

# THE ABBOT OF MISSENDEN'S ESTATES IN CHALFONT ST. PETER

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## I. THE GRANTS TO THE ABBEY OF MISSENDEN

THE rolls of "The Court of the Lord Abbot of Missenden held at Chalfont" begin in 1308 and continue, though with some breaks, down to the Dissolution of the Abbey in 1538.<sup>1</sup> For the last two centuries of its existence the history of the manor is adequately covered by these records, but how it came into being, what it first consisted of and how it was expanded and consolidated can only be inferred from documents which are incomplete and from records of suits in the King's Courts. The Missenden Cartulary in the Harleian Collection<sup>2</sup> in the British Museum once contained nearly a hundred charters relating to Chalfont, but they were long ago cut out of it, leaving only the headings made by the compiler for his index. A second Cartulary was still in existence in the eighteenth century, and from it Browne Willis caused a brief calendar to be made which is in the Bodleian Library among his papers. Entries in Bracton's Notebook and an Assize Roll of 1232 are particularly valuable, since they record lawsuits in which the inhabitants of Chalfont St. Peter gave evidence of the parts they played in the disputes between their lords and showed how their lives were affected by them.

At the end of the twelfth century, on the eve of the grants to the Abbey, most of Chalfont St. Peter had long been settled. In fact, some inhabited sites may date back to Roman times; the name Chalfont is thought to mean Ceadele's funtan or spring and to be of Romano-Celtic origin. There had once been one Chalfont, but Domesday Book shows that by 1066 the vill had split up, certainly into two, probably into three parts. Half a hide was lacking to make up ten hides and had possibly been taken by a freeman into Iver, for Oak End, which will often be referred to later, consisted of a half mile of the valley of the Misbourne on the southern boundary of Chalfont. The remaining nine and a half hides were equally shared by the two manors which became the parishes of Chalfont St. Peter and Chalfont St. Giles. The irregular boundary between them shows by its bights and islands that outlying settlements were already in existence when it was laid down.

In Domesday Book each of these manors was assessed in respect of four

<sup>1</sup> The court rolls and other manorial records of Chalfont St. Peter belong to the Rev. Dr. P. C. Moore of Pershore Vicarage, Worcester, and are deposited on loan with the B.A.S. at Aylesbury.

<sup>2</sup> *Missenden Cartulary*, ed. J. G. Jenkins (Bucks Record Society). For the lost Chalfont Charters, see Vol. II, p. 174, Appendix A.

and three-quarter hides and there were in each fifteen ploughs at work. A similar state of affairs is found in all the villages in the valleys of the Chiltern rivers of Misbourne, Wye and Chess. It can be inferred that the geld assessments had been outstripped by new colonisation and the ploughing up of woodland and heath. The old common fields of Chalfont St. Peter lay on either side of Gold Hill to the north-west and south-west of the village; on the east side of the river assarts were made and a series of hamlets arose, probably before 1086. It is impossible to date the origin of the many settlements which together with part of the village became the Abbot's manor of Chalfont St. Peter, but the map shows that many of them were remote, and suggests, as does their subsequent history, that they belonged to separate agricultural systems. The pioneers who founded them may have received privileges for the lands which they brought under cultivation from the lords of Chalfont. In any case these isolated settlements acquired in the course of time their own rights and customs. On the top of the hills to the east ran Shire Lane, the county boundary, a highway leading to Uxbridge and London and along it there was a line of estates and hamlets. Starting in the north there was the Feld, then the important estate of Newland with the homestead of Gorelands adjacent to it and to the south of Newland and extending into Oak End, where Chalfont Common and Hornhill are shown on modern maps. hamlets, common fields and small estates, of which only Dencfield and Mattocks can be traced in recent times. On the high ground to the south-west, the parish was bounded by another highway, the present Oxford Road, shown on the fourteenth-century Gough Map as one of the principal roads from London to the west. Many of the estates which lay in this part of the parish still bear their old names; Pitlands, Birchlands, Stampwells, Mumfords, Layters and Marsham are still in existence, while another called Slaperesden has disappeared. Along the river valley too there were small settlements; Hurnwick and Wattlewick to the north of the village and Oak End with its mill over the border to the south. Chalfont St. Peter was not centred on the village with its common fields; it was a parish of great farms and hamlets united only by being under one lord.

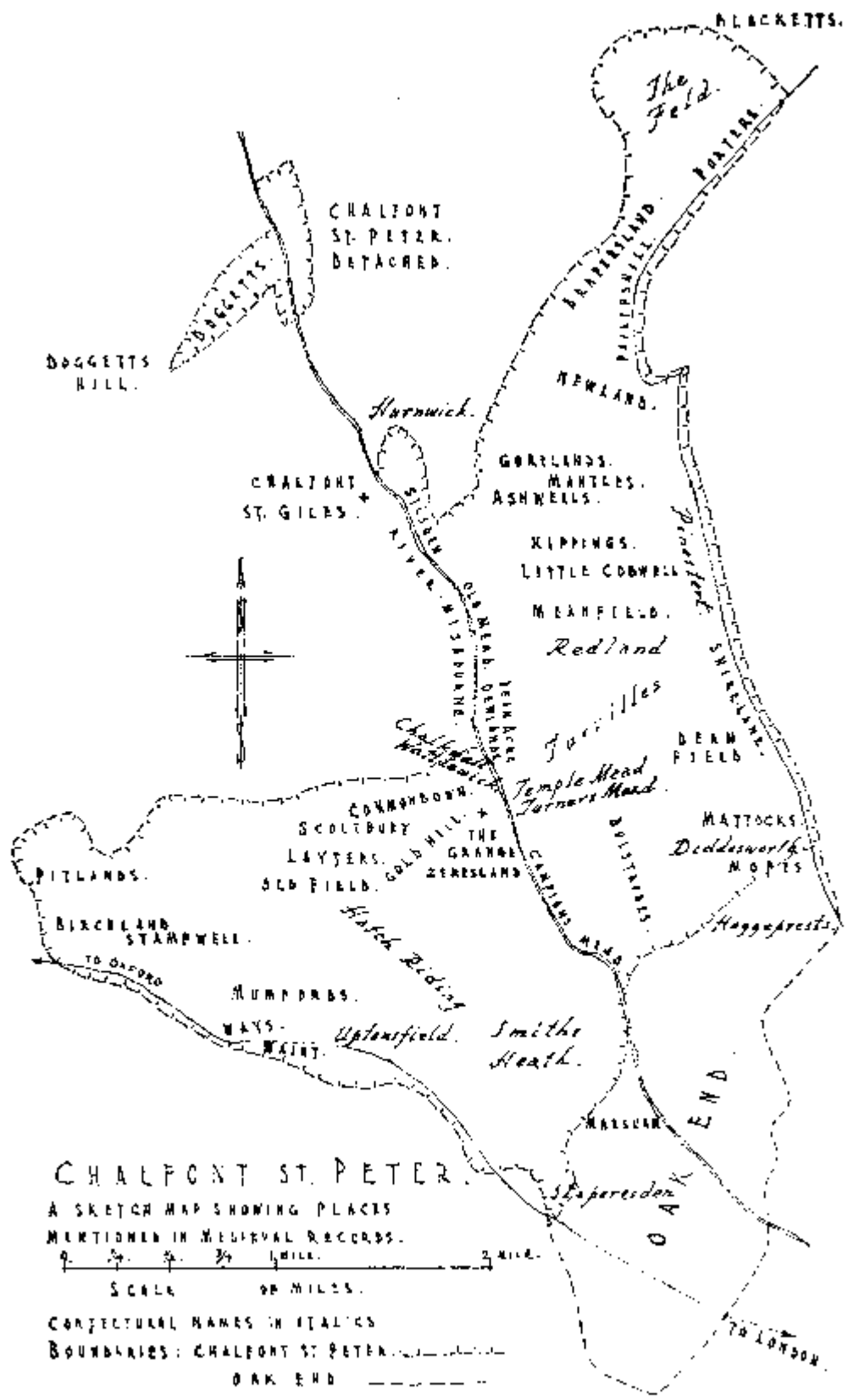
The manor was in 1086 part of an honour based on Weston Turville which Roger, son of Anketil, held of the Bishop of Bayeux. His daughter brought the honour in marriage to Geoffrey de Turville I and out of it he and his successors owed to the Barony of Leicester the service of nine and a quarter knights.<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey de Turville II appears about the end of Henry II's reign to have given the church of St. Peter in Chalfont to his son, Geoffrey, who was a clerk and the vill to Richard, his son, but not his heir, who was a knight.<sup>4</sup> Some years later Richard bought the church from his brother and gave it to the Abbey.<sup>5</sup> The Abbey of Missenden had been founded eight miles up the valley in 1133. It quickly attracted gifts of churches and lands in the neighbourhood from local magnates and their tenants, and farther afield from knights of the Giffard barony. By the end of the twelfth century, it had become a house of importance, well endowed and prosperous.

