

RINGMER PARK

by

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The history of the three parks of Plashett, More and Ringmer cannot be commenced (as far as my researches go) at so early a period as that of the Broyle Chase, which was brought to a conclusion in the last number of *The Reliquary*.

The first of them to obtain explicit mention in ancient records is RINGMER PARK. To-day, having been totally disparked, it exists merely by name, being that part of the parish at its south-west corner bounded on three sides and part of the other by high-roads and comprising the properties known as Middleham and Park Farm. The first definite mention I have found of it is in the register of Archbishop Peckham (one of the two natives of Sussex who have occupied the chair of St. Augustine) in the year 1281. It is the subject of a letter addressed to his bailiff of South Malling, the translation of which is as follows :-

"Brother John by the Divine mercy a humble minister of the church of Canterbury and Primate of All England to his bailiff of South Malling health grace and benediction. If Simon le Bunde and Geoffrey de Chaunterell who broke into our park of Ringmer and took a certain deer there have performed or may be performing the penance which we enjoined upon them in our letters through our beloved son the Dean of South Malling, we command you that henceforth you in no wise molest them on that account or cause them in any way to be molested. Farewell. Given at Southmere 8th January in the second year of our consecration." (1281)

There are, in various documents, many implicit references to Ringmer Park, as well as to the other parks of the lordship of South Malling, in which the parish of Ringmer was included. Indeed, it may be taken as certain that though other parishes in the wide lordship possessed parks, the references in question mainly relate to those of Ringmer; South Malling itself, in all probability, being without one of these inclosures containing as it does, only 2,680 acres, of which a large proportion was either marsh-land or down. The earliest of these references is to be found in a manor roll of Henry III's reign (1270 - 71), when the lordship was in the king's hands. It is entitled "Expenses incurred in the manor of Sut Mallyne," and the various items, few in number, almost entirely refer to the parks and forests :-

"For making pales around the parks and enclosures around the
parrock, 16s.5d.

For digging ditches and making walls and closing gaps in
hedges, 6s.7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

For the wages of 5 foresters, 9s.7d.

For the wages of 3 parkers, 5s.1d.

For the wages of one guardian of the pale of the parks, 6s.

For the wages of three bailiffs, 6s.

For the wages of two collectors, 5s.

Then, again, when, as we have seen in the account of the Broyle, the Hundred Rolls of Edward I. record complaints of the high-handed proceedings of Richard de Clifford, the Seneschal, in selling oak trees in the manor to the value of £43 "et amplius," the phrase "tam in foresta quam in parcis" doubtless includes all the parks in Ringmer. Thus, too, the various commissions of Oyez and Terminer issued at different times to enquire into poaching affrays previously quoted in connection with the Broyle relate equally to the other parks. From the Inquisition of 1366 concerning the possessions and rights of the Canons of South Malling it appears that though they had the privilege of hunting over all the lands of the Archbishop and their own tenants in Stonhame - a place-name in very many documents interchangeable with Ringmer - the parks within those lands were excepted from those rights.

A chamberlain's account-roll for the manor in 1392 gives us the next reference to this park, wherein is entered the expenditure of two shillings and twopence on some "new hedging round the park of Ringmer." At a Hundred Court - for the Archbishop was lord of the Hundred as well as of the Manor - held in the reign of Henry V. it was presented that "branches of the trees in the lord's park of Ringmer are so dependent over the king's highway which passes alongside the aforesaid park that the said road is thereby rendered defective." In the next reign Ringmer Park is specially mentioned in the commission of Oyez and Terminer appointed to enquire into the extensive foray into no less than seven parks of the Archbishop made by certain malefactors "arrayed in manner of war."

About that time William Delve was parker of Ringmer, at a salary of £4.12s.8d. Some of the expenses incurred by him in his office are recorded in the manor rolls, such as "one Fetherlock for the great gate at the entrance to the park and two padlokk for the two other gates there." In the same roll he accounts for "28s.9d. received for agisting divers beasts within the park in the summer this year"; 12s. received for 10 stubb oaks and two 'erist' sold to Richard Janyver; from the oak wood in the heronry nothing; from pannage, nothing." Similar entries occur in a roll of the next year :- "28s. received for wood sold to the vicar of Ringmer" (Thomas Sampson); while he paid for two gate-

posts "at the east gate of the park with planche-naill hoks and henges". Among other items of expenditure was the tithe of agistment and pannage, amounting to the large sum of four shillings, paid to the vicar.

