

BOTH before and after the fateful battle of Senlac there must have been much hurry and alarm along the valley of the Parret. Whether across the ford of Combwich, the bridge of Bridgwater, Borough Bridge, at the confluence of the Tone and Parret, South Petherton Bridge, or Langport Bridge, eager messengers, bowmen, and steel-clad knights, rushing to the assistance of the great Saxon cause, must have passed and repassed. Never perhaps was there such tumult, never such a momentous national crisis since the days when the Roman legionaries encamped at Vespasian's camp in Selwood and met the British chiefs. Or when, four hundred years and more afterwards, the British forces under Geraint and King Arthur, rallying round tall Camelot and the Tower of War, exchanged those mighty blows with the Saxons at Llongporth, or Langport itself. Or when, after a space of another 400 years, the summons went forth from King Alfred, hiding in the forest of North Petherton and along the ridges of Quantocks, to all the faithful men of Somerset and to the royal herdsmen and swineherds of this region to meet at *Egbright's Stone*. East, west, south, and north the troopers had hurried to that noted rendezvous in the depth of leafy Selwood, creeping round, it may have been, on the south by Othery or by South Petherton, on the north by Brugie or Bridgwater itself, singly or in small parties, all determined with strong hearts and resolute wills to deal death and destruction upon the heathen Danes who had wrought such havoc everywhere. Almost within sight and sound of Brugie was that battle fought at Edington — so we may well place it — upon the Polden Hills.

Now it was the turn of the Saxons themselves, for under the sway of the mild and saintly Edward the Confessor their national unity and national aspirations seemed to suffer an eclipse. Duke William, nurtured in war from the very cradle, stern and ruthless in demeanour, crafty in politics, and great as an organizer, had secured the reversion of the English crown to himself, so far as putting himself technically in the right was concerned. There might have been — and probably there were — advocates of the Norman claim in Somerset and in the valley of the Parret, but the majority of the thanes and earls were whole-hearted Saxons. Had not Edward the Confessor been crowned himself at a Witenagemot at Gillingham, close to Sherborne, and on the borders of Somerset and Dorset? Were they likely to

forget their choice and the oath of allegiance?

The Saxon chronicler, Ethelwerd, in describing King Alfred's extremities in 878, just before the battle of Edington, remarks that he fought *daily battles against the barbarians, having with him the province of Somerset only : no others assisted him, except the servants who made use of the king's pastures*. Loyalty to Alfred's line and to the Wessex princes of the House of Cerdic must have been a tradition not lightly to be forgotten, especially when it was remembered how such loyalty had been sealed by the great glory of a successful campaign, and how, as a climax to all, Guthrum, the Danish king, at Aller itself, close to North Petherton, had received Christian baptism and a new name.

The King's pastures and — it must be added — the King's forests were goodly and wide in Somerset. There were the five forests of Selwood, Mendip, Neroche, North Petherton, and Exmoor, all hunting centres of the Saxon kings. Mendip and Axbridge were notable centres, and in the days of S. Dunstan King Edmund had urged his horse along the cliffs of Cheddar in that classic hunt ; Edward the Elder had sojourned at the old Taunton Priory on a hunting and hawking tour westwards (901) ; and Somerton, with its ancient warren, bounded on one side by the Roman foss and on the other by the Cary River, had sporting annals second to none in the kingdom. Eastward of Somerset and right into Hampshire, to Gillingham Forest, to Cranbourne Chase, and to regions covered afterwards by the huge *New Forest*, the Saxon preserves ran.

These forests and king's pastures held many brave and good archers and men-at-arms. The hundreds of Carhampton, Williton, Cannington, Andersfeld were royal hundreds, and the musters there must have furnished a goodly spectacle of West-country men. We would gladly have welcomed a roll of these men, just as we welcome those Elizabethan musters when the summons went forth to rally round the Tudor Queen against the usurping Spaniard. But history is silent, and we can only guess at the number and names of these Saxon thanes who went first, it might have been, with Comes Haroldus to Stamford Bridge, and then southwards to Senlac.

We can only guess, too, at the way the news was carried westwards to the valley of the Parret, to say how Harold fell. Perhaps the ominous rumour of the bowing of the

Cross at Waltham — that cross which tradition said had been taken from the hill of Montacute itself to begin with — was passed from one to another of these Somerset men, who awestruck at the reputed portent, read into it some stroke of an over-ruling power. Had Harold really perjured himself over those relics? Had that cross, before which he prostrated himself in prayer, really intimated to him that fate which awaited him next morning at Senlac? Was King William's founding of Battle Abbey in honour of S. Martin of Marmoutier really a proof not only of personal piety but also of Divine grace?

