

Notes on Rickmansworth.

By TOM BEVAN.

POSITION.

RICKMANSWORTH straggles along the banks of the Colne for about two and a half miles, and comprises the river-flats, the low hills of Croxley and Rickmansworth Park on the north, and the higher hills of Moor Park, Batchworth, Woodcock Hill and Harefield on the south. The Chess and the Gade enter the Colne practically in the heart of the town.

Along the low, flat levels by the rivers the soil is bog and river silt upon gravel, which may be dug anywhere. Batchworth lake and a neighbouring stretch of water are simply ballast holes from twelve to fifteen feet deep. The higher levels are gravel or excellent sand upon chalk and flint, and huge flints are obtainable everywhere a few feet below the surface.

With the exception of very few houses the whole of Croxley Green, Rickmansworth and Mill End is built on the northern side of the valley. This fact is remarkable as an example of continuity of human occupation. From the gravel pits of Croxley Woods and Mill End, separated by the rather deep valley of the Chess, hundreds of stone axes have been dug, some Palæolithic in type, some Neolithic, others the comparatively modern ground and polished Celts. Just across the river is the London clay. The number of stone implements found on two sites of a few score acres each point to one of two conclusions; either the valley must have been fairly densely peopled over the whole of the Stone Age or the inhabitants, blessed by a superabundance of flints, were the manufacturers of weapons and tools for their neighbours. Unless one admits one or other of these suppositions, it is difficult to account for the astonishing finds. The axes were well known to the gravel-digger, and when the pits were in full work he and his children drove a brisk trade in them at two shillings and half-a-crown each.

ROMAN TIMES.

Hertfordshire was, as we know, extensively occupied by the Ancient Britons, and the rich valleys of Rickmansworth, with their streams and pools for fishing and

flanked by the densely forested hills, would hardly be an empty wilderness; a flourishing tribe subject to the great Cassivelaunus would doubtless be in occupation of so ancient a dwelling-place.

How did Caesar advance to his attack upon the fortress of the British king on your own hill above the Ver? Surely the open way was along the Thames valley and thence along that of the Colne. We need not stretch imagination unduly by seeing the legions of the Roman Conqueror sweeping through what is now Rickmansworth, and, later, the troops of the brave Boadicea surging to the conquest of Verulam, and, later still, the shattered fragments of her army fleeing in terror from the avenging Romans.

The only piece of actual evidence of Roman occupation I have seen are all the fragments of a bowl of Samian ware of the characteristic sealing-wax red. These were unearthed on Chorleywood Common during the war, when trenches were being dug for a bombing school. The depth was about six feet.

SAXON RICKMANSWORTH.

It is from Saxon times that Rickmansworth gets its name. One derivation, long accepted, was "Rick" or "Rich," "Merc," pool, and "Worth," enclosed meadows or farm. My own opinion has always been one that affords a simpler derivation, "Rickmersworth," or Rickmer's Farm or Holding. A queer corroboration of this came to me in a letter some twelve years ago, when a German family spelling their name Rykmer wrote asking if any of their name still lived in the neighbourhood. When Offa, in the eighth century, founded the Abbey of St. Albans, the manors of Rickmersworth, the Moor, and Crokesley were part of the Abbey endowment, and for about seven hundred years they continued to be part of the Abbey domains. The record in Domesday Book gives Rickmersworth thirty families, with four Frenchmen, land for twenty ploughs but only three in use, and 1,200 hogs feeding in the woodlands that formed part of the great forest of Herts and Middlesex. Beyond this Norman history is a blank.

MEDLEVAL RICKMANSWORTH.

It was during the Plantagenet period that Rickmersworth rose to the status of a market town, Henry III.

granting the necessary charter. When the peasants rebelled in 1381 under Wat Tyler, John Ball, and the miller of St. Albans, William Grindcobbe, the disgruntled folk of Rickmersworth marched to the city and wrung their charter of liberties from the Abbot. The manor tithe-barn at Croxley is still in excellent preservation. From this time history in Rickmersworth centres around the Bury, Moor Park, and Basing House. Before dealing with these we will glance at the Church.

THE CHURCH.

