

## LITTLE MAYNE.

### SOME NOTES ON LOCAL HISTORY.

By E. R. SYKES, B.A., F.Z.S., *who gave the deeds of the farm to the Dorset County Museum.*

IN 1931 Col. Drew read to our Society a paper on Parish History and how it should be written, and the following pages are an attempt to follow his instructions so far as relates to a small hamlet in the parish of West Knighton, situate about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Dorchester, on the Wareham Road.

Little Mayne, which has also been known as Parva Maene, Mayne Syrard, Mayne Sirard, Lyttlemayne, Litelmayne, &c., is now known to be the "Maine" of Domesday Book.

The following quotation\* explains the matter: "It has been printed out by Tait (I.P. N.L. 130) that Scirard or Sirard was a Cheshire tenant of the first Earl of Chester and that the family of Sirard which held the present place in 1285 (F.A.) clearly descended from the Cheshire Sirard. It may be added that Comes Hugo, the first Earl of Chester just alluded to, was the D. B. tenant in chief of Maine (Do), and also that, as early as 1202 (Car. F.F.), the tenant of Maine or Parva Maene was Adam Shirard or Syrad, and that the family (later also spelt Shyrard, Sherard) held Little Mayne at least up to 1436 (F.F.)."

I am now able somewhat to expand this history.† To begin with, this first Earl of Chester was a most important person in the time of William the Conqueror. A full history of him may be found in the *Dict. Nat. Biography*; it is sufficient here to mention that he held land in twenty counties, was popularly known as "Hugh the Fat," and died in 1101.

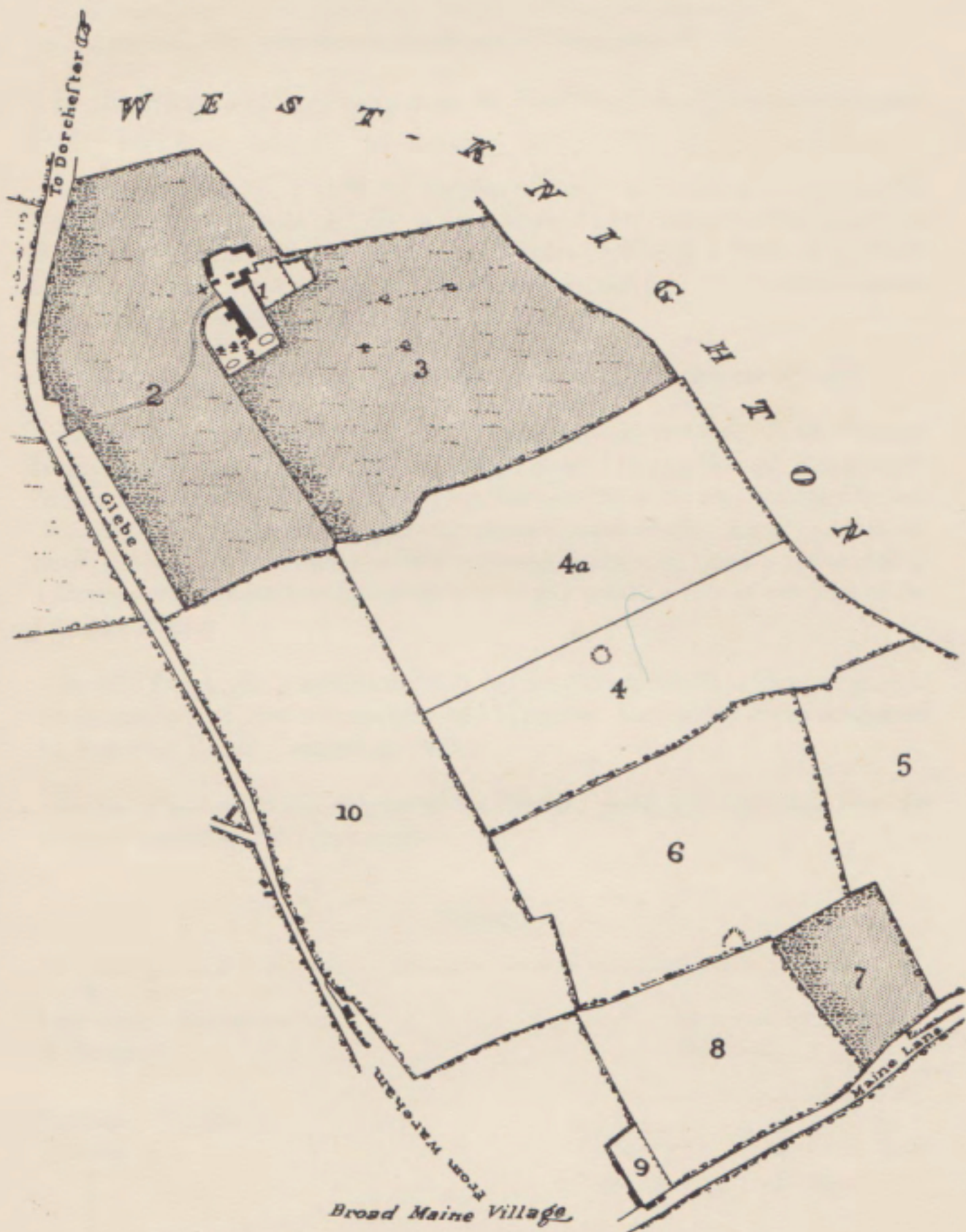
In 3 John (1201-2) there was an exchange of land in "Parva Maene," and Eude Martell transferred to Adam Syrad one virgate of land.

