

THE *CWYLLA* OF  
KING EDMUND'S WEST MALLING CHARTER

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At some time during his brief reign from A.D. 942 to 946 King Edmund made a gift of land in Kent to Buhric, Bishop of Rochester.<sup>1</sup> The location and extent of this land approximated to the present parish of West Malling, but the precise interpretation of the bounds given in the charter has remained a subject of speculation.

Of special interest is a reference to a spring or stream, near the boundary with East Malling, for which the charter employs the Anglo-Saxon word *cwylla*<sup>2</sup> (*cwyllan* in the oblique case). Wallenberg observes that this is 'the only case of *cwylla* "well, spring" evidenced in OE.' He says further: 'Well Street in East Malling may perhaps be a reminiscence of the fact that there was a *cwylla* in this district.'<sup>3</sup>

In accordance with the custom of the times the body of the charter was in Latin with the definition of the bounds in Old English. In reproducing this charter Thorpe rendered the Old English into Latin,<sup>4</sup> but mistranslated the unfamiliar word *cwylla*. His version of the passage where this word occurs is: '*et sic recta Austrum versus ab Oriente crocis [vel patibuli]*<sup>5</sup> usque ad amplam viam.' In rendering into modern English, Fielding perpetuated this error, and compounded it by adopting Thorpe's alternative as though it were part of the original text, thus: 'and so southward from the east of the cross or gallows to the broadway.'<sup>6</sup>

The relevant passage in the original Old English (substituting modern forms for the runic 'th' and 'w') is as follows: 'Of cinges fyrthe on offahames gemaere. Thanan on here straet, andlang straete ofer lylle burnan oth east meallinga gamaere, & swa riht suth be eastan tham cwyllan oth tha wyde straet, suth andlang straete on geriht oth cinges fyrthe.' This may be translated into modern English as: 'From the

<sup>1</sup> W. G. de G. Birch (ed.), *Cartularium Saxonicum*, London, 1885-93, 779.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. C. Hall, *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, London, 1898, 63, gives '*cwylla*—well spring'.

<sup>3</sup> J. K. Wallenberg, *Kentish Place-names*, Uppsala, 1931, 252.

<sup>4</sup> J. Thorpe, *Registrum Roffense*, London, 1769, 479.

<sup>5</sup> R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word List*, London, 1965, 336, gives '*patibulum*—gibbet c. 1138, 1480; cross, rood 11c, 1240, post 1300; pillory, 1570.' That Thorpe gave it as an alternative suggests that he had only the meaning 'gibbet' in mind.

<sup>6</sup> C. H. Fielding, *Memories of Malling and its Valley*, West Malling, 1893, 10-11.

King's wood [plantation] to the boundary of Offham. From thence to the Army street. Along [this] street over the Lylle bourn as far as the boundary of East Malling; and so straight south by a spring to the east as far as the Wide street. South along [this] street right on to the King's wood [plantation].<sup>7</sup>

The 'Army street' appears to have followed the route of the present London-Maidstone road (A20) for a short distance eastwards as far as the Town Hill turn. Here, the A20, which is also the boundary between the parishes of West Malling and Leybourne, bears slightly northwards. It is suggested that the ancient 'Army street' continued straight on, picking up the present boundary again near the Lylle Bourn. Continuing this straight line the East Malling boundary is then reached some four hundred yards further on. By keeping to the present London-Maidstone road the parish of West Malling would be left before reaching the Lylle Bourn and one would cross into the parish of Leybourne instead of into East Malling. In King Edmund's time the East Malling boundary may have been somewhat closer to the Lylle Bourn. Today, in this vicinity, the West Malling boundary bulges eastwards, just after turning south, to skirt the grounds of 'The Hermitage'. Reference to the map will show that where the boundary first turns southwards it is roughly in line with the East Malling boundary further south, beyond 'The Hermitage'. This suggests the possibility that in early times, the boundary ran in an uninterrupted straight line from the point where it first turns south; that is to say, where it left the 'Army street' and today leaves the London-Maidstone road.

A short distance along the road from West Malling to East Malling, east of the parish boundary, and on what is suggested may have been the route of the 'Army street', there is a cross-roads, known until recent times as Crouch Green but now garbled into Couch Green. The place-name 'Crouch' usually derives from Middle English *cruche*, Old English *cruc*—'cross'.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps Thorpe was misled by this place-name in translating *cwylla*, confusing it with the Old English verb *cwellan*—'to kill, slay, murder'. He may well have proceeded to deduce 'cross' as an instrument of execution, with the alternative 'gibbet'.

Wallenberg appears to have been able only to assume that there was a stream or spring locally from which Well Street derives its name. It is, in fact, in this hamlet that there rises the stream which flows northwards, giving Bradbourne House its name and becoming Ditton Stream before debouching into the Medway. The spot is known today as 'Springhead', though there is evidence that, in the early seventeenth

<sup>7</sup> *Here straet* can be translated as 'High road', and *Wyde straet* has been translated as 'Broadway'; but such renderings are considered to take some liberty with the text, and for clarity the literal translations are preferred.

<sup>8</sup> For this occurrence, derivation from Brit. *crucoc*—'hill, barrow, mound' could be argued, but this alternative is not relevant to the present discussion.

