

**BOLEY HILL, ROCHESTER.**

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ALTHOUGH in my few notes on the Boley, or Bulley, Hill, I shall not be able to tell much that is new, I think that by looking at what is known from a new standpoint, we may arrive at some conclusions, and suggest new lines of research which may, perhaps, lead to a fuller elucidation of the history of this interesting portion of Rochester city. Although I have spent some considerable time in making researches, I have been able to add very little to what is already ascertained. I attribute this mainly to the fact that past historians have not really known the significance of the Boley Hill, and hence have not paid that attention to it which it so well deserves. If what I shall say will help towards getting fresh information and establishing the main points in the history of Boley Hill, I shall consider I have obtained no mean success in Kentish archæology.

I will first deal with its topography, secondly with its historical associations, thirdly with its name. I do not pretend that what I shall advance under these heads is the final word on the subject, and I do not suggest that my theories are capable of exact proof. I throw out the suggestions accompanied by such proof as I am able to bring to bear upon the subject, and I venture to ask the assistance of the Society in clearing up some of the doubtful points, and supplying facts which have not come under my notice.

Mr. Clark has taught us the relationship between Norman castles and early earthworks, and he has thus described those at Rochester. They "are on a large scale," and "seem to have been composed of an oblong space included within a ditch which commenced near the bridge foot, and was carried eastwards for about 130 yards, when it turned to the

south and ran for about 270 yards, roughly, parallel to the river, towards which it was again returned. This oblong area was subdivided into two unequal parts, the southern being the smaller, by a cross ditch, and the latter part was occupied by a large flat-topped conical mound known as Boley Hill. The northern part contains the castle. . . . The area thus included is about  $7\frac{1}{4}$  acres. The mound is of large size, though reduced by modern operations. It is in part natural, in part formed by the adjacent ditches."

I gather from this that the earthwork, as a whole, may be said to have preceded both Boley Hill and Rochester Castle, as they are presented to us now, and that it formed the original British settlement, before Roman or Saxon had put their stamp upon it. Rochester has not an entrenched area surrounding an inner earthwork, such as Wareham and York have; but it has, like Wareham and York, not only the castle mound, but what Mr. Clark designates as purely English work, another mound dominating the river. Thus, when we consider this latter mound, the Boley Hill, as a part of the earthworks, there does not seem much to distinguish it from other well-known characteristics of English defensive positions. It was, together with the castle mound, thrown up by the English occupiers of the British Oppidum, when they in their turn had to face the foe, in the shape of Danish and Norwegian Vikings. Subsequently, when the Normans took possession of the stronghold, they built the castle, as in all other cases, on one of the English mounds, and the other mound, the Boley Hill, remained untouched by any works of masonry.

Thus far the topography of the subject. Let us now turn to the historical associations. Hasted, quoting from pp. \*282, \*284 of the anonymous history of Rochester published by T. Fisher in 1772, and again in 1815, has the following interesting passage:

"At a small distance southward of the castle is a large mount thrown up in ancient times, called Bully Hill, on which there are several genteel houses built, the principal of which is situated on the summit of the mount" . . . (Hasted, iv., 161), which, he adds on p. 163, "in all likeli-

hood was thrown up by the Danes in the year 885, at the time they besieged this city, a circumstance mentioned by most of our ancient historians. There is one similar to it at Canterbury, thrown up probably by the same people, though it is not quite so large, and stands somewhat further from that castle. By King Edward IV.'s charter to the citizens of Rochester in the first year of his reign, he granted to them a view of frank-pledge,\* and also to hold a court of pie-powder in a certain place called the Boley, within the suburbs of the city. This is a separate leet from that held in the Guildhall, and the inhabitants of this small district are bound to appear before the Recorder as Steward of the Court of the Mayor and Citizens, which is annually held on the Monday after St. Michael, who then appoints an officer, called the Baron of the Bully, for the year ensuing, by presenting him with the staff of office. The court is holden under an elm-tree at the east end of the hill. The householders of this spot are generally appointed to the above office in succession."

