

MELCOMBE MILL :  
A FOURTEENTH CENTURY BUILDING ACCOUNT

By FELIX HULL, B.A., Ph.D.

AMONG the Darell of Calehill MSS. is a single sheet of paper, approximately 11 in. by 8½ in., the right hand edge being somewhat tattered, which bears a sixteenth century endorsement "I understand not the use of this."<sup>1</sup> How, in view of such a statement, it managed to survive is a mystery, yet this small item is of quite unusual interest. In the first place it is the earliest piece of paper in the Kent Archives Office, being more than twenty years earlier in date than the first Canterbury register of wills of 1397. There is, of course, no water mark though the lining of the page is clearly evident. Certainly it came from the Continent though its actual country of origin might be more difficult to determine.

It bears in Anglo-French the payments for building the mill of Melecombe in the year 1374. These are set out as weekly accounts and are confined, in the main, to labour charges with occasional details of the work done. As might be expected there are many deletions and alterations and not a few obscurities in the text. Unfortunately the evidence is insufficient to determine whether a wind or water mill was being constructed, neither do we know whether this was a replacement or an entirely new mill.

In the first place the name Melecombe presents difficulties. Hasted and Wallenburg both refer to a lost place-name Melcompwood in Wye. In the *Inquisition post mortem* on Stephen de Bocton in 1286, reference is made to Mellecombe meadow in Boughton Aluph and the internal references to Socombe Chalkpit, the parson and the manor of Boughton are all in favour of the mill being situated in that parish. At Domesday the manor of Boughton had two mills, in 1286 there was but one worth 40s., while in another inquisition taken in 1336 a water mill and land is referred to though not by name. Rentals of the manor show that about 1720 Clement Hobson was paying 4s. 10d. a year for a water mill near Potters Corner, but that surely would have been Hothfield Mill and outside the parish at least.<sup>2</sup> The only place name in the account which has been identified is Socombe now Soakham but there is no direct evidence to relate the mill with that situation. In fact if the mill lay within the parish of Boughton Aluph there would only appear

<sup>1</sup> K.A.O., U386 A7.

<sup>2</sup> K.A.O., U55 M236.

to be four or five possible sites. If it was a water mill it could have been on the Stour near Buckwell, but Buckwell was a separate manor and one feels the name might very well have appeared somewhere in the text if that was the position. Further south two small streams flow in a south-easterly direction to the Stour. Either of these might have supported a mill and either could have been reasonably near meadow land thus linking with Mellecombe meadow of 1286. In this case Park Barns Farm or Spring Grove are possible sites. It is always possible, too, that evidence of the whereabouts of Mellecombe or Mellecombe has been obliterated by the eastern end of Eastwell Park. Another possibility, probable enough if a wind mill was involved, is in fact Soakham Down. On this northern border of Boughton lies the woodland of King's Wood, a detached portion of Wye and a suitable enough position for Melcomp Wood. Without additional references, however, identification is impossible and these numerous alternatives must remain. In addition it must be admitted that situation within the manor does not determine situation within the parish and the mill might lie in any parts of Eastwell, Westwell, Kennington or Wye over which the manor of Boughton claimed authority.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the place-name Socombe, there are references twice to Couless, where evidently clay was readily available possibly for brick or tile; that name has not been identified.<sup>2</sup> It is of some interest that in the inquisition of 1286 referred to above a well attested place name in Boughton was Stockmede, while in 1374 a man employed in this constructional work bears just that name.

The information given is insufficient to build up a detailed picture of the construction. Each day with three exceptions a number of labourers are employed, usually on unspecified duties and in addition certain people appear to play a special part at different times and to be paid a rate commensurate with skill. The standard labourer's wage throughout is 4d. a day, but Wellere, who first appears half way through the work commands a wage of 12d. Carts normally cost a shilling a day for whatever purposes, but it is of interest that altogether

<sup>1</sup> Since this article was prepared a map of Boughton Aluph, Wye and Godmersham, 1720, which had belonged to the late Mr. A. J. Burrows of Ashford, has been received in the Archives Office. This bears two important pieces of evidence [K.A.O., U614 P1]:

- (a) that in Wye, south of Olantigh and in a bend of the Stour, there was a small triangular meadow called 'Melcommead';
- (b) that the boundary between Boughton and Godmersham leading to the river was formed by an old roadway described on the map as 'An old Fulling Mill Way now decayed'.

This, surely, was Melcombe mill. If so, the problem of situation and type of mill has been solved and once more the importance of early estate maps for topographical evidence is apparent.

