

ELING.

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Vicar of Eling. †

The first mention of Eling with which I am acquainted occurs in Domesday Book. William the Conqueror, who made this survey in 1086, was like most of ourselves—he wished to know what his income was, and also to see that he got it. He accordingly sent out this commission of enquiry and what these commissioners did when they came to Eling, as everywhere else, was this. Arriving, no doubt in suitable state, they summoned to their presence—probably in the parish church—the ‘reeve’ (or headman) of the hundred, the parish priest, and six tenants or labourers of the manor, and enquired of them what the manor was called, who held it in the time of Edward the Confessor, who held it now, how many hides and ploughlands were on it belonging to the King, what was the population, how many of them were respectively slaves, labourers, freemen and small holders, how much wood, meadow and pasture there was, what mills and fish-ponds (or fisheries), how much it was worth as a whole, and what sum was payable to the King.

The report on Eling which the commissioners made was to this effect:—

Edlingès (for that is the ancient name of Eling) is in the King’s own demesne (*i.e.* he had not given it away to any of his knights in reward for service). In the time of Edward the Confessor it was under obligation to provide half-a-day’s entertainment to the King. The number of hides in it is unknown.* It contains twenty carucates, *i.e.* small holdings—

† This paper was prepared as a lecture for the members of the village “Reading and Recreation Club.” It is, therefore, of an entirely popular character. It is hoped that the consideration of this fact may serve to mitigate the severity of learned criticism.

* I may say here that the words ‘hide,’ ‘carucate,’ or ploughland, which are of constant occurrence, were not any fixed measurement of land. The amount varied according to the character of the soil and its adaptability for cultivation. A carucate was the amount that a man with one plough could till in the course of a season; and the amount naturally varied according as it was heavy or light soil.

of which five are reserved for the King. There are thirteen farmers and forty-three cottagers, with seven ploughs, thirteen labourers and two mills, which pay a rent of twenty-five shillings. The meadow land pays forty-five shillings. There is a fishery and salt works—which pay no tax. There are 125 acres of meadow land. There are woods with twenty hogs which should belong to the manor, and other woods in the hands of the King himself. The manor was granted to Hugo de Port; and land, occupied by sixteen farmers and three cottagers, turned into forest, with 280 hogs on pannage, and producing yearly three gallons of honey. These are now taken back from the manor, and are worth £26. The whole undivided manor was worth, in the time of Edward the Confessor, £38 8s. 4d., and is now worth £20—but it pays £52 6s. 1d., a rent which includes the forest portion. There is a church—*i.e.* the present parish church—with half a ploughland in endowment.

From this statement we may gather, I think, that about 900 years ago Eling consisted of some 75 households, which taking five to a house as a moderate average, gives a population of from 350 to 400. If, as is stated, a portion of the cultivated land was converted into forest, the population would be reduced to under 300.*

Eling, however, at the time of the conquest was not the Eling of the middle ages. When, a hundred or two hundred years later the parochial system in England was completed, the parish of Eling, beginning at the bridge at Redbridge, comprised a very large area, its boundaries being the right bank of the Test, and the parishes of Romsey, Minstead and Dibden; *i.e.* it included what are now the parishes of Netley Marsh, North Eling, Colbury and Marchwood—all of which within the last fifty or sixty years have been cut out of it. Eling, at the time of the Domesday survey, was a much smaller place. For example, Totton, which is now included

* I think it is as well to mention here that what is said in some histories of England about William the Conqueror's laying waste of flourishing villages and destroying their churches, in order to throw the land into forest, is sheer nonsense. There is no reason whatever for thinking that the forest before the conquest was thickly populated; and the mere fact that Eling, in common with many other places, paid twenty years after the conquest, a larger sum in revenue to the King, than it did twenty years before the conquest, shews conclusively that no afforestation, on any large scale, took place.