Then there was that other great portent, the comet of 1066, such as never had been seen before. The historian Palgrave assigns a great importance to this, and dwells upon the fact how *night after night the appalled multitude gazed at the messenger of evil, the long-haired star, darting its awful splendour from horizon to zenith. Crowds, young and old, watched the token far beyond the midnight hour, and when they retired to their broken rest, its bright image, floating before their eyes, disturbed their slumbers. Even if this were but an idle opinion, yet it was an opinion which became a reality, as the moral world was then constituted. The conviction that the phenomena of nature and the destiny of mankind were bound up in a mystic unity gave more boldness to the fortunate, and increased the cares of the despondent. And the English, throughout all the Anglo-Norman period, acknowledged their subjection to be a kind of national punishment.*

Such thoughts may have confused the loyalty of Saxon thanes and made them waver. The passes of Selwood had been entrusted to a family of the name of Stourton — so called from the Stour — and it is the tradition of the lords Stourton that their ancestor, who must indeed have occupied the important fastnesses round Pen Pits and Vespasian's Camp, came to terms with the Conqueror. All this and much more must have flashed through the country and formed a topic of conversation along all the highways of the country and the bridges of the Parret, not the least being the bridge at Bridgwater. For it was from this bridge, more almost than any other, that the Saxon must have looked seaward and have wondered whether by some disastrous turn they might have to take refuge in Ireland, as Harold's son did, or perhaps in South Wales and Monmouth, where Harold's triumphs were still a bright spot in the Saxon annals.

When, after Senlac, the strong castle of Dover, one of the very few existing in England, had been taken; when Canterbury, where Archbishop Stigand ruled and Agelnoth, apparently one of the Godwin family, commanded the military forces, had made a formal submission; when Winchester had proffered obedience; nay, when London itself had surrendered, her citizens bearing with them the keys of the city and delivering to William the person of the infant Atheling as he sat in the palace where the Confessor had been accustomed to wear his crown, then indeed the cause of the Saxons seemed to be hopelessly lost. Stigand, the Archbishop, had proffered his formal submission, Edwin and Morcar had given their adhesion to the Norman, and it was a well-known fact that Eadnoth, the standard-bearer or marshal of the Saxon hosts — an hereditary and honourable post — had acknowledged William's claims.

The siege and fall of Exeter form a very distinct phase in the conquest of the west, for Exeter would by no means accept the Norman domination except upon certain conditions, even if the city would go as far as this. Indeed, the men of Exeter and others with them desired to form a general league amongst the English burghs against the common enemy. But Exeter fell, and one of the most pathetic results briefly narrated in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle runs thus: —

This year (1067) Harold's mother, Githa, and the wives of many good men with her, went to the Flat Holm (Bradánreolic) and there abode some time; and afterwards went from thence over sea to S. Omers.

The Saxons of Brugie and the Saxon followers of Haroldus Comes in the valley of the Parret must have known of this supreme climax in the fortunes of the House, and their hearts must have gone out in sympathy to the forlorn Royal Lady seeking such precarious asylum in the lonely island of the Severn Sea. How did the fugitive reach the spot from Exeter? Was it by an escape which followed the rough tracks of Dartmoor Forest to Hartland, where indeed there existed a monastery founded and endowed by the Queen-mother herself in honour of S. Nectan; or, more likely, was it by following the valley of the River Exe by Tiverton, by Bampton, by Dulverton, and so to Porlock, a favoured Saxon centre? Thence by boat to the Flat Holm was a short and easy transit.

Still all was not lost, and from Ireland

might come a rescuing hand, and so the Chronicle briefly says: *During these things one of Harold's sons came with a fleet from Ireland unexpectedly into the mouth of the River Avon and soon plundered all that neighbour-hood. They went to Bristol and would have stormed the town, but the inhabitants opposed them bravely. Seeing they could get nothing from the town, they went to their ships with the booty they had got by plundering and went to Somersetshire, when they went up the country. Eadnoth, Master of the Horse, fought with them, but he was slain there and many good men on both sides; and those who were left departed thence.*

