

ON THE HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF
MURSLEY.

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Mursley or Muresley, in the Deanery of that name, and in the Hundred of Cotslow, lies about four miles nearly east of Winslow. The early notices respecting it are not very numerous, but the Deanery in which it is situate, being called by its name, it must have been a place formerly of some note. Some doubt, however, exists as to the name of the Deanery being derived from this parish. There seems to have been a Priory, called St. Margaret's or Meurseley, in the southern part of the Deanery, near Ivinghoe, of which few or no traces now exist; and this probably may have designated this Ecclesiastical Division of the county. The present Hundred of Cotslow formerly comprised the three Old Hundreds of Coteslai, *Mureslei*, and Erlai, which Civil or Terri-

torial Division, no doubt, refers to the same place, wherever it was, with the Ecclesiastical. One thing is certain, viz., that once, in a remote period, it was a place of more consideration than it is at present, the proof of which we shall adduce. The Manor was anciently in the Giffards, Earls of Buckingham; afterwards in the Fitzgeralds; from whom it passed, by a female heir, to the family of Nowers. Grace, daughter of Robert Fitzneale, married Almaric de Nowers, sister of Sir John Nowers, of Gothurst or Gayhurst, through whose marriage Mursley-cum-Salden came to the Nowers; they surrendered it to the Crown in 1351. Henry the Fourth gave Mursley to his second son, John Duke of Bedford; it having been seized by the Crown on the Attainder of Sir Robert Tresilian. On the death of the Duke of Bedford it was sold by the King to Cardinal Beaufort. In 1439 it was conveyed to Robert Whittingham, Squire of the Household, and Alderman of London, and confirmed to him by the King's patent in 1449. After this the Manors of Mursley and Salden appear to have been separated. Sir Ralph Yerney, who inherited both from the Whittinghams by female descent, sold *Salden* about 1580, to Sir John Fortescue. Mursley continued to be the property of the Verneys nearly a century longer, having been purchased by the Fortescues in the year 1664. Of this latter family (the Fortescues) we shall have occasion to speak hereafter. But first we will present you with some further particulars respecting the parish where they resided. Mursley, though now only a village, was once a small market town. It had formerly a market on Thursdays, granted to the Prior of Snelshall in 1230. Warren Fitzgerald had another charter for a market on Wednesdays, in 1243, and a fair on the Festival of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. This charter was renewed to John Duke of Bedford, who had the grant of another fair on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, renewed to Robert Whittingham in 1449. "The Wednesday market is said to have been held in a yard on the left-hand side of the town, as you approach it by the Whaddon road, near the great tiled house on this side of it."—(Cole's MSS. Brit. Mus.) There was a hamlet in this parish named *Hyde*, and a distinct Manor; but where it stood is unknown; perhaps it was in the Liberty of

Salden, in which, there is or was a meadow called Hyde Meadow. It was the opinion of Mr. Lord, of Drayton, that Mursley lay on an old Military Roman way. It was, it is thought, a branch from the Watling Street to the Akeman Street; the road from Little Horwood to Stewkley, is, in his opinion, too well mended with stones to suggest any other idea than that of an old Roman way* How Mursley became a market town seems to have been this:— The direct road from Buckingham to Dunstable, and so on to London, lay through this place; Mursley and Leighton divided the distance between Buckingham and Dunstable: so that Mursley was well situate for a small market town lying between them. When Aylesbury began to flourish, and the fore-mentioned towns, Buckingham and Dunstable, decayed, the road through Mursley began to be neglected; and so "*poor Mursley* (it is the expression found in Cole's MSS.) dwindled into a neglected village." To shew the antiquity and comparative consideration of the place, it is worthy of remark, that Winslow was then of no note, and had no market till five years after Mursley. Cole, in the middle of the last century, writes of this parish, "Here are about 66 families, and 258 souls ; of which six are reputed Papists, and one Anabaptist," The Papists have disappeared, but the Anabaptists have greatly increased: indeed, the population is now nearly double what it was then, with probably little more accommodation for the inhabitants. The effect of this on their health and morals may easily be conceived. In temp. Hen. III., the Advowson of Mursley was given to the Monastery of Nuneaton, county of Warwick, and the living was in the patronage of that Convent till the dissolution of Monasteries. After which, it seems by the patents, first to have been granted to Sir Francis Verney, Knight, and then, on his Attainder, Anno 1560, Queen Elizabeth granted the Rectory of Mursley, by letters patent, to Robt. Davy and Henry Vynne or Dynne, and their assigns for ever, who sold it to the Ashfields, and thus it came by marriage to the Fortescues. Sir Edmund Ashfield appears to have gotten a lease of this Advowson from the Convent of Nuneaton. The mention of the *Ashfields* may lead us to refer to a place in the neighbourhood, a few remains of which are still standing