About 1208 it began to build up a fee in Chalfont St. Peter. About that

<sup>3</sup> *Curia Regis Rolls*, VI, 285.

<sup>4</sup> *Feet of Fines* (Pipe Roll Society, Vol. 17), p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> *M.C.*, Vol. 1, No. 23.



time Richard de Turville granted to Robert de Braybroc, sheriff of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire:

"all the land which Thomas le Latier held in Chalfont with meadow and with all other appurtenances and all the land with all other appurtenances which Robert Kippig held in Chalfont with Robert himself and all his issue and all the land with its appurtenances of the assarts of Chalfont which is of Richard's fee".<sup>6</sup>

Soon afterwards Robert granted the same land to the Abbey.<sup>7</sup> The estate was considerable; it evidently included Newland, the largest and probably the most ancient of the Chalfont assarts, administered always by the Abbey as a separate manor; a villain farm (though Robert de Braybroc may have freed its tenant) which can be identified with Skippings, and some if not all of the assart farms which lay on the Oxford Road. The general clause which ends the grant by Richard to Robert must be presumed to have conveyed any other lands outside the village which Richard had in hand at that time.

During the next twenty years the Abbey received a series of grants which seem to have given it the lordship over nearly all the lands on the east side of the river. Many of these grants were made by free tenants of Richard de Turville. Richard, son of Osbert, a man of good social position with land in many parts of the county, granted the whole of the fee which his father had acquired there.<sup>8</sup> Smaller men granted their holdings, taking them back at rent. A long series of grants was also made by Richard de Turville, grants of land, of rents, of services and of villeins with their issue. Most of these grants concerned assart lands, but some of the villein holdings lay in the common fields of the manor. Before his death, which occurred in or about the year 1228, Richard went to live in the Abbey and some of the grants may have been for a corrody. His last gift gave rise to a suit in the King's Court; its circumstances were of such interest to Bracton as an instance of livery of seisin that he caused it to be transcribed into his Notebook.<sup>9</sup> The vivid picture it gives makes it worth quoting:

"The jurors say that Ranulf (Brito) and Arnold (de Turville) unjustly and without a judgement disseised the Abbot of the field called la Denelande. As to the seven villeins and their services they say that after Richard de Turville and Arnold his son had made several exchanges, Richard ended by having those villeins in hand and their services. He placed himself in Missenden Abbey and took up his abode there, and gave to the Abbot the villeins with their tenements and services, and the land of Denelande and the services of the free tenants. So Richard sent his steward, one Henry de Stoke, to his men with letters patent, and all the villeins were there; and he put the Abbot in seisin of the villeins and the Abbot forthwith took the homage of them all, demanding rent from them. But they answered him that no rent was due to him before the Feast of St. Michael, whereupon some pennies were lent to them and some of them paid a penny to the Abbot for admission and all paid something. After that time they all owed ploughing services and each did his ploughing according to the number of oxen he had.

<sup>6</sup> *Rot. Chart.* 180.

<sup>7</sup> *M.C.*, Vol. II, App. Ai.

<sup>8</sup> *M.C.*, Vol. II, App. A., pp. 175-6.

<sup>9</sup> *Bracton's Notebook*, ed. Maitland, No. 524. (Assize "Ad Convincerdum".)

"And afterwards Henry, the steward, proclaimed in the presence of everyone that he put the Abbot in seisin of the services of Hugh le Champiun, but the jurors could never find out whether Hugh afterwards did fealty or service for his tene-ment.

"As to Philip de Boterfelds's fee the jury know that the Abbot was seised by the gift of Philip himself, saving to Arnold ten shillings.

"As to the fee and service of Richard de Boterfeld . . . they do not know because they are too far away.

"Asked if Henry had with him the charter of Richard de Turville as well as his letters patent they say they are not quite sure, but some of them believe he produced the charter and caused it to be read out." Easter, 1231.

The swift action which followed the gift, the holding of a special manorial court, the personal attendance of the Abbot and the care that was taken to proceed according to the strictest form may only point to anxiety, lest the heir should dispute his dying father's gift. It is more likely, however, that the Abbot foresaw another danger.

Either just before or just after the death of Richard de Turville, the manor of Chalfont St. Peter was acquired by one of the principal officers of the King's household, Ranulf Brito, the Treasurer of the Wardrobe, who thereupon did homage to the overlord for a fee of two knights.<sup>10</sup> In March, 1229, he obtained from Arnold de Turville, Richard's son and heir, two carucates of land in return for the discharge of Arnold's debts in Jewry.<sup>11</sup> At the same time he obtained from the king the privilege of holding a two-day annual fair on the Vigil and Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul and a weekly market on Wednesdays.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps he had plans for developing Chalfont St. Peter into a market town and private borough as the Earl of Essex had lately developed Amersham. He also set to work with a high hand to bring the whole vill under his immediate lordship. Ralf de Montfort later described how Ranulf's servant came to Mumfords, entered his chamber, took his corn away to Ranulf's hall, drove off his beasts and finally imprisoned him, the Abbot of Missenden's free man, in the king's gaol for three days.<sup>13</sup>

Hugh le dyntere, met with elsewhere as Hugh le Champion, was imprisoned for a night and most of the following day and only rescued by his neighbours after great trouble. Geoffrey le Stamp had to suffer the loss of his winter fuel from Stampwells. Richard de Boterfeld was induced to do homage and service to Ranulf.<sup>14</sup> Pressure put upon the villeins in Denefeld gave rise to the suit already referred to.

The vigour of the attack may have been relaxed during the absence of Ranulf in Gascony; in September, 1231, he was disgraced and banished.<sup>15</sup> The Abbot evidently counter-attacked; Ralf de Montfort, Hugh le Champion and Geoffrey de Stamp complained in the King's Court of the wrongs they had suffered and it is clear that the Abbey retained whatever had been granted to it

<sup>10</sup> *Bracton's Notebook*, No. 328.

<sup>11</sup> *Charter Rolls*, Vol. I, 93. *Cal. C.R. 1227-31*, p. 162 (21st March, 1229).

<sup>12</sup> *Cal. C.R. 1227-31*, p. 169 (23rd April, 1229).

<sup>13</sup> Assize Roll, No. 62. *ap. Procedure without Writ*. Selden Society, Vol. 60, No. 40.

<sup>14</sup> *Feet of Fines (Bucks Record Society, Vol. IV)*, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Cal. C.R. 1227-31*, p. 599 (12th September, 1231).