in it, was a separate place altogether, and belonged, not to the King, but in part to the Abbess and Convent of Romsey. Hangre, which like Totton, is mentioned in Domesday book, was a separate community. So was Langley, which is also mentioned. These, however, though distinct, were quite small places. Thus Totton—which, as I say, is as ancient as Eling, but distinct from it—is that piece of land which begins at Redbridge Causeway, stretches as far as the corner, where now-a-days, the parliament of the unemployed usually gathers, being bounded by the High Street and Junction Road, continued as far as the Test. Rumbridge, which adjoins it, is a separate manor altogether. There is a lord of the manor of Rumbridge at this day, who has a parliamentary vote by right of his manor. Totton then contained four or five small farms, with three ploughs, thirty-five acres of meadow, a mill, and saltworks; and a population of well on to one hundred. Hanger had two farmers and five cottagers, a plough, an acre of meadow, woods, and one horse; it was assessed at ten shillings. Langley, held by Hugo S. Quentin, contained six farmers and seven cottagers, with two ploughs; and was assessed at 30s.*

That Eling was a place of some little importance at the conquest, may I think safely be inferred from the number of its population, the high rate at which it was assessed, and the existence of the church with its endowment. The same conclusion, both as regards these times and as regards later years, might also be arrived at from its geographical position. For it was the natural outlet to the sea from all this portion of the forest, and whatever timber from the forest was required for shipbuilding in these parts would naturally be brought out through Eling, and so floated down, just as it is now. Again, it had a sort of strategic importance; it commanded the main and old Roman road from Dibden, Hythe, and Fawley, which runs past the church to the bridge; and I think that this is the explanation of the somewhat curious position of "The Grove" (the house and land now owned and occupied by Col. Rabbets), lying just under the shadow of the church, and, as it

* There were other manors in the parish, of which I need not say more than that they are now forgotten, or have no name; and I may add in passing, that by way of compensation, there are places now in the parish which are called 'manors,' which neither have, nor ever had, any sort of right to the name.

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ELING CHURCH.

Exterior.



ELING CHURCH.

Interior.

seems, carved out of the church glebe land, and almost completely surrounded by it; for the glebe still runs round to a point facing the upper part of Eling wharf. The explanation, I think, is that the King thought it desirable to keep command of the road at that point, where, before Eling bridge was ever built, it crossed over by a ford, and came out at the spot where now the Anchor Inn is situated, making a straight line with Eling Lane; and in order to retain command of it he kept it within the civil power, and put it, no doubt, in the hands of one of his own soldiers, as warders. And what I have ventured to call the old "strategical" importance of Eling—especially with Totton combined—may be inferred again from the fact that it commanded also, at least, one of the roads from Southampton to Salisbury, and the West of England; and that this is something more than a bare supposition is shown by the fact that, in the time of the civil war, when the royalist troops were marching to attack Southampton, held by the parliamentarians, the commander of the attacking forces marched as far as Redbridge and broke the bridge down, and thus cut off the town from its western sources of supply.

From the period of the Norman Conquest onward, till about the time of the Commonwealth, there is very little I have been able to learn regarding the social and economic life of the community. The church was in time, after some vicissitudes, attached to the Abbey of Mottisfont, and the manor granted to Winchester College. If the records of the abbey and of the manor were in existence and accessible their would be, no doubt, a good deal that one could learn about the life of the community; but Mr. Barker Mills tells me the records of the abbey are lost—whether the records of the manor are in existence or not I do not know.*

All that I have been able to gather is a little about the history and records of the parish church, and it is to this effect. It was built before the time of the Norman Conquest, and of that original building a few portions still remain. It was enlarged and practically rebuilt in the 13th century, the tower being added about a century later. The church as it was then was almost the same as it is to-day; no subsequent

* There are scraps of information to be gathered from various ancient records—e.g. I have from the "fine Rolls" of Henry III. the names of 15 or 20 of the tenants of Eling in the year 1272, but such information does not amount to much.

addition or alteration having been of any important character. I have been told by good judges that Eling is the most ancient and most beautiful of all the churches of the New Forest. Apart from its great architectural interest, the church contains some very fine mural monuments, one by Chantry, and three or four by the equally famous sculptor of the preceding century, Michael Rysbrack, and one in the style of the Renaissance in memory of Peter Searle of Testwood, M.P. for Andover, by a sculptor unknown. It has registers of great antiquity, and in an almost perfect state of preservation; churchwardens and overseers accounts from the time of the Commonwealth, which have now happily been preserved from the decay and destruction with which they were threatened, and which must very soon have overtaken them. It has also a service of communion plate of silver gilt—given on the Feast of the Nativity, 1693, by Margaret Leigh of Testwood—of unusual size and magnificence, which the Master of the Goldsmith's Company, in a book shortly to be published, describes as "superb;" and finally, a peal of six bells, which were not (as a curious local tradition has it) "stolen from Millbrook."

