt. aet Gamelanwyrthe.”

This may be translated : “ I grant in eternal possession a portion of my inheritance which the men of Kent in their own tongue call a yokelet and also ten corn fields where the countrymen have humorously given it the name of the Old Man's farm.” The construction is not entirely free from difficulty and it may be read that only the ten corn fields were called Gamelanwyrthe. But the charter is endorsed “ This is thaes landes boc aet Gamelan wyrthe ” and it is likely that the name was extended then or later to cover the whole area. It is certain that at a later date both words “ Gamelan ”

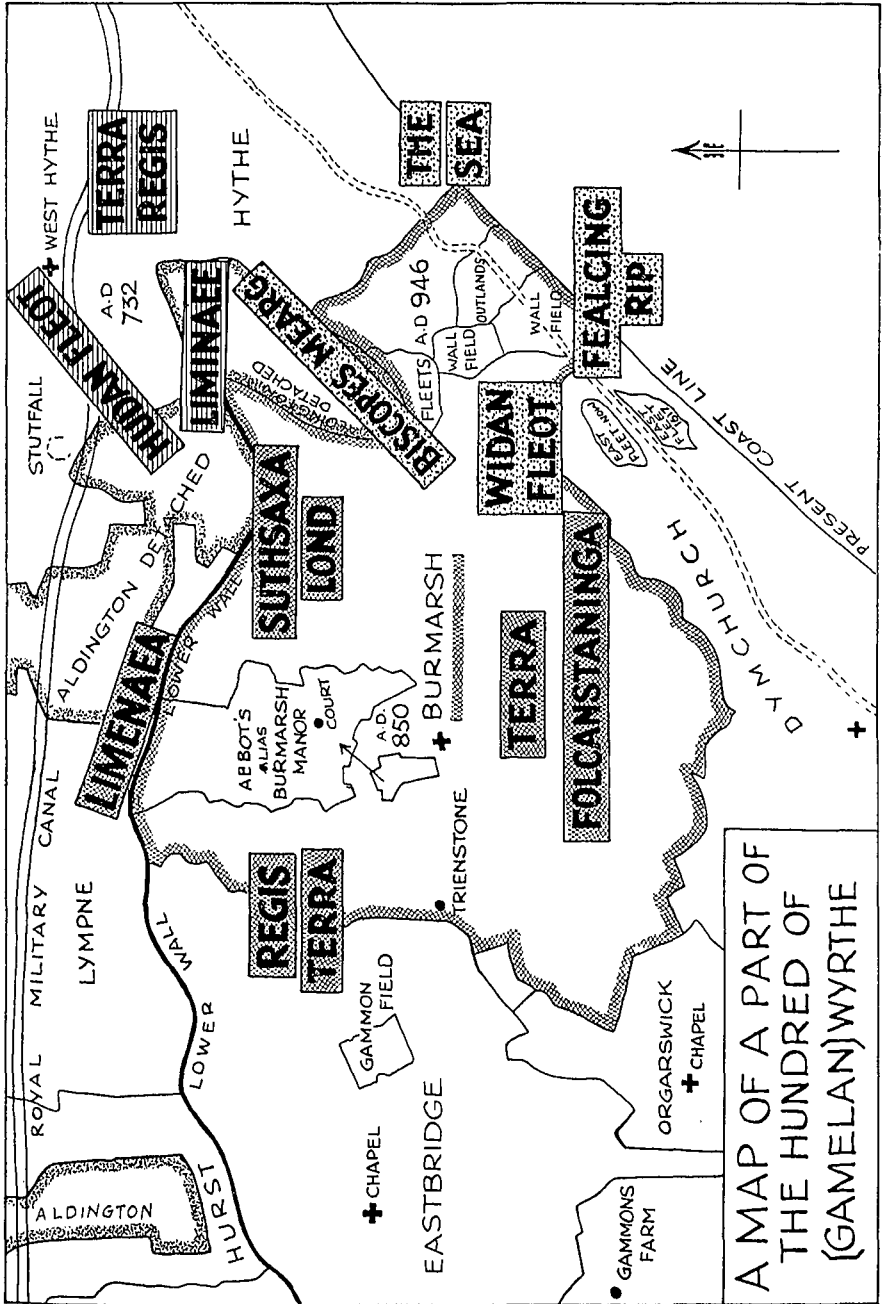
and "Wyrthe" are found over a much larger area than that to which the boundaries given in this charter can well apply. These boundaries are described as follows :

"This synt tha land gemaero to gamelan wyrthe. suth fealcing rip oth sae. widan fleot mearc on west hand aet thara hina lande to folces stane & thonne thaes biscopes mearc on north healfe & on east healfe ut to sae."

