

SOME RECORDS OF IGHTHAM PARISH.

BY SIR EDWARD HARRISON.

THE Parish records preserved at Ightham include Vestry Minutes ; Churchwardens' Accounts from 1708 to modern times, with a gap between 1726 and 1734 ; Overseers' Accounts for the periods 1669 to 1701, 1726 to 1734 and 1771 to 1805 ; Highway Accounts from 1774 to 1800 ; Workhouse records (apart from those appearing in the Overseers' Accounts) ; National School Accounts ; and an eighteenth-century book called the "Tythe Book," intended primarily for particulars of compositions for tithes but used by several Rectors to record current events. There are also many loose bills and papers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Taken as a whole these records are probably about as interesting as those of many other parishes in rural Kent. Most of the entries are too commonplace to merit publication, some have a considerable local value, and a fairly large selection would well deserve a place in a history of Ightham parish. The particulars given below relate to several matters that seem to have an interest which is not merely parochial.

1. BRIDGE MONEY.

The parish of Ightham, in the hundred of Wrotham and the lathe of Aylesford, was, till 1934, made up of the two manors of Ightham and St. Clere. There are grounds for thinking that the Manor of Ightham, which has existed since the time of Henry III or a little earlier, was created as a sub-manor of Wrotham. The Manor of St. Clere arose on the partition of the Manor of Aldham, which may itself have been created as a sub-manor of Wrotham, though direct evidence is lacking.

Lands contributory in old time to the maintenance of Rochester bridge consisted mainly of manors or hundreds within the lathe of Aylesford. Wrotham contributed, but

not Ightham or St. Clere. A possible explanation is that the original liability in respect of the bridge, which goes back to Saxon days, may have attached to the whole of the ancient Manor of Wrotham but may not have been apportioned when any sub-manors were created.

Demands on contributory lands for the bridge at Rochester ceased to be made before the year 1508.

In the accounts of the Overseers of Ightham parish for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there are recurring payments "to the Constable for bridg money," and an entry of the year 1699, "Pd. to Tho. Edmans ye money laid upo' ye parish for Aylsford Brid . . . £1 18s. 9d." establishes that, at that date, Ightham parish was a contributory to Aylesford bridge.

The origin of this liability has not been traced. There was a bridge at Aylesford before 1331, which a jury in 1370 found "had always been repaired by the alms of those crossing." Camden mentions that Aylesford bridge was repaired by the County in 1688 and 1724. When the County took over the responsibility for the bridge, on what basis were the contributory parishes or other areas determined? Were lands contributory—whether actually or only nominally—to Rochester (which lands, it is worth noting, included the Manor of Aylesford) exempted from liability for Aylesford? Was the parish of Ightham, or were its constituent manors, considered suitable to be laid under contribution for Aylesford bridge because that area was not contributory to Rochester bridge? These questions cannot be answered, but if a list of all parishes or manors contributing to Aylesford bridge could be put together some progress towards finding an answer might be made.

2. THE RIGHTS OF THE COMMONERS.

On 4 May, 1633, William James, Lord of the Manor of Ightham, sold to "Sir Henrie Vane, Knight, Comptroller of H.M's. honorable Houshold and one of H.M's. most honorable Privie Counsell," of Fair Lawn, some 300 acres of land, part of the Common of Ightham, in two parcels.

The first parcel comprised land lying nearest to the populated parts of the manor. The second parcel included Beacon or Raspit Hill and the neighbouring district, an upland area remote from the hamlets.

There was excepted from the sale, "unto the tenants and commoners of the Manor of Ightham . . . all right of commoning and common of pasture . . . according to the custom and usage of the said manor."

The land so sold did not cover the whole of Ightham Common, which probably included Oldbury Hill and the adjoining Chart Bottom, as well as a broad strip of land on the west side of the road leading from Ightham village to the hamlet of Ivy Hatch.