(Snelshall Priory). In the spot where this little Priory stood, viz., about a quarter of a mile from Whaddon Parish Church, is a farm-house, the north side of which is supported by some arches, originally belonging to the Cloister of the Conventual Church: excepting this, no part is remaining, the whole of the materials having been disposed of to erect a new chapel at Tattenhoe adjoining, which was before the Reformation subordinate to Snelshall. We have already seen that Mursley had formerly a market on Thursdays, granted to the Prior of Snelshall, 1230, and this connection between this village and the Priory is further shewn by an account of its revenues taken 26th Hen. VIII. Next to the value of the site of the building, and the adjacent lands, occurs this entry—"In Mursley Redditus unius Clausi," (the rent of one close) 61s. 4d." The estate originally belonging to the Convent in this immediate vicinity (principally in that part of the parish called the Hamlet of Selden) is thus described at a later period — "A close called Oxwicks, lying near Newton Field, Salden Leys, containing 90 acres, with eight acres lying on Bletchley Leys. Queen Mary, in consideration of £301 9s. 10d. paid her by Edmund Ashfield, of Tattenhoe, Esq., demised Snelshall to him, his heirs, and assigns for ever." Snelshall becoming the property of the Ashfields, it came into the Fortescue family, by the marriage of Cecily, daughter of Edmund Ashfield. The Fortescues sold it about 1620, to Sir George Villiers, the celebrated Duke of Buckingham; of whose son's trustees it was bought in 1697, by James Selby, Esq., Serjeant-at-Law, and has since descended to Wm. Selby Lowndes, Esq., of Whaddon Hall. The Chapel of Tattenhoe just mentioned, stands in a very retired situation, in Whaddon Chace. It is a very small building, not much larger than a room, with a single bell in an open turret. Close by are the remains of a moat, with some water, indicating the spot where a mansion formerly stood ; most likely the seat of the Ashfields. A daughter of Sir Edmund Ashfield, married to Sir John Fortescue, lies buried in Mursley Church, where a monument is erected to her memory by her husband. Warinus de Fitzgerald, and Agnes his wife, founded at Salden a Chantry Chapel, to the honour of St. Nicholas, and to pray for their souls, Anno 1253. A list occurs in Cole's MSS. of the Chaplains to the Chapel of St. Nicholas,

Salden. The first name is John de Chandon, 1250; the last but one is Richard de Mursley, and the last is Hugh Withee of Kimpton. The Chapel was for the use of the Manor House, and was discontinued 1350. The existence of an ancient Manor House at Salden, before that built by Sir John Fortescue, was reported to Cole by Mr. Lord of Drayton, who told him that "Lewin de Newenham had a mansion there, and that this tradition was further confirmed by what happened at the pulling down of the latter house, when there was found an old chimney-piece behind the wainscoat in one of the parlours, with *an ancient date* upon it." But that which has conferred on this parish more celebrity than anything else, was the residence of the Fortescues there for a century and a half. Sir John Fortescue, having become possessed of Salden, a hamlet in this parish, A.D. 1580, built there a most magnificent seat. It was built round a court or square. The width of the principal front was 175 feet, with a balustrade at the top; and nine large windows on a range, gave it the appearance of a palace. The second front, with an equal row of windows, in the middle story of which was the gallery of 148 feet, and which probably faced the garden, was little inferior to the former. The building was of excellent masonry in the brick and stone work. About £33,000 were expended on it; in itself a large sum, but remarkably so for the time, although some of the rooms were not finished, and notwithstanding the carriage of the materials and the timber were found by Sir John. In Salden House were a great many coats-of-arms in the various windows, all of which were bought by the celebrated Antiquary, Browne Willis, for a trifle, and some of them were presented to Judge Fortescue, a descendant of the family. Two coats-of-arms, taken from this house, were put up by Browne Willis in the east window of Fenny Stratford Chapel, and two were in 1760, in the parlour of Old Whaddon Hall." There was also in the dining-room or gallery chamber of Salden House, an alabaster or marble chimney-piece, justly admired for its curious workmanship, which was sold for about £5 to the Lord Fermanagh, and is put up in his house at Middle Claydon."—(Cole's MSS.) The mansion at Salden, on the property becoming divided, was pulled down; part of it in 1738, and the remainder in 1743: the materials were sold to one Thomas Harris,

a builder, of Cublington, for £400 or £500. So that this noble seat is entirely demolished, except a small portion, which served as a passage from the lofty kitchen and "great parlours, and which is now occupied as a farmhouse. The situation is pleasant, and bears some marks of former splendor. There are remaining a large piece of water, which doubtless helped to supply the family with fish; a circular mound, surrounded here and there by a straggling hawthorn bush, the remains, it may be presumed, of a well clipped hedge, which served as a fence to the bowling-green. On digging around the site of the building, traces of cellars have been found; and, perhaps, if further excavations were attempted, some additional discoveries might be made. The double-terraced walks of the garden are still to be seen, with the fine old yew trees which stood near the lodge at the entrance, towards the south; while, in various parts, traces of the wall that surrounded the building are distinctly visible, the wall, in some places, still standing entire, with portions of the original stone coping upon it. Three drawings were taken of the house before it was pulled down, one of which was exhibited to the meeting at the time this paper was read, and also a drawing of the remains of Snelshall Priory.