This roll is particularly interesting as giving the first mention of the heronry in Ringmer, no other record, tradition, or memory of it being extant elsewhere. Sussex does not appear to have contained many heronries, if we are to judge from mention of them in public records. Edward I. had one at Iden, which he specially reserved to the Crown when in 1297 he granted the manor to Robert Paulyn. At Hamsey, near Lewes, there was a heronry at about the same period. A "survey" of the manor of Halnaker, near Chichester, records the existence of one there in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Parham also possesses a heronry, a migration from an earlier one at Michelgrove, itself a migration from Penshurst, to which place the birds are said to have been brought by Robert Dudley in Elizabeth's reign. In mediæval days the heron was a bird of some repute, encouraged by landowners and protected by laws. By 19 Henry VII. it was enacted that no person without his own grounds should slay or take any heron, unless with hawking and the long-bow; while by 25 Henry VIII. the eggs, also, of the birds were protected by severe penalties. As late as the reign of James I. it was enacted that any person who killed a heron with gun or bow should be imprisoned for three months unless he paid to the churchwardens, for the use of the poor, 20s. for each heron killed. All these Acts, which it is said are still unrepealed, were doubtless directed to the protection of the heron as the chief quarry of the ancient sport of hawking, a pastime which was inveterately pursued by all classes of sportsmen. That very Boniface who, as we have seen in a previous paper, wrote to Cuthbert of Canterbury that "the servants of God should not keep hawks or hounds" seems himself to have had a reputation for his own particular strain of falcons; for in 760 King Ethelbert begged him for a brace. In Stuart times falcons were still in great esteem, for we read that Sir Thomas Monson gave £1,000 for a cast of hawks.

It would take up too much space to enter on a description of the niceties of the ritual of this mediæval pastime. Suffice it to say that every class of the community had its particular hawk or falcon assigned to it, from the eagle of an emperor to the kestrel of the knave. Birds of prey frequently figured in matters of law, rents being paid and agreements acknowledged by the render of a hawk of some kind or other. In this parish of Ringmer, for instance, in a Final concord concerning a piece of land in 1290, one party thereto gave the other a "spervarius sorus"; "spervarius" usually meaning a sparrow-hawk, but coupled with the adjective "sorus", red, may here mean a gos-hawk, to which the word would be applicable. A gos-hawk, too, was the hawk assigned to a yeoman,

but the sparrow-hawk was apportioned to a priest.

In 1441 the court-rolls give the name of Radulphus Carehert as parker of Ringmer; and one of his accounts records the spending of fourpence "for making a dam at the well". This well was probably the natural spring appearing at the bottom of a declivity in the park, which, gradually enlarging as it flows westwards, discharges its water into the Ouse near Wellingham. To-day a deep well has been sunk there and the water that Robert Carehert damned for his deer to drink will now be pumped up to a reservoir on the Downs to supply the village at large.

Like most other parks, Ringmer Park possessed a "lodge"; and three years later the same parker notes the expenditure of "12d. in reparation of the lodge there".

In 1456 another parker, Robert Stoneham by name, was in office, and one of his rolls has this reference to the heronry:- "In the matter of a certain profit arising from the heronsews there, nothing received this year because none have been captured this year". Two years afterwards he accounts for "12s. the price of 18 herons taken there and sold for the use of the lord's household, price 8d. a head".

Alexander Wode was the next parker whose name appears in the manor rolls, one of which records the receipt of "26s.8d. the price of two dozen herons taken there this year"; by which it appears that the value of herons had risen.

In a roll of nine years later date he accounts for "8s. received for 24 cart-loads of wood and fuel". This price (4d.) per load is half the sum for which tenants of the manor could obtain wood for fuel out of the Broyle one hundred years later, as we saw in the "Survey" made in Queen Elizabeth's reign, quoted in our last paper. From the same roll it appears that the value of herons fluctuated to a considerable degree, the price realised being now 6½d. a head; the matter being entered thus: "24s.8d. received, the price of three dozen herons taken there this year, as sold to various persons, beyond 5s.4d. for the expenses of capturing and conveying them to London". Among other expenses incurred that year the parker inrolls the cost of making 1,900 pales for the enclosure of the park. The herbage was farmed at 26s.8d.

In the first year of Henry VII's reign Thomas Brother was parker of Ringmer Park, who, in a roll of that date, records the payment of 26s.8d. for the farm of the herbage and 4s. from sale of wood to Robert Bradbury, "receiver of the Lord King", the temporalities of the archbishopric being then in the King's hands, owing to the death, on March 30th of that year, of the "Lord Cardinal Thomas Bourghchier, late Archbishop".

Another roll of the same parker affords an indication of the ultimate destination of some of the numerous cart-loads of timber sold out of the park; one of the items heading : "10s,8d. received for 30 cart-loads of timber sold to the burner at the lime-kiln"; from which low price we may conclude the lime-burner was a tenant of the manor, and the kiln probably situated within its precincts. There are several chalk quarries close to Ringmer Park; in one of them a large kiln has only gone out of use within this last generation. The farm of the herbage in the park had now risen to 30s.

Two years later the expenses of the parker included the wages of "a man working at the fencing of the park three days at 4d. per diem, 12d.". The same year as many as forty-eight cart-loads of wood were sold. On the margin of this roll is an inventory (the first I have come across out of a long series of rolls) of the deer within this park. It is written in English, there being no words in Latin to express the technical terms applicable to the varieties of deer in the precise nomenclature of the mediæval sportsman. This is the list of deer, viz., "3 bukks, 3 sowres, 1 sorell, 2 preckett deer, fawnes 30". Dame Juliana, whose Book of St. Albans has been already quoted, sufficiently explains these terms :-

"The discrevyng of a Bucke.

