

SHORTER NOTES

LOCAL POLITICS AT ROCHESTER, 1710-14.

THE official minutes of the Council of the City of Rochester in the eighteenth century are jejune and uninformative to a degree. It is therefore of some interest to find in the Kent Archives Office a first-hand account by one of its members of some of its proceedings in the early years of the century. The work, contained in a quarto notebook and headed 'About Incorporating part of Chatham with the City of Rochester also about Chatham Market', is anonymous and couched, like Caesar's *Commentaries*, in the third person, but its provenience among the Weller MSS.<sup>1</sup> and the hero's part as played in its story indicate that its author was Robert Weller, apothecary, Mayor of the City in 1719 and a member of its Common Council at the time of the events that he describes.

To appreciate the significance of these events it is necessary to bear in mind the history of the City over the previous two centuries, Rochester was in a decline. With the growth of Maidstone and the dissolution of the Cathedral Priory it had lost its medieval importance as a market centre for West Kent, while its neighbour, Chatham, grew from a village to a town in all but name, around the gates of the Royal Dockyard. For a time at least this brought some prosperity to the citizens. A few benefited directly as employees, others let lodgings to seamen and their families, and, most relevant to the question at issue, the shopkeepers and the stallholders in the markets gained a welcome addition of custom. Moreover, since the shopkeepers, who had to possess the freedom of the City in order to trade, formed the dominant element among the freemen, it was natural that the City government should regard their interests with jealous concern.

It was also natural that the people of Chatham and the Lord of the Manor, Sir Oliver Boteler, should be equally anxious for commercial independence. The latter obtained from Charles II (without any notice being given to the City) the grant of a market and annual fair. The Mayor and citizens instituted legal proceedings alleging that the Crown had been misled. These dragged on for some years, ultimately reaching the House of Lords, and culminated in the issue of a writ *Ad Quod Damnum*, in accordance with which an inquiry was held in 1686. At this the jury, after hearing the evidence of forty witnesses,

<sup>1</sup> K.A.O. U38 Z.1.

declared that Boteler's fair and market were prejudicial to the interests of the City.

However, Boteler was not defeated. In the same year he again petitioned the King and Council for a grant. His petition was heard and dismissed. The next year at his instigation a third petition to the same effect was presented, this time from the inhabitants of Chatham. This was passed to the Navy Board, which approved it, and accordingly James II granted a market and fair. Despite further appeals by the City, the grant was confirmed by William III in 1689. Since then both town and market had grown apace, to the considerable profit of the Botelers, who owned the site of the latter besides the manorial rights, while the people of Rochester had laid out, at their own estimate, upwards of £1,000 to no avail, and that at a time when municipal resources were slender and all extraordinary expenditure had to be met by public subscription.

Here the matter seems to have rested for the next twenty years, until in October 1710, Sir John Leake, Chairman of the Board of Admiralty and recently re-elected Member of Parliament for the City, wrote to the Mayor professing his gratitude to his constituents and asking if there were any practical means by which he might express it. This was a tactful move on Leake's part, since by Weller's account his conduct in the election had caused considerable bitterness among the supporters of the defeated candidate, Sir John Fairborne, with whom he had formerly had an electoral alliance. It was this Fairborne faction, Weller among them, which seems to have been most active in the events that followed.

Leake's letter was read by the Mayor to the assembled freemen at a specially convened meeting of Common Hall on 16th October. The meeting was almost unanimously in favour of asking Leake to use his influence for the abolition of Chatham market, although the Recorder and Town Clerk (both Leake supporters) pointed out the practical difficulties and the embarrassment that they would cause. The matter, however, was agreed and in due course a deputation put this request to Sir John, who promised to seek a legal opinion from Mr. Baron Bury if the City would provide him with the necessary details of the case.

Two months elapsed with nothing further done. Eventually the matter was raised at a meeting of the Bench. Had the Town Clerk yet sent the case to Sir John? The Town Clerk replied, somewhat querulously, that he did not know who should pay the cost of preparing it. Did the Bench propose to open a subscription list to cover the expenses of litigation? This did not satisfy the activists, who had heard rumours that Thomas Best, the Chatham brewer and a connection of Leake's, had been putting pressure on the Town Clerk to do nothing. It was not until 17th February, however, that any effective move was

made. On that date the Council appointed a committee to consider ways and means. It consisted of the Mayor, John Unite, two Aldermen, John Bryen and William Head, and two representatives of the Common Council, Weller and Nathaniel Hawes, besides Francis Barrell, the Recorder, and Francis Brooke, the Town Clerk.

