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ASTON BURY, HERTS.

*Notes on Aston Bury.*

BY MR. F. TREVOR DAVYS.

Aston, or as it was formerly called in the Domesday Survey "Estone," and in the Monasticon "Heston," is a small village standing on a hill about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles East of the main road which leads through Stevenage and Hatfield to London, which is 31 miles distant.

The Parish is bounded on the North by Stevenage, and on the South by Datchworth and Watton, on the East by Benington, and on the West by Knebworth.

The area of the parish is 2,052 acres, and the population at the census taken in 1871 was 662 persons, being an increase during the ten preceding years of twenty-three inhabitants.

## THE MANOR.

At the time of the compilation of Domesday Book, this Manor formed part of the extensive possessions of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, brother of the Conqueror, in that record it states that:—

"The Bishop himself holds Estone, it was rated at ten hides, there is land to fifteen ploughs, four hides are in the demesne, and there are four ploughs there, and a fifth may be made. A priest and eleven villanes, with five bordars, have five ploughs there, and five more may be made. There are six cottagers and four bondmen. Meadow for two ploughs, pasture for the cattle, pannage for two hundred hogs. Its whole value is eighteen pounds; when received fourteen pounds. In the time of King Edward, twenty pounds. Three vassals of Archbishop Stigend's held this Manor and might sell it."

Odo, the Bishop, having amassed an immense amount of treasure in England (in Kent alone he had the revenues of one hundred and eighty-four Manors), considered himself sufficiently wealthy to purchase the Papal chair. Taking advantage of the King's absence in Normandy, he set out for Rome, attended by Hugh, Earl of Chester, and a large retinue of followers, contrary winds detained him at the Isle of Wight for some time, and when at length he was about to embark he was surprised by the sudden appearance of the King, who having received intelligence of the Bishop's intentions, hastened to England to frustrate them. Seizing his brother with his own hands,

the King took immediate possession of his treasure, sentenced him to perpetual imprisonment, and confiscated all his estates to the crown. King Henry I. afterwards bestowed this land in dower on his second wife, Adeliza or Adelyda, who appears by a grant (the original of which is in the possession of Mr. Abel Smith of Watton Woodhall) bestowed it on the 1st of December, 1136, the first anniversary of her husband's death, upon the Abbot and Monks of the Benedictine Monastery of Reading, which had been founded by Henry I, and where he and Adelyza were buried.

ADELIZA'S (OR HENRY I'S 2ND WIFE'S) GRANT OF  
THE MANOR OF ASTON, UPON THE ABBOT AND  
MONKS OF READING.

Be it known to all faithful of the holy Church of all England and Normandy that I Adelidis Queen wife of the most noble King Henry and daughter of Godfrey Duke of Lortharingia have granted and given in perpetuity to God and the Church of St. Mary of Rading for the health and redemption of the soul of my lord the most noble King Henry and my own (soul) for the health also of our Lord Stephen by the grace of God King of the English and of his wife Queen Matilda and of all the progenitors of the most noble King Henry and of my father and mother and relatives as well living as dead and of all faithful Christians living and dead my Manor of Easton which my most noble lord the King Henry gave me as Queen and his wife in Hertfordshire with all appertaining to it so that it may be held freely and peaceably according as I myself have held it in demesne by the gift of my most noble lord the King Henry that is to say with soc and sac and thol and them and infangenethief with the Church and demesne with free men and villanes with wood and plain with pastures and feedings with waters and mills with ways and lanes with all customs and liberties and with whatever else my lord held in his demesne and gave to me This gift moreover I have made on the first anniversary of (the death of) my lord the most noble King Henry in the same Church by a certain pallium which I have placed upon the high alter the undersigned being witnesses that is to say Roger Bishop of Salisbury Symon Bishop of Worcester Ingulph Abbot of Abing-

don Walter Abbot of Egenesham (Ensham) Bernard Abbot of Mount St. Michael Warin Prior of Worcester Nicolas Prior of St. Martin de Bello Ralph Prior of Oseneia Herman the Queen's Chaplain Master Serlone Clerk of the Queen Adam and Robert son of Walter Canon of Waltham Ralph Theabald Roger Clerk of the Bishop of Salisbury Symon nephew of the Bishop of Worcester Gervase Bertrand Clerk of the Bishop of Worcester Jocelin brother of the said Queen\* etc., etc.

This Manor continued in the possession of the Abbot and Monks of Reading until the Dissolution of Religious Houses, when it came to the Crown, and was granted by King Henry VIII., in 1540, to Sir Philip Boteler, Knight of Watton Wood Hall, in whose family it remained until the year 1778, when it was sold by John Palmer Boteler, Esq., to Sir Thomas Rumbold, Bart., who died possessed of it in 1791, and by the Trustees under the Will of Sir Thomas Rumbold, in 1794, to Paul Benfield, Esq., of Albemarle Street, London, Member of Parliament for Shaftesbury.

