

ABEFELD AND ACKHAMSTEAD

TWO LOST PLACES

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IN the Index to the Place-name Society's volume on Buckinghamshire, the first two entries are *Abfield* and *Ackhampstead*, both printed in italics to indicate that the names are obsolete. Thanks to the references in that volume to early forms of these names, it has been possible to identify their position and trace much of their history. The industrious collection of these references deserves the deepest admiration and thankfulness, yet there is a strange omission. No reference is given to the Hundred Rolls, possibly because they there occur under Oxfordshire, to which county both places belonged until modern times.

The original six-inch Ordnance Survey, very painstaking in the collection of obsolete local detail, shows the Oxfordshire parish of Lewknor (in the hundred of the same name) as consisting of a main portion (about 3,431 acres) and three detached parts (see map, p. 167). Of the latter, no. 1 is a very small area, two miles to the west, wedged between the parishes of Easington and Warpsgrove, in a belt of land along the foot of the Chiltern escarpment abounding in small and intermixed detached parts: it is not shown on the map and has no Buckinghamshire interest.

No. 2, for reasons stated later, I identify as Abefeld. It is an area of about 832 acres, at the S.E. end of Stokenchurch parish, in which it is now merged. It became a part of Bucks. only when Stokenchurch was transferred from Oxon. in 1896.

No. 3 is Ackhamstead, which has immemorially been an enclave of Oxon. in Bucks. Its area is about 456 acres.

Lewknor appears in Domesday Book as belonging to the Abbey of Abingdon and assessed at 17 hides. The History of the Abbey¹ gives a confused account of its repeated acquisition and loss before the Conquest, ending with its final grant by the Confessor and Queen Eadgitha in 1052. In the course of this confused account we find a reference to Luuechenore 'cum membris suis (id est Hachamstede et cæteris)'.

Ackhamstead is not mentioned in Domesday Book, though I was strongly tempted to identify it with the 'Acham' there recorded; but that place has no connexion with Abingdon, and has been identified alike by Mowat,² Alexander,³ and Stenton,⁴ with Ake of the Hundred Rolls, the modern Noke. Ackhamstead is probably included in the 17 hides held by the Abbey in Lewknor.

In or about 1112, Henry I being overseas, Queen Matilda, at a Council at Winchester attended by the bishops of Sarum, Lincoln, and London and many of the

¹ *Hist. Mon. Abingdon*, I, 459-61.

² J. L. G. Mowat, *Notes on Oxfordshire Domesday* (1892).

³ H. Alexander, *Place-names of Oxfordshire* (1912).

⁴ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, I, 425.

King's barons, decided that the Abbey of Abingdon, in respect of the manor of Lewknor, owed no service to the hundred of Pyrton, but only to that of Lewknor, in which the Abbot still held the 17 hides of 1086.⁵

Between 1154 and 1158 we read that a certain clerk of Lewknor called Ansgerus made a good bargain with Abbot Ingulf, against the wish and interest of the monastery. He obtained, as much by persuasion as by payment—*tam prece quam pretio*—



a member of Lewknor called Hacamsteda, *in feudo et hereditate*, for 40s., which had hitherto been rendering 50s.⁶

The Hundred Rolls of 1278 confirm that Queen Matilda gave the manor of Lewknor with its appurtenances to the Abbey in alms, owing suit to the hundred of Lewknor, and that the Abbot holds the same manor in chief of the King. Under 'Liberi Tenentes' the first item is this:

'ACHAMSTEDE. Thomas de Lega, knight, holds two carucates of land in the parish of Lewknor in one tenure, which is called *Achamstede* and *Chissebech* for 40s. annual rent to the said Abbot. . . .

'Helyas de Wytefeld holds half a hide of land for 18s. 4d. rent yearly to the Kitchener of Abingdon' [and various agricultural services].

⁵ *Hist. Mon. Abingdon*, II, 115-16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 209.

Helyas must have been a descendant of Robert de Witefeld, judge and administrator under Henry II,⁷ who in turn was descended from Peter [of Wheatfield, Oxon.], whom we shall see as holding Abefeld in 1086.⁸

The reference to the abbey kitchener reminds us that the rents of Lewknor seem always to have been of the nature of food-rents. Queen Eadgitha's original gift is said to have arisen from her sorrow at the undernourishment of the younger monks.⁹

Chissebech is obviously the modern Chisbridge (the 'r' is a nineteenth-century intrusion), which lies just to the west of Ackhamstead.

