

CHAPTER 4. Winkleigh from Earliest Times.

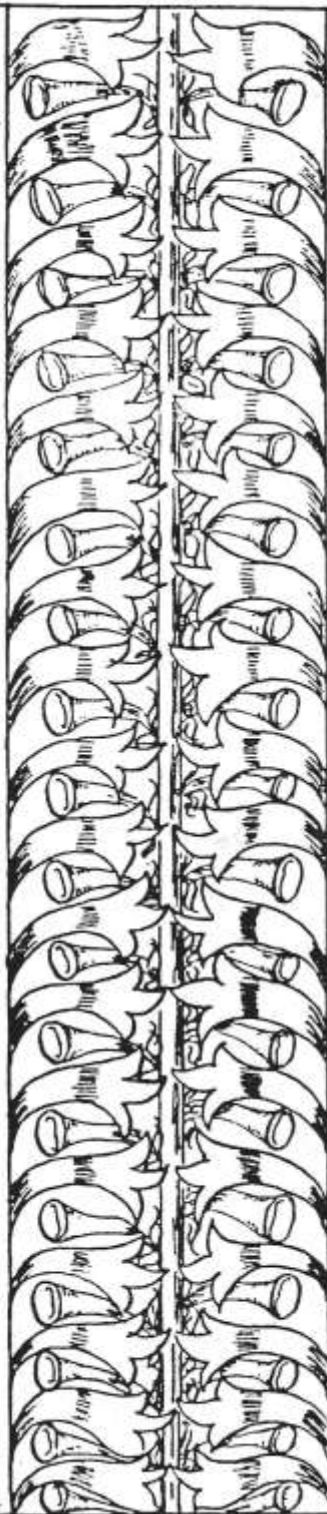
Many centuries before the Church became a landmark for the traveller from the South east, long, long before it was known as Wintrea's Lea, Winkleigh must have been well known to the nomad and marauding tribes. To avoid the natural and formidable obstacles of the Eggesford route they would pass through the area, attempting the easier approach to the

North Devon settlements. At this period, then Winkleigh was in a favourable position. Indeed even today, with the tactics of modern machines of war, the earthworks of more than two thousand years ago are still the most suitable positions for a defensive strategy. The relation of these earthworks to the general scheme of defence in this part of North Devon has been outlined by B.M.H. Carbonell who states:—

"Winkleigh is in the Chain of earthworks stretching from east to west. They appear to come to a 'neck' at Eggesford, where the two camps lie on the river Taw. Three miles west of

this point is the conical earthwork in the village with the remnants of another about 200 yards away, after which the Camps and tumuli increase in number towards the North Devon Coast" ¹ (See Map p)

These two defensive works situated at either end of the town are so placed as to recall the position of the two earthworks in ² Heywood Wood, Eggesford. Winkleigh appears, in fact to have been on the right flank of the "British" defense system of the Taw fortifications, which include the Chain, made up chiefly of the towns of Barnstaple, South Molton, Chulmleigh and the village



of Eggesford. It would seem that the main attacks were anticipated from the South east, at Winkleigh, that is, from the Exeter - Crediton road, but there are no records of any skirmishes at Winkleigh.

Risdon, writing in 1605, notes that "Winkleigh vaunteth two Castles, now ruined by time and overgrown by tall trees. There only remaineth in one of them a pillar of lime and stone so firmly compact, that time hath not yet ³ wrought his will thereon. Similarly, Capt Worthy says of Court Castle "it must have once been a ⁴ place of great strength.

These two structures, Croft and Court, were constructed on top of the earthworks.

They are distinctive in character and history and merit separate attention.

From a probable burial ground mound to a defensive position in Romano-British times, Croft has stood guard over the junction of numerous trackways against the passage of marauding groups. It may be asked, why did the early settlers choose the hill and not the river ^{at} Taw Bridge, as was the case at Eggesford. Apart from any question of the different origin and habits of the two groups of settlers, a survey of the position reflects the wisdom of



these people in rejecting an untenable site. Taw Bridge is more open and the river normally shallow. But what had they to encourage molestation from outside tribes or foreign invaders? Little more than their bodies, a small store of provisions and their humble dwellings, one might hazard.

It was these people who left behind the bronze which was discovered ⁵ at Winklesham in 1867.

Of the antiquity of this mound there is not much doubt; of the exact period, this can only be a matter for speculation. It may be of the Bronze Age and the late Brachycephalic man, with his weapon of

war revealed by the plough - or possible of the Stone Age. There are no distinguishing features that will enable us to identify them with either. The round earthworks occur in the Stone, Bronze and Early Iron periods. Bronze was certainly discovered but it is doubtful if any Stone implements would have been revealed. The rocks of the immediate surrounding are of the middle culm measures, softer in substance than the upper culm areas of the North of the parish. Flint chips would hardly be noticed, ^{and} any old specimen found in working the soil may have escaped the notice



of the antiquarian easily. Had the finder been a labourer his lack of interest or a superstitious dread of the possession of something out of the ordinary would have led him to destroy his find. The nearest flint factory was probably close to Torrington. Thousand of years of turning the soil by hand and plough do not justify much hope of further discoveries.