Afterwards, pursuant to an Order of his Majesty's Court of Exchequer, it was sold on the 21st of May, 1801, and purchased by Edmund Darby, Esq., of Aston, who was the possessor when Mr. Clutterbuck wrote his history of this county.

Mr. Cussan, a later historian, goes on to say that:—  
 "This Edmund Darby, Esq., died on 5th of April, 1831, by whose trustees it was sold to Ann Walmsley, of Hoddesdon (Herts.), spinster, who by her Will, dated 16th May, 1844, devised it to her great-nephew, Donat John Hoste O'Brian, Esq., J.P., of Eastwick, who (Mr. Cussans says in 1878) is the present lord of the Manor."

#### THE OLD MANOR HOUSE, ASTON BURY.

The old Manor House, known as Aston Bury, is about three-quarters of a mile South-East of the Church and Village, and was probably built by one of the Botelers

\* The Seal attached to this Grant is of white wax, three inches and a half long, and in shape a pointed oval. It bears a full face female figure, habited in a long robe, with hanging sleeves. She holds in her right hand a sceptre with a bird on the top, and in her left hand a mound and cross. The legend:—*Sigillum Adelide a regine Anglie.*

This was originally the Seal of Matilda, Henry's first wife, the legend only being altered.

about the middle of the sixteenth century, but to which one is uncertain.

The plan on the North side forms a straight line, but on the South is unbroken by two projections, which are filled with remarkably bold but fine staircases with renaissance details, they are both much of the same design, but the one in the Eastern wing is the richer, leading to it on ground floor out of the old hall is the principal doorway, with a Tudor-headed arch in the spandrils of which are carved two shields of arms, which help to give a date to the building, on the East side are the arms of the Botelers, viz.:—Gules, a fess counter compony argent and sable between six crosses-crosslet of the second, and on the West side the arms of Drury:—Argent; on a Chief vert a Tau cross between two mullets or. (These same arms are on a brass in Watton Church.) Sir Philip Boteler, of Woodhall, married Elisabeth, daughter of Sir Robert Drury, knt., of Halstead, Suffolk; he acquired the estate in 1540, and died on 28th of March, 1545, and it was in all probability by him that Aston Bury was erected.

Most of the rooms as was usual at this time of domestic planning are thoroughfare rooms.

The most peculiar feature in the house is the long room, which is reached by the Eastern Staircase, it runs the whole length of the building on the North side, it is 110ft. long internally, 17ft. 6in. wide, and 8ft. 4in. from floor to top of the moulded wall plate cornice. The roof is waggon-shaped and ceiled. It is lighted by a large square-headed window at East and West ends, and by four smaller ones on North side in the gables, there are 11 small cupboards formed in the roof, which seem to have been originally all boarded. It was entered by two large doorways in South side, and warmed by two open fire-places in South wall. It is the opinion among some of the inhabitants that Aston Bury was once a nunnery, and this room was their living apartment, and that the 11 small cupboards was where they slept. This idea, I think we can without hesitation put aside, it being much more probable that it was intended for a ball-room.

I was told by the present occupiers of the house that several stone coffins have been found at different times near the house.

There was formally a Chapel at the East end of the

building, the foundations of which were removed not many years ago.

The building externally is most picturesque, especially the North front, the monotony being broken by the four moulded brick gables and string course. (See Illustration.)

The moulded brick chimney stacks here are most beautiful in detail, most of them varying in design.

In a number of the *Herts Constitutional Magazine* for 1889, is an account of this place by Mr. F. Silvester who says:—"Mr. E. V. Methold who stands unrivalled in his knowledge of the history of Stevenage and all the villages within a large radius, says:—"There is a picture in the British Museum of Aston Bury, drawn about the year 1805. In this drawing, the porch is placed in the exact centre of the house, and is of brick, the top of the porch corresponding with the gables of the house. The present front door was formerly a window, and no doubt was altered when the house was turned into a farm house, for the porch is of wood, and perhaps made of part of the oak screen, which used to run across the old hall. In the beams and floors of the new kitchen, formerly the old hall, are marks of where the screen was attached to the old beams.'"

In conclusion, besides our county historian, I have to tender my thanks to the Rev. G. A. Odie, and Mr. F. Silvester, for the valuable information they have given me. The picture is from a photo, kindly given me by Mr. R. L. Lowe, taken by him on the day of our visit to Aston.