According to the Rev. H. E. Salter, there is mention in 1242 of a chapel in the deanery of Aston [Rowant] 'at Ackhampstead or Chyssebech'.¹⁰

In spite of these couplings of Chissebech with Ackhamstead, I find no evidence that the former was ever other than a Buckinghamshire hamlet in the parish of Hambleden. In 1175-6, Reginald of Chissebech appears on a list of Bucks. men in debt to the King *pro foresta*,¹¹ and in 1227-8 he (or his son of the same name) was one of a jury dealing with a dispute about land in Wycombe.¹²

The next information we have about Ackhamstead is from the Calendar of Patent Rolls.¹³ Under date 24th April, 1429, at Westminster, an *Inspeximus* of a deed relating to lands in Warwick, Oxon., and Berks. includes as one item 'reversion of the manor of Akhampstede, co. Oxford, held by Thomas Chaucer, esquire, for life'. The index to the Calendar corrects 'co. Oxford' with the note '*rectius*, co. Buckingham'; but this is wrong. Instead of *rectius* we should read *postea*.

This Thomas Chaucer was the elder son of the poet Geoffrey Chaucer. He was M.P. for Oxfordshire 1400-31 and Speaker of the Commons 1407-11. By marriage with a co-heiress he had become Lord of the Manor of Ewelme, ten miles west of Ackhamstead, so it is not strange that he should have acquired a life-interest in the latter small estate. There are many references to him in the *Boarstall Cartulary*, the latest giving him as witness to a deed on 7th September, 1494,¹⁴ though the *Dictionary of National Biography* (from which the above details are taken) gives the date of his death as 14th March, 1494.

At the present day Ackhamstead has so completely lost its identity that the revised parish boundary between Hambleden and Great Marlow cuts across it. Although described in the Place-name Society's volume as a lost parish, it is more correctly a lost hamlet or chapelry. The ruins of the chapel are still in much the same condition as in 1912, when reported on by the Historical Monuments Commission.¹⁵ The plan is a simple rectangle. The walls, of rough flint, are only 2 or 3 feet high and largely buried in mould. The site is fenced in, and forms a thicket of cherry, holly, and other trees, with much bramble and ivy. Two shaped blocks of what appears to be Aylesbury limestone represent the remains of the doorway, and others have been used as steps up from the adjacent farm-lane.¹⁶ A furlong southwards along the lane

⁷ *Boarstall Cartulary*, pp. 306-7.

⁸ *Infra*, p. 169; *V.C.H. Oxon.*, I, 383.

⁹ *Hist. Mon. Abingdon*, I, 459-61.

¹⁰ *V.C.H. Oxon.*, II, 58-9, referring to Linc. Epis. Reg. Grosteste Inst.

¹¹ Pipe-Roll Society, XXV, 23.

¹² Eyre Rolls (Assize Rolls) Bucks.; Bracton's *Note-book* (ed. Maitland), II, 237.

¹³ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1422-9, p. 535.

¹⁴ p. 49.

¹⁵ *Buckinghamshire*, I, 168.

¹⁶ It must not be confused with another ancient chapel, nearly two miles to the south-east, incorporated in Widmer Farmhouse.

The following Erratum appeared in Records 15 part 4 (1950):

Vol. XV, part 3, page 168, lines 27 and 29, *for* '1494' *read* '1434'.

Note: According to Leland's *Itinerary*, vol. II, p. 6, quoting the epitaph on Thomas Chaucer's tomb, the date of his death was 18th November, 1434. A recent inspection of the tomb failed to find the epitaph.

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is the most striking example of a swallow-hole in the county. This was mentioned by Sheahan in 1862 as 'Guvin's Pit'. At that time, he wrote, 'for civil purposes Ackhamstead is still connected with Lewknor, but in ecclesiastical matters it is attached to Hambleden'.¹⁷

Ackhamstead was finally added to Great Marlow parish by L.G.B. order in 1885.¹⁸

Abefeld is even more completely 'lost' than Ackhamstead. While the latter is marked on local maps as late as 1842, none of the eighteenth-century maps of Oxfordshire that I have been able to inspect mark Abefeld. This may be because it was only a hamlet, not a chapelry.