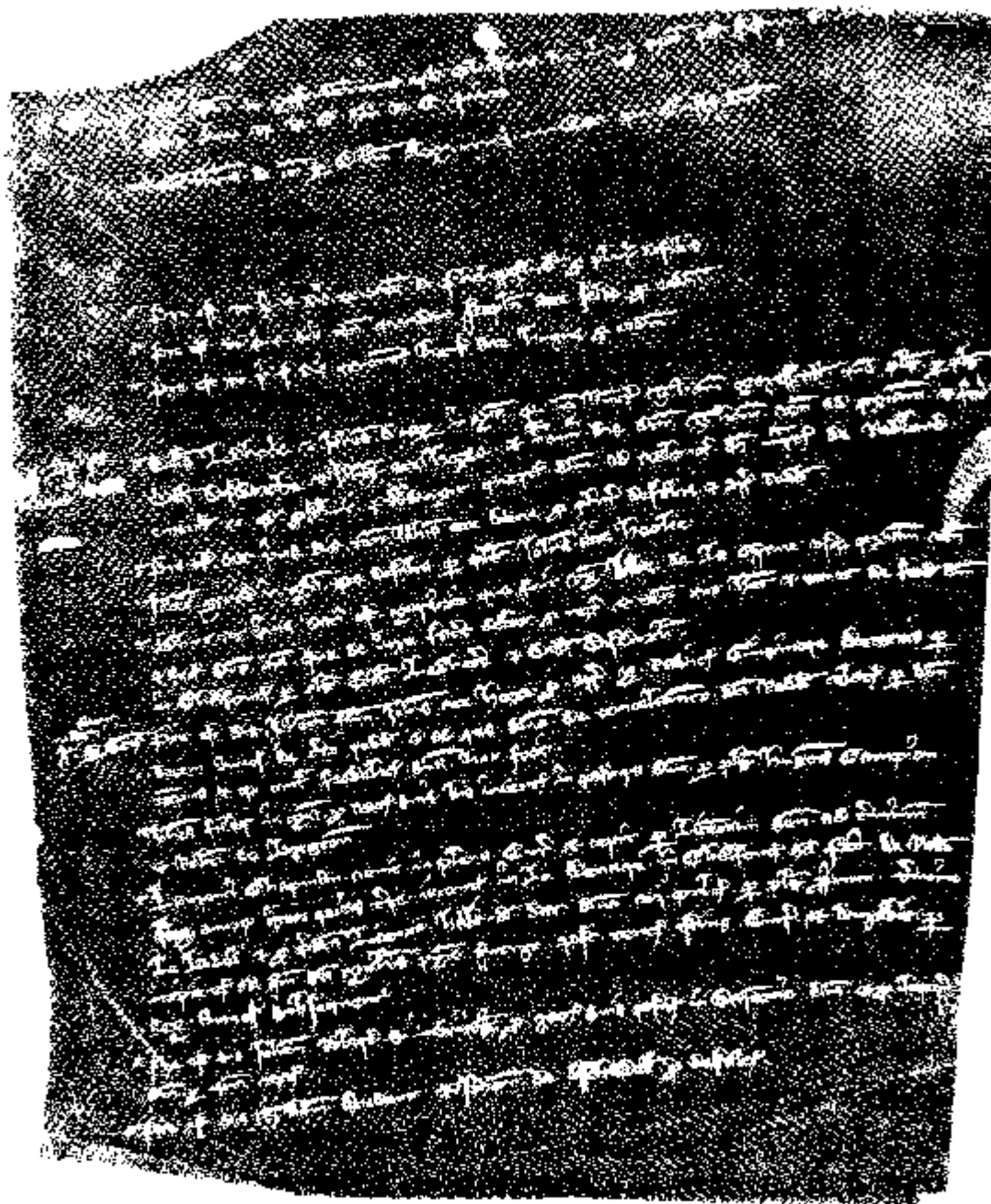


PLATE I. Membrane 3 of the earliest Court Roll of Chalont St. Peter.

before the death of Richard de Turville. The Abbot was even able to procure a grant from the king of some houses in the village which he took into his hand when he disgraced Ranulf.<sup>16</sup>

What lay behind Ranulf Brito's attack on the Abbey and what was the nature of his claim to the services of its tenants can only be matter for speculation. Had the transaction by which he purchased the manor been a normal one of bargain and sale, he would presumably have required and obtained full information about all the tenancies in the vill before he entered into it. Either the extent of the Abbot's rights took him by surprise after he had entered the manor, or he deemed those rights to rest on an insecure foundation, though no such plea appears in the litigation referred to. The most likely inference in either event is that Ranulf purchased the manor neither from Richard nor from Arnold de Turville but from the Jews, into whose hands it had fallen—as indeed he is known to have bought the two carucates of which Arnold was only the nominal owner. The Jew gagee did not need to be in possession in order to have a valid pledge,<sup>17</sup> but if he chose not to enter the property he could not prevent the debtor from wasting it, as Richard de Turville had wasted Chalfont. The purchase which Ranulf Brito made was perhaps speculative and at a low price; certain it is that he failed to turn it to good account, that he soon enfeoffed Andrew le Goys<sup>18</sup> who had been in his service at the Wardrobe,<sup>19</sup> and abandoned it. Andrew and his descendants continued to hold it for four hundred years.

The manor that they held certainly covered the whole vill of Chalfont St. Peter, but the effective lordship they were able to exercise had been restricted by the grants which the Abbey had received and had successfully defended. There seem only to have been left to them some of the tenants who held land in the common fields of the village and the two carucates that Ranulf Brito had acquired by discharging Arnold de Turville's debts to the Jews. These two carucates became a new demesne and eventually, when grass land became more profitable than arable, they emerged as part of Chalfont Park.

The Abbot of Missenden held immediate sway over far more land than this. Though the nature of his rights was sometimes disregarded, the lands of his manor extended into every part of the parish and all the principal men in the vill appear as his tenants.

Of the lands of the church, which had been granted in almoin to the Abbey, the Abbot retained two messuages.<sup>20</sup> All the glebe lands, together with other lands afterwards granted in almoin, and probably Ranulf Brito's houses, became the endowment of a vicar when the church was impropriated, and they were held as a manor by the vicar himself.

Finally, a small fee was held by the Knights Templars and their successors, the Hospitallers. It consisted of a mill, meadow land and arable known as

<sup>16</sup> *Cal. C.R.* 1237-42, p. 374 (16th November, 1241).

<sup>17</sup> Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, Vol. II, p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> *Book of Fees*, 895.

<sup>19</sup> *Cal. C.R.* 1227-31, p. 535.

<sup>20</sup> *Liber Antiquus Hugonis Wells*, 1209-35, ed. A. Gibbons, pp. 17 and 18; *M.C.*, Vol. III, No. 843. Note of an assize of Novel Disseisin, 20th February 1365; the Abbot recovered seisin of his free teneement in Chalfont St. Peter, viz. 100 acres of land, 3 acres of meadow and 4 acres of wood, claimed by the Vicar as part of the land assigned to the Vicarage at its ordination.

Turvillesland, which may have been the demesne land of the manor gathered together in one part of the common fields. The Templars had been attacked by Ranulf Brito when he entered the manor and their crops had been distrained in order to bring them into subjection, but they, like the Abbot, appear to have successfully resisted him.<sup>21</sup>

SUMMARY OF SURVEY OF circa 1333<sup>22</sup>

<i>Tenant</i>	<i>Land</i>
Ralph de Wedon	Elye del Byrche 1q
"	Le Wayte 1q
"	William and John atte Byrche 1q
Robert le Mountefort	Mody 1q
"	Wolfrych 1q
"	Rudyngges 1q
"	ubi inhabitat 1q
"	Sleperesden 1q
"	Le Coche 1q
John de la Hache	1q
Philip Durdent	Boterfeld 1 virgate
"	Whay and Loryng 1q
Philip Durdent and Richard Vyel	Gef 1q
John Bebbegrove	
Thomas le Taylor	Russchemere 1q
Gregory le Hore	Colewelle 1q
John atte Grove	Dyddesuorth 3q
Geoffrey de Bolstrode	Campion 1q
"	Toky 1q
Ralph atte Watere	Coche 1q
Philip Durdent	Le Maysham 1q
Hugh and William atte Merssch	One free & the other a villein ½ virgate
Geoffrey de Bolstrode	Turvyle 2 virgates
Nicholas Plomer senior and junior	Le Stompe 1 virgate
"	Gerard de Chalphonte 1q
"	Le Leche 1q
"	Le Frenche 1q
"	Thomas atte Grove ½q
William de Donyngton	1q
Beatrix Eddred	Dogets 1q
John Asschewelle	1 virgate
"	Manutel 1q
John by West	Le Gore 1q
"	Greneway ½ virgate
"	Ubi inhabitat 1q
John le Draper	1q
Matthew de la Vache	
John le Draper	William atte Felde ½ virgate
Matthew de la Vache	Stephen atte Felde 1q
"	Henry atte Hurne ½q

<sup>21</sup> Cal. C.R. 1231-34, p. 92 (31st July, 1232).