In 1817, Commissioners acting under an Enclosure Act of 1814 directed the area bought by Sir Harry Vane in 1633 to be sold and the rights of common extinguished. This order never became operative, for John Simpson of Fair Lawn, who had purchased the property from the heirs of Vane, claimed it as his freehold and satisfied the Commissioners that they had no power over it.

After this fiasco the Commissioners found that the common lands with which they had authority to deal "were of inferior quality and small value" and "scarcely sufficient, when sold, to defray expenses." They disposed of the land next to the Ightham—Ivy Hatch road and a strip of land crossing Oldbury Hill, and prepared an Enclosure Award which, for some unknown reason, was never signed.

The Vane property was advertised for sale in 1823 by Simpson, the then owner, no mention being made in the particulars of sale of the existence of rights of common. The inhabitants of Ightham, however, were alive to the situation. They at once consulted a solicitor, from whose detailed bill of costs the following information has been gathered. On 11 July, 1823, their legal adviser appeared at the auction sale and notified both the auctioneer and the solicitor for the selling owner of the claims of the Ightham commoners.

No immediate satisfaction was obtained and it was decided to institute legal proceedings to test the commoners'

rights. Early in 1824 one Haines or Haynes, who occupied land near Ivy Hatch, was selected as "a good Commoner to try the question . . . as Lands, the former occupier, could speak to the common right of that property." It was arranged that Haines's cattle should be turned out on the common. A fund of about £100 was raised in the parish towards the cost of the contemplated litigation, and Counsel's opinion was taken as to the advisability of getting into touch with the new owner of the common land, Edmund Yates of Fair Lawn, with a view to a settlement by agreement.

Yates was apparently willing to settle, but for some time Haines was determined to proceed for the restitution of his full rights of common which had been restricted by enclosures. The parishioners, however, were advised that "those commoners whose rights had been barred by time" could not be benefited by a verdict in favour of Haines, which would not restore their own privileges, and, on 31 May, 1825, it was resolved at a meeting of parishioners to abandon the claim to the part of the Common which Yates or his predecessor in title, Simpson, had enclosed, and to try to compromise with Yates "as to that part which was not fenced in."

A settlement was arranged in September of the same year. It took the form of a conveyance to the parish by Yates of about seven acres of land, then or formerly part of the Common, in return for the release of the rights of the Commoners over the remainder of the 300 acres. The deed of release was executed by a large number of Commoners and others, some of whom required much persuasion before they would affix their signatures.

It is not clear whether rights of common were ever exercised over Oldbury Hill and Chart Bottom. If so, although not formally extinguished, such rights have probably been barred by lapse of time.

3. ECCLESIASTICAL DUES.

The Rev. Temple Henry Croker, M.A., who was Rector of Ightham parish from 1769 till 1773, was an able and industrious man with a strong personality, a keen eye for the rectorial interest, and a spirit which, according to his

friend Sir Thomas Gatehouse, of Lower Wallop, Hants, would "never submit to any imposition."

During his tenure of the living he re-valued the parish for rating purposes, substituting a "whole rent" for a "half rent" basis of valuation, perambulated the bounds, made an elaborate investigation into the "profits of Ightham parsonage," which compositions for tithes had diminished considerably, and, best of all for present purposes, recorded much of what he did in the Tythe Book.

His re-valuation, on a rental basis, and 12s. an acre for land not let, gave rise to opposition in the parish. Some of the landholders refused to pay their rates, and the Rector wrote to them that "unless all things were settled amicably I wd. take up their Tithes in kind next year." William Selby of Ightham Mote appealed to Quarter Sessions against his assessment, but unsuccessfully, and, whatever the extent of local resentment may have been at the time, the "half-rent" basis of assessment was never after reverted to. The Rector, however, was disheartened by the struggle and left an expression of his disappointment on record in the Tythe Book.

"Mr Selby was cast at the Quarter Sessions and I settled the Rates at whole Rents . . . but finding I had made Enemies, tho' it did not appear I had gained Friends, notwithstanding the most impartial and upright behaviour, I determined on Easter Tuesday to be no further concerned in Parish affairs than just to pay my Assessments.