In 20 Henry III (1235-6) we find that a Helewisia Martell held land at Maine by arrangement with Eude Martell; this may however really relate to Broadmayne as the Martell or Martel family held land there. Indeed Broadmayne has also been known as Maine Martel.

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\**The Place Names of Dorset*, by A. Fagersten, 1933.

†*Cf. Fry's Dorset Records; Hutchins History of Dorset, &c.*



PART OF LITTLE MAYNE IN 1820.

About the year 1500 the property passed from the Newburghs to Thomas Kirton, who sold it in 1511 to William Middleton, Abbot of Milton, and the latter settled it in 1511 in trust to maintain a free school at Milton Abbas. The place remained in the Trustees hands for over 400 years, when they sold to Mr. W. H. Chilcott, from whom I purchased.

Amongst the tenants while the property was in the trustees hands may be named the following, with dates at which I am certain they were there : Robert (1543) and William Best (1548), William Talbot (1631), William Talbot (1692), John Spratt (1730), Richard Pearse (1755), James Sherren (1765), Henry Sherren (1836), while in more recent times the names of Duke and Groves occur.

A small confirmation as to the Best family may be found in the " Muster Roll," taken at Dorchester on September 28th of 34 Henry VIII before Thomas Trenchard, Kt., John Williams, and others.

These people had to attend by Parishes that the Military resources of the county might be known and we find there attended from " Lytell Maine " :

Robt. Beste, sen., with " a harnys, a horse and sheff of arrowes."

Robt. Beste, jun., with " a bowe and vi. arrowes "

Robt. Sare with " a bowe and vi. arrowes "

Owing to rebuilding having taken place, rather over a century ago, few of the older buildings remain beyond the large barn, over 120 feet long, with two bays and the base of the chapel referred to later. The farmhouse itself, which appears on a manorial plan of West Knighton, dated 1741, as a white house, apparently of stone, was rebuilt of Broadmayne brick, on a different site, and the stones appear to have been used, with various bits of sarsens in some of walls and outbuildings. There is an estate plan, dated 1820, showing how the buildings were then arranged.

The property was never large in size and 1836 was stated to consist " of a farm called Little Mayne in the parish of West Knighton, comprising a farm house, out buildings, and 14 parcels of land, containing 231A. 1R. 30P., with the right of a foreshare on a piece of common meadow in the parish of Fordington. The whole was let in 1821 at £300, in 1822 at £270, and in 1823 at £210, at which rent it is still held by Henry Sherren as yearly tenant, but to whom the trustees have been compelled to make an abatement of £10 10s 0d. per annum since the year 1830."

#### THE CHAPEL.

The " free chapel " was in existence about the year 1300 ; a list of the rectors and patrons from 1326-1491 may be found in Hutchins *History of Dorset* ; the earliest known rector was William, son of John de Frome, who was 14 years old at the time. The chapel was dedicated to St. Stephen.

At the dissolution in 1548 the chapel was granted to Thomas Boxley and Robert Reve for £36 ; its net income, derived from land which now forms a narrow field, alongside the main road, and which is locally sometimes referred to as the " parson's plot or " cemetery field " being £1 10s. 0d. after the deduction of one shilling toward the Prebend of Preston in Salisbury Cathedral. A pension was paid to William Baker, the last Rector.

The lead, bells, and woods were excepted, and went to the King ; but it was certified that the " woodes " were not sufficient to make the fences, and that there were " ornamentes, jewells, plates or goodes, none."

According to *Hutchins*, a bell, on which was " Ste Jacobe ora pro nobis," was removed to Fordington. This cannot be traced and several of the bells at Fordington have been recast since his day.

There still remain a few feet of the old walls of the chapel, with some pieces of the old " ripplestone " flooring, forming part of a cottage, which was inhabited up to about fifteen years ago, but is now empty and will not be relet for occupation : it was known as " Chapel Cottage."

There was litigation as whether the profits of the Chapel belonged to the school trustees or not, and, in 1620 there was a decree of the Commissioners of Charitable Uses adjudging the profit to the trustees. This, however, was reversed by an award of 1630, declaring that neither the free chapel, nor the tithe belonged to the school, and this tithe has remained in other hands ever since. On the estate map there is MS. note that the chapel and the glebe field were purchased by the trustees in 1882.