This is a curious turn in the history of the Norman Conquest of the county of Somerset. Eadnoth adhered to King William's cause and fought against the sons of Harold. He lost his life in the task, but evidently he showed which way his sympathies went. Perhaps, also, the sons of Harold were not as popular as Harold himself, and their descent upon Somerset was in the guise rather of pirates and freebooters than of consistent Royalists and Legitimists. Everything seemed to tell in favour of the adventurous William the Bastard ; so much so that he seemed in reality to have the blessing of Providence. Locally, it is an interesting speculation to wonder what particular part of Somerset the son of Harold ravaged, and deductions have been made from the state of those manors which seem to have lost value between the days of Edward the Confessor and 1086, the date of the Great Survey. Amongst them are many showing signs of great impoverishment in the valley of the Parret and the Quantock country, such as Pignes — part of Bridgwater itself — Cossington, Combwich, Gothelney in Charlinch, Radlet and Planesfield in Overstowey, Durborough, close to Stoke Courcy, Stowey itself, where Haroldus Comes had been a landowner. Stoke Courcy, Stringston, under the Quantocks, and Knowle in Baudrip parish and Edington on the Poldens. Lower down, the manors of Quantockshead, Carhampton, and many in the vicinity of Porlock itself show signs of depreciation. No doubt the invasion was on a large scale, for there were fifty- two ships, and these were manned partly by Danes from Ireland and partly by English exiles (Freeman, *Norman Conquest*, Vol. IV, p. 225, and *Som. Arch. Proceedings*, Vol. XXV, p. 22).

Yet another striking event which must have resounded through the valley of the Parret and aroused the deep passions and

sympathies of its inhabitants, and this was the famous siege of the castle of Montacute, where King William had installed his half-brother, Robert Count of Mortain, with great powers to rule the country. This trust the Count seems to have abused, and although it may be presumed that many of the Saxon thanes were ready to acknowledge King William, it was not in their disposition to submit tamely to King William's officers, who through underlings and subordinates treated them badly. So there was a great rising in Somerset and Dorset, but unfortunately for the Saxon cause there was no head and no one great plan, and it was remorselessly crushed by the warlike Bishop of Coutances at the head of an army composed of Saxons of London, Winchester and Salisbury.

Montacute, that lonely hill now crowned by a deep growth of trees, was once the site of a strong castle, the ruins of which have now entirely disappeared. But to this castle, next in importance to Bristol in the west as a Norman administrative centre, was paid the hated Romfeoh or tax to Rome. In an old Wells document there is a mandate from William the Conqueror to William de Corcelle, father of the great Quantock Baron, Roger de Courcelle. *We command you to see that the Rome denarii (or Peter's pence) be paid at the coming Feast of S. Michael and make this known at Montacute and Bristol.* Apart from its local interest this mandate sheds a light upon the changed circumstances of the land. Rome had a footing which she never possessed before in England, and it is not surprising to read how in April, 1070, at Winchester, William the Conqueror received his crown from the Pope through the hands of Hermenfried, Bishop of Sion, and Peter the Bibliothecarius or Keeper of the Records of the Holy See, called Peter of S. Maria in Trastevere. This ambiguous act, *wholly passed over by the English historians as distasteful to them*, so Palgrave remarks, is, however, simply an amplification of that official act by which Pope Alexander sanctioned Duke William's expedition to England to punish Harold. That consecrated banner, the gonfanon of S. Peter, when it floated victoriously over the stricken field of Senlac, meant a kind of spiritual and ecclesiastical change for England. Could it be welcome to the Saxons? Especially when introduced under such circumstances of humiliation? The old question was destined to arise again in King John's day, and of King John Somerset and Bridgwater knew a good deal.

The change was one of those which made itself felt even in the remotest parishes. The Normans were, as we know, great benefactors of the monks and of the monastic orders, giving in the first place much property which belonged to them simply by the rude processes of indiscriminate plunder. Churches and their advowsons were handed over to priories and abbeys in Normandy, as in the case of Stoke Courcy and of Bridgwater Parish Church itself, which was given to the monks of S. Martin of Marmoutier, the privileged holders of Battle Abbey, an abbey made independent, by the way, of the English Church and the great see of Canterbury. But how were these parish churches served by absentee Norman monks? Instead of the old resident parson, vicars were appointed on a slender pittance, and so a form of appropriation of Church property was introduced unknown to Saxon times. By the aid and awe of a foreign power and the see of Rome a bad custom was imperiously put upon the poor English clergy. As an old writer remarks, *between such monastic and papal ambition and avarice the practice of appropriation, which crept in with William the Conqueror, became the custom of the land within the space of a few reigns, and the infection spread till above a third part of the benefices, and these the richest, became attached to monasteries. It was a craft with the monks to get their rules relaxed, and either to personally serve these cures or else to do it by vicars in the cheapest way.*