This is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, and is referred to in old documents as the church of Our Lady of the Island. The site is an island one, formed by two of the many streams hurrying to join the Colne. With the exception of the tower the building is quite modern, but excavations show that a large church has stood for many centuries. The known list of vicars goes back to the thirteenth century, and in 1476 Roger Birch left money for the repair of the well-worn bells and money also for lights for the high altar and six other altars. About the same time John Stocker left money for general repairs to the fabric, and his best cow bought from his brother Will to be sold for the provision of candles for the high altar. It is interesting to note that Stocker's Farm still exists in name and fact. Part of the vicarage is very old, the porch dating from 1461. The folk of Rickmansworth seem to have been of the rebel and reformer type. During the time of Wolsey's ownership of the Moor they smashed the font and set fire to the church. The record of the event states that, although the building was almost destroyed, the sacred elements on the altar were untouched, and the rood, notwithstanding that the rioters had wrapped it about with tow to ensure its destruction, likewise suffered no harm. To those who assisted in the re-building the Cardinal granted one hundred days shortening of the pains of purgatory, and my lord of Lincoln granted a term of forty days.

Later we find Richard Baxter, the eminent divine of Stuart times, wrestling mightily with the dissenters of the town for ten days. It is noteworthy that his first sermon after his thirteen years of inhibition was preached in Rickmersworth church.

The most notable Dissenter associated with the town

was William Penn, the Quaker. He married Miss Springett, of King John's Farm, Chorleywood, and spent five of the first years of his married life at Basing House, where his chair is still preserved. Basing House stands on the site of a much older building of monastic origin. It is interesting to note that when Penn lived at Basing House the unhappy Duke of Monmouth was living at Moor Park. After the battle of Sedgemoor, and while Judge Jeffreys was holding his Bloody Assize in the West, Penn went to St. James' Palace to plead the cause of the hapless children of Taunton, condemned because they had cheered the Pretender. He failed in his mission, and returning to the ante-chamber met Sir John Churchill, afterwards the famous Duke of Marlborough. Placing his hands on the marble mantelpiece he said, "His Majesty will not be moved; his heart is as cold and hard as this stone." Penn was by no means the quiet, peace-loving Quaker of popular imagination. He was pugnacious and rebellious, bitterly attacking other sectaries who disagreed with his religious views, and on two occasions his father turned him out of the house for obstinacy and disobedience. He was the founder of Pennsylvania. At the Jordans, a few miles from Rickmersworth, he and his wife are buried.

Next door to Basing House is The Limes, for some years the home of Gerald Massey, the poet and Egyptologist. He was a barge boy on the Grand Junction Canal, and was born at Tring. A little farther down the street is The Elms, and here George Eliot resided for several years.

Other notable people connected with the town are Dr. Caius, physician to Queen Elizabeth and founder of Caius College, Cambridge. He was granted the manor of Croxley, and to-day it forms part of the College endowment. Wolsey, the founder of Christ's College, Oxford, made the Moor his home. Sir Thomas White, who founded St. John's College, Oxford, was born in that part of Rickmersworth known as Mill End; he also founded the Merchant Taylors School.

THE BURY.

This is the most ancient of the big houses of Rickmersworth, and was used by Ridley, Bishop of London, and afterwards by Bishop Bonner, who sent him

to the stake at Oxford with Bishop Latimer. It is a Tudor structure with interior work of later date. It stands on the site of a very ancient house, probably the dwelling place of the reeves who farmed the manor for the Abbots of St. Albans. Some years ago, when the father of the present Mr. Colin Taylor lived at the Bury, the old hearth-stone was found with the mason's mark and the date 1325. In Stuart times the Bury came into the hands of the Crown, and Charles I. granted it to one of his staunch Cavaliers, Sir Thomas Fotherly, the founder of the quaint almshouses in the High Street. His son, John Fotherly, was one of those who supplied Charles II. with funds, and there is a legend that that monarch hid in the Bury and in a secret chamber behind the chimney of "The Feathers," then "The Cross Keys." The back of the inn abuts on the Bury grounds. According to Allen Fea's able book "The Flight of the King," detailing the journeys of Charles after the battle of Worcester he never ventured so near London as Rickmersworth, and if anyone hid behind the chimney at "The Feathers" it is more likely that the fugitive was John Fotherly himself.