The "Victoria" History describes the earthwork "On the South-west of the town, this mount, with an escarpment of only 20 feet in height, and on the summit of which there is a platform 6 feet wide, surrounding a hollow

which descends 12 feet perpendicular measurement into the heart of the mound. Thus the first of the defensive works is a plain fort, consisting only of a mound with encircling ditch or fosse. With the exception of the building of the Castle School and the cutting of a new road from the old Exeter Road into Castle Street - thereby slicing off a piece of the moat - the earthwork has probably remained undisturbed for centuries. In 1936 there was a proposal to purchase the whole or at least a part of the moat. This was to give better access to the site which had been offered



free for the building of a Parish Hall. This did not materialise and attempts to get the mound scheduled as an Ancient Monument likewise failed because the owner refused to give his assent. The whole affair is recorded in the notes, for it may reasonably be asked why this act of vandalism was perpetrated on the oldest monument in the village (the building of a Parish Hall ^{at} village, on top of the mound) when there were so many other open spaces available for building. Excavation work for the foundation of the New Hall (1937) revealed no object of antiquarian interest. This is not

surprising for the site most probably was excavated on more than one occasion after it became a ruin. It was discovered, however, that the ramparts are of red soil and today there is none of this kind in the immediate vicinity of Winkleigh.

It is a matter for regret that there were no members of the Devon Archaeological Society present. The "red soil" may have been mistaken for the red ochre used at the burial ceremonies and found on similar works of this kind.

The problem of Croft is by no means capable of easy interpretation, with its seemingly long, quiet and ~~unsuccessful~~ uneventful course through history. whatever the vicissitudes and mutilations which would be far beyond the recognition of the original founders of this mound, it still stands in its virtual indestructibility a monument to man's endeavour.

The second of these earthworks is rectangular, probably of the Romano-British period.

It is the more imposing of the two mounds and now is in a better state of preservation



Conditions have been more favourable than at the other earthworks, and it is extremely pleasing to record that, arising out of the unfortunate case of Croft, the owner of this property (R.H.K. Johnson Esq) agreed to the urgent necessity of registering Court Castle as an Ancient Monument. His generosity in readily acceding to our wishes should not be overlooked. 8.

Situated North-east of the Church, this mound is 144 feet across, from North to South. The plough has somewhat changed its configuration. The rampart has gone, leaving a plateau of



12 feet on the S.W., broken by a terrace, comprising of a small octagonal building in which bricks of unusual colour and size have been used. (These were probably made in Winkleigh, at the time of the making of the fishpond, and were intended for the building of a mansion which did not materialise). The remnant of a fosse on the North makes a curve at its eastern extremity and indicates an approach by a sunken road. 9. Worthy gives the dimension as 145 feet from North to South and 104 feet from East to West and 44 feet high and

it is still nearly surrounded by a deep moat.

Of the periods, Saxon, Norman and later, these may be related to the earth-works in general. Each period probably saw some change and the building of Norman Castles on both Croft and Court, perhaps similar to the one remaining at Okehampton, was no doubt a defensive measure against the attempts of neighbouring lords to gain independence from the central government.

We are now entering the really



historical period of Winkleigh when archaeological evidence gives way to literary. Accordingly, our interest shifts from building sites to forms of political organisation and to still shadowy individuals, whose names and brief appearance help to make our picture the more concrete and satisfying. From this point the present chapter will concern itself with the story of the manors, leaving the personality of their lords and the development of the Parish Church to Separate Chapters 8 and 7.

As often in the affairs of man, finance and law suits provide the clearest indications of his works. Much of our story has been traced from the tax returns. It is in connection with an assessment that Winkleigh first appears, when in the early days of Saxon domination it was levied at five hides.

This represents the tax of Cynewulf's reign (755-784) the probable date of Saxon occupation of Devon.

Unfortunately this gives no extent of the manors, but it is generally understood that the Saxon homestead contained approximately 100 acres of arable land.
10.

There is no further record until the Domesday book



was compiled in 1086. Winkleigh appears from a very early date to have been the chief seat of the important Barony of Gloucester and, as Fossou says, "to the fee whereof much land belonged!"

Although there is no proof of the period in which it became a part of this important lordship, it must have been prior to the Norman Conquest, since Bristric, the grandson of Æofric, Earl of Mercia, succeeded his father Algar, as Earl of Gloucester, and is mentioned as the owner of the manor of Winkleigh in Domesday (as will be seen in the Exeter copy). The translation of the passage relating to Winkleigh is as follows:

"(1086). The King has a manor called Winchleia (Winkleigh) which Bristric held T.R.E. and it paid