

THE BOUNDARIES OF WINSLOW – SOME COMMENTS

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It is always gratifying when a missing piece of the historical jigsaw is found and falls neatly into place, and one read with great satisfaction the account of the tenth-century bounds of the Winslow estate in *Records* 38.¹ It represents a fitting culmination to the pioneering study by Arnold Baines of the charter relating the grant in 792 by Offa of Mercia of a thirty-hide estate around Winslow to St. Albans, which had lost its detailed boundary clause,² not to mention the hard work in tracing the newly-discovered bounds by two men with intimate local knowledge of the landscape - the late Ted Bull and Julian Hunt. This note is intended to offer some amplification of some of the points raised in the two earlier papers, and also some very minor emendations to the solution of the boundary clause.

These comments are based on a reading of a copy of the seventeenth-century Bollandist manuscript, itself taken from a lost twelfth-century cartulary, the author of which presumably had the original perambulation of the estate (and several other hitherto unsuspected St. Albans' estate bounds) before him. In view of the number of stages through which the Old English bounds had passed, and the no doubt complete unfamiliarity of the final copyist with both the language and the context of his exemplar, the result is surprisingly close to reality. I also used a copy of Dr. Baines's interpretation, and a typescript from Dr. Keynes's examination of the text. This study falls into two parts: comments on the interpretation of the boundary, and remarks on the nature and location of the components of the original grant.

It should be stated at the outset that a grant of 792 would not have had the thirty point boundary clause attached to it, but would have employed a simple shortlist of key points, such as those given for the *Scelfdun/Baldingcotum* component, identified with modern Granborough.³ The sets of bounds which found their way into the Bollandist manuscript would have related to later grants, now apparently lost, probably of the third quarter of the tenth century, a time of re-foundation and re-endowment of monasteries across southern England.

I

There is little to dissent from in the interpretation of the individual boundary points in Messrs. Bull and Hunt's paper, either linguistically or topographically. I would, however, offer some alternative versions for three points, and amplification/comment on three more. The very first point on the perambulation, '*cynemderes heafde*', is almost certainly a miscopying of *cynemæres heafde*, which is translated in the paper as 'the head (i.e. end) of the king's boundary'.⁴ This assumes the application of the common OE qualifying element *cyne*, 'kingly, royal', to the word (*ge*)*mære*, 'boundary', which while possible, seems unlikely.⁵ In charter boundaries, the usual form is *cyninges* (*ge*)*mære*, which form survived into the 1630s in Putney (Surrey) as "the Kinges Meare (Hilles)".⁶ The meaning of *heafod* in place-names is varied, but most likely in the context is 'end, top of', or 'headland', in the sense of a strip used for turning the plough in open-field agriculture.⁷ As the au-

thors point out, there is no record of a royal connexion with Mursley in the eleventh century, although that does not mean to say that there had never been one. One of the five estates comprising Swanbourne was in the king's hands in 1086, but it is not clear whether this shared a boundary with the Winslow estate.

It is suggested that a more probable reading of the manuscript here, and in the case of Point 19 (*kynemæres broc* – interpreted in the paper as 'king's boundary brook', in this instance between Great Horwood and Winslow, another case where royal ownership is unproven) is the use of the personal name *Cynemær*, well attested from various sources as being used in place-names: Kempford on the Thames at the Glos./Wilts. border;⁸ Kimmerston (Northumberland 1244) and Kimsbury (Glos. 1121).⁹ If this is the case, the two boundary points would signify 'Cynemær's headland' (or the top end of his property, depending on whether the open field system reached the estate boundary at this point as well as further south) and 'Cynemær's brook'. Bearing in mind that these bounds are of tenth-century date, Cynemær could have been a prominent tenant of St. Albans abbey, perhaps the holder of the whole estate by lease. A much less likely alternative is that he had held the estate at some stage before it was granted by Offa in 792. If that were the case, it is just conceivable that he was connected in some way with the West Saxon royal house, many of whose members had names using the Cyne- element (e.g. Cynewulf, king 757–786; Cyneheard). Offa had finally acquired southern Oxfordshire for Mercia at the battle of Bensington in 779, and Winslow could have been an outlying property of his defeated rivals which formed a suitable endowment for a favoured church.

Points 14 and 15 on the perambulation (MS *acald ripig* and *acald wylles*) were interpreted by Dr. Baines as 'cold stream' (twice) in his reading of the original, and it is certainly true that the words concerned begin with 'a'. There is no evidence from the standard works on place-name elements for such a prefix being applied to the customary OE word *c[e]ald*, however.¹⁰ It is suggested that this is a scribal error, either in the twelfth or seventeenth century, and that the reading should be *scald ripig/wylle*, from OE **sceald/*

sceldu, meaning 'shallow, a shallow place'.¹¹ This is commonly applied to various water-related features, for example Scaldwell (Northants.), Shalbourne (Wilts.).¹² Given the insignificance of the streams in question, it seems an appropriate description. If anything would warrant the use of 'cold', it might be the spring at Point 16. (Small stream-names often appear in simplex form in charter bounds, as is the case here with the *ripig* and the *bec* further north.)

The *bec* or *water gefealle* (Point 24) seems at first sight to be contrasting two rather different features, viz. a stream and a waterfall. Margaret Gelling has suggested, however, that a beck (a rare word outside the west Midlands¹³) may represent a small stream in a marked valley,¹⁴ which fits the topography well, and the steep gradient may once have given rise to a significant fall of water, perhaps seasonally after heavy rain.

