

A NOTE ON THE YOKES OF OTFORD.

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It is well known that the Domesday records of Kent make continual mention of two land units not met with in any other portion of the survey. These are the sulung and the yoke. It is perhaps less generally realised that these terms are met with in the Saxon charters and also that they continued in use long after the conquest. The yoke is frequently mentioned in manorial records as late as the eighteenth century and still survives as an occasional farm name. We have therefore written evidence extending well over one thousand years as to the nature of the Kentish yoke. Since the yoke has seldom been discussed except as one of the incidental difficulties in the study of Domesday Book, it may be well to take advantage of the material relating to Otford for the purpose of a more detailed inquiry.

A convenient starting point is afforded by a copy of a rental belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Polhill-Drabble of Sundridge, to whom the writer is indebted for permission to make use of any of their extensive muniments. He is similarly indebted to Lord Sackville and to Sir Henry Streatfield for free access to the valuable records at Knole and Chiddingstone, which have thrown light on many debatable points.

The rental mentioned is of about the date 1425. It deals only with a part of the Manor of Otford, namely the reeveship of Otford, which included the lands in the present parishes of Otford and Dunton Green. These lands were held under three different kinds of tenure, of which only that pertaining to yoke land now concerns us. These yoke lands chose their own reeve each year, had a proportionate share in the duty of enclosing the "burgherd" of Otford (probably the "borough yard" of the nature of which I can find no information), and were responsible for money rents and a variety of services of carrying, reaping, etc. These services

and rents attached to each yoke as such and not to the individual tenants where a yoke had become split up. In this latter case, it is doubtful if the services could have been enforced. But where a yoke was still in single ownership, the rents and services were certainly paid or compounded for. This was true even when only a substantial portion of the yoke remained as a unit in the hands of one man. Amongst the yoke dues was a payment of 4d. per annum which seems to have served as a composition for fines which would else have accrued for absences from the three-weekly manor courts. But whether this was its original use or intention has yet to be discovered.

Existing under these conditions there were in Otford reeveship the yokes mentioned below. To each is added some account of its status as an agricultural unit in 1425.

Maleville (a full yoke). 120 acres. Divided amongst four or five principal tenants. The original farm house, then and now called Brocton or Broughton, was the property of a non-resident landlord and retained only a portion of the land under its own care.

Hale (a half yoke). 61 acres. Half of this yoke and with it the original farmhouse had been acquired long before by the Lord of Otford Manor and was part of his demesne land. Most of the remainder was farmed from two subsidiary houses within the yoke but some had gone to swell the yoke of Donnington. The original farm, then known as Wickham, was on the site of a Roman building.

Golman (a half yoke). 51 acres. The original farm remained but most of the land had been added to the demesnes of the manor of Donnington, a sub-manor of Otford.

Donnington (a yoke and half and quarter). 127 acres. This had absorbed much of the neighbouring yokes and was managed as the home farm of Donnington Manor, whose Lord was non-resident.

Oxeneve (full yoke). 122 acres. Much of this including the original farm house had been acquired by the Lord of

Otford Manor and added to the demesne. The house was used as a warren house. The remainder was then and long after farmed as a unit but from another centre. A few fields were in other hands. There are remains of a Roman villa in this yoke.

Legh and Thundre (a quarter yoke). 33 acres. Mostly in the hands of the Lord of Donnington sub-manor.

Mose (a half quarter yoke). 22 acres. As last.

Twetton (a full yoke). 232 acres. From the field names given it seems that 70 acres of the adjoining yoke of Sepham, in Shoreham reeveship, have been added here. A further 99 acres are included which were in the borough (but not necessarily the yoke) of Sepham. Each of these lots was a separate farm. Twitton itself had still a central farm but was assuming the status of a hamlet.

Longford (a quarter yoke). 38 acres. Much of this yoke was in the neighbouring reeveship of Chevening and part of the Manor of Moraunts Court. The 38 acres here included were mostly annexed to Donnington Manor. There were also a tile works and a mill in this yoke. The tile house was probably the original farm. Tiles are still made here.

Reye (a yoke and a quarter). The original farmhouse and all the land were in one ownership. The acreage is not given. The cash rent was 16s. 8d. and the usual rate was at about 2d. per acre, which would suggest about 100 acres. This farm has scarcely altered since.

Landrishulle (full yoke). 231 acres. The large acreage is explained by the many acres of woodland included. Most of the yokes on the hills are large for the same reason. The yoke seems to have been divided into three farms, as is still the case.

Wodeland (full yoke). The whole in the hands of one person. A small village which was yet large enough to have a fair and a church had developed. It has been decaying ever since. Acreage calculated at 2d. the acre would be 85 acres.

These twelve yokes lay at the junction of two valleys, well watered, fertile, and already for some 700 years in possession of the Church. It is not surprising that they show more signs of the wear and tear of time than are found in less favoured spots. It is probable that there were at least two other yokes which had disappeared as rent producers by inclusion in the demesne lands. One of these, named *Greatness*, emerged again as a yoke after the Reformation.