The charter of Edward IV. must not be supposed to have originated the court-leet that met on Boley Hill. As a matter of fact, the charter of Henry VI. is the first to mention the court-leet jurisdiction, while the charter of Edward IV. adds the information about its meeting-place being the Boley Hill. One cannot therefore resist the conclusion that this reference, in the charter of Edward IV., is one of those delightful accidents, in record history, which help the student so materially in gathering up the fragments of an unrecorded past. Mr. Thompson was, I believe, one of the first to point out that the charters granted by our Norman sovereigns, to boroughs, did little more than cover with official or regal authority the privileges which already existed, and had grown up with the town as part of its pre-

\* "*Visus francplegii civitate predicta et in quod loco vocato le Boley intra suburb' civitatis predicte bis in anno,*" etc. In T. Fisher's *History of Rochester* this note is added, on p. \*284: "By the court of pie-powder, whenever any difference arises concerning bargain and sale, either in the fair or market, the mayor has power to take with him two discreet citizens on Bully Hill, and there upon hearing the merits of the cause they have a power immediately to decide."

scriptive rights. Mr. Peacock has urged the same view, and I myself have more than once proved this to be the case in several important matters. If it were not for a clause in the charter of Edward IV. which is not given in the previous charter of Henry VI., both charters referring to the court-leet jurisdiction of the borough, we should not be able to carry back our documentary evidence of the Boley Hill beyond the eighteenth century; but contrariwise, because of this reference in the charter of Edward IV. we must not stop at 1460, and say that the gay, pleasure-loving Edward, or his ministers, knew sufficient of Rochester and its local history to make such a curious grant; the real fact being that the men of Rochester at that time obtained sanction to an institution which had existed for ages before.

If my suggestion, that the Boley Hill court did not originate with this charter be correct, we have an entirely new phase of the subject to consider. What we have before us is a most singular special jurisdiction, of unknown date and origin, within the municipal jurisdiction of Rochester city. It appertains to a particular district; it has a significantly archaic aspect, in its method of meeting and in its ceremonial. And, most important of all, we perceive that the locality itself can have had very little to do with forming the special jurisdiction belonging to it; but that this must have been derived from the community which settled down upon the locality. What was this little community, which has stamped itself so indelibly upon the municipal history of Rochester?

We see it now in its degenerate stage. There is nothing in it necessary to the modern government of the city; it is too unimportant to be antagonistic to the municipal authority; but still it has lived on, side by side with the progress of Rochester, through all the struggles which mark the mediæval history of English towns, and it has thus shewn a vitality which stamps it as a phenomenon of some significance.

I look first to its meeting-place—in the open-air under a tree. This custom takes us back to archaic times, as I think I have proved in my little book on *Primitive Folk-moots*.

Just as we get in other municipal towns, in London, Preston, Southampton, Dover, Hastings, Wycombe, peculiar and special assemblies meeting persistently in the open-air, with a guildhall or other sufficiently available place almost alongside of it, so we get in Rochester the same singular phenomenon. I have had occasion to examine at some length the meeting of the folkmoot in London, on a piece of land near St. Paul's Cathedral, "qui dicitur 'folk moot.'" And in seeking to explain the Boley Hill court at Rochester, I think I see, as at London, that it is explainable as the privilege obtained by a portion of the inhabitants, different in race from, and yet at one time powerful enough to impress its own institutions on, the governing forces of the town. In London I suggested, from the local facts surrounding its history, that the folkmoot which met in the open-air near St. Paul's, and the municipal body which met at Guildhall, represented the descendants of English and Roman masters of the city respectively. In Rochester, I would suggest that the community meeting in an open-air assembly on the Boley Hill, and the municipal body, represent respectively the Danish and English masters of the city. We must, however, confine ourselves at present to the Boley Hill community, and its Danish origin.

All tradition points to the Boley Hill as connected with the Danes. The quotation made by Hasted from the *History of Rochester*, identifies it with the mound thrown up by the Danes in 885, when, as recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, they invested the city. This is, to say the least of it, improbable; but the failure of this theory, to satisfactorily account for the connection of the Boley Hill with the Danes, need not prevent us from seeking some clue to its history in the latest rule of the Danes. It is the seat of a court of view of frankpledge, and the community forming this court are inhabitants of the Hill. Now the origin of the court of view of frankpledge is, by such an authority as Palgrave, referred to the Danes; and even Professor Stubbs does not advance anything in opposition to this statement. We know how greatly the Danes influenced the local history of our land; although they have not greatly impressed its