The park now known as Rickmansworth Park was till 1826 the Bury Park. The Bury is at the present time the property of Lord Ebury. The present tenant, T. W. Bevan, Esq., has done much to preserve the beauties of the old place.

THE MANOR OF THE MOOR.

The bigger history, history of national importance, associated with Rickmersworth centres in the Manor of the Moor, and this because of the high political and historical standing of so many of its owners. The manor was part of the original endowment of the Abbey of St. Albans, but the first known record dates only from 1431, when the manor was granted by the Abbot to one, Fleete, at a rent of a shilling a year and the obligation to provide one nag horse to carry the Abbot to his cell at Tynemouth whenever that dignitary rode thither for retreat. As Tynemouth was away in the wilds of Northumberland, it is probable that Fleete was seldom called upon to honour this part of his bargain. Twenty-six years later we find Ralph de Boteler, Lord of Sudeley, in Gloucestershire, disputing the Abbey title to the manor, but he

compromised his claim for a rent of one penny per annum. When Boteler fell under the ban of Edward IV. for his adherence to the Lancastrian cause he mortgaged the property to the original owners, the Abbots. Three years after this the manor was in the possession of George Neville, brother of the King-maker, Warwick, Archbishop of York and Chancellor of England. He enclosed 600 acres as a park, pulled down the house occupied by Fleete, and built a moated palace where the moats now are, on the lower road to Watford. In "The Last of the Barons" Lytton imaginatively describes the splendours of the house and its gardens. Here Neville lived in a style of almost Oriental magnificence. One is able to gauge this magnificence by a study of the items provided for the feast to celebrate his installation as Archbishop of York. Here is a rough summary of the menu:—

Cattle, sheep, pigs and deer, 4,218.

Fowls and game birds, 15,500.

Meat pasties and sweet pasties, 16,500.

Fish, rabbits, hares and small birds, without number.

Bread, ale, wine, in proportion.

Neville, like Wolsey, was a politician rather than a Churchman, and his house at the Moor was his usual place of residence. He was a man of keen intellect, Machiavellian in its subtlety, and was one of the foremost statesmen of his time. Like his brother the King-maker his ambition was limitless. It was he who pronounced the famous judgment that the Duke of York was the true heir and successor to Henry VI., to the exclusion of the son of that monarch, and this judgment led directly to the Wars of the Roses. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the conduct of the war in its middle and latter stages was centred at Moor House, for the Archbishop was the brains of the Yorkists and afterwards of the Lancastrians. Unfortunately he was double in his dealings and never true to the cause he espoused. When he changed over to the Lancastrians he betrayed them by allowing Edward IV. to escape after Warwick had captured him. Later, when Edward had re-conquered England and the Archbishop was once more a Yorkist partisan, he plotted to betray his king whilst he was a guest at the Moor. A servant warned Edward, who seized a horse and galloped

by night to Windsor. By his policy of facing-both-ways he lost London to Henry before Barnet was fought, thus rendering the Lancastrian cause hopeless. When Edward felt himself thoroughly secure he took a swift and sweeping revenge, seizing Neville for treason and confiscating all his goods. From the jewels in his mitre the king adorned his own crown, and it is reasonably certain that some of them are in the royal regalia to-day.

After Neville's time the Moor was crown property, bestowed from time to time upon royal favourites. Henry VII. gave it to De Vere, the Earl of Oxford, who did more than any other man to help him to the throne. The manor reverted to the crown upon his death. Henry VIII. used it as a royal residence in the early part of his reign, and an inventory exists of the wardrobe and furniture. An inventory, years afterwards, of Wolsey's belongings makes mention of a billiard table for the first time in English family records.

The house is first mentioned as Wolsey's residence in 1525, and it is interesting to note that, like Neville, he was Archbishop of York and Chancellor of England. He enlarged and beautified the mansion, which he called "My poor house at the Moor." The treaty that ended the war with France was signed here, Wolsey being in residence with the King and Queen as his guests. The treaty is known as "The Treaty of the Moor."