There were at one time in the church other objects of interest which are no longer there—for instance, there was at least one recumbent effigy of some great lady of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, of which all that now remains is the head. Even within the last century many things have disappeared from the church.

In a book published about one hundred years ago, called "Companion in a Tour round Southampton," the writer describes what he saw in Eling church. "In the middle aisle is a flat stone to the memory of Wm. Barnard, M.A., minister of the church of Holy Rood in Southampton, with an inscription in Latin, stating that he died in the year 1666, at the age of forty years, 'being worn out by the assiduous labours of his functions.' Near him lies Richard Speed, forty years, vicar of Eling, who died 1757; next is Sir John Mill, Bart., who died in 1705, aged twenty-three. He goes on to mention as being within the rails of the communion table the 'brass' of William, son of Lord Chidioc Paulet, which also disappeared from the church and was discovered, together with its shields of armorial bearings, four or five years ago among the sundry jetsam of Messrs. Crook's building yard, and

put back into the church. He adds that there was on the north side, hanging 'a kind of tunic, one side of which is made of cloth of gold, the other of purple velvet. Over it is a gilt helmet, on which is a gilt castle as a crest'—the helmet and crest are still there, but the tunic has disappeared. I am told that it was thrown away, as being dilapidated, within quite recent years. 'There is also, in one of the parish chests,' he says—'a sword,' which once formed part of these monumental decorations, and 'a curious ancient iron box,' formerly used for collecting money—these also have vanished, as have also the two folio volumes of Comber's *Companion to the Temple*, chained to reading stands, 'which were many years ago the donation of one who had been a boatswain in the navy, and in that situation of no very circumspect life, but who, in his latter days, grew reformed and left these volumes for the edification of others.'

I have made out a list of the vicars of Eling, from the year 1253 down to the present time, and a printed copy of them may be seen on the wall, just inside the door of the tower. One or two points in the history of the church are worth mentioning. In 1204, King John, by deed, gave the rectory (*i.e.* the patronage and the great tithes) to the canons of Mottisfont Abbey "in perpetuity." Less than fifty years later it had been taken from them again; for in 1253, one Nicholas de Ria, was not vicar but rector of the parish, and was engaged in a law-suit with the abbot and convent of Jumièges, a great abbey on the Seine, between Havre and Rouen. The result of the litigation was, that the Pope on September 5th, 1253, issued from Assisi, a faculty to the abbot of Jumièges to enter into possession of the rectory of Eling, and to take the other two-thirds of the tithe, in addition to the one-third which de Ria had given them (in the hope, it would appear, of coming to terms with them), and to appoint a vicar with a sufficient stipend; all this to take effect on the death or resignation of the said Nicholas de Ria, but not before. The rector lingered on for a considerable time, about thirty years, and it was not till 1284 that Walter de Waterford was appointed as vicar by the prior and convent of Ellingham (between Ringwood and Fordingbridge), acting as proctors for Jumièges.

The vesting of the patronage in the abbey of Jumièges is interesting, because it was during that patronage that the church was rebuilt, and evident traces of French workmanship are seen in the ornamentation of the bases of the pillars on the south side of the nave of the church. Such ornamentation is very rare in England, but is not uncommon in Normandy. The church continued to be "attached" to Jumièges for about fifty years, when it was again transferred by a subsequent king to the prior and convent of Mottisfont, by whom, John de Somborne, was appointed in 1329. Mottisfont retained the patronage and tithes of the church till the middle of the sixteenth century, when that monastery, with others, was suppressed. Little or nothing is known of the numerous vicars who succeeded one another, age after age. None of them seem to have attained any particular distinction. No doubt they did their work according to their several abilities, preaching the gospel, and performing the offices of the church, ministering to the sick, and burying the dead, and so 'pursued the noiseless tenor of their way,' till at length their turn came, and they were carried into the church in the mournful procession which they had themselves so often led, and laid to their rest under its shadows or within its walls. Something of the same kind might, no doubt, be said of the inhabitants of the parish generally during the same long period. Nothing of great public importance seems ever to have happened in this part of the country; at any rate, nothing is mentioned in history. Even the great plague, which came as far as Southampton, stopped there, and seems not to have crossed to this side—indeed, many people from Southampton came and lived here for a time, to seek a refuge from it.