It can, however, be identified, though it is not named, in Domesday Book. It is the one hide in 'Levecanole' which Peter [of Wheatfield] held of Robert de Oilgi [d'Oilly]. 'There is land for one plough, which is there with 2 serfs; and 2 villeins have half a plough [i.e. 4 oxen]. There are 6 acres of meadow. It was and is worth 20s.' Much of the area must have been woodland.

The identification comes from the Abingdon records.¹⁹ Abbot Faritius (1099–1115) claimed that he had recovered, by charter of Henry I (c. 1106), possessions lost in the time of the Danes. Among these was 'the land which Algar holds in Abbefeld, which Nigel de Oilly returned to the same church to hold in demesne'. Elsewhere²⁰ he describes it as 'the land of Ebbefeld, which is of the fee of Droco [Drogo] de Andely, returning 60s. to the kitchener and for tithe 10s.'.

Drogo is mentioned in Domesday Book as holding land of Robert d'Oilly at several places in Oxfordshire. The reference to the kitchener links Abefeld, like Ackhamstead, to Lewknor.

In the Feet of Fines for 1196,²¹ under date 21st January, an item of 8s. rent in Abbefeld comes between two items concerning Kingshill and Peterlee, and one concerning Wycombe. This is the only suggestion that Abbefeld might have been in Bucks.

All through the thirteenth century the history of Abefeld is bound up with the family de Scaccario and its relations, not always friendly, with a neighbouring family. Both these families had a rule of alternating Christian names in successive generations. Three generations of de Scaccario—Laurence, Roger and Laurence—held the post of grand usher of the King's exchequer, and held land in and near Abefeld by serjeanty of that office, forming half a knight's fee of the Honour of Wallingford. Their troublesome neighbours were successively Alan fitz Ronald, Ruwald fitz Alan and Sir Alan fitz Reywald (or Roald). The editor of the *Boarstall Cartulary*, Rev. H. E. Salter, referring to this half knight's fee at a later date, suggests that Abefeld was cut out of Aston Rowant about 1170 and given to the grand usher²²; but some of the documents noted below show that the Abbot of Abingdon had manorial rights in Abefeld. The association of the Scaccario family with this neighbourhood is still shown by the name Chequers Farm (see map).

In 1206, Easter term (7–8 John), Alan fitz Ronald was summoned to the King's

¹⁷ J. J. Sheahan, *History and Topography of Buckinghamshire*, pp. 899–900.

¹⁸ *V.C.H. Bucks.*, III, 65.

¹⁹ *Hist. Mon. Abingdon*, II, 110.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, app. II, 288.

²¹ Pipe-Roll Society, XVII, 88. This item does not appear in the *Bucks. Feet of Fines*, edited by W. M. Hughes.

²² *Boarstall Cartulary* (1930), pp. 296, 304.

court for burning the Abbot of Eynsham's pasture in Abefeld, and later in the same term for disseising Laurence of his common pasture in the same vill. Laurence had his seisin restored, and Alan was 'in mercy': fine 4 shillings.²³

About a third of a century later (1239-40) the same trouble recurred. Roger de Scaccario complained that Ruwald fitz Alan had disseised him of his common pasture in Estwode which pertained to his free tenement in Abefeld.²⁴ Ruwald denied that there had ever been common pasture, but the jury testified that both parties had inter-commoned both in the wood (Eustowode) and in the land of both, although they were ~~not of the same fee or barony~~. Judgment was given for Roger, and Ruwald was at mercy.

All this fits in perfectly with the identification of Abefeld on the map. East Wood still exists, between Stokenchurch and 'Lewknor det. no. 2', just where common of pasture was probable.

On Roger's death, thirty years later, we learn that he held half a knight's fee in Lewknor and Stokenchurch parishes 'by serjeanty of being grand usher of the King's exchequer, usher of Jewry, and crier before the justices of the King's bench and the rest of the justices of eyre, for all pleas throughout the realm of England'. In Estone [Aston Rowant] he had 'one hide of land, held of Sir Alan son of Reyward [evidently the son of his old opponent] rendering 1 lb. cummin, 1 lb. pepper and 12d. yearly'; and in Lewknor $\frac{1}{2}$ hide land held of the Abbot of Abingdon, rendering 20s. yearly'.²⁵

He was succeeded by his son Laurence, then over 30, who only enjoyed his grand ushership for about fourteen years. His duties and emoluments are given in greater detail.²⁶ He had to find two serjeant ushers at the King's exchequer, four serjeant criers in the bench, one serjeant at the exchequer for the Jews, and two serjeant criers and ushers for each eyre; to cause exchequer summonses and writs to be carried throughout England; and to provide all the green wax for seals.