<sup>22</sup> C.S.P. 2. Membrane 6.



Matthew de la Vache	Bonnesbury 1q
"	Pynestert 1q
"	William de Fulham at Pheippeshull 1q
Robert le Porter	Le Cansour $\frac{1}{2}$ q
Richard le Budel	1q
John atte Hache	1q
Thomas le Mareschal	$\frac{1}{2}$ virgate
Robert Gerard	$\frac{1}{2}$ q
William de Langeleye	Wodewyk 1q
Richard Edward	1q
John atte Hache	Le feldlond $\frac{1}{2}$ virgate
Robert atte Borde	$\frac{1}{2}$ virgate
John atte Hache & Adam Kuppyng	1q
Hugh le Rotourius and Hugh Euelot	$\frac{1}{2}$ q
Philip Durdent	Fulham 3q
Thomas Mareschal	Molp 1q
Thomas Mareschal, Edmund de Chungton and Geoffrey Bolstrode	Cherlemere 1q

q: quadrental.

## II. THE MANOR IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY<sup>23</sup>

### (i) *The Early Court Rolls*

After the defeat of Ranulf Brito little is known about Chalfont St. Peter until the Abbot's court rolls begin with the reign of Edward II. The court was usually held once a year, but sometimes more frequently. The records are not well written or well arranged; business did not follow any particular order and the early courts contain a haphazard collection of admissions, presentments of deaths, arrears of rent and services and trespasses against the lord. Those present found pledges to carry out the orders of the court and the bailiff was told to distrain on the property of absent or recalcitrant tenants. In the second roll, which starts soon after the accession of Edward III, there is a rental and a survey which supplement one another, for the rental is very faded and the survey for some unexplained reason incomplete. They form links with the original grants to the Abbey and together with the rolls make possible a sketch of the manor in the early fourteenth century.

Some of the free tenants were men of importance in the outside world. It was always difficult to make them carry out their obligations: to acknowledge services due and do fealty on admission to their holdings or on the election of a new abbot, and to pay the annual rents. As time went on, many of these tenants ceased to be mentioned in the court and their lands went out of the manor. Only the early rolls show the full extent of the Abbot's claims.

In the north of the manor there appears to have been an estate called the Feld extending into Chalfont St. Giles and Chenies. In 1326, Alexander Cheyne, lord of Isenhamstead and a coroner,<sup>24</sup> came after many presentments, distrains and respites and did fealty for thirty acres of land, his patrimony, once held by

<sup>23</sup> The main sources for Part II are the first three court rolls, C.S.P. 1, 2, and 3, 1308 to 1364. There are no serious breaks in the records until 1346.

<sup>24</sup> *Rolls from the Office of the Sheriff of Beds. and Bucks.*, 1332-1334, ed. G. H. Fowler, p. 38, section 90.

William atte Feld. It was the last time a Cheyne recognised the Abbot's overlordship. Probably pressure was brought to bear on him through his subtenant, John Draper, who also held another part of the Feld from the Abbey. A toft in Deneield in Chenies, "eight acres of the yardland once Robert atte Feld's", was held by John Grace who came to court in 1324 and did fealty for it. Neither he nor his successors attended and their land presumably was drawn into Chenies manor. Another part of William atte Feld's estate was held by Thomas Blackett who served at least twice as knight of the shire.<sup>25</sup> For a time he also held Greenway, perhaps Greenstreet in Chenies. These holdings are not mentioned in the rolls after the middle of the fourteenth century. On the other hand, the Feld lands which were acquired in 1331 by Matthew de la Vache, lord of The Vache manor in Chalfont St. Giles, remained in the Abbot's manor. He held Philipshill, Lufffeld formerly Stephen atte Feld's, and Hurnwyk, on the river beside the road from Chalfont to Isenhamstead, perhaps the site of the present Pheasant Inn, then in the corner or "hurn" of Chalfont St. Peter parish.

In the early fourteenth century, much business in land is recorded in the rolls. Bad harvests may have forced tenants to sell up their holdings. Vache's lands had previously been held by his neighbour at Loudhams, Thomas Spigurnel,<sup>26</sup> who had himself only acquired them in 1327. Sir Ralph de Wedon a great landowner and three times sheriff, took over three holdings at about the same time. Geoffrey de Bulstrode, successor to Goys in the other Chalfont St. Peter manor, became the Abbot's tenant for Campions in addition to Cherlemere and Turvilles, the Templars' old estate. It is curious to find Turvilles in the survey. Geoffrey was at that time engaged in litigation over it with Burnham Abbey and the Hospitallers<sup>27</sup> to whom it eventually passed. Another neighbour, Duredent of Denham, had built up a considerable estate; among his lands were Marsham and a Butterfield holding, probably one of the two mentioned in the dispute between Ranulf Brito and the Abbey.

Other humbler free tenants were prospering—people who lived in the manor, took an active part in the proceedings of the court and were in fact the leaders of the community. When the parish was assessed for taxation in 1340 in the inquiry called the *Inquisitiones Nonarum*,<sup>28</sup> all the jurors were the Abbot's tenants. The valuation and their names are equally interesting. They said that a sixth of the parish which had been ploughed and sown was uncultivated. With reduction of the tax in view, they may have overestimated the decline of arable, but there must have been some truth in a claim not made by their neighbours at Chalfont St. Giles. The list of jurors was headed by Nicholas and William Plomer, the only suitors of the court to come to life in the early rolls. The family had held of the Abbey from the time of the original grants and had been involved in a lawsuit over land in 1237.<sup>29</sup> Two brothers held in 1317;<sup>30</sup> Nicholas and William, the jurors of 1340, were cousins, William having just

<sup>25</sup> *Rolls from the Office of the Sheriff of Beds. and Bucks.*, 1332-1334, ed. G. H. Fowler, p. 38, selions 88 and 89.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33, selion 22.

<sup>27</sup> *V.C.H.*, Vol. III, p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> *Inquisitiones Nonarum* (Record Commission), p. 333.

<sup>29</sup> *Cal. C.R.* 1234-1237, p. 525.

<sup>30</sup> *M.C.*, Vol. II, p. 43.

succeeded his father, another Nicholas. In the survey Nicholas Plomer the elder and Nicholas Plomer the younger had two very important estates—le Stompe, once held by Geoffrey atte Stompe who resisted Ranulf Brito, and le Leche or Layters—and three other holdings from one of which Gerrards Cross probably takes its name. Most likely all their land lay along the Oxford Road and was held by charter, for, unlike the great men who ignored the Abbey, the Plomers came to court and claimed privileges granted to their predecessors. Young Nicholas went hunting and caught hares and partridges in the lord's warren; his uncle was his pledge to produce a charter of Abbot Roger (elected 1240<sup>21</sup>) granting a licence "to hunt and fish in all the lands, woods and waters of the lord Abbot which he has in the vill of Chalfont". The charter actually brought to court was not considered adequate, but it looks as though the Plomers had right on their side. Evidently they had many charters. There is no sign of their having any professional adviser to read the documents or present their case, but in fact such wealthy landowners cannot have relied on the casual assistance of a parish priest. It was not the last time that the family resisted the Abbey.

Little is known about the next three jurors. John le West held Gorelands, a farm which still exists. Henry Joseberd or Joseberd was a suitor of the court. John de Ashwell gave his name to a farm near Gorelands, so close that both farms may have been part of a hamlet which long ago disappeared. He held by military service and may have been tenant of the large estate, granted by Geoffrey de Turville to Richard son of Osbert, who in turn granted it to the Abbey.

