

Archæologia Cantiana Vol. 2 1859

THE DUMB BORSHOLDER OF CHART, IN THE
PARISH OF WATERINGBURY.

BY THE REV. HENRY STEVENS, VICAR OF WATERINGBURY.

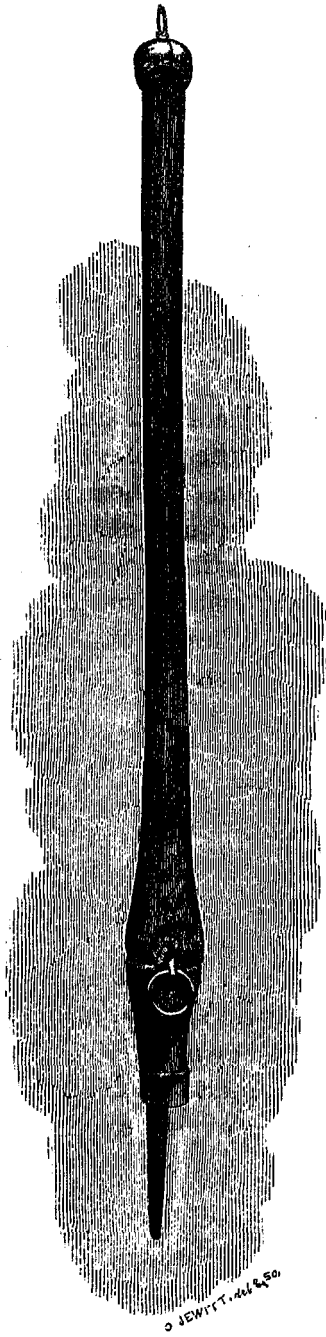
MANY of the readers of the 'Archæologia Cantiana' may remember to have seen, among the curiosities and antiquities exhibited in the museum formed at the Deanery, Rochester, a somewhat cumbrous-looking club, with an iron spike at one end and an iron ring at the other, of which we furnish an engraving from a photograph drawing by our Honorary Photographer, Mr. Cruttenden. This is the Dumb Borsholder of Chart, whose history is here given, so far as it can be ascertained. The most authentic portion of that history is perhaps the "Extract from the Court Rolls of the Manor of Chart, in Wateringbury," for which thanks are due to our Secretary.

It would seem that a tything freeburgh, or decennary, originally consisted of ten freemen householders, who were answerable to the King for each other's good behaviour. Each tything formed a little state or commonwealth within itself, and chose its own dean or head, who was sometimes called the alderman of such a tything on account of his age and experience. Most commonly however he was called the borsholder, from the Saxon word *borh*, a 'surety,' and *alder*, a 'head' or 'chief.' The members of each tything, with their borsholder at their head, formed a court of justice, in which all the matters of dispute within the tything were heard

and determined. Thus much for the term borsholder.

In 4 Edw. II., A.D. 1310, Henry de Leybourne obtained a charter for a market in his manor of Wateringbury, to be held on every Tuesday; and a three days' fair on the vigil, feast, and morrow of St. John the Baptist (to whom the church is dedicated), *i.e.* on 23rd, 24th, and 25th of June; and free-warren in his demesne lands of his manors of Wateringbury and Chart (Rot. Cart. 4 Edw. II. No. 42). But it is probable that this market was never of any great account, in consequence of the vicinity of those more noted markets then in being, *viz.* Tunbridge, Malling, and Maidstone. Nor are we informed how long this market continued in force, or in what part of the parish it was held.

Come we now to our main subject of investigation. Pizein Well is a hamlet within the manor of Chart, in this parish. The "Dumb Borsholder of Chart," as he was called, formerly claimed a separate and exclusive jurisdiction over the inhabitants of that Liberty, which originally consisted of only twelve houses. This Dumb



Borsholder was always first called at the Court Leet holden for the hundred of Twyford; when his keeper (who was yearly appointed by this Court) held him up to his call, with a neckcloth or handkerchief put through the iron rings fixed in his top, and answered for him. This ancient custom has now been discontinued one hundred and four years, and the Borsholder put in by the Quarter Sessions for Wateringbury claims jurisdiction over the entire parish, including the liberty of Chart.

The Dumb Borsholder of Chart is a staff of wood, that by age has become perfectly black; it is three feet and half an inch long, and has an iron ring on the bottom. It once had four more by the sides near the top; three of these however are now wanting, though the marks remain where they were inserted. The circumference is greater at some places than at others, and it has a square iron spike fixed in the top, four and a half inches long, which perhaps was used to break a door open upon occasion, which was done without a warrant from a justice of the peace, when it was suspected that persons or things were unlawfully concealed in any of those twelve houses above mentioned.

As to the precise antiquity of this Dumb Borsholder of Chart it is not easy to determine, but we may with great probability take it as the type of the original staves borne by constables in early times.

The last person who acted as deputy for the Dumb Borsholder was Thomas Clampard, Blacksmith, who died in 1748. The following is the inscription on his tomb:—

“ My sledge and anvil I’ve declined ;
 My bellows, too, have lost their wind ;
 My fire’s extinct, my forge decayed,
 And in the dust my vice is laid ;
 My coals are spent, my iron’s gone,
 My nails are drove, my work is done.”

We will close this short history with an extract from

the Court Rolls of the Manor of Chart, in Wateringbury. At—

“The Court Baron of Sir Roger Twysden, Knight and Baronett, holden there on Tuesdaie the twentieth daie of May, in the yeare of our Lord God 1657,”

among other returns from the Homage is the following:

“Item—they presente that within this mannor there is a custome, which is that the tennants belonging to this mannor have a staffe, which is the bosholder, and is called a dumbe bosholder, and that anie man liveing within this libertie, which are only twelve howses, may with the same staffe search within this precinct, and that this bosholder evrye yeare is carried to Yalding, to the Hundred Court, and there is called the ffirst of all the bosholders, and there does his service as a bosholder; and that whosoever of the Twelve carry him thether, eleaven howses paie a penny a piece to him that carried it, and that evrie one of the twelve take their turne for carrying of it.

“Affirors all the homage,

“*Examinatum per Senescallum ibidem,*

“THOM. TOMLYN.”