national history. In London, I think we can trace some such special jurisdiction as I am endeavouring to establish at Rochester. Near a portion of the Strand beside St. Clement Danes Church, a little eminence admittedly occupied by a Danish colony, a court used to be held in the open-air, near a large stone. Everything points to this as the relic of a primitive Danish meeting-place, for the "Thing" or moot. Similarly I suggest that the facts connected with the Boley Hill court, at Rochester, point for its origin to the time when the Danes occupied the city in sufficient strength to obtain a special, though not a dominant, power in the government of the city. The Danish colony formed a community by themselves; adopted their own mode of meeting in the open-air; and thus gave to the city of Rochester its court of view of frankpledge, meeting on Boley Hill. As time went on, and the English municipal organization became more complete, the little Boley Hill community sank into insignificance, until it re-appears in history as the charter-sanctioned court of view of frankpledge, belonging to the court-leet jurisdiction of the municipal authorities, as Lords of the Manor.

It is curious to observe the few signs of special relationship, between the Boley Hill community and the Rochester Corporation. Already, in the quotation from Hasted, we have noted that the "inhabitants of this small district," that is the descendants of the original community, appear before the city recorder for the purpose of electing their representative officer. And parallel to this I find, from a writer in *Notes and Queries* (Third Series, xi., 124), that the Mayor and the officers of the corporation always assembled under the elm-tree on Boley Hill, when courts were held for the purpose of reading royal proclamations, etc. In these significant acts we can trace an original independence, in the Boley Hill community, which had gradually succumbed to the more powerful municipal authority of Rochester.

That race distinctions did assert themselves, in our municipal towns, is proved by one or two instances in historic times. In Nottingham, the two races—English and Norman—were distinguished by different modes of succession to pro-

perty; the English being governed by borough-English, and the Norman by primogeniture. In Southampton there were two distinct districts, English town and French town. And we find, in other great towns, distinct evidence that the mixture of race did not take place so rapidly or so completely, as we, accustomed to look to geographical units and not to racial units, generally suppose.

I now wish to say one word as to the origin of the name "Boley Hill." I have suggested in my *Primitive Folk-moot* that it might be a corruption from Burleigh Hill, a Scandinavian meeting-place of open-air assemblies, frequently to be met with in the North of England. Professor Hales, upon reading my book, suggested it might be from "Baily Hill." This last is a tempting derivation, because it leads up to all the associations of ancient legal jurisdictions, so familiarly known to us from the court of Old Bailey in London. Not so tempting for my purpose is the derivation suggested in *Notes and Queries* (Third Series, xi., 47) from Beaulieu, by reason of a spot in the marshes East of London called Boley Mead or Bully Mead, which originally belonged to the Templars, whose Preceptories were often called Beaulieu. Let me, however, note in passing that the eastern marshes of London were famous battlegrounds of the Danes. But without treading upon the dangerous ground of speculative philology, there is one derivation which is feasible, and which takes us back to Danish times again. "Bole—the stem of a tree"—is a Danish word in use in the Danish district of Lincolnshire. It is connected with *Icel.*, "bolr, bulr," the trunk of a tree; *Sw.*, "bal"; *Dan.*, "bul." Thus the Boley Hill would be equivalent to the Tree Hill, that is the hill where there was a famous tree under which the court of the community met.

Gathering up the threads of our researches, we seem to have established that, during the Danish occupation of England, a colony of Danes settled in Rochester. Their headquarters were fixed on one of the mounds forming part of the ancient earthworks, and here they held the assemblies of the Thing. Whether they ever dominated the city it is difficult to determine; probably they did. As English, or at

all events Norman-English ascendancy began to grow, the Danish community gradually shrank up, and ultimately became merged, so far as race is concerned, in the general inhabitants of Rochester; but it still retained for its old district sufficient distinction and power to hand on something of its history to these times. If there is anything in local history, or topography, place-names or street-names, customs or traditions, which help to bear out this theory, it would be a great thing for the Members of the Kent Archaeological Society to record. They would help to establish an epoch in the history of Rochester.

But whether I am right or not in my estimate of Danish influences on the history of Rochester, one thing I claim to have established:—that the history of the Boley Hill is the history of a little community, different in race from the rest of the citizens.