William atte Hatch, the last juror, is more interesting. By the time of the inquisition, he had succeeded his father, John, who was tenant in 1333. Both are frequently mentioned in the rolls; they were progressive farmers extending their lands and rights to the utmost. John had land in the Feld as well as other property. He was brought before the court for inclosing common land and for removing goods from his customary to his free holding, with the object of giving up the bondland and keeping only the freehold. Everything on a customary holding belonged to the lord and sixty-two sheep were taken as pledges for the return of the goods. Probably many of the tenants had taken to sheep farming. The ploughland which had been allowed to revert to grass may have been put to more profitable use than the jurors made out. William rented Mattocks, when the heir proved unable to pay the admission fine, and eventually became the Abbot's tenant.

There were other important freeholders whose homes were in the parish. Robert Montfort, whose ancestor was attacked by Ranulf Brito's servant, seems to have had the same social position as the Plomers. They were neighbours, for Montforts became Mumfords, the next farm to Layters, and they claimed the same privileges which were perhaps attached to land in that part of the parish. They refused to do homage to the Abbot and the claim to exemption was of such importance that it was referred to the royal justices, John de Stonor or William de Scherdeshull. Finally in the spring of 1337, the verdict was given in favour of the Abbey and "Robert Montfort, Nicholas Plomer and

<sup>21</sup> *V.C.H.*, Vol. I, p. 375.

John le Smith came and did homage, also William son of Nicholas Plomer. A day was given to Geoffrey de Bolstrode." The decision affected other people too. Another matter under dispute was decided at the same court; the jurors "say on oath that the lord has never received a heriot from the holdings of Thomas atte Grove and Le Frensche (to which William Plomer had just succeeded) and he ought not by law to have one".

The other freeholders only need brief mention. Beatrix Eddred held the detached portion of Chalfont St. Peter.<sup>32</sup> Thomas Mareschal's holding of Molp or Mopes is never again mentioned in the rolls. John atte Grove held the Grove estate in Chalfont St. Giles; his father had bought the ancestral land of William Disworth or Diddesworth, a farm and a tile works.<sup>33</sup>

There is more information about the tenants by roll and in villeinage, for unfree land and persons had many disabilities attached to them. The courts had to uphold the lord's rights, but the customary tenants were in a stronger position than the legal language suggests. Tenants who held by roll of court could sell their land, as in the case of Gilbert Edward, a villein, who produced a charter beginning "I, Martin Rotorius", to show how he bought a messuage from Martin Wheeler, another villein. Heirs could not easily be deprived of their patrimony; even if the land were not claimed at the proper time, there was always a chance that the heir would return and make good his title later on. Sometimes it was provided that, if an heir regained his land, he would have to pay a heavy fine to the lord and compensate the occupier. With villein holdings, it was the custom for the mother to be guardian of a minor. A widow was not entitled to dower in her husband's lands; in fact, she was often enfeoffed with her husband and held all the land on his death. Family settlements were registered on the court rolls. Roger Cade took from the lord in bondage the tenement once Welifed's to himself and his issue, but, if there were none, it was to revert to the issue of Richard Edward.

Many of the restrictions on bondland were such as any landlord would place on his property. Sub-letting needed the lord's licence, partly because the sale of a licence was profitable and also because the Abbey wanted to be sure of receiving rent and services due from the holding. Since there were few disputes about labour services in the early rolls, they are seldom mentioned; in 1327, Robert le Port's land was taken in hand, until he had renounced his claim to hold freely and found pledges to do the usual services. Tenants were obliged to keep their houses in good repair and the land in good heart; otherwise holdings were seized into the lord's hands, as William Hoggeprest's was in 1331. They were expected to obtain a licence to fell trees growing on their land, but if the timber were used to repair the house, a fine was not exacted. Hugh Wheeler, who was presented for cutting down an oak, had the fine remitted, because he had built it into his house.

The survey shows that nearly all the holdings were quadrentals or farthing-lands of thirty acres, as specified in a court of 1401: "a messuage and thirty

<sup>32</sup> *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, Vol. 15, Appendix VII, No. 16. The Eddred family held land in Chalfont St. Giles and Amersham, adjoining the detached part of Chalfont St. Peter. In Amersham, Doggetshall is mentioned in 1362.

<sup>33</sup> *Rentals*, C.S.P. 25. Also researches of the Rev. G. C. Edmunds.

acres called a farthingland". A ferlingate and a yardland are also mentioned. Some holdings were measured in virgates; John de Ashwell held a virgate, while Turvilles consisted of two virgates. The area of a virgate is never given and would have been exceptionally large, if it had contained four farthinglands. Carucates are not mentioned until 1356; in the fifteenth century, Turvilles, Montforts and Layters are each described as one carucate.<sup>34</sup> Carucates of forty acres are found in the sixteenth century.<sup>35</sup> The evidence is desultory and insufficient for calculating acreage in the early fourteenth century or at any other time. The most important facts which emerge from the early rolls are that ingrossment of holdings was proceeding rapidly and that it was quite unusual for a tenant to have only one holding.

The fourteenth-century court rolls seldom indicate the nature of the holdings, whether the land lay dispersed in open fields or in different parts of the parish or whether it lay in one block. Fortunately, much is known about one of the ancient holdings, le Budel or Beadle, whose tenant once had official duties and was perhaps still responsible for their performance. Ralph the Beadle's only child was his daughter, Maud. In 1312, when he became unable to manage all his land, he let four acres in Denacre to Laurence Chapman who gave the steward six chickens for leave to rent it for six years. The vicar, Robert Stowe, took over another three acres without licence and in 1319 was fined together with his neighbours who had concealed the offence. Two years later by leave Ralph let to Laurence the Chapman a piece of land in Grenelond and to John the Smith a piece in Eptonfeld for four crops. Maud the Beadle, native of the lord, had inherited by 1324 and came to an agreement in court with Robert Cupping who took over a croft called Little Cobwell with four pieces in a common field; Maud retained pasture for all her livestock, remained liable for the customary services and was to receive every third sheaf as rent. Three years later she married Richard de Langley who gave the lord half a mark for admission to Ralph the Beadle's land by marrying his daughter and heir. In 1330, Richard, then known as the Beadle, was fined for letting his land without leave; the position was legalised later, when Richard Butterfield leased the land for three years by licence and found pledges for payment of rent and services. The story shows that his holding lay dispersed in common fields far apart from each other, for Denacre lay to the north of the village and Eptonfeld was Uptonfeld to the south of Goldhill, where a detached part of Upton parish adjoined Chalfont St. Peter. There must have been many similar holdings divided into what were called "parcels"—Beadles consisted of seven parcels—and much land farmed by sub-tenants. There was another type of holding; Richard Butterfield who rented Beadles also took from the lord on a lease for three lives "a messuage and a quadrantena (quadrantal) called Redland with six pieces in Deneland". The main holding was a "land", a compact block presumably with cottagers who cultivated it for the lord's tenant, and with it went a few strips in a common field.

The court was not interested in recording the precise make-up of each holding. In case of dispute an inquisition would have been held. If the jurors could

<sup>34</sup> Rentals, C.S.P. 25.

<sup>35</sup> I. S. Leadam, *The Domesday of Inclosures*, Vol. I, p. 206.

not solve the problem, recourse was made to the old court rolls or to another collection of precedents called the Roll of Domesday. When Agnes, widow of William the Carter, claimed his cottage for life, she gave the clerk sixpence to search the rolls. Since the rights of lord and tenant were founded on custom, innovations were made under the guise of custom. It is difficult to see reality behind ancient forms. For instance, long lists of trespasses appear in the records between 1333 and 1364. There were fifteen cases presented in the autumn of 1346 and they range from Walter atte Dene with two sheep and two cows in the lord's pasture at Newland to Richard Butterfield with twelve beasts and forty sheep in the lord's corn at the same place. In 1354, a similar list was added up and "for agistment 10s. 9d." written below. It looks as though the Abbot, who then had Newland in hand, had laid down much of his demesne to grass and was letting other pasture as well.

Up to the middle of the fourteenth century the court appears to have served the community well. The lord and his tenants were able to adapt new ways of life to its framework. Great men ignored the manor, but resident freeholders took a prominent part in its proceedings. For the customary tenants the court rolls took the place of title deeds and provided a cheap and easy means to register family settlements.