This may be translated :

These be the land marks of Gamelan Wyrthe. South Fealcing Rip as far as the sea. The Widan Fleot mark on the west hand at the land of Folkestone brotherhood. And the Bishop's mark on the north side. And on the east side out to sea.

It will be noted that nothing has been recorded so far which indicates that this charter has anything to do with Burmarsh. Birch (*Cart. Sax.* 813) suggests that the land was "near Folkestone"; no doubt because it was near land of the Monastery of that place. But we know from other sources, to be mentioned presently, that the brotherhood had land in Romney Marsh and that this land was the southern boundary of Burmarsh. To this fact we may add that this land was certainly in Worth Hundred, that there was also a Widan Fleot in Worth Hundred (Wallenberg, *Kentish Place Names*, 267, where this charter is fully discussed but without definite conclusions), that Gamelan reappears in Gammon's Farm and Gammon's field, also in the neighbourhood of Burmarsh and that it is in Romney Marsh that we expect to find a shingle beach described by the distinctive term of Rip or Rype. We are therefore justified in looking for Gamelan Wyrthe in Romney Marsh and in the locality which these names suggest, that is, near Burmarsh in the Hundred of Worth. Passing now to the boundaries given we find that there was sea on the east and sea also on the south but here with the "Fealcing Rip" interposed. There is no doubt that the present boundary of Romney Marsh in this area is further inland than once it was. Dymchurch Wall was moved back 150 yards somewhere



A MAP OF A PART OF THE HUNDRED OF (GAMELAN)WYRTHE

about 1844 and the old wall thus replaced was itself well within the boundaries of an earlier period. All geologists seem to agree that the sea line was once a mile or more south of the present wall but they are not decided on the details of the changes which have brought it into its present position. In these circumstances we cannot go any further than to suggest that much of the land which was at Gamelanwyrthe in 946 is now under the sea. And with it will have disappeared all traces of Fealcing Rype except perhaps some "full" recurving inwards beneath Dymchurch Wall.

Now it is well to take a map and note where the present parish of Burmarsh touches Dymchurch Wall and the sea. At the most eastern end of this line we write "The Sea" and at the most southern "Fealcing Rip," thus fixing two of our Gamelanwyrthe bounds. Next we must find on the west the "Widan Fleot" which adjoined the Folkestone lands. This is not very difficult. Sketching in the Abbot's Court Farm from Sale Particulars of 1858 (in which it is called "The Manor of Abbotts alias Burmarsh") we have pretty accurately the grant of Burmarsh made to the Abbot of Saint Augustine's which had for its southern boundary the land belonging to Folkestone. This can be entered on the map accordingly. Between this and Gamelanwyrthe there should be a "widan fleot," that is a broad expanse of water, a lake. There is not much left now but an idea of its position which is probably correct is given by putting on the map (1) the East Flete given on Poker's map of 1617, (2) the East Flete as it is to-day, and (3) a very large field called Fleets in 1840, that is, on the Tithe Map. If we write Widan Fleot somewhere between East Flete and Fleetes we cannot be very far wrong. There remains one boundary to discover. On the north was the Bishop's mark. The Bishop in Kentish charters, if he is not further described, is the Archbishop of Canterbury and he owned amongst other lands those of Aldington manor. Just where we should expect our northern boundary is a detached portion of Aldington parish and this must have been an outlying portion of Aldington manor.

Its boundary or "mark" would be the Bishop's mark. Thus everything seems to fit in very well, particularly when it is remembered that we have been identifying the land marks of a thousand years ago.