The expression "the original farm house" has been used rather freely in the foregoing descriptions. Only in a few cases does any trace remain of a house which may have been there in 1425. But it seems likely from records that there has been no change in the positions of these central farm houses which would, in any case, tend to be fixed by considerations of water supply, access to roads, and general convenience. The Polhill muniments contain undated charters which have frequent mention of Twitton, Donnington, Sepham, etc., as places from which persons took their names. Some of these charters can be little if at all later than 1200. They are followed by a long series of conveyances, etc., which enable one to form some idea of the fixity of site of the original holdings, or farm houses.

Besides that of Otford, the head manor included the parishes of Shoreham, Chevening and Sevenoaks. It had also a large sub-division known as the manor of Penshurst Halemote or Otford Weald. These contained a further series of reeveships and yokes. None of them were so favourably placed for development (or disturbance) as those about the village of Otford and in general they show much less sign of change. There is no space here to allow of their individual notice but their names may be given because these have some bearing on their antiquity. They are :—

Godegrome	Cherche	Better
Teveling	Timberden	Muston
Quintin	Ladde	Crookefoote
Stibard	Goddingeston	Andrews
Carver	Newmans	Smythesferthing
Pickmans	Poweys	Beechers

Cladhamer	Ayland	Russells
Levyngderyng	Greteness	Denehyll
Bradeburn	Morants	Danyell
East Chevening	Swete	Everyld
West Chevening	Duchy	Dryhill
Normans	Chepstede	Godlak
Hendelwelle	Shirburn	Fercombe
Chafford	West Chested	Harelond
Vexore	East Chested	Frithesland
North Pysbroke	Swaynsland	Powndesland
South Pysbroke	Boxes	Sprotts
Hepinden	Doddisland	Gaunt
Hawden	Algaresden	Combridge
Chepsted (two of this name)		Sepham

Turning once again to the question of the nature and status of the Otford yoke after the Conquest, we may deduce from the evidence, which is scarcely more than hinted at above, that it seems to have been an area of land farmed from some central homestead, and including arable, pasture, meadow and wood. The size varied according to position and fertility from about 100 in the valleys to 200 or more acres in hilly or wooded country. There is no trace in Otford reeveship of any farm which was not also the headquarters of a yoke, excepting only the Manor house itself of which this may or may not have been true, and certain small and plainly subsidiary homesteads of relatively late date. It is interesting to note that there is a third Roman site, not yet excavated, near the Manor House. If the yokes and their fields, as they existed in 1425, are plotted on a modern six inch map, it becomes clear that the common field system existed at that date but already much modified by enclosure. The striking fact about these common fields is that they are small and based on the yokes instead of large and based on Otford village. If we add to these such considerations as the philologist will deduce from the yoke names, we are obliged to the conclusion that even in 1425 the yoke system, like the specific yoke services, already bore the stamp of great antiquity.

This conclusion is borne out when we proceed further back, groping in the ill-documented period which preceded the Conquest. Here we must perforce draw conclusions from a wider field than Otford itself.

The Saxon charters have fairly frequent references to the characteristic sulung and yoke of Kent. But the latter seems most often to be camouflaged as an "ioclet" or yokelet. It may be that the word "yokel" is derived from this form. Occasionally the word "jugum" (of which yoke is presumably an anglicisation) appears, as in the case of the "jugum" on the south of the River Limene which was called by the inhabitants Lambaham. Otford appears now and again as the site of a battle or as a possession of the Archbishops (e.g. in Werhard's Will) but of the yokes only Greteness appears by name although it is possible that the yoke of Oxeneye is in fact mentioned under the name of Coppanstān (see *Arch. Cant.* XLI. 1).

In Domesday Book there is no mention of yokes in Otford for they are included in the larger units, the sulungs. But yokes are mentioned in other parts of Kent. The references are scanty but we may safely deduce from them that even in 1086 the yokes were of very varying value and already subdivided in many cases. The writer finds nothing in the Saxon charters or in the Kentish Domesday to suggest that the yoke was anything but the sort of agricultural unit which we should expect to find in the lineal ancestry of the yokes of 1425. In particular, there is nothing to suggest that there was an equal amount of arable land in each of the yokes, or any particular number of plough oxen employed thereon. If we assume that the yoke was a fiscal unit, fixed long before, and attached for convenience to some homestead whose size and acreage had often varied since, we find that the pre-Conquest evidence falls naturally into place. It is only when we insist on trying to find in the Domesday yoke that acreage which it can scarcely be supposed to have kept intact through the long years before, that we find our path beset by contradictions and difficulties. No doubt there was still here and there a yoke or a sulung which had the

precise acreage on which its homestead was assessed at an earlier period. No doubt the fiscal value of the yoke was still one fourth of a sulung, neither more or less. But to deduce that every sulung had the same acreage, and every yoke one fourth of it, is to deduce too much. For this could only have been the case if the whole land had been freshly admeasured for the purpose of the Domesday survey. Even if that had happened, and there is nothing to suggest but much to negative it, we should still be in difficulties, for it would mean that the Conqueror parcelled out the land amongst his friends in precise multiples of whatever the unit may have been, but in any case, of a strictly areal unit of so many acres. It is scarcely worth labouring the point that he did no such thing. He gave away what he found existing, namely, self-contained estates, which had waxed and waned long before his time. About these estates his commissioners could find nothing fixed and constant except their fiscal value to the State. This they expressed in such words as "it answers for one sulung" or for so many yokes. When we examine into what it was that answered, we find only estates of varying capacity and population. Such estates were the yokes, Saxon entities which even in 1086 were immemorially old.