THE CWYLLA OF KING EDMUND'S WEST MALLING CHARTER

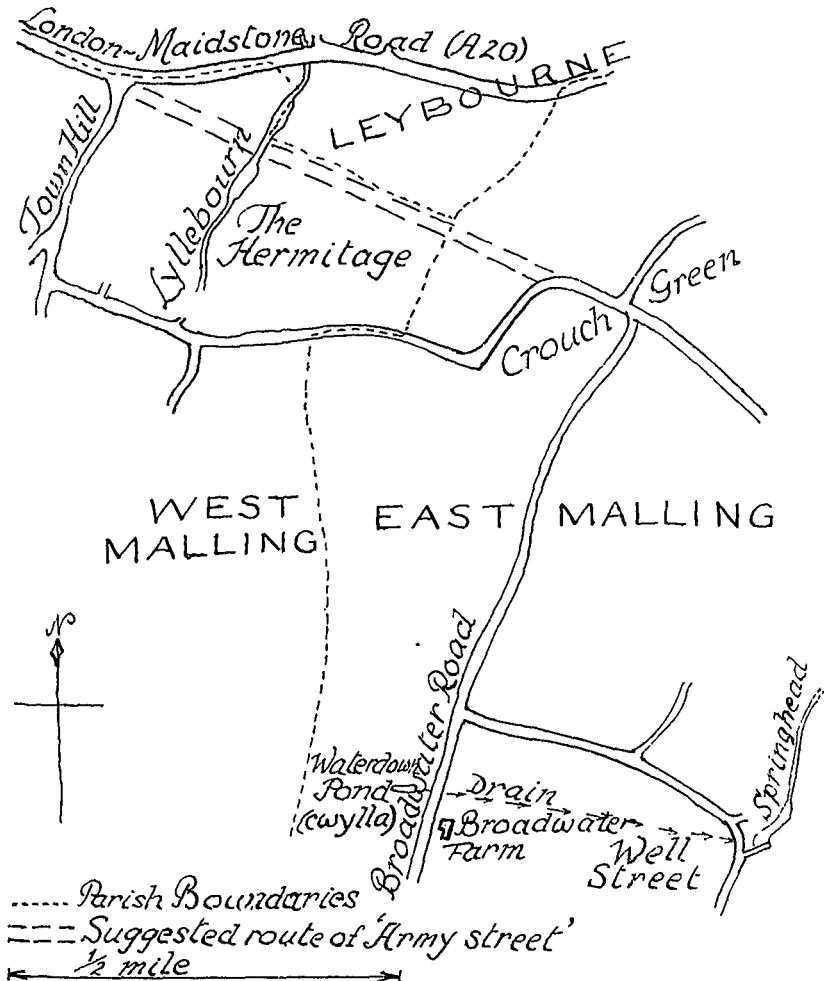


FIG. 1.

century, it was known as the 'Well Head'.<sup>9</sup> Surprisingly, although this stream provided power for mills since at least Domesday until a few decades ago, it has remained un-named on its course to the point where it enters the parish of Ditton.<sup>10</sup> It may well have been called the 'Bradbourne' in early times, but no record has been traced. However, in

<sup>9</sup> Deed dated 1609, KAO U47/45 T38.

<sup>10</sup> This stream was the subject of an article in *Salmon and Trout*, no. 100, 1941, when it was referred to as 'The Malling Bourne'. The new owner of its spring-head and upper reaches has revived this name.

postulating this water as the *cwylla* of the charter, Wallenberg appears to disregard the objection that this would place the eastern limit of King Edmund's gift over half a mile within the boundary of East Malling. Moreover, the charter gives the bounds as a line directly south from the 'Army street' at the East Malling boundary, after crossing the 'Lylle bourn'.

Although Wallenberg notices Broadwater Farm and traces references to this place-name as early as A.D. 1240,<sup>11</sup> he does not associate it with the *cwylla*. The farmhouse stands in Broadwater Road which runs north and south about two hundred yards within, and roughly parallel with, the East Malling boundary. It is this stretch of the bounds of King Edmund's gift which has the *cwylla* to the east. There is, however, today no water worthy of the name 'Broadwater' closer than the spring-head in Well Street. At a distance of more than half a mile, deep in a little valley, and in Saxon times probably even more obscured by trees than it is now, this spring-head could hardly have served as a landmark in tracing the boundary. It is equally unlikely that Broadwater Farm could have taken its name from a stream at this distance.

But just west of Broadwater Road, a hundred yards or so from the present farmhouse, there is a small pond. This pond is situated in land bearing the name 'Waterdown' on the Tithe Award map of 1842. At the same place, two adjoining fields are shown under the names 'Waterdowne Hill' and 'Waterdowne Bottom' in an estate survey of 1681-84.<sup>12</sup>

The pond is spring-fed and drains under Broadwater Road into a runnel which flows eastwards for a short way until it disappears underground. The water is then conveyed by agricultural drain to the spring-head at Well Street. Map evidence is lacking, but the route of this drain was confirmed when a new water-main was laid in Well Street early in 1973 and the mechanical digger struck the drain-pipe. The flow ceased during the dry summer of 1973, but it was observed to gush water into the Well Street spring-head on one or two occasions after heavy rain. Land contours make the Well Street spring-head the natural direction of water-flow from Broadwater Farm and from Waterdown Bottom.

The evidence leaves little doubt that this nameless little pond is the *cwylla* of King Edmund's charter. It is just east of the West Malling boundary with East Malling where this boundary runs south from what was once the 'Army street'. It is exactly in the location described in the charter. The place-names associated with this location suggest

<sup>11</sup> J. K. Wallenberg, *The Place-names of Kent*, Uppsala, 1934.

<sup>12</sup> KAO U49 P4.

THE *CWYLLA* OF KING EDMUND'S WEST MALLING CHARTER

that in the Middle Ages the pond was of considerably greater extent than it is today, while in Saxon times it was significant enough to serve as a landmark. Topographically insignificant though this pond has become, it has the distinction of preserving a word in our Anglo-Saxon dictionaries which would otherwise have been lost.

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