"An ye speke of the Bucke the fyrst yere he is
A fawne sowkyng on his dam say as I yow wis
The seconde yere a preket the iiii yere a sowrell
A sowre at the iiii yere the trowthe I you tell
The v yere call hym a Bucke of the fyrst hede
The vi yere call hym a Bucke and do as I yow rede."

It appears, therefore, that no large number of deer was maintained in this park, as might have been supposed from the fact that the herbage was farmed out. According to the aforesaid dame it was indeed a "littyll herd"; if we apply to it her rhymed rule -

"xx is a littyll herde though it be of hyndis
And xl is a mydyle herde to call hym be kyndis
And lxxx is a grete herde call ye hem so
Be it herte be it hynde buckke or ellis doo."

The year 1490 appears to have been a lean one to the lord as regards his parks, for the chamberlain records that he had received no money from either Ringmer, Plashett, or More Parks.

The first year of the sixteenth century is noticeable in our manor rolls for recording the name of a woman as chamberlain of Ringmer; for the roll of the year 1501 is headed "Ryngmere, Johanna Ashton vidua cameraria ibidem". Possibly this accounts for the use of the vernacular tongue in her roll for that year, in which she records the

"Repar'ions don at Ryngmer pk.

Item to the hegyng of ii furlongs a le furlong, xx^d."

Item palyng ii.quarters of a furlong.

Item delyv'd to the lyme kyll xlii lood, ix^s.

Fifteen years later another lady, Alice Morley (doubtless one of the Morleys of Glynde) was both "cameraria et bedella ibidem" (Ringmer), but she does not appear in any relation to the parks. In 1506, Thomas Dolve, deputy parker, records "nothing received from the sale of herons there this year because the keeper of the park suffered them to fly away". This is the last reference to the herons of Ringmer appearing in any of the manor rolls or other documents, and whether this flight which Thomas Dolve speaks of was their final desertion of the neighbourhood we know not. Not for more than three hundred years can I find any mention of these birds till in 1822 the Annals of Sporting record that "at Ringmer, on Thursday, the 13th of June, a heron was struck down by a hawk, and taken up alive by the person who witnessed the circumstance".

Returning to the manor rolls, we find that Thomas:Brother was still parker, and his accounts include such items as "paling xxx rod against the king's highway"; the sums received from the sale of wood, the farm of the herbage, and the pannage of hogs.

In the roll for the year 1506 there is a list of all the names of those to whom wood was sold, and also an inventory of the deer in the park. This is headed -

"The vewe off the dere in Ryngm' pke.

Item in bukks viii.

In sores iii.

In sorells iiii.

In Rascall lx (lean, worthless deer).

In moren fawns viii.

In warrens (warrants) for buks to tholstholde (the household) iii bukks.

Item my lorde p'or i bukke.

In moren doys (does) ii "

In moren sorell i " "

It will be seen that the herd of deer had considerably increased in number since the former survey, but not in quality, for the lean deer in what was now a

"grete herde" amounted to more than the number required to make a "mydyle herde". The warrants referred to were issued under the hand of Archbishop Warham and were in favour of, inter alios, Master John Pires, his steward, and "or welbeloved broder the prior of Lewes," doubtless "my lorde p'or" mentioned in the above "vewe". As they are couched in similar terms to the warrant quoted at large in the history of the Broyle, I have not thought it needful to give any specimens here in extenso.

After this point in its records, the period, that is to say, of the Reformation, the history of Ringmer Park become somewhat obscure, so many and frequent were the changes which took place in the ownership and tenancy of Ringmer lands, the parks included, after the great upheaval. In 30th Henry VIII. Cranmer leased the manor of Stoneham - practically synonymous with Ringmer, and particularly with the park to which it is contiguous - to Henry Polsted, gent. Early in Elizabeth's reign it was in the possession of the Cornefordes, a yeoman family, from which it passed in 23rd Elizabeth to Thomas, first Lord Buckhurst. It was then described as containing "a dwelling house, a dove-cote, two barns, two gardens, 80 acres of land (arable, no doubt), 20 acres of meadow, 70 pasture, & 10 wood.". From this we may judge that it had already been dis-parked, although retaining, as it does to-day, the name of a park. Succeeding owners were John Evesfield, Richard Gunn, and the Shadwell family, who called it a manor, although never pretending, so far as I can ascertain, to hold any courts. The mansion of this spurious manor is known as Middleham. The largest house in the parish, it is now altered from its ancient aspect, with its three gables and fine mullioned windows, to a commonplace, early Victorian, pseudo-classic appearance (2).

References

- (1) Taken from Dr.Legge's article entitled "The Parks of Ringmer in Sussex" published in the October 1902 issue of The Reliquary & Illustrated Archaeologist, pp.217-225.
- (2) Here Dr.Legge makes an uncharacteristic error. Ringmer Park did indeed pass to Lord Buckhurst, but its subsequent history is as described in the following article by Monica Maloney :
The Eversfield, Gunns and Shadwells were the owners of the adjoining but quite distinct Manor of Middleham. Recently a court book of this sub-manor, recording courts dating back to the 16th century and reciting a charter from the 13th, has come to light in the East Sussex Record Office.