<sup>2</sup> There was a Coulese in Brabourne in 1324, see *Kent Place Names*, p. 339 and *Cal. I.P.M.*, vol. VI, Edward II, p. 321.

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the parson of Boughton provides carts for timber on six days, and is paid at a rate of 1s. 8d. a day.

The work was carried out between 16th October and 24th November, 1374, and begins with six carts and four labourers being at "le Chalkpette de Socombe" and on "le Clay de Couless". In the first week also a certain "Milde" receives a shilling as a nightwatchman and later in the week 9 labourers appear to lay the foundations, if the obscure word "lewe" or "legge" means that. There is also a reference to "servays" but the document is defective at that point and the reading therefore difficult to establish.

During the second week work continues on the foundations and also on "le Way" presumably a cart road to the mill. Stokemedede appears for the first time accompanied as always "et son compaynon", the parson of Boughton hires out his carts and a cooper is needed to fix the mill stone.

The third and fourth weeks see activity carrying timber and also "bord" though twice during the third week a day passes without any progress or charge. Was work dependent upon the weather? This seems likely as the whole labour scheme is clearly on a day to day basis. It is interesting to note that the Saturday half day is not a modern feature. On each of the first four Saturdays payment is made for a half day only.

The fifth and sixth weeks show the highest regular return of day labour apart from the period of digging foundations. The timber carts are still busy and both "bord" and "spykynges" are purchased at Wye. Wellere, clearly a high grade craftsman, who first appeared on the Friday of the third week and had his half day on Saturday, is almost continuously at work. The mill one can only suppose was completed on the Friday of the sixth week for the account ends "Samadi ryn," i.e. Saturday nothing.

A further paragraph, however, indicates that certain manorial dues were yet to be paid and these fell due on 8th December, perhaps an additional reason for completion by the end of November. These payments are difficult to define. 24s. 8d. is paid "pour le delivere de le manair de Bocton" and in addition there is 5s. "pour le Fyn de Heyr." The supposition is that a rent and an admission fine were charged but additional medieval evidence for the manor is needed before this can be established with certainty. The whole mill cost 7 li. 13s. 6d. paid by John de Leycester who kept the record.

The text is much abbreviated and as with the vernacular the endings of medieval Anglo-French words are often uncertain. An edited translation is therefore appended with notes whenever the reading was obscure or affected by deletions or alterations. Place names and any difficult words are given as in the original.

MELCOMBE MILL

Made a remembrance of the expenses and payments which were paid by the hands of John de Leycestr' for the mill of Melecombe in the forty-eighth year [i.e. 48 Edw. III, 1374-5].

1st week  
Sum 25s.

In the first place the Monday immediately before the feast of St. Luke the evangelist [16 Oct.], given for 6 carts [?], 4 labourers being on the "Chalkpette" of Socombe and on the Clay' of Coul[?ess] for 2 days, 17s. 4d. Item given to Milde [by my Lady *struck through*] for 3 nights,<sup>1</sup> 12[d]. Item given<sup>2</sup> to the carpenters for a reward by my lady, 4d. Item given to 9 labourers working on the "lewe"<sup>3</sup> for 2 days, 6s. Item paid by my lady for (?) "servays" [—] to labour,<sup>4</sup> 3d. Item paid to Stephen Gybbe for one morning [at] Conless, 1d.

2nd week  
Sum 13s. 1d.

Monday before the feast of St. Jude [23 Oct.] paid to 6 labourers for the day, 2s. Tuesday paid for the six labourers being there,<sup>5</sup> 2s. Tuesday paid to Stoke [med] and his mate for the day, 8d. And given to the parson of Bocton for cartage for 3 days, 5s. Thursday paid to 4 labourers working on "legge" and on the "Way" 16d. And given to one cooper fixing the stone of the mill, 5d. Friday paid to three labourers, 12s. Saturday to 2 labourers, 4d.

3rd week  
Sum 6s. 2d.<sup>6</sup>

Tuesday<sup>7</sup> paid to Stokemed and his mate for the day and half a day, 12d. Thursday on the feast of All Souls, given to Roger Cookes for carting of 2 horses,<sup>8</sup> 12[d]. A day carrying timber from Bocton to Melecombe, 8d. The Wednesday, nothing,<sup>9</sup> Friday and Saturday paid to 3 labourers there,<sup>10</sup> 2s. and Wellere for the day's work on Friday, 12d. and for half a day on Saturday, 6d.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "ij nuits" written above "ij nythe" *struck through*.

<sup>2</sup> written above "paye" *struck through*.