His Oxfordshire property is given as half a knight's fee in Little Abbefeld (messuages, arable and woodland), and a capital messuage in Great Abbefeld, held as to one-third of the Abbot, and as to two-thirds of Sir Alan son of Roald (each with arable, and the latter with meadow and wood). Cummin rent is also mentioned, and there was a little property in Hambleton, held of the Earl of Cornwall.

At Laurence's death in 1284, his mother (or his father's widow) Laura or Lorra was still alive, occupying a dower-house at Abbefeld. His son Simon was under 15, and the King had taken charge of the estate. The Abbot laid a complaint that the dower was held of him and not of the King, who was taking the rent of it.²⁷

What came of this complaint we do not learn.

Six years earlier (1278) the Hundred Rolls record that Laurence held land called Abbefeld for a rent of 18d. to the Abbot and 20s. to the Kitchener of Abingdon²⁸; also of Alan fitz Roald, lord of Aston [Rowant], a certain tenure called 'Goldcroft' and another called 'Wyggodesland', and his mansion at Abefeld with garden, for 1 lb. pepper and 1 lb. cummin.²⁹ Under Stokenchurch it is stated that William de Gardino and William de Murefeld hold a virgate for 6s. 1d. and various services, including care of the lord's swine in Estwode in time of pannage.³⁰

²³ *Curia Regis Rolls*, IV, 103, 132.

²⁴ Bracton's *Note-book*, ed. F. W. Maitland, III, 285-6.

²⁵ *Inq. post mortem*, I, 248, no. 763, 2nd April, 55 Hen. III.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 317, no. 528, 1st May, 12 Edw. I.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 348, no. 586, 10th May, 13 Edw. I.

²⁸ *Rot. Hund.*, II, 782.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 786.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 785.

In 1300, the *Boarstall Cartulary*²¹ lists among the knights' fees of the Honour of Wallingford, the same half-fee in Abbefeld held by Laurence's heirs, valued at 6s. 8d.

Simon died in 1291, soon after coming of age, and the Inquest, held on Friday, the eve of the Purification, 20 Edw. I [1st Feb., 1291-2], gives this account of his estate:²²

'Abbefeld. A capital messuage etc., 6 acres land by the lesser hundred, 2a. meadow, 20a. assarted wood, a wood of 8a. where there is no profit but pasture which is common, 110s. rents, works and customs, and 12d. pleas etc., held part of the abbot of Abindon by service of 12s. 6d., part of the earl of Cornwall by service of half a knight's fee, and part of Alan son of Roald rendering 6s. and 1 lb. pepper and 1 lb. cummin, and to a nun of Markyate 7s. yearly'.

In all these documents Abbefeld is always taken as in Oxfordshire.

The estate now passed to Simon's three married sisters, 'unless Petronilla, late his wife, is pregnant', which was apparently not the case. These were Maud Dag-gewrth, aged 40; Laura Painforer or Payforer, aged 28; and Beatrice Peverel, aged 24. With this division of the estate, and the agricultural revolutions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries approaching, it is not surprising that Abefeld should have lost its identity.

We cannot leave this complicated part of the Bucks.-Oxon. boundary without a reference to the parish of Ibstone, which is partly in one county and partly in the other. This curious state of things already existed in 1086, and doubtless long before. Although Hervey, the King's legate or messenger, held the whole 4 hides of Ibstone, it was assessed as three separate holdings, each with its own spelling. The principal portion was that in Bucks., Hibestanes, 2 hides valued at 4l. (T.R.E. 100s.), with 4 ploughs and room for another, 7 villeins, 4 serfs, and a smith. Wood for 100 swine. Tovi, a thegn of King Edward, held this manor and could sell it.

Ebestan, in Oxon., was worth only 10s. Land for one plough, assessed at one hide. Ulf had held it.

Ypestan, also in Oxon., was worth 20s. in both 1066 and 1086. Land for one plough, assessed at one hide. There was one villein and three acres of meadow. We are not told the name of its pre-Conquest holder, but it appears to have been geld-free (*non geldat*).

We can hardly guess at the series of events which may have led to this peculiar state of things.

²¹ *Charter* 173, pp. 296, 304.

²² *Inq. post mortem*, II, 501, no. 820.