Point 25 (*gateleage*) is, as Messrs. Bull and Hunt note, either 'goat clearing/wood' or 'clearing by/with a gate'. The former is perhaps to be preferred, since the OE pronunciation of *geat* often gives ModE Y- (cf. Gateley, Norfolk, from *gat* [goat] and Yateley, Hants., from *geat*).¹⁵

A final comment on the boundary clause concerns Point 29 (*hlaford leasan garan*). I agree with the interpretation as 'lordless gore [triangular plot of land]'. Its location at the Winslow/Little Horwood – Mursley – Whaddon meeting point may well indicate the moot point of Mursley Hundred, for which it is reasonably central and accessible by a variety of trackways. In terms of the tenth-century landscape, this small plot would have been without a lord in the sense that it had been excluded from whatever grants of land had been made by successive kings, of which the Winslow charter is the only one to survive.

II

We return now to the original grant by Offa to St. Albans. This comprised four named parts, totalling thirty hides:

| | Hides |
|-----------------|-------|
| Winslow | 12 |
| Granborough | 3 |
| Shucklow/Fenton | 10 |
| Lygetun | 5 |

This size of estate seems to be typical of the second wave of church endowments, and is the same as Monks Risborough, a Canterbury holding.¹⁶ The combined total for High and West Wycombe is also 30 hides in 1086, although only 19 of them were held by the bishop of Winchester, whose Ivinghoe estate was assessed at 20 hides. East and Middle Claydon represent a fragmented thirty-hide estate by 1086, whereas Bledlow and Princes Risborough remained undivided. These properties are a far cry from the 200 to 300-hide endowments of some of the original minster churches in the seventh century, a time when the church was only beginning to establish itself (e.g. Chertsey and Barking). Three hundred hides was also the assessment of the smallest polities listed in the *Tribal Hidage*, probably a seventh-century Mercian or Northumbrian tribute list, and that is unlikely to be a coincidence.¹⁷ As time went on, the tendency to grant lands to laymen as well as the church meant that kings had less and less of their patrimony left, with a consequent reduction in the size of grant.

The problem in the case of the Winslow charter of 792 is reconciling the hidages given with the situation three centuries later in Domesday Book. Winslow (with Little Horwood), is assessed at fifteen hides, covering the first and third of the charter properties whose total was 22 hides. Granborough was rated at five hides, compared with three. This means that the block of land encompassed by the tenth century perambulation had an assessment of 25 hides in 792 and 20 hides in 1086 (setting aside the question of Shipton/Littleton for the moment). Changes of this sort are not unknown as liabilities were changed to suit new circumstances; for example Linslade had ten hides in 966 and fifteen a century later. Both Winslow and Granborough had hides in demesne in 1086 – five and two respectively. If this represents an abatement of liability, as suggested in a recent paper,¹⁸ the actual geld due from the two estates is virtually the same as in Offa's day. It is also possible that the hides in demesne at Winslow are represented by a separate demesne hamlet and field system which may be identified with Shipton, whose assessment would then be five hides. These might therefore be the fourth of the estates granted in 792, *Lygetun*, but one would then have to account for their apparent loss of geld liability in the intervening period.

There have been other suggestions about the location of the lands granted by Offa. For example, St. Albans' other Bucks. estate was Aston Abbots, several miles to the south of the Winslow estate.¹⁹ Its assessment in 1086 was ten hides, of which six were in demesne. This may be the original *Lygetun*, with substantial changes in hidation, and although it is seems to have been acquired by St. Albans from Ulf in Edward the Confessor's reign, early possession and subsequent loss by the church are not impossible.²⁰ There is a farm at the northern tip of Stewkley parish called Old Leighton, whose antiquity is unknown, and which lies in the territory of the Woburn Abbey grange, created in the twelfth century.²¹ This area may have been abandoned previously, since it appears not to be covered by either of the two Domesday manors, whose assessments were each 3.5 hides. In 1279, the Grange had three carucates in demesne, and villein holdings totalling two hides, so this may once have been a five-hide unit granted to and then lost by St. Albans, although the name Leighton is more likely to derive from OE *leactun*, 'vegetable garden' than *Lygetun*, 'farm on a stream called Lea' (cf. Leighton Buzzard and Luton).²²

It is possible that the fourth estate is represented by Littleton, as suggested by Messrs. Bull and Hunt, a block of land lying athwart the later boundary between Winslow and Swanbourne.²³ There is a problem with the etymology of the name, however, since Littleton represents OE *lytel tun*, 'small village, hamlet', rather than a stream name of Celtic origin. We know that the Swanbourne already bore that name in 792, although there are many other streams in the vicinity which could have been called *Lyge*. One should note in passing that one of the five estates named Swanbourne in 1086 was assessed at five hides, and was held by Ralph and Aelmer from the Count of Mortain. In 1066 Brictwin, king Edward's thegn had 4.5 hides (*recte* 3.5) and Aelmer, Harold's man, had 1.5 hides. This might equate to the two parts of Littleton. It seems likely on balance that the four estates named in Offa's charter formed a continuous block, whose overall assessment had fallen from thirty hides in 792 to only twenty in 1086, if only because of the positive identification of the Granborough, Shucklow/Fenton and Winslow units from unimpeachable medieval sources.

Great Horwood was clearly excluded from the tenth century boundaries of the Winslow estate, and had a quite separate tenurial history from its namesake. The same is true of the various components of Mursley and Salden, and it seems unnecessary to look for any of the places named in 792 in these parishes.

In conclusion, therefore, one may agree with the attribution of *Lygetun* to the eastern end of Winslow parish and part of Swanbourne, later known as Shipton and Littleton, despite the problems of hidation and etymology. Neither of these seems to warrant looking for the fourth estate granted by Offa in a parish separated from the core territory around Wine's mound.

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