When the proceedings for divorce were on the Cardinal had the King and Queen again as his guests, and Anne Boleyn was present in her capacity of Maid of Honour. One can picture the scene, the watching and arguing Cardinals, Wolsey and the wily Italian Campeggio, the doomed Catherine, the sly and bewitching Anne, and her obese royal lover; plaintiff, defendant, judges, and the shallow cause of the suit. This visit of a month had been arranged in the hope that the Queen would be persuaded to agree to a divorce. The plot failed. The party then went on to another royal house in Northampton, and, the Queen still continuing obstinate, the two Cardinals returned to the Moor, from which Campeggio set out for Rome. When he had gone it was discovered that he had found and taken away with him a packet of love-letters from Anne to Henry. The hue and cry was out immediately and he was followed to France. The letters

were never recovered, and in all probability they are stored in that repository of many secrets, the Vatican at Rome. Wolsey was now in disgrace, and he retired to the Moor to brood over the failure of his ambitious schemes. Tradition records that he would sit for hours under an oak at the top of the park and look out in the direction of London, the scene of so many of his glorious triumphs. The oak has always been known as the Cardinal's Oak.

After Wolsey fell the Moor became once again a royal residence. It is said that the unfortunate Catherine Howard spent her honeymoon there.

Henry appointed the Earls of Bedford, then residing at Chenies, four miles off, as Rangers of the Moor, and James I. granted the manor to the third Earl, and the Countess laid out the gardens with such perfection that Sir William Temple described them as "The perfectest figure of a garden I ever saw either at home or abroad." The Earl of Pembroke purchased the park. He was the nephew of the famous Sir Philip Sidney. As another link between Rickmansworth and the older Universities we may mention that Pembroke College, Oxford, is named after him, also that he presented valuable Greek MSS. to the Bodleian Library.

The next owner of the Park was Robert Cary, Earl of Monmouth. He was cousin to Queen Elizabeth, his mother being sister to Anne Boleyn. He it was galloped post-haste to Edinburgh to tell the King of Scotland that he was also King of England. He died at Moor Park, a very old man, and is buried in the parish church.

The last tenant of the old mansion was the Duke of Ormond, who had impoverished himself by his loyalty to the Stuart cause. He was unable to maintain his position and sold to the Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles, who had married the heiress of the famous Scottish House of Buccleuch. He pulled down the house of Wolsey and built the present house higher on the hill. He built of brick, using the old material, and the stone front of to-day was added by another owner about forty years after. Monmouth's attempt to seize the throne upon the death of his father led to the tragedies of Sedgemoor and the Bloody Assize in the West. He himself paid the penalty of treason. The beheaded oaks in the front of the house are the symbol of the grief of his Duchess.

Upon the death of the Duchess of Monmouth the house was purchased by one of the lucky gamblers of the time, a Mr. Styles, one of the few who made a fortune out of the disastrous South Sea Bubble. One of the new rich, he treated his fine property in characteristic fashion. The house was encased in heavy Portland stone, a really fine portico added, together with curving colonnaded wings and a chapel. He also adorned the walls with frescoes and much cheap Italian stucco. Marble doorways were built leading from the salon to the principal rooms, and under the direction of Sir James Thornhill, the artist responsible for the dome of St. Paul's, the ceiling was decorated with a florid, classical conception of the coming of Dawn. Styles spent £150,000 on his improvements.

After Styles came Admiral Anson with the money he had garnered during his voyage round the world. The famous gardens of the Countess of Bedford, somewhat away from the newer house, were not to the liking of the gallant admiral, savouring rather of the exotic and formal, so he called in "Capability Brown," the greatest landscape architect of the day. Brown destroyed the old gardens and laid out those that are still in existence above the house, with their lake and Temple of the Winds. Brown spent £80,000 of Anson's money.

There was a savour of the sea about the two next owners, Rous and Williams, both being of the East India Company. Rous pulled down much that Styles had built. The name of Williams remains in the banking house of Williams Deacon, which he founded. He began life as an upholsterer. Both Mr. Williams and his wife left very fragrant memories behind them in Rickmansworth. The estate was once more sold at their death. The new owner was the Marquis of Westminster, the property passing to his son, Lord Ebury. The third Lord Ebury sold, and Lord Leverhulme bought as one of his multifarious commercial speculations. The proprietors are now Moor Park, Ltd. The park is a golf course, or rather three golf courses, and the mansion the most palatial golf club house in the country. Where kings and queens walked, and courtiers fawned and plotted, the golfer now shouts "Fore!" The contrast is tremendous and significant.