The committee held its first meeting two days later. Two possible courses of action were suggested by the Recorder: firstly, to petition the Queen and Council to revoke the grant; and secondly to go to law with the Botelers and, if successful, with the others concerned with running the market. Both were open to objection. The influence of Lady Boteler and the Navy Board militated against the former, and the cost of the latter would be prohibitive. Accordingly the Mayor put forward a third proposal, which, he said, had been suggested to him by some Chatham people, *viz.*, that the boundaries of the City should be extended so as to include all the charity lands belonging to it (part of the Watts Charity estate lay in the centre of Chatham) and to hold a new market on the ground thus included. Thus they would be able to outbid the Botelers without a head-on conflict and at the same time would increase the City revenues with the admission fees of those inhabitants of Chatham who, being now included within the City, would need to purchase the freedom to continue in trade. This last scheme won unanimous approval, though somewhat grudgingly from Weller, who thought that their original purpose was being sidetracked. Largely by his insistence it was also agreed that a case for direct action against the market grant should be prepared for submission to Sir John.

Meanwhile the committee made its report to the Bench on 21st February and was authorized to open negotiations with the leading inhabitants of Chatham and Strood (now mentioned for the first and last time in the affair) to see whether a mutually acceptable scheme could be drafted. At the same time the committee was enlarged by the addition of Alderman Thomas Huggins and the Mayor's brother, Robert Unite, a Common Councilman. At the next committee meeting, a week later, Weller and Hawes were deputed to invite six of the leading Chatham inhabitants to a meeting at the Bull Inn on 2nd March. These included Thomas Best and were, no doubt, the originators of the Mayor's initial proposal. At the meeting it was agreed that a draft 'Specimen' should be prepared by the Recorder as a basis for discussion. The Chatham representatives insisted that the new Charter should mention the market explicitly as well as the boundary changes. Weller demurred, ostensibly to avoid trouble from Lady Boteler, but more probably, one suspects, because he hoped that the disagreeable necessity of a market at Chatham might ultimately be avoided altogether.

The following day the committee again reported to the full Council, and at the same time the Town Clerk submitted his draft of the City's

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case for submission to Mr. Baron Bury. This outlined the history of the dispute down to 1689 and asked for counsel's opinion whether, and if so, how the grant could be circumvented, whether the Corporation had any grounds for proceeding against the butchers and others who used Chatham market or against Lady Boteler herself, and thirdly whether it was reasonable to expect Sir John to proceed in these suits at his own expense. It was agreed without much difficulty that this should be forwarded to Sir John, but the committee's report had a very different reception. Its members, expecting to gain an easy approval for continued negotiations, were surprised to find themselves openly denounced by Common Councilman John Creswell. That he was not in favour of the scheme can have been no secret to Weller at least, despite Creswell's absence from the meeting of 21st February, since in the meanwhile he had darkly hinted that the townspeople should be informed of the progress of the negotiations 'that they might know their friends and enemies'. But clearly Weller was not expecting concerted opposition and was taken aback to find most of the Bench in agreement with Creswell's assertion that the new scheme would ruin trade and was opposed by all the shopkeepers ('all' in this context meaning the three whose views he had obtained: a shoemaker, a tailor and a cutler). Worst opponent from the committee's point of view was one of their own members, William Head, who questioned the accuracy of the Mayor's report of its proceedings and magnified the difficulties that the Chatham representatives were making. Alderman Huggins supported him in this, though he admitted that in general he was in favour of the plan.

This was the signal for violent outcry from the opposition, in which the Mayor, visibly nettled, had difficulty in making himself heard. Creswell, Elliott and Austen on one side were keeping up a chorus against accepting the scheme on any terms, while Weller, unsupported save by the Mayor, expostulated that the committee were being badly treated and that, if the Bench wanted to break off negotiations, they had better suggest a reasonable pretext for doing so. His words went unheard among the general hubbub, in which the Mayor's voice could be heard saying in an aggrieved tone that 'he thought it Dover Court', and after attempts by Huggins and Weller to turn discussion to more constructive topics had failed, the meeting was eventually adjourned without any decision being reached.