In the history, however, of Bridgwater it is of more particular interest to know what changes of ownership there were both in the vill itself and also in North Petherton hundred. In Bridgwater and Wembdon we have seen that the Saxon owner in the time of King Edward the Confessor was Merlesuain. Who was this Merlesuain? Could he have been that Saxon thane Merlesweyne who fled with Edgar Atheling and his mother Agatha and his sisters, Margaret and Christina, to Scotland to seek the protection of King Malcolm? He is found also in 1069 at the siege of York helping in the last struggles of the great cause alongside of Gos Patrick and Edwin and Morcar. Besides Bridgwater and Wembdon, it may be noticed that Merleswain is said to have held Stockland, Quantocks-head, Bagborough, Hewish and Newhall — in fact, the whole Domesday property of Ralph Paganel, the ancestor of the Paganels who succeeded to Walter de Douai at Bridgwater.

At any rate, the Merelesuain of Brugie and Wembdon disappears, and his place is filled by Walscinus de Duaco, or better known as Walter de Douai, a Fleming. It must always be remembered that in that great and composite host of King William's followers who landed at Kent there were a large number of Flandrenses, stout men of Flanders, fellow-countrymen of Matilda, King William's wife and consort, and subjects of Baldwin Count of Flanders. In a well-known Charter of Banwell there are the signatures, not only of King William and of Matilda and of Richard the son of whom we hear so little, but also of Walter the "Flemmenc." This was, we take it, Walter of Douai, and he was a most influential follower of the King.

The Flemings lived of old in the country that spread from the borders of Normandy almost to the Rhine. The name of Calais was Vlaemskeland, and the cities of Flanders were centres of mediaeval art and industry. The looms of Arras wove the tapestries which constitute the splendour of the Vatican, and Queen Matilda has by her Flemish handicraft handed down to posterity one of the most enduring monuments of her husband's successes in the famous Bayeux tapestry. These Flemings were great wanderers also, and going to Scotland as sailors and adventurers, laid the beginnings of influential Scotch families. There were Flemings of Aberdeen, Flemings of Lanark and Flemings of Dumbarton, and from Flemish stock sprang the Douglases, the Leslies, and the Bruces.

Under William the Conqueror the Flemish bands were mercenary troops, but they became too powerful to be disbanded, and so formed an important element in the Norman settlement. The difficulties of such a country as the valley of the Parret were familiar to these stout warriors, who came from somewhat similar regions in the Low Countries. Over and over again England and the Low Countries have been associated together in war and trade, and perhaps the most agreeable invasion, as far as England was concerned, took place in Tudor days, when Flemish weavers were settled at Glastonbury and elsewhere in Somerset, helping forward the trade and industry of the county.

A short description of Walter de Douai's barony is locally very instructive. Next to Roger de Corcelle, with his eighty-seven

Somerset manors, and William de Mohun, at Dunster, with fifty-four manors, Walter de Douai was the most powerful layman in the neighbourhood, excepting, of course, the Earl of Mortain, the Conqueror's half-brother, at Montacute Castle. The manors given to Walter de Douai seem, however, to have been given with a distinct idea of military strategy, and this idea was to guard the rivers Parret and the Axe from source to outfall into the Severn Sea, a task this Fleming was, no doubt, well able to fulfil. At the same time he commanded and intercepted the main lines of inland communication, whether it was by the old Roman road that led from Bath and Bristol over the Mendips, or further south by the roads that converged upon Ilchester, or, on the side of the Severn Sea, by such lines of communication that crossed the Parret at Brugie itself or Comwich Passage, the early importance of which latter place has been already noted.

The *caput Baroniae* was at Castle Cary, a place perhaps so called from the old caer or castrum that might have existed either on the site of the old castle itself or on the adjoining ridges of *Lodge Hill* and *Park Hill*. The outlook from these eminences is over a wide and extensive tract of land. On the east is Selwood, the passes of which we must suppose were entrusted to Rodolphus de Stourton to keep in virtue of his homage to King William; to the north-west, Glastonbury Tor; and, due west, spreading out like a map, the valley of the River Parret, reaching right up to North Petherton hundred and the distant boundary of the eastern ridge of Quantock.