#### THE SARSEN STONES.

Known locally as " Littlemayne Rocks," there still remain a few isolated remnants of what must have been a very fine series of stone circles, with avenues leading up to them. At the present day no design or plan can be traced, except possibly on the S. side of the main road, and no attempt at reconstruction can be made. The problem is additionally complicated by the fact that the site being on the last outcrop of the Reading Beds (passing from Wareham to Dorchester) digging work, e.g. building, tree planting, &c., often reveals a foot or two below the surface Sarsen stones, unweathered, which therefore have never been above ground. Further, old inhabitants tell me that, many years ago, one tenant deliberately sunk some of the stones ; and many others have been used for building, road work, &c.

An account of the stones may be found in Sydenham (*Baal Durotrigensis*, pp. 18, 19).

Also in Hutchins *History of Dorset*, second Edition (Vol. II, p. 118); as this edition is very rare, his account derived from a MS. of Roger Gale, for which he gives the date of 1710, is reproduced here :

"About a mile South-East of Dorchester, at Priors Maen, was a circle of stones lately broke to pieces by the owner of the ground called Talbot. The stones were very large and rude. I saw the remains of one that had been hollowed through the middle, the tube was about eighteen inches in diameter, and had been about six feet deep, as I was told by Mr. Conyers Place, who saw it entire. Before it stood, as he assured me, two small images about three feet high, resembling children in swaddling clothes, and of rude work. There were two avenues pitched of stones, leading to it, one from the South, the other from the East, as I could perceive from their remains like those at Abury."

This note is reproduced by Warne in his "*Ancient Dorset*." He appears to have seen the same MS. by Gale, then in different hands, and he heads his copy "April, 1728."

I should have hesitated to be certain that this related to Littlemayne, as the mileage is wrong and Priors Maen is usually understood to refer to Friar Mayne, when the mileage would be still more inaccurate, but he fixes the matter by referring to the "owner of the ground called Talbot." Now William Talbot was tenant of Littlemayne from at least 1692 to nearly his death in 1734, so that both dates given are within his tenancy and I fear we must look upon him as the original destroyer.

There is a MS. description of the stones, as they were in 1847, in the Museum copy of Warne's "*Illustrations of the History of Dorset*," p. 232. This runs as follows :—

"These remains are of a very extensive and interesting description. They are scattered over several fields, have in many cases evidently been removed from their original situation, and many have probably been used in building the farmhouse which stands in the midst of them, whilst many others have in all likelihood fallen victims to the vandalism of surveyors of highways and byeways. Still there are sufficient manifestations to attest that here was the site of a magnificent Dracontium. Rather more than three miles from Dorchester towards Wareham, immediately contiguous to the turnpike road and on the S. side of it, are many of these stones of various sizes : and a complete circle may still be traced, formed of ten or eleven stones, all which are there, but the high upright ones have been thrown down with violence and fractured by falling on other stones. This circle (one side of which is encroached on by the road) is about 30 feet in diameter. At the NE. two very large stones anciently stood but they have been overthrown, and one of them broken into three pieces. This was ten feet high by five feet broad. Several other stones are around this circle, one lying to the SE. of an irregular form, now broken, but having a large hole through its centre, the stone being 2ft.

4in. in thickness and the hole more than a foot in diameter. This circle was erected in a form which extends considerably to the SE. and is traceable for nearly a mile to the NW. being in some parts very deep, at least 20 feet, with valla in each side, but having few of the ordinary features of a military earthwork. It was widened considerably at the point at which the circle was erected. On the other side of the road, to the NE. of the circle, is a field containing a great number of large stones, placed in a circular form, but with intervals in which other stones probably stood ; round them are other stones still larger, possibly forming an outer concentric circle, and some distance to the SE. of this are several large stones reared edgeways in a line ; four of them being respectively 30, 22 and 11 paces distant from each other. Many other stones are in the same field. Earthworks are also visible. Just beyond the circle last mentioned to the NE. is a farmhouse and yard behind which is another close of ground containing a straight avenue in the direction of the circles, formed of a shallow fosse, with a vallum on either side, and with a considerable number of stones placed on the summit of the valla. Here also are further earthworks, and a broad terrace lying to the SE. of the Avenue, and of the same length."

At the present day the " fosse " behind the house can still be seen with stones nearly buried lying on the " Valla." The earthworks also exist ; some may relate to the old farmhouse which, as I have said was rebuilt on another site—others, again, appear to be more ancient.

In 1909 the Field Club visited the site and in our *Proceedings*\* may be found a brief account, with a plan of the stones. Since that date a number of those marked have disappeared.

During the last few years, in digging and planting work a few pieces of Roman ware have been found ; the best perhaps being a Samian Cup, nearly perfect.

It remains to thank the Trustees of Milton Abbas School, Lt.-Col. D. C. Drew, and Mr. Vere Oliver, for kindly assisting me to compile these notes

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\*Vol. XXX., p.p. xlv.—xlvii., plan.