THE BOREWARMERS CHARTERS

The Gamelanwyrthe charter has been dealt with first because the Burmarsh charters themselves are no longer in existence and the thirteenth century copies or extracts on which we have to rely are such as makes it desirable to have some firm ground to start from. Birch (*Cart. Sax.* 837) gives a charter which he dates "about 616-618" but he notes that Thomas of Elmham, in a catalogue of charters which remained at the Abbey of St. Augustine's, when he was a monk there, records the date 848. This latter date is almost corroborated by Thorn's Chronicle where the transactions which we are to discuss are stated to have taken place in the time of Abbot Diernod. Thomas of Elmham gives Diernod's abbacy as extending from 844/5 to 863. On the same authority the King involved in the matter—Aedbald or Edbald—reigned from 857 to 860. There is no exact agreement, but the date A.D. 850 is probably near enough for such practical purposes as it may be put to by geologists and other students of marsh history.

About this year King Aedbald gave to "Winemund my friend" (in exchange, however, for adequate payment):

"aliquam partem terre agelluli mei . . . in loco qui dicitur Burwaramers Halfsaeta, necnon et illud agellum his terminibus circumcincta est. in oriente Suthsaxa lond. in meridie Terra Folcanstaninga in occidentale regis terra in aquilone limenaea."

In modern language this might read:

"some part of land of my very small field . . . in a place which is called Burmarsh Halfsaeta, and moreover that little field by these boundaries is surrounded. On the east Suthsaxa land, on the south land belonging to Folkestone, on the west land of the King, on the north the Limen water."

It should be noted that the Saxon charters show a most curious fondness for diminutives, such as *Agelluli*, which seem to have no particular relation to the size of the grant and of which the true meaning and intention remains in doubt. This grant of King Aedbald is repeated in various Registers of the Abbey but without any significant variation. At some later period Winemund (who may well have purchased it with this intent) gave the land in question to the Abbey. We have no charter for this gift but only chronicle records, namely :

Thorne : who describes the land as “ *terram de Borewarmers cum terra de Wyk.*”

Thos. of Elmham : who only says “ *Winemundus dedit Burwarmerck.*”

The “ *terra de Wyk* ” was the manor of *Snave* alias *Snave-wick* and this was managed with, and taxed with, *Burmarsh*. How Winemund got hold of it does not matter. We are concerned only with the *Burmarsh* part. It is described as an “ *Halfsaeta* ” but this term does not affect either its size or position and need not now be discussed. The southern boundary is *Folkestone* land. Had we only the *Burmarsh* charter to go upon this boundary might cause difficulty (in fact, it has caused much difficulty to various writers) but taking the two together we find that the same land fits as southern boundary of *Burmarsh* and western boundary of *Gamelanwyrthe*, two places of which the position is reasonably well established. We can therefore assert with some certainty that the southern part of *Burmarsh* parish did at some time belong to the Monastery of *S. Eanswith* at *Folkestone*. The northern boundary is “ *Limenaea.*” This word occurs with many variants but there seems no reason why we should not here accept it as meaning just what it says—*Limen-aea*, the *Limen* water. The boundary to-day stops at what is called *The Lower Wall*, which is a boundary in whole or part of most of the manors and parishes in its neighbourhood. Although one cannot here discuss the matter in detail, there can be very little doubt that this is a mediæval wall designed to enclose the marshes about the

Limen, which is now represented by the Willop sewer. In 850 the Limen may have been wide enough and sufficiently estuarine to cover all the land between the hills and the site of the wall, and thus have come to be cited as a boundary of Burmarsh. In the case of the remaining boundaries great difficulty arises. On the west is "regis terra." It has been suggested elsewhere that this term is very likely to be taken as having a particular technical meaning (*Arch. Cant.*, XLIII, 43) and as applying to land such as shingle and sand newly thrown up by the sea. The term is used in a charter of 732 and in this case there may well have been, and is now, sand and shingle land in the position indicated (see map). But there is no such land to the west of Burmarsh. To the east, on the other hand, such land is far easier to find. It is very easy for errors to occur in the copying of charters and the error of writing east for west (by misreading much contracted words) is well known. It is just possible that it happened in this case and that the "regis terra" really lay to the east of Burmarsh and nearly adjoining to the "terra regis" of 732. But this is not the sort of argument on which one would wish to rely and the question cannot be considered as in any way decided. The land called Suthsaxa lond is given as the eastern boundary of Burmarsh. This statement has been a stumbling block to many. But we need not read it as meaning that what we now call Sussex was to the east of Burmarsh, which it quite evidently is not. There was land in the middle of Sussex and yet forming part of Kentish manors, for example, the dens of Leeds, and Bishop Odo joined to the manor of Bilsington certain Kentish lands belonging to the Sussex Rape of the Earl of Eu—possibly portions of Burmarsh in Romney Marsh. We do not know that that was so but it is obvious that there was nothing considered anomalous in early days in having what could properly be called "Suthsaxa lond" even in Kent. It is not possible to take the matter further but since an eminent writer has said of this charter "the document as a whole needs the attention of a local antiquary" one felt bound to take it thus far.