Indeed, Castle Cary, standing a little north of South Cadbury, occupied in Norman times the same important and strategical position that King Arthur's Tower of War at Camelot occupied in British days, both of them standing a little east of the Fosse Way and the old Roman road to Bath. Together with Castle Cary, Walter de Douai received Harptree, on the east side of Mendip, commanding the Roman road that followed the line of Mendip, and ultimately had its terminus at the mouth of the Axe and Breaun Down. Both Richmond Castle at East Harptree, and Castle Cary were celebrated places in the time of King Stephen, and were held by the Perceval or Lovel family for the Empress Matilda, a proof of their early importance. There under the walls of Castle Cary issued the fountains of the River Cary, the eastern feeder of the Parret, now canalized, as already mentioned, and

having its outfall, for drainage purposes, at Highbridge, but at the time of the Norman Conquest flowing along its natural channel adjoining the River Parret, not far from Borough Bridge.

Together with Castle Cary Walter de Douai held Wincanton, Milton-Clevedon, Ansford, close to Castle Cary, Brocton or Bratton (Seymour) to the south. North Barrow, Sparkford, a manor in the immediate vicinity of the noted Cadbury Castle and lying on the road from Castle Cary to Ilchester. There was a feudal connection between Castle Cary and the old Roman town of Ilchester, as we are told that a burgess of the place paid rent to Walter de Douai. It may be remarked that of the manors held in the neighbourhood of Castle Cary and Harptree the greater part, like Sparkford, soon passed on to the Lovel barons.

Next to Castle Cary the most important place was Bridgwater and the adjoining manors along the valley of the Parret, e.g. Creech S. Michael, high up the river, and, nearer Bridgwater, Wembdon, Bradney, Horsey, Donham or Dunball, Baudrip, East Bower, Walpole in Paulet parish, Huntspill and Alston-maris in Huntspill, Paulet, Stretcholt, Burnham at the mouth of the Parret itself, and Huish, a manor in Burnham. Many of these manors fell under the territorial division of North Petherton hundred, but it is worth noting that Walter de Douai held the fords and bridges. He held the bridge at Bridgwater; he held Stretcholt and Paulet dominating Comwich Passage; and he held Burnham at the very mouth of the Parret. Together with William de Falaise at Stoke Courcy Castle, Walter de Douai may be said to have been the master of the Parret, although his strongest fort and castle was at the source of the Parret waters, whilst William de la Falaise's was on Bridgwater Bay.

In a similar way Walter de Douai had the oversight of the Axe River and held Compton on the Axe, Weare or Werre on the Axe, Bagewerre or Badgworth, Alston (Sutton) in Weare, Turnock or Tarnick near Biddesham, and Allerton, known better as Chapel Allerton. These manors formed a goodly section and block by themselves, rich beyond measure, not only as places where the reclaimed marsh ground would be valuable for grazing, but also as places where profit might be made from the traders and vessels bringing merchandise up the Axe, as at

Weare (or Overweare) two miles below Axbridge. For Weare at one time was a borough in itself. If Walter de Douai held nothing at Axbridge, this must be explained by the fact that Axbridge had been from time immemorial a royal burgh associated closely with the Royal Forest of Mendip.

At the mouth of the Axe Walter de Douai was placed in charge of Worle, the old camp lying above the modern Weston-super-Mare and Brean or Brean Down. As if to show his sense of the importance of these two headlands lying east and west of the mouth of the Axe, Walter de Douai held them both in his own hands, just as he did Huntspill and Burnham at the mouth of the Parret. From Domesday it also looks as if he held Donham or Dunball in his own hands, and Donham is described as a virgate of land and part of some gift which the king made, lying *inter duas aquas*. What these two *waters* were does not appear, but the land may have been an island or peninsula formed by the loop of the Parret close to Dunball.

To sum up — the new Norman Lord of Bridgwater was an extremely powerful baron, and from the heights above his strong Norman keep at Castle Cary he could look westward and northwards and survey his broad domains reaching down to the sparkling waters of the Severn Sea. We do not know what became of the Saxon thanes. There was Alnod, who held Bradney close to Bridgwater in the time of Edward the Confessor and probably gave his name to Alnodestone or Alston-marish in Huntspill. There was the Saxon Elsi at Castle Cary, Wincanton, Brocton, West Barrow, and there was a certain Aluuacre who held Overweare, Milton-Clevedon, Sparkford, Huntspill, Compton, Harptree, and so on, and as for Merleswain we have already speculated whether he could have been the powerful thane who fled to Scotland. But darkness covers the Saxon landowners after the Conquest. With bitter hearts they must have witnessed the absolute extinction of their family histories. Even to pronounce the names of the old manors with the Norman tag must have been gall and wormwood. The sacred hill of Leodgaresburgh was changed to Montacute from the name of a Montacute in Normandy. Shepton became Shepton-Montacute, another Shepton became Shepton-Malet. Stowey was called Stowey Columbers, Stoke became Stoke-Courcy, Cutcombe became Cutcombe Mohun,