<sup>3</sup> written above "legge" *struck through* and followed by "et autres bonsoins par le ordynaunce Joh' Elys" *all struck through*. A "legger" was a stone layer, see *Building in England*, p. 30, and the word "legge" means "to lay down", Halliwell, *Dialect Dictionary*, so that this may refer to laying the foundations.

<sup>4</sup> written above "a Bocton par mayns" *struck through*.

<sup>5</sup> The text gives "demoraune' illegs". The second word is a corruption of the Latin "illuc"; "there".

<sup>6</sup> A former total, 9s. 10d., is struck through.

<sup>7</sup> written above "Lundi de vaunt le feste touz seynty3 mardi ensuant" *struck through*, the Monday would be 30 Oct.

<sup>8</sup> The words "son fur' et" have been struck through.

<sup>9</sup> The scribe writes "ryn" which presumably stands for "rien."

<sup>10</sup> See note <sup>5</sup> above regarding "illegs."

<sup>11</sup> A further sentence is deleted, viz., "Et [deliverens written above done *struck through*] a ma dame par mayns John' Cookes vjs. viiijd."

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4th week Monday in the feast of St. Leonard [6 Nov.] paid to  
Sum 11s. 2d. Stokemed and his mate for half a day, 4d. Item Weller  
for the same time, 6d. Tuesday paid to Wellere and his  
cart for 2 horses, 12[d].<sup>1</sup> Thursday paid to the 5  
labourers, 20d. and for 2 carts, 2s. Friday paid to  
Stokemed and his mate, 8d. and Wellere for carriage of  
"Bord," 6d. Saturday paid to 4 labourers for half a  
day, 8d. And Wellere, 6d.

5th week The Monday after the feast of St. Martin [13 Nov.]  
Sum 23s. 11d. employed 4 labourers, 22[d].<sup>2</sup> Item We[llere], 12d.  
Tuesday paid to the said 4 labourers, 16d. And Wellere,  
12d. Wednesday paid 2 labourers, 8d. And Wellere,  
12d. Thursday paid to 4 labourers, 16d. And 4 carts,  
3s. And for "Bord" bought<sup>3</sup> at Wye by John Elys,  
2s. 4d. and in "spykynges" bought there,<sup>4</sup> 9d.  
Friday employed 3 carts,<sup>5</sup> 3s. And employed 4  
labourers, 16d. Saturday employed 3 carts, 3s. And  
on that day for John Barry, 6d. And for 4 labourers,  
16d.

6th week Monday in the feast of St. Edmond [20 Nov.] employed  
Sum 29s. 10d.<sup>6</sup> 2 labourers, 8d. Item employed Stephen Cookes,  
Stephen Gibbe, 4d. Item Wellere, 12d. Tuesday  
employed the 4 labourers, 16d. Item Wellere, 12d.  
Wednesday employed the four labourers, 16d. Item  
Wellere, Richard Hilles and Barry, 3s. And paid to  
the parson of Bocton for carriage of timber for 3 days, 5s.  
And paid to John Barry for half a day before, 6d. And  
paid to John Reymond for timber, 11s. 3d.<sup>7</sup> Thursday  
employed 2 labourers, 8d. And Wellere, 12d. Friday  
paid to 2 labourers, 8d. and for 2 carts, 2s. Saturday  
nothing.<sup>8</sup>

Item paid the Friday in the feast of the Conception of  
Our Lady [8 Dec.] to John Cobra [?] for the payment to  
the manor of Bocton,<sup>9</sup> 24s. 8d. And to Robert B[?]ndy

<sup>1</sup> written above "vjd." struck through.

<sup>2</sup> written above "xxiiij" struck through.

<sup>3</sup> and <sup>4</sup> The text reads "chate", possibly a corruption of "achete."

<sup>5</sup> preceded by "iiij" struck through.

<sup>6</sup> A former total, 16s. 6d., is struck through.

<sup>7</sup> This sum is followed by the following sentence *all struck through*: Et a lez Sayerntz', xjs. viijd. Et a William Edwynne'.

<sup>8</sup> See note 5p.

<sup>9</sup> The text reads "pour le delivre de le manair de Bocton", possibly a relief or a rent payment.

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and his mate for "le Fyn de Heyr"<sup>1</sup> vs. And to William John', 10s.

Sum 7 li. 13s. 6d.<sup>2</sup>

*Endorsed in a 16th century hand:* "I understand not the use of this."

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "le Fyn de Heyr" presumably links with the previous payment as a manorial due and is in fact an admission fine.

<sup>2</sup> A former total, 7 li. 5s. 2d., is struck through.