April 12, 1772.

T. H. Croker."

Among other entries by Croker in the Tythe Book is a series of extracts from the account book of a former Rector, the Rev. Ralph Leigh, who held the benefice from 1724 till 1760. The following copy of such extracts has been shortened by the omission of some items of little interest.

Extracts from Mr. Leigh's Acct. Book, which shows the custom of Ightham Parish in Many Articles.

	£	s.	d.
1725 Agreed with Rd. Summers for the Church Yard		5	0
Do. with Esq ^o Glanvill for Sanfoin and Grass			
per acre		2	0
With Mr Selby for Hops, Grass and small Tithes	6	6	0

	£	s.	d.
1726	Agreed to keep H. Marshal's cow in the Yard		
to	per week		9
1743	Sold a Qr. of Barley Chaff for	4	0
	With John Mace for tythe of 5 Acres of St. Foin	12	6
	With H. Baldwyn for fruit and Offerings	2	0
	With Wm. Taylor for carrying all Tythe and a Ld. of Wheat to Sevenoak, he allowing for what I let off—one Qr. of Oats &	10	0 0
	With Mr Glanvill for small tithes at St. Clere and Seal Chart	2	2 0
	„ Mrs James for small tithes and fruit	1	1 0
	„ Ed. Batt for small tithes and Offerings	2	16 0
	A funeral Sermon and Burial	12	6
	A funeral Sermon chosen Text	1	1 0
	Drying Hops on my Kiln per Ct.	6	0
	With Wm. Catt for fruit in two Farms	10	0
	With Widow Honey for all her Tithes this year	2	2 0
	With Thos. Harrison fruit and Offerings	2	0
	For a Grave Stone setting up in churchyard	10	0
	For Thos. Newman's wedding out of Parish	5	0
	With G. Small for Woodland at 12 sh. per Acre to be felled at 11 years growth	12	0
	With H. Baldwyn for Tithe of Filberds and Cherries	5	0
	With Mr Selby for 11 Acre of Wield	16	0
	For a Burial in the Church	10	0
	With John Taylor for Pigs, Fowls and Ducks at home	1	6
	Do for Herbage and Wooll	5	0
	Do for Turneps and clover fed off per acre at	1	0
	For an Assize Sermon £3.3.0 and expences £1.8.6	4	11 6
	With Wm. son of John Taylor for Pigs and Fowls (breaking Windows 4s. 6d.)	5	0
	With Taylor (1747) to carry all my Tithes this year	12	0 0
	With E. Batt for small tithes except hops, clover, Wield and Wood, per ann.	2	15 0

The Rates of Composition for Tythes, etc., in Ightham as appears from Mr Leigh's Book.

		£	s.	d.
Per Acre	Wheat, Flax, Fruit, Beans or Pease	5	0	
„	Tares and Beans on Hop ground paid for as such	3	0	
„	Barley, Oats	3	0	
„	St. Foin or Rye	2	6	
„	Clover or Grass	2	0	
„	Rye, Turnips or Buckwheat fed off	2	0	
„	Buckwheat threshed in the field per Qr.	1	0	
Per Acre	Grass, 2d. Cut or Tares fed off	1	0	
„	Good Pasture fit for cutting	1	0	
„	Rowen or coarse grass feed		6	
„	Hop ground	10	0	
Per Year	A Cow and Calf	3	6	
„	Each pig		3	
„	Geese Ducks and Fowls	5	0	
„	Fruit or Garden or small Orchard	1	0	
„	Offerings at Easter	1	0	
„	A Wedding	5	0	
„	A Burial in the church	10	0	
„	A Burial in the churchyard	2	0	
„	A churching	1	0	
„	A christening at home	2	6	
„	A christening	1	0	

N.B. The last Article ought not to be charged, nor do I ever take the small Surplice Fees of the Poor, nor is it the Rector's interest to charge Tithe for Turnips fed off. Everything else seems very reasonable to me.

T. H. CROKER (Rector, 1770).