EARL GODWIN'S MARRIAGE GIFT.

There remains one further Burmarsh charter. In the year 1016/20, as near as can be stated, Earl Godwin was married for the second time to a maiden who lived at Brightling in Sussex and whose father was named Byrhtic (*vide* Thorpe, 312). The latter made agreement with Earl Godwin about a marriage gift (Kemble, 732; Thorpe, 312). This consisted of "the land at Straete, with all which thereto belongs, and at Burwara Mersce a hundred and fifty acres, and thereto thirty oxen and twenty cows and ten horses and ten serfs." This is Thorpe's translation except that he translates Burwara Mersce as Burwash (in Sussex) of which the early forms are quite unlike those of Burmarsh. It may also be noted that the words translated as "150 acres" are in the original "other healf hund aecera"—which doesn't look quite right. There is nothing to indicate where in Burmarsh this land may have been. Hasted gives only one manor in Burmarsh other than that of the Abbot. This is Trianstone. The name has become corrupted and now appears only in Great, Long and Inner Trimpson Fields which centre about the Forty Acre Farm, which probably represents the manor house. It was Trineston in 1252 (*Arch. Cant.*, II, 306) but any connecting link with Byrhtic and the maiden of Brightling is still to be found. The post-conquest history of Trianstone is that of land forfeited in 1066 and given to a man named Tryan. All land that had once been Earl Godwin's was thus forfeited—but so was the land of most other people (see Elton's *Tenures*, etc.).

COMMENTARY.

From the point of view of the historian of the marsh one of the chief interests of these charters is the light which they may throw on the much debated question of how the marsh was formed. From this point of view the Fealcing Rip of 946 assumes some importance. The word Rype occurs in the marsh *inter alia* in the following places :

774 and later. The Rhip Wood in Lydd at one end of what are now called the East and West Ripes.

946. The Fealcing Rip, the sea boundary of Burmarsh.
 1446/7. Rypeland, in Court Rolls of Eastbridge Manor.
 1840. Fields and banks called Ripe and Great Ripes on the north-east of the Dowels in Warehorne, Woodchurch and Kenardington.
 1840. The Midripps in Lydd near Proom hill.

This list is scarcely likely to be exhaustive but for those who know the district it will be sufficient evidence that the word Ripe is applied to a bank near water and usually to a shingle bank near the sea (even if the sea has long ago left it). Turning back to Burmarsh we note that the boundary on the sea side is a Ripe beyond which lies the sea. This tells us at once that there was at least a bank of some size there. The fact that the sea itself was the eastern boundary rather suggests that the bank didn't go any further eastward in 946, in other words that there was a considerable estuary of the Limen in this position. We ought further to assume that the absence of any reference to a wall or artificial work is presumptive evidence that Dymchurch wall was not in existence in 946.

The mention of the Limen in the 850 (about) charter falls into line with that in the charter of 732 which places it to the south of Sandtun and with those in the various Ruckinge charters of 724, 786, 805, etc., which show it passing through the south of that parish. It has often been denied that the Limen ever ran this way, and it is commonly doubted whether it did so so late as even the eighth century. These charters seem conclusive. However small it may have been or however estuarine and un-riverly, there was certainly a watercourse called the Limen as late as 946 and there can be little doubt that the lower edge of its peregrinations is marked by the Lower Wall shown on the accompanying map and, so my friend Mr. Edwin Hart, F.S.A., informs me, plainly perceptible on the ground.