

THE RIVER LIMEN AT RUCKINGE.

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IN a paper entitled "Sand Tunes Boc" in *Arch. Cant.*, XLIII, 39, there is evidence that the River Limen, in A.D. 732, ran south of West Hythe in or near the line of the Willop Sewer. It is now proposed to consider another group of early references to the same river which show that in A.D. 724 it passed through the southern part of the parish of Ruckinge. It might seem that this could hardly be doubted and so needs no discussion; but this is not the case. There are those who think that any waterway which existed near West Hythe could only have been an inlet of the sea and need by no means have been connected, at that date, with any actual river. Indeed, one has only to glance at the huge literature of the geology of Romney Marsh to perceive that any light which history can throw on its welter of conflicting theories will be gladly welcomed. Hence this essay.

In the year 724 King Ethelbert of Kent (which was still an independent Kingdom) gave to the Abbess Mildrith (of Lyminge) certain land "circum flumen Limenae quam dudum possederant qui in Ieccaham pro tempore habitabant," that is, land "about the river Limen which those who lived in Ickham at that time had formerly possessed" (Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, 141). There is here no mention of Ruckinge, but that the land "about the river Limen" was really at Ruckinge is shown by subsequent records. In 785 Offa of Mercia, who had by that time conquered Kent and confiscated whatever he wanted, gave to his thane Ealdbeorht and Selethryth his sister certain lands at Iocoham (Ickham) and Palmstead (Perhamstede) together with named dens in the Weald and elsewhere (Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, 247). This grant was renewed or confirmed in the year following. The dens in the Weald are the same but the principal lands are now

Iocham, Peorhamstede and Hroching (Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, 248). In the year 805 King Cuthred granted or confirmed to the same thane and his sister, who has now become Abbess Selethryth of Lyminge, two ploughlands "in loco qui dicitur Hrocing quod est positus in utroque parte fluminis Liminea" — "in a place which is called Hrocing which is placed on either side of the river Limen" (Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, 1336). One further series of records connects Ruckinge and Ickham. These are those of the Domesday period by which time Lyminge Monastery and its possessions (all that the Danes had left) had long passed into the possession of Christ Church, Canterbury. In Domesday Book we read under the description of Gecham (Ickham): "Of the land of this manor William the Archbishop's man holds as much as is worth seven pounds." In the Domesday Monachorum it is worded rather differently and for our purposes much more helpfully, thus—"William de Hedesham [Adisham] has one suling at Rocinges worth seven pounds." This also is entered under the description of Ickham and as part of the possessions of Christ Church.

Without going more deeply into the matter of these various charters it seems fairly clear that the "land about the river Limen" of 724 was the "land on either side of the river Limen" of 805 and also the "Rocinges" of 1086/7, and, one may add, the Archbishop's manor of Ruckinge of still later years.

We must turn next to the map. The Court Lodge or Manor house is still shown and also the adjacent manor church with its elaborate Norman doorways. But the River Limen is less easy to discern. The church stands on a low hill overlooking the marsh to the south. Below it we come very quickly to the upper limit of Sedbrook Watering, that is, of the jurisdiction of the old drainage authorities of the Marsh in this area. Just south of this the Royal Military Canal crosses the map and its towpath levels are marked as 10, 9, 10, 10, 9 and 10 from west to east. From one to two-thirds of a mile south of the canal are the loops and bends of the Sedbrook sewer. Surface levels are rarely

marked here but what there are show the same levels as the canal towpath. A mile to the south of the Sed-brook (as it must once have been called) we reach the limits of Ruckinge parish.

It is natural enough to suppose that the Military Canal must follow the line of the old river Limen. But there is no warrant for this in known record. All the maps made prior to the time of Napoleon (whose activities occasioned the making of the canal) agree in representing the Sedbrook channel and in failing to represent any other waterway crossing the southern part of Ruckinge. The bends in its course show clearly that it is no product of modern engineering and the fact that it has given its name to one of the waterings of the marsh shows that it must be of great antiquity. Kettebregge, one of the two bridges crossing it in this area, is so named before 1250 (Brit. Acad., VII, 126) but Bunting Bridge is not at present to be traced further back than 1617 (Poker's map).

It is perhaps asking too much to suppose that the river Limen did not alter its course in any way between 805 and 1932. But judging from the general habits of marsh rivers, we may be very sure that it never followed the straight course of the canal, and judging by what records are available we may very properly suggest that part of it at least remains to-day as that branch of the Sedbrook sewer which flows through the southern part of Ruckinge.

That the West Hythe or Willop section of the river Limen of 732 was continuous with the Ruckinge or Sedbrook section of 724 can hardly be doubted. It follows that any theory of the formation of the marsh which can merit acceptance must allow for the fact that between 724 and 732 the river Limen ran along the north-western side of Romney Marsh to an exit somewhere to the south of West Hythe.