The church registers go back to the year 1537, so that for nearly four hundred years we know, at any rate, the name of practically every man, woman and child who has lived in the parish during that time—of every person who has been baptised, married, or buried in the parish. These registers are the oldest, and probably the most voluminous, and, I believe, the best preserved in Hampshire. Some idea of their contents may be formed when I say that the number of names they contain of persons buried in the old churchyard is about fifteen thousand; and some idea of what the old churchyard itself is, may be formed, when I remind you that these fifteen

thousand were buried there during the last four centuries only, and that it was the burying place for the parish for at least five hundred years before that—so that I should think it safe to say that, at a low estimate, 30,000 people have been buried in that acre of ground during the last nine hundred years. By the help of occasional and sometimes very curious remarks that the clerk has inserted in the registers, and by comparing one year with another, it is possible to gather some information about the parish. You might, for instance, easily make out a pedigree for three or four centuries of not a few families who still have representatives living in the parish. Among the entries of marriages there is not much that is interesting. But it would be an omission not to call attention to the marriages celebrated in the church during the period of the Commonwealth, when the vicar of the time was ejected, with others, from his office. Those who undertook this part of his duties were the Mayors of Southampton, Romsey, and Winchester, certain justices of the peace in the neighbourhood, and on one occasion, the most interesting of all, "Richard Ld. Cromwell, as he calls himself or is called." Of a different and much sadder character are many entries of burials, especially those of persons drowned or killed by accident, and poor wayfarers, or those children who died in the barn at Bury or Testwood, or in the cottage of some hospitable parishioner ; or again, in the evidence that is sometimes afforded of the dreadful havoc that was caused by an epidemic in days when there was but little medical skill available to arrest its course. Thus, there are many years when the death rate rises suddenly from twenty-five or thirty to well over one hundred ; and there is one particular case which I remember—about three hundred years ago—when one day eleven persons were buried here, and twenty-eight within not more than a week—these including five children of one family. Behind the bare recital of such entries as these—these "cold hic jacets of the dead,"—we see something of what is, for the most part, commonly concealed from us—those tragedies of human life, by which the artificial distinctions of society are swept away, and "the rich and the poor meet together." It is by such things as these that we are, I think, brought nearer to the people who lived here many generations ago, and that we seem to know more about them.

For the later centuries we have other and fuller sources of information in the churchwardens' accounts and those of the overseers of the poor, which date from the time of the Commonwealth, 1660—together with a very large number of other documents, indentures of apprenticeship, and bonds of illegitimacy, and others, notes of parish disputes and legal proceedings, contracts, bills, marriage licences, and so on. From such papers it is obvious that a very great deal of all that concerned the public life of the parish, during these last 250 years, can be learned. Then there are complete lists of all the ratepayers, the amount of rate they paid, and the properties on which they paid it; lists also of the persons who were appointed to the public offices of the parish, *i.e.* churchwardens and overseers. Minute details of all expenditure on the maintenance of the fabric and services of the church, on the support or relief of the poor, both those who lived in the parish and those who were merely sojourners or travellers passing through; on the repairs of the public roads; what steps were taken, when needed, to vindicate the rights of the parish as against other places; what children were apprenticed to what masters; the rate of wages that were paid; the cost of house rent, of materials, and of fuel, &c. Now, if one really knew all these things, it would be, I think, to know a good deal about the parish during the period to which I refer. It is, of course, quite impossible for me to enter into any details of these various things; but there are one or two general remarks that I may make. First: All the affairs of the church and parish seem to have been managed at the beginning of this period with the most scrupulous care. The services and appointments of the church were no doubt plain and, indeed, somewhat severe in character when compared with what they had been a hundred years before, when in place of the black Geneva gown of the minister and the pewter vessels of the holy communion, they had had silver chalices and crosses of copper and gilt, with vestments innumerable of brown and of blue and red silke, and of yellow velvet, and these "embroderyd" with swans and lions, and the rest; but all was evidently done, as it should be, decently and in order, and it is sad to notice the change for the worse that is to be seen a century later on. Secondly: There was little or no distinction in those days between the ecclesiastical and the