News of the meeting spread quickly beyond the Council Chamber, for later the same afternoon Weller, visiting Chatham on business, met Andrew Hawes, one of the Chatham spokesmen at the previous day's conference, and was surprised to find that he was fully informed of what had happened.

The incorporation scheme having thus failed, there remained

the original proposal of a direct legal assault. The Town Clerk had prepared his fair copy of the City's case by the following Monday, 5th March, and the Mayor and Weller waited on the Recorder to ask him to write a covering letter to Sir John. The Mayor, with Weller's support, said that the Bench wanted the third question omitted (*viz.*, whether it was reasonable for Sir John to bear the costs of the case). The Recorder objected that it was unreasonable to expect Sir John to do anything in the matter and they ought to leave him some excuse for declining. Eventually he won over the Mayor and the matter was referred back to the Council, who were adamant and suspected that the Recorder's reluctance to agree was pecuniary rather than legal in origin. In this they seem to have been right. A fee of five pounds induced him to withdraw his objections, and the case was duly dispatched. The result was, however, as he had forecast: counsel's opinion held that suppression of the market was not practicable.

Both paths to the desired objective had thus led to dead ends. Not that the citizens altogether failed to secure some concrete expression of Sir John's good-will: not long afterwards he set up a charity school for freemen's daughters, paying £40 a year for a master and mistress to teach arithmetic, knitting and sewing (a counterpart to Sir Joseph Williamson's foundation for boys—Williamson, too, had been a Member for the City). He was careful to inform the Corporation that this was not done out of hope for their votes but from a disinterested regard for his birthplace. Nevertheless, when he failed to secure re-election in 1714, the school died a sudden death.

That the City should have failed in its efforts directly to suppress the market is not perhaps surprising. The advocates of doing so seem to have been totally unable to appreciate the legal and practical difficulties of suppressing an established institution, the public utility of which they themselves admitted, or of asking the Chairman of the Board of Admiralty to undo what had ostensibly been set up for the convenience of the Navy and its dependants. Throughout their attitude to the law had been that lawyers will do anything if only they are paid well enough—an attitude which their own Recorder's example, it must be admitted, did nothing to discourage. The incorporation scheme was less impracticable, but seems to have been too devious for the ordinary citizen to appreciate; and it is not surprising that its opponents could rally support with the cry that this was not what they had voted for on 16th October. How much truth there was in Cresswell's assertion that the shopkeepers of Rochester would suffer from additional competition is not clear. Probate inventories show that at this period Rochester was still the commercial centre, yet even without the new charter Chatham was overtaking it by the end of the century. Whatever the facts, it was an easy fear to arouse in a declining community. More real was the fear

of some of the Aldermen and Common Council that they would lose prestige and perhaps their chance of the mayoralty to the newcomers from Chatham, of whom at least some, Best, for example, were probably men of greater substance than most of the City Bench; and it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the City's difficulties were being used by Best and his associates for their own personal advancement and that Weller, who is constantly expressing surprise at the turn of affairs, was their unconscious dupe. It is noteworthy that the opposition came chiefly from the Common Council, while the Aldermen, who had mostly been Mayor already, were lukewarm in the business. None of the three most vociferous opponents, Austen, Elliott and Creswell, it is interesting to note, ever reached the Mayoral chair.

Any enlargement of the City franchise would, of course, be relevant to the outcome of Parliamentary elections, and it is possible that this may have been a consideration in the dispute, although never mentioned expressly in Weller's account. The nearest that he comes to it is in a remark of his in the stormy meeting of 3rd March that the Bench should beware of the charge of wanting unfairly to limit the franchise, which had already been refused to some applicants on any terms whatever, presumably on political grounds. Whether this was a serious charge or merely something said in the heat of debate is not clear. Leake or his supporters seem to have insinuated something to this effect after he had been ousted at the election of 1714, but scrutiny of the registers of admission to the freedom does not suggest that large numbers of outsiders were buying the franchise for political ends. Even the direct influence of the Navy Board on what was traditionally a naval seat was limited, since few Dockyard workers were freemen and those formed a very small minority of the electorate. Their votes were perhaps enough to turn the scales against Sir Thomas Palmer in 1713. Leake, himself unopposed, had put pressure on the officials at the Yard to vote for Col. Gage, who was returned by 264 votes to Palmer's 230. But the overall impression that one gains from reading Weller's account is of the remoteness of municipal affairs from national politics. A deputation to London is an event of sufficient moment to be recorded in the official statement of the City's legal case as proof of the extraordinary pains taken to preserve their interests. For the average citizen, and not least for Robert Weller, all the world could be surveyed from Chatham Hill and the most precious object it contained was an alderman's scarlet gown.