#### (ii) *The Black Death*

It is impossible to tell when the Black Death came to Chalfont St. Peter. The second roll ends with the autumn court of 1346 and the third begins with the spring court of 1349. Another court was held in the autumn and two other documents belong to the same year—a loose membrane with a list of tenants on it and notes for a fair copy of the spring court, by mistake sewn into the previous roll. Disorganisation of the manor is evident, but the full effect of the pestilence cannot be gauged when there is such a large gap in the records.

Abbot William was elected in 1348,<sup>36</sup> when the Abbey had been six months without a head, and in the following spring the steward, as usual when there was a new lord, called all the tenants to court to do fealty. It was a mere formality to call men like Sir Richard de la Vache. The list contains the names of fifteen tenants, nearly all of whom held their land before the plague. Four deaths were presented and others must have been presented in courts of 1348, for many new tenants were admitted in the autumn of 1349. In all there were twelve, and, of these, seven were the heirs; in one case the guardian of an heir was admitted. It was not until 1357 that the Abbey discovered that one important tenant, Robert le Warde, had died in the pestilence and that his heir's wardship and marriage had wrongfully been sold by Sir John de Molyns. Even if the head of the household survived, families were weakened by the loss of their younger members. Not long afterwards one of the Plomer holdings was in the hands of Sir William de Aldbury and William atte Hatch appears to have given up much of his land at once. By 1401<sup>37</sup> the families of nearly all the tenants who made their mark in the first half of the fourteenth century had left the manor or perhaps become sub-tenants not entered on the rolls. From 1349 on, it was not

<sup>36</sup> *V.C.H.*, Vol. I, p. 372.

<sup>37</sup> *Rentals*, C.S.P. 25.



the yeoman or the husbandman who gave trouble to the lord, but the villein.

In 1357, three villeins had fled from the manor; one of them, William Rotorius or Wheeler, had evidently been lured away by Hugh de Berwick, for he was staying in his house at Beaconsfield. The same court recorded: "Ralph Hatchet in mercy on account of his rebellion who holds at the will of the lord"; he and his fellows agreed to take an oath. He was fined sixpence. Not long afterwards "one curtilage formerly Ralph Hatchet's which used to pay twelve pence a year and three days' work at harvest is in the lord's hand for lack of a tenant". Henry Boterule was fined sixpence on account of his rebellion and his defiance of the steward. John Bole and Alexander Carpenter were not present with their neighbours as ordered. It was probably these labour troubles which led to the election of a new reeve by the homage in June, 1360; Henry Butterfield and Thomas Shepherd were chosen and Henry was sworn in. By November he had made various attachments amounting to 3s. 4d. and Richard atte Nock was fined 3½d. for failure to perform his day's reaping at harvest time and for being in arrears with day works. By May of the next year Henry had only collected 5d.; he may have been successful in getting the lord's work done.

These last recorded fourteenth-century courts show that the Abbey was facing another new problem. In 1349 all the vacant holdings (except perhaps one) were immediately taken by new tenants, nearly all of them paying the usual fines for admission and other dues, making these courts particularly profitable to the Abbey. In 1360 two houses needed repair and Robert Shepherd, the tenant of one of them, surrendered his bond tenement which remained in the lord's hand until the following year. For another holding the admission fine had to be pardoned, because the cottage was completely ruinous and would have to be built anew, and a curtilage last held by Richard atte Nock had to be granted without payment of fine. The next part of the story is missing, but a long list of holdings which "used to pay rent . . . and are now in decay" was added to the rental of about 1401.<sup>38</sup> It is not perhaps an accident that the last thirty-five years of the fourteenth century have disappeared from the court rolls.

### III. THE END OF THE MANOR<sup>39</sup>

By the beginning of the fifteenth century the administration of the manor had been reformed. Nothing is known about the abbots of this period, but the bishop's report after his visitations of 1431 and 1436 was not unfavourable.<sup>40</sup> It was an interlude between the rule of the fourteenth-century abbot who forged the currency<sup>41</sup> and of the last abbots who were notorious for evil life and neglect of their duties.<sup>42</sup> The rentals and court rolls are well-written, businesslike documents and the same standard is maintained until the first years of the sixteenth century, in spite of the abbey's corrupt state which became evident after the

<sup>38</sup> Rentals, C.S.P. 25.

<sup>39</sup> This part is based on the following court rolls: C.S.P. 4. 1401, 1404, 1411, 1412 and 1415; C.S.P. 5. 1416, 1420 to 1443; C.S.P. 6. 1423, two Vicar's Courts, 1425, 1426, 1447, 1448, 1450, 1453 to 1459, 1461; C.S.P. 7. 1461 and 1469; C.S.P. 8. 1495, 1496, 1499, 1501 and 1502; C.S.P. 9. 1517 to 1519, 1528, 1530, 1531, 1534, Robert Drury's Courts, 1539 to 1546.

<sup>40</sup> *V.C.H.*, I, p. 372.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 371.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 371, 373, 374.



election of Robert Risborough as Abbot about 1450. There are two gaps of over twenty years in the rolls, between 1426 and 1447 and between 1469 and 1495, when the manor may have been let at farm to the principal landowner in the parish. The Grange, Rectory or Parsonage, as it was sometimes called, was always farmed; it was a convenient system for the Abbey which employed the farmer or a member of his family as bailiff and held the courts in his hall. There is mention of John Kynwoldmerssh, farmer, in the early fifteenth century, but far more is known about the later farmers, members of the White family. The administration of the manor gave them opportunities to add to their property; they knew what was going on and surrenders of tenancies were often made into their hands between courts. They were evidently substantial people. William White the elder lost cattle valued at £7 4s. in a raid on his house in 1458 and towards the end of the century another William White and his wife took a lease of the Grange for twenty-one years at an annual rent of £10 5s. Less is known about the stewards who presided over the courts; there is a copy of the command given by John Cheyney squire (lord of Chenies, who died in 1468) to the suitors of the court to attend at "the manor and parsonage".<sup>43</sup> Presumably the post was always filled by prominent local landowners. In the management of his estates the abbot was assisted by a council. There are several occasions when reference was made to the lord and his council<sup>44</sup>—and the abbot himself once attended a court.<sup>45</sup>

The usual business consisted of presentments of deaths and admissions and surrenders by customary tenants. They had established their right to dispose of their land as they wished and were entitled to copies of the entries in the rolls to serve as title deeds. The land and the renders from it are described in detail; much information about topography as well as about land tenure is gained from these later rolls. The tenants on Goldhill had cottages and gardens and usually a few acres in the common fields. In 1461 an ancient holding called Vynerscroft changed hands and an extract from the rolls was made for the new tenant. "Thomas Kyng and Isabel his wife, she examined and confessed alone, surrendered one croft lying at Goldhill called Chelesteres containing in all about four acres, with another croft lying next it called Vyners with four acres divided in the four fields of Chalfont of which one acre lies in Oldefeld, another acre in Astwell, another acre of land in Scolebury and another acre of land on Grete-down with a small meadow called Spirynead and a way leading from the garden of John Lorkyn by a meadow called Templemead abutting on Turnorsmead to the use of William Russell and Joan his wife to hold to themselves, their heirs and assigns at the will of the lord according to the custom of the manor." The annual rent was 8s.; they owed suit of court, heriot when due and customs; they paid 20d. fine and did fealty. It is interesting to compare this entry with one made a hundred years earlier, when Margery, daughter of Thomas Shepherd took a croft called Vinourescroft to the end of her life, paying 18d. a year. After 1450 copyholders always surrendered their land to "uses". Living on the other side of the valley were the more important tenants by roll. In 1401 the homage presented the death of Henry atte Well who held a messuage and thirty

<sup>43</sup> British Museum, Sloane 747, f.64v.

<sup>44</sup> C.S.P. 6, 1453 and 1458.