But, it will be asked, when did these yokes originate, if they were old even in Saxon days? The answer is not free from doubt but it must be attempted.

In the first place we may return once more to the yokes of Otford and consider their names. These names sometimes altered, the yokes taking those of their successive owners. In another Kentish example, the royal manor of Wye, the yokes seem almost all to have had personal names, for example (from a rental of 1605) the yoke of Elizabeth Goddard, the yoke of Peter Rainham and the yoke of Bartholomew Elgar. But at Otford the personal name was less usual. Russells, Andrewes and Beechers may well be examples. But a number of the names are good Saxon and terminate in the familiar -ham or -ton. There remain a few which suggest a pre-Saxon origin, for example, those

containing the syllable "ing" at the end of the name, namely, Teveling, Levyngderyng, and Chevening. Sometimes also the same syllable appears followed by an apparently Saxon termination. Examples are Goddingeston, Donnington and possibly Hepinden. There is more room for doubt when the syllable is in the middle of the name, but when it occurs at the end, and especially when it is in West Kent and so removed from the influence of invaders of the Danish period, that syllable may fairly be said to betoken a family settlement of the pre-Saxon type. It is believed that from such settlements Kent also derived its laws of Gavelkind, as much peculiar to it as the sulung and the yoke. We have very little written history of this period but we have at least good reason to know that Otford was well populated even in the first and second centuries A.D. Apart from intrusive Romans (who have left many relics) there must have been Celtic natives and they must have had some social and agricultural organisation. Some at least of the names and always the arrangement, the common field system, and the accompanying laws of Gavelkind, suggest that the yokes were originally Celtic and pre-Roman settlements. Nearby, at Oldbury, and again at Westerham, are typical hill forts of the pre-Roman type. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the agricultural centres of the Celtic population have also remained on their old sites.

It does not certainly follow that they called them yokes but there is one very significant fact which bears on this. We learn from W. T. Arnold (*The Roman System of Provincial Administration*, page 217) that the Emperor Diocletian when making a detailed division of his empire for taxation purposes used as his unit the "jugum," our "yoke." The surviving records seem to have reference to the eastern empire but the following quotation may well have applied also to the west :—

Diocletian divided the eastern part of the Empire into *juga*—that is, really existing divisions with definite boundaries, varying from five acres to sixty, but all alike of one and the same value. For instance, the five acres might be five acres of vineyard ; the

sixty acres would be sixty acres of indifferent corn land, and their money value would be the same. It has been a question about these *juga* whether they really existed or were only abstractions, ideal divisions for the convenience of reckoning. Savigny thought the latter. But a codex of A.D. 501 of the Eastern Empire proves the contrary; and we also learn from this codex that a re-survey of the Empire took place under Diocletian for the purpose of this division into *juga*. . . . It is not to be supposed that there was the same arrangement of these *juga* in all provinces alike. In Africa the *jugum* is called *centuria*, and consists of 200 acres. In Italy there is a larger unit called *millena*, whose larger size is easily explained by the existence of *latifundia*.

Diocletian was Emperor, *inter alia*, of West Kent and of Otford. It is unlikely that he neglected their taxable possibilities. It is reasonably certain that he introduced some modification of the *jugum* or yoke system. It is even highly probable that he would adapt it to existing family settlements if there were such. We have reason to suppose that there were. It is true that there is a big gap in our written history between Diocletian and the earliest mention of a *jugum* in a Saxon charter. But the fact that there is no written record does not forbid us to suppose such continuity as other facts warrant. Kent was more Roman and longer under Roman influence than any other part of the country. It might well keep most persistently the Roman term for its farms. Diocletian may also have been responsible for the *sulung*, the unit so large that it owned a full plough team of eight oxen, the yoke, the common farm, possessing only two—a yoke.

It may at first sight seem rather surprising that one should suggest that the Celtic farms which the Romans found and taxed have persisted until the present day, and that this continuity can be traced through the word "jugum" or "yoke" from somewhere B.C. to the homesteads of to-day. But on second thoughts it would be even more remarkable if we found that these homesteads had vanished. The determining factors in siting a homestead for agricultural purposes are the same in all ages, always

excepting the water supplies, etc., of ultra-modern civilisation. A good homestead for the Celt was good also for the Roman, the Saxon, the Norman and all other founders of our race. And when we find in Otford a Celtic yoke, a Roman villa, a Saxon homestead called Wickham and a modern Frog Farm all occupying the same site in the yoke of Hale, may we not claim that we have just what we should expect ?

The implications of this theory are far too extensive for discussion here but the theory itself may be briefly re-stated, namely that the characteristically Kentish "yoke" derives its name from the taxation of Diocletian and its character from an earlier period still.