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#### KENT IN THE RAVENNA COSMOGRAPHY

"The compilation of the Ravenna Cosmography, as we have it, belongs to the late seventh century. It was done by a cleric of Ravenna

. . . and the object of the work is to furnish a list of the countries, towns and rivers of the known world compiled from Greek, Roman and Gothic authors.' Of the British section of the *Cosmography* the interest of the present note are the Kentish place and river names recorded in it.<sup>1</sup>

*Place-names.* The following are mentioned. Duroaverno (for Durovernum) Cantiacorum, *Canterbury*; Durobrabis (for Durobrivis), *Rochester*; Rutupis, *Richborough*; Dubris, *Dover*; Lemanis, *Lympne*; Durolavi (for Durolevo) *Faversham?* but mistakenly noted as a river name. The following Romano-British places are not named; Regulbium (*Reculver*); Vagniacae (*Springhead*), and the Kentish Noviomagus, the station between Vagniacae and Londinium, whose site is at present unknown.

*River-names.* The Kentish rivers occur in a sequence which begins at the Firth of Forth, runs down the east coast to the Kentish coasts and so westward along the south coast. Those which concern us are as follows, the comments being those of Richmond and Crawford in the *Archæologia* Paper quoted above.

1. Vividin. The name of a river in East Anglia, but not otherwise identified.
2. Durolavi. A river next southwards from the above and probably connected with Durolevo.
3. Alauna. (No comment, but presumably the next river eastwards from the Durolavi.)
4. Coguveusuron. The name of a river in Kent between Durolavi, Medway, and Dubris, Dover. The word is probably the result of a conflation.<sup>2</sup>
5. Durbis. For Dubris, the river at Dover.
6. Lemana. Now Lympne, place and river.
7. Novia. A river west of the Lympne and possibly connected with Ptolemy's Portus Novus.

The first point which will strike the reader in considering this river list is the omission of the two most important rivers in this sequence, the Thames (Tamesis) and the Medway and we will comment on this apparent lacuna later. As regards the Durolavi this cannot be a river name for in Brittonic it means 'the fort on Lava' and it is the Lava which should have been listed. For surely Durolavi is Durolevo the Roman station which, according to the *Antonine Itinerary*, was sited twelve miles from Canterbury, going towards Rochester. This would suggest the west end of Faversham, the Lava being Faversham Creek with its continuation into the East

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from *The British Section of the Ravenna Cosmography*. I. A. Richmond and O. G. S. Crawford. *Archæologia*, xciii, 1.

<sup>2</sup> A conflation is a compound word made up of two variant readings of the same name. The word comes to us through the Greek.

Swale. Ekwall writes<sup>3</sup> that the name Lava in Brittonic means 'babbling brook', equivalent to the Gaulish 'labar' and the Welsh 'llafer'; if we remember, which archæologists and place-name experts so often do not, that the level of the land towards the end of the Roman period stood some fifteen feet or so higher than the present level in relation to the high tide then the stream of Faversham Creek may well have been such a brook in its upper course. The stream at Dover and the Lymyne or Limene which flowed by the walls of Portus Lemanis are properly identified and so the Alauna and the incredible Coguveusuron must be between the East Swale and Dover. There is no choice, for the Alauna must be the Wantsum by Reculver and the Coguveusuron the Stour at Richborough.

The *Geography* of Ptolemy seems to site Portus Novus somewhere near the later New Romney, which would agree with the Novia of Ravennas. Since Ptolemy was writing before A.D. 150 it follows that this 'new Port' must have been established at latest during the early years of the Roman occupation, and perhaps much earlier. As the Saxon Shore fort of Portus Lemanis at Lymyne, seven miles north of New Romney, was not built until late in the third century then Portus Novus may have been its predecessor. On the other hand it may always have been the *port* with the later *fort* built on the nearest *terra firma*, for a masonry fort could hardly have been built on marsh or shingle. As Romney Marsh proper with its great protective shingle bank was already in existence<sup>4</sup> in Roman times a seven miles road between port and fort along the top of the shingle was possible. Roman pottery has been found at Dymchurch, midway between the two places. If, as the *Cosmography* indicates, Novia was west of the Limene and does equate with Portus Novus then the latter could not have been sited at West Hythe. And in any case Ptolemy names the Limene-mouth as Lemanonios bay.