Harptree became Harptree Gournay, part of Stockland was called Stockland Lovely one manor of Huntspill became Huntspill-Mareis, and another moiety Huntspill Cogan, and plain Brugie became, as we have seen, Brugge Walter.

William the Conqueror began by acting leniently to the English who acknowledged his rights, but as time went on and one revolt after another, crushed with an iron heel, embittered all relations, he waxed sterner. It was said that sixty thousand knights received their fees from the Conqueror, but, granting some exaggeration, there was a great host of Normans, Flemings, Angevins, Bretons, and others who by his gift stepped into the heritage of Anglo-Danish and English nobility and gentry. As the historian Palgrave remarks (*Hist. of Normandy*, Vol. III, p. 480), the great majority of the adventurers who fought under William's flag had been rude and poor and despicable in their own land; the rascallions of Northern Gaul. These, suddenly enriched, lost all compass and bearing of mind, and no one circumstance vexed the spirit of the English more than to see the fair and noble English maidens and widows forced to accept these despised adventurers as husbands.

The list of the thanes of the King as described in Domesday is a short one. There is a Brictric who held under the King a place called Buckland, and Tuckswell in Over Stowey, and he may have been the Brictric who held Clive or Kilve in the time of Edward the Confessor. With him was associated a certain thane called Ulward who may have given his name to Ulwardeston, or Woollston, a farm in Stoke Courcy parish and close to Stockland. Then there was an Anglo-Dane amongst the thanes called Harding, the son of Alnod, already mentioned. A Saxon Dodo held Dodington as part, then, of Nether Stowey, and Hosmer held a virgate of land in Otterhampton, which it is said *his father held before him* in the time of King Edward. But the change was generally typified in the transfer of such a manor as Perleston or Parieston in Kilve, where it is recorded in the Great Survey *Perlo held it in the time of King Edward the Confessor, and paid Danegeld for half a hide*, etc., *Normanus tenet* — without even specifying who the Norman adventurer was.

Or, perhaps, the original Saxon owner sinks down to a position of a tenant such as Eldred, who held part of Selve or Monksilver in the time of Edward the Confessor, and

then holds under the great fief of Roger de Corcelle, so powerful on the Quantocks and in the neighbourhood of Bridgwater and Stoke Courcy. Just indeed as the Saxon Alric, who held Halsway and Colford in Stogumber parish as owner in King Edward's time, and then as tenant under Roger de Courcelle.

Feeling themselves aliens in England, the more notable Saxon thanes and earls fled to Ireland (as many of them doubtless did from North Somerset) ; to Denmark, to the Elbe, but most of all to the south, and even to Byzantium, where the English guard were deemed the most trusty defenders of the Eastern emperor.

It is a curious fact that so many of King William's personal attendants and servants were found settled in the valley of the Parret.* For instance, Robert de Odburville or Ambreville, who was a kind of Forest Baron and ruled at Melcome in North Petherton and at Bower in Bridgwater itself, held under Humphrey the Chamberlain, who was installed himself at Curry. Johannes Hostiarius, i.e. John the door-keeper, held Pegens or Pignes in Bridgwater itself, and also Huntstile, with Pury or Perry in Wembdon, under the Chief Chamberlain. Ansgar the hearth-keeper held Chilton and also Michaelchurch and Sheerston, the hamlet in North Petherton, with Durleigh; and another Ansgar, described as the Coquus or the royal cook, held Lilstock. The wife of another cook called Manasses held a place called Haia, probably some park or enclosure. A Parcarius or park-keeper, called Anchitil, held North Newton in Petherton parish itself and also a place called Honibere, close to Stoke Courcy. The presence of these servants and attendants of the King in the neighbourhood has given rise to a conjecture that King William himself may have held a hunting court here, but at present there is no corroborative evidence to show for certain that such was the case ; nor is it possible to prove that the Conqueror was ever at Bridgwater itself.



* Forests and Deer Parks of Somerset, by Rev. W. Greswell.