<sup>45</sup> C.S.P. 8, 1496.

acres; a heriot of a cow price 9s. fell to the lord. John Butterfield junior took the holding to himself and his heirs according to the custom of the manor paying 4s a year. He owed a long list of services each valued and he was to exchange gifts with the lord; he owed suit every three weeks and heriot when it fell due. The fine for admission was 13s. 4d. In a note below, the lord conceded that he could either hold in this manner or pay 8s. 9½d. a year for rent as well as works. This property was Redland granted to Richard Boterfeld in 1327. There were also tenants who had ingrossed several holdings. An early fifteenth-century rental shows John Bryan, the vicar, holding Bordes, Zeresland, a parcel called Hoggesprests, a parcel called Mattoks, three parcels containing an acre lying in Hatchesryding with common in Smiths heath.<sup>46</sup> The same property was held by Richard Pese in 1453. This entry is interesting, showing that at least part of these holdings lay in open fields and that the tenant had right of common on a heath.

The Abbey tried to maintain its rights over its customary tenants. At the beginning of Henry V's reign, both John Butterfield and John Bryan were presented for creating sub-tenancies without licence and for allowing their houses to become ruinous; Butterfield made fine with the lord for permission to sub-let. There must have been a great demand for smallholdings. The Abbot was allowing cottages with gardens to be built in the Grangefield; in 1416 John Halle took a piece of land of the Grangefield for building in length eight perches and in breadth four perches. As long as he was paid for the licence and continued to receive the customary renders, the lord did not object to sub-tenants, but changes in the use of land were sometimes a threat to his rights. For instance, if holdings were amalgamated and laid down to grass, farmhouses and cottages were no longer needed and became ruinous. The Abbot had lost property which he had the right to have kept in good repair and the cottagers had lost their homes and their livelihood. The community was behind the lord in resisting these changes; through the formality of the legal documents comes the feeling of the parish that the land was intended to support all those who were born on it, but the old system was in decay. The big customary holdings were becoming very valuable and their tenants were able to dispose of them to people who disregarded the ancient restrictions.

As an owner of property, the Abbey struggled to keep its rights alive, but its income was mainly derived from leases. The manor itself was sometimes let; the Grange, Newland, Silsden with Abbotsmeads nearby and other estates were held by leases some of which were copied into the Sloane Cartulary now in the British Museum.<sup>47</sup> The free tenants of the manor ignored their obligations. In the middle of the century an inquisition was held to find out who held Ashwells and other lands for 12d. a year, suit and other customs, all withheld for a long time past. In 1420 an entry in the Close Rolls records a grant by Thomas Southcote of all his lands in both Chalfonts to John Dyer and John Day, witnessed by William Whaplode;<sup>48</sup> yet a presentment was made in the Abbot's court

<sup>46</sup> C.S.P. 25. Rental of about 1401

<sup>47</sup> *V.C.H.*, Vol. I, p. 373, gives a description of the Sloane Cartulary. *M.C.*, Vol. III, No. 919, ff.203v. and 204. List of rents at Chalfont St. Peter, to be published shortly. The editor kindly showed me these passages in the unpublished volume. <sup>48</sup> *Cal. C.R.*, Henry V, Vol. II, p. 65.

of waste made in the lands of Thomas Southcote which with his body were in the custody of the lord, because he was a minor who had not proved his age nor gained his freedom nor his lands according to the demand of law. The lands were to be seized and the offenders made to answer to the lord for trespass. Thomas, however, had gained the protection of someone more powerful than the Abbot.

William Whaplode was the most important person in the neighbourhood. Between 1403 and his death in 1447, he held many offices; he was Treasurer to Cardinal Beaufort, Escheator of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, Justice of the Peace and Member of Parliament first as Knight of the Shire and then as Burgess of High Wycombe.<sup>49</sup> He was lord of The Vache in Chalfont St. Giles; in Chalfont St. Peter he held of the Abbey the lands formerly held by the Vaches, the old Bulstrode holdings of Campions and Charlemere (called Charmerecroft), Montforts (called Momfords) and many other holdings, but refused to pay rent. He seems to have been interested in any land that came into the market; the only two years surviving of the medieval rolls of the Vicar's little court show his admission to two cottages with gardens, apparently quite small holdings. Among the five executors of his will, proved in 1447, were Richard Restwold his kinsman and Edmund Brudenell who had inherited Bulstrodes Manor from his mother, Agnes Bulstrode. Apart from specific legacies, his manor of Chalfont St. Peter and all lands there and in nearby parishes were offered to Restwold, who only bought the Vache estates. The trustees carried out his wish that intercession should be made for the souls of himself and his wife by endowing a chantry in the Church of St. Peter with rents from Momfords and other property; the chaplain was in the sixteenth century appointed by the Brudenell family.<sup>50</sup> The rest of the estates in Chalfont St. Peter was acquired by Edmund Brudenell.

From the early fourteenth century the Abbey had been losing outlying holdings to the lords of adjacent manors. The Cheyne family had ceased to recognise the Abbot's rights. In 1453 John Cheyne was presented for default of suit of court, since his ancestor Alexander "once did fealty as it shows by roll of court 19 Edward II", that is over a hundred years before. Blacketts and Chilternes whose tenants did fealty to the Abbey in the early fourteenth century appear in the Close Rolls of 1440 as adjuncts of Chenies Manor.<sup>51</sup> In the later fifteenth century some of the most important of the Abbey's lands came into the possession of the Brudenell family who refused payment of rents and services and presumably incorporated them in their own Chalfont manor. When Edmund Brudenell died in 1469, he held himself or as trustee of the Chantry, Layters, Campions, Momfords and other properties. He had bought the freehold of Layters and installed William Copsherew, the previous freeholder, as his tenant. The court decided to distrain on the occupiers of the holdings, but what effect the order had is unknown, because there is a break in the rolls from 1469 to 1495. Nothing is known about the actions of Dru,

<sup>49</sup> See R. Somerville, *The Duchy of Lancaster*, for a summary of William Whaplode's career; he was feodary of the Duchy.

<sup>50</sup> Transcript of William Whaplode's will made for the Rev. G. C. Edmonds; P.C.C. 31 Luffenham, *V.C.H.*, Vol. III, pp. 187 and 197.

<sup>51</sup> *Cal. C.R.*, Henry VI, Vol. III, p. 357.

his son and heir, but he may have come to an agreement with the Abbot to farm the manor and the rolls of his time may have been retained by his family.

Dru was succeeded by his son, another Edmund, who pursued a policy which eventually ruined him and obliged him to sell his family estates at Amersham and Colshill to his uncle, Robert Brudenell, one of the most eminent of the Brudenells.<sup>52</sup> Whenever the opportunity presented itself, Edmund extended his estates and influence in Chalfont St. Peter. In 1498 he bought the remainder of the lease of the Grange from the widow of William White, the last farmer.<sup>53</sup> The rights which went with it should have been profitable; he also gained control of the day-to-day administration of the Abbot's manor and had the chance to acquire holdings surrendered to the lord. In the following year he was found to be in possession of Butterfields and Peses. He had probably had Butterfields for several years, since John, Thomas and Henry Butterfield, villeins by blood, were reported to have fled from the manor by 1495. These tenants had presumably sold their land for a good price and gone away to make a living elsewhere. The subsequent history of Brudenell's treatment of the Grange or "Rectory" and of his estates is so complicated that each will be followed separately instead of pursuing the entries year by year through the rolls.

In 1501 he was presented for not repairing the "Rectory" buildings, some of which were ruinous and for taking away the equipment which belonged to it to his own house "to the grave damage of the lord and all his tenants". Evidently there was a common plough and other implements. Next winter the charges were repeated and the damage estimated at £8; further, the pound was not fit for use and seventeen cartloads of wood had been taken from the green outside the parsonage. The autumn court of 1502 contains a detailed account of the state of the Rectory: "The barn as to the walls and the two porches is in decay, a house called a kitchen containing three bays, another house called a stablehouse containing five bays is truly ruinous in tiles and in walls and also the mansion that is to say the hall with the chamber to it pertaining with doors and windows and other repairs, whence it is stated on oath (that the damage amounts) to £8 sterling at the least." No mention is made of the farmer withholding the rent. In fact, the Abbot had to sue him in the King's Court and the settlement of the case by which Robert, Edmund's brother, promised to pay £6 a year until the Abbey had received £35 was not honoured; only £26 was received.<sup>54</sup> Later the farm fell into the hands of John Compton, a favourite of Abbot Fox, who pillaged the Abbey's property and cut down its trees. He, too, left the Rectory ruinous. The last abbots were such disgraceful characters that they could not keep any semblance of decency or order at Missenden or control the administration of the estates.<sup>55</sup>

The weakness of the Abbey made life at Chalfont St. Peter very uncertain; rights which had long been undisturbed were taken away and no redress could be obtained. Edmund Brudenell's treatment of Butterfields and Peses caused damage to the Abbey and to the cottagers living and working on these holdings.