civil authorities. The overseers of the poor and the churchwardens were chosen at the same time, in the same place, by the same people, and the overseers at the end of the year became churchwardens almost as a matter of course. Practically all the work of the parish was transacted in the vestry of the church. It was there that they fixed all rates, there that they kept their money, and there that they distributed it to the poor, and there at the end of the year the parish officers gave an account of their stewardship to the people who had elected them. Again I think it may be said that the affairs of the parish were exceedingly well managed. People are apt to think that we have made great movement in these late days, and so we have; but much of it is possibly in the wrong direction; it is possible to move backwards as well as forwards. At any rate I am convinced, after a careful study of all these documents, that the public civil business of the parish was quite as efficiently managed two hundred and fifty years ago as it is now, and much more economically; and what is more, in a much truer spirit of democracy.

There was a list of persons owning property in the parish, and everybody, man or woman, could be, and was, compelled, when his or her turn came, to serve for a year as overseer of the poor. These overseers not only fixed and apportioned the rate, as overseers do now, but they collected it, and that not as now twice a year, but in small instalments for the greater convenience of the poor, sometimes as many as ten to twelve times a year. Not only so, but they also expended and distributed this money on parish works, and on the relief of the poor. And all these things—and this is the important point—they did 'for love' as we say—*i.e.* they received no payment of any kind for their work. They even kept their own accounts and records, and thus saved the expense of a clerk. Yet again, these accounts shew clearly enough that the money spent on the relief of the poor was spent in a judicious, as well as a considerate and kindly manner. I do not think it would have been possible for them to give relief to those who were undeserving, because at the end of the year they had to submit a detailed account of every item of expenditure to the parishioners who had provided the money, and if they had spent it improperly they would hear about it, and in all probability the vestry would refuse to "pass" their accounts;

there are, in fact, one or two, but only one or two, instances of this in these records. But if they spent the money judiciously, they spent it also, as I have said, in a considerate kindly manner. The aged and infirm poor had a regular monthly allowance. Regard was paid to the varying circumstances of different persons; thus, a poor widow would have her cottage thatched, or her little garden dug and planted for her, and the hedges trimmed; a supply of faggots to light her fire during the winter, or a stuff gown, or a pair of blankets given her. An old man would receive a smock now and again, and have his shoes mended or tipped, and so on; all this I think showing, and perhaps also helping to create, a personal interest in and an understanding of the wants of the poor, and a feeling of sympathy with them, which it must be difficult for the modern guardians to feel.

There is one thing more that I may perhaps mention, and with this I will conclude. The sight of Eling once—exactly two hundred years ago—suggested to a well-known poet the thought of heaven. Isaac Watts, as you probably know, was to begin with, a poor boy, living in Southampton. The vicar of Eling at the time, John Pinhorn, by some chance became acquainted with him, took a kindly interest in him, and helped to educate him, and no doubt often had him out to see him at the vicarage.

Now you know how exceedingly beautiful the sunsets over the forest sometimes are, especially in spring and autumn. It was, apparently, on such an evening that Isaac Watts looked, with feelings of tender and grateful recollection, across the water to the place where the good old man lived who had befriended him. He saw Eling bathed in all the sad splendour of the setting sun; and the picture suggested to him thoughts of the transitoriness of earthly things, and of that far off home which is our promised haven of rest. And then and there his feelings found utterances in the hymn known to all, "There is a land of pure delight," in which occur the lines:

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
Stand dressed in living green."