Going back to the apparent omission of mention of the Thames and Medway in the river list. But Tamese (for Tamesis, Thames) is mentioned for it heads a short list of names which runs Tamese, Brinavis, Alauna, which Richmond and Crawford suppose represents places on the Oxfordshire road linking Silchester with Ryknild Street, but the places cannot be identified with any certainty and the authors remark that the situation of the group of names is not clear. But their remarks on the meanings of the names are significant, for they admit that Tamese is the Thames although they associate it with Thame far inland, and

<sup>3</sup> E. Ekwall, *English River Names*, 1928, 238.

<sup>4</sup> No Roman remains have been found in Romney Marsh proper but this does not mean that such remains do not exist in it, for excavations in marshes are extremely rare, for obvious reasons. The recovery of large quantities of Roman material in the Upchurch marshes of the Medway was partly due to extensive and deep mud digging and partly to the gradual erosion of a marsh edge.

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state that Brinavis is a river-name meaning 'brown stream', while there are no less than six Alaunæ in the *Cosmography* apparently naming both places and rivers. Thus we have a Thames name, a river-name and a possible river-name. Whether the name of Medway goes back to Brittonic or is Saxon in origin is a matter of doubt, for while Zachrisen refers it to Old English 'meduma,' middling, Ekwall believes that the word is a compound one made up of the well-known Brittonic river-name Wey or Wye and the Celtic word 'medu',<sup>5</sup> mead. Thus both Brinavis and Medway could have the same meaning, 'the brown or mead-coloured river (of Wye)'. Is it possible that these three river-names have been displaced in the copy of the *Cosmography* known to us, and that they really fill the gap between the Vividin and the Lava? Thus the full list might read,

- Vividin, a river in East Anglia or Essex.
- Tamese, the Thames.
- Brinavis, the Medway.
- Lava, the East Swale, with Faversham Creek.
- Alauna,<sup>6</sup> the Wantsum.
- Coguveusuron, the Stour.
- Dubris, the stream at Dover.
- Lemana, the Lymn or Limene.
- Novia, the Rother at Romney Haven.

JOHN EVANS.

## MANOR HOUSE AT FORD

THE Archbishops' Manor House at Ford, between Canterbury and Reculver, which was partly demolished in 1658 for the value of its materials, and was the subject of papers in *Archæologia Cantiana*, xxvi 119-132, and xlv 168-173, suffered further destruction by bulldozer on July 24, 1964.

Two large sections of flint and stone wall, one about 24 feet long at the base and 10-12 feet high, representing the north end of the great hall, and a 70-foot length of low wall, probably the north side of the chapel, were grubbed out to clear the site for the erection of a grain store and general purpose building.

Very little now remains to be seen of the building erected (or rebuilt) by Morton in the late fifteenth century, in which Cranmer entertained Henry VIII in July, 1544, where that Archbishop spent much time during the evolutionary period of the English Reformation, and to which Archbishop Abbot was "exiled" in 1627 for refusing to license a sermon

<sup>5</sup> Ekwall, in the work cited, 286.

<sup>6</sup> The Alauna being included in both lists.

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by the Vicar of Brackley on Charles I's right to raise forced loans. There is still a length of stonework representing the foundation of the south side of the quadrangular group of buildings, while some of the west face seems to be incorporated in a shed now used for poultry. A single step from a stone spiral stair can be seen built into a later brick wall on another section of the line of the west front.

It seems to have escaped notice in *Archæologia Cantiana* that a fragment of a Roman inscription was discovered at Ford among wall debris about eighty years ago. It was presented to the British Museum in 1933 (Acc. No. 1934/I-II/1), and was published in *J.R.S.*, xxiv (1934), 219-220.

The inscription, which reads:

..... G O B A N .....  
.. O (Or D) G V L P .....  
....A N T I S .....

is at present on extended loan in Herne Bay Museum.

The true provenance of this inscription is unknown, but it is perhaps significant that second-century Roman cremation burials have been found a short distance south of the Manor House site along the undisputed Roman road which passes it, while a hoard of coins, certainly Roman, but of unknown date was found—and dispersed—during the erection of an oast house a generation or so ago.

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