<sup>52</sup> Joan Wake, *The Brudenells of Deene*, Chapters I and II for the early history of the Brudenells.

<sup>53</sup> British Museum. Sloane 747, f.6. Lease of the Rectory to William White. *V.C.H.*, III, p. 197.

<sup>54</sup> *V.C.H.*, III, p. 197.

<sup>55</sup> *V.C.H.*, I, pp. 373 and 374.

Although there were several Butterfields who were tenants, this particular property can be identified by its other names: "Redlond lately Botervyld" and "Tenement called Hery Welles lately Botervyld". It was the land which returned to the Butterfield family, when Henry atte Well died in 1401. There were presumably always cottagers living on it who worked some of the land for the Abbey's tenant and had smallholdings of their own; perhaps when permission was obtained to create sub-tenancies in 1416 all the land was divided between these cottagers. Whatever arrangement was made, the buildings on the estate remained undisturbed, until it came into the possession of Brudenell. A suggestion for the identification of Peses will be made later. Pese in 1453 had several holdings which had been in one hand for at least fifty years; the land may have been worked from one farm for a long time and the unneeded buildings allowed to fall down unnoticed by the lord. In 1499 both holdings were presented as "ruinous and truly in decay for lack of repair". Brudenell was ordered to repair them and show his title to them; also he was presented for cutting down trees on Butterfield. By 1501 he had become liable for a fine of 40s. for not obeying the orders of the court. "He has destroyed and despoiled all the houses which were standing on the tenement called Redlond laterly Botervyld and carried them away out of the domain without licence of the lord or his officers, and he gave those houses that is to say eight bays with tiles and all the rest to William Whyte his servant to the grave damage of the Lord." At three successive courts proclamations were made giving notice of the lord's intention to seize both holdings into his hands and in 1502 the bailiff was ordered to seize them. As far as the court rolls are concerned, that is the end of the story, but, since what was happening in Chalfont was part of a general movement causing unemployment and unrest, the government felt obliged to intervene.

Already in 1489 by Act of Parliament, "against pulling down of towns", penalties had been imposed on owners of houses let with twenty acres of land or more, if they failed to maintain them or their farm buildings. In 1515 two other Acts ordered that land converted to pasture after February of that year should be restored to tillage and the houses from which it was cultivated rebuilt. With the object of enforcing these Acts, Royal Commissions were appointed to find out what changes had been made since Michaelmas, 1488, and to fix responsibility for them.<sup>66</sup> The jurors of Chalfont St. Peter described what had happened to Butterfields and also to Layters, once the chief Plomer estate; both had been held by Edmund Brudenell of the King as of the Duchy of Lancaster. Each contained a carucate of forty acres, time out of mind ploughed and sown, but the land had been laid waste and the houses destroyed. Two ploughs had been displaced and twenty persons who previously made a living there were forced to leave home, seek sustenance elsewhere and were driven away in misery.<sup>67</sup> Peses does not appear to be mentioned, but in Iver Brudenell held Hogpittes; it consisted of a messuage and fifty acres of arable which he had converted to the pasture of sheep and other livestock. The house had been razed to the ground and two persons lost their livelihood.<sup>68</sup> One of Pese's holdings was a parcel called Hoggeprests which may have been part of

<sup>66</sup> I. S. Leadam, *The Domesday of Inclosures*, 1517-1518, Vol. 1, pp. 6-10.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

Hogpittes. The Abbey had land in the detached part of Iver and Hoggeprests may well have been there, not far from Mattoks, where Pese also had a parcel.

Brudenell had destroyed the traditional way of life on two of the most valuable estates in the Abbot's manor and had gained possession of many other holdings. The decline of the manor had been steady since the middle of the fourteenth century. If the tenants of that time are compared with those who made recognition for their lands to Robert Risborough in 1453, it is clear that many important estates and some quite small properties had simply gone out of the manor. Edmund Brudenell the second had completed the process of dismemberment, but the price he paid was high. He had used much capital and had become involved in expensive legal proceedings. He was much impoverished, but he left his daughter a valuable inheritance which she brought in marriage to Robert Drury, an active supporter of Henry VIII<sup>59</sup> and a good man of business.

Drury obtained the farm of the Manor and Rectory of Chalfont St. Peter from the last Abbot by a lease which had many years to run when the Abbey was dissolved. He became the King's Farmer<sup>60</sup> and in 1540 bought both at twenty years' purchase for £594;<sup>61</sup> he was also granted View of Frankpledge, previously held by the Duchy of Lancaster.<sup>62</sup> Already the principal landowner, he had obtained the advowson of the church and was able to hold court leet and court baron. A new life comes into the court rolls. The lord of The Vache came and made recognition for his lands, tendered a penny for seisin and did fealty. Old customs were summarised; the widow of a customary tenant had no right to dower from his lands; the lord had the right to a heriot after the death of a free tenant and to heriot and fine after any alienation of customary lands. Order was restored in the common lands of the parish; ditches were cleared, gates repaired, balks reinstated and pigs ringed. The tenants knew their rights and obligations and must have benefited from Drury's strong rule, but there is no record of the fate of those who could not "show how they entered the fee and offer their copies and evidences".

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The history of the estates of the Abbey of Missenden has been traced for three hundred years; it is an account of the formation of a manor, its working in its hey-day and its decline and virtual break-up before the dissolution of the Abbey itself. It remains to decide what other interest this story has and what light it throws on the development of Chalfont St. Peter as a whole. The relations between the Abbot and the lord of the other manor and the effect of their disputes on the life of inhabitants have been discussed at some length, but it must be remembered that only evidence favourable to the Abbey has survived. When an attempt is made to demarcate their lands, difficulties arise; the Abbot's Manor once covered most of the parish and diminished as Missenden fell into disrepute. The rights of the Abbey can be defined more precisely;

<sup>59</sup> *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, Vol. 14, Part ii. No. 90, p. 25; No. 100, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> C.S.P. 9. Membrane 4.

<sup>61</sup> Public Record Office. F.318.390. Particulars for Grant. *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, Vol. 15, p. 171.

<sup>62</sup> C.S.P. 35. Copy of Deed, 21st July, 1626. P.R.O. DL. 30 80/1107.

the courts were concerned with land tenure and regulated the relations between lord and tenant. Although little is learned from the rolls about the occupations of the people of Chalfont, whether in agriculture or trade, yet the manorial and public records together make it possible to describe society there and follow its development. In the thirteenth century the free tenants showed their pride and independence, while the villeins submitted to their fate, bound by custom and protected by it. From the endless repetition of the fourteenth-century court rolls, there emerges a picture of a go-ahead community accepting the manorial system of rights and obligations and adapting it to changed circumstances, a society led by wealthy free tenants, but in which a successful customary tenant could improve his status. There followed a time of depression and discontent of which there are few records. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Abbot's Manor was in decay and he was finally left with tenants living on smallholdings; the documents do, however, give glimpses of other men—the big farmers, the important people in the parish, and at the other end of the scale the outcasts of society who became the rogues and vagabonds of Tudor England. The records of Chalfont St. Peter are interesting from many points of view; besides being the annals of a monastic estate, they throw light on village life and its links with the outside world, but they will probably be most often used for special studies, such as genealogy and place-names for which they contain abundant material.

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#### ABBREVIATIONS IN NOTES

M.C. Musenden Cartulary.  
V.C.H. Victoria County History of Buckingham.  
Cal. C.R. Calendar of Close Rolls.  
C.S.P. Manorial records of Chalfont St. Peter with numbers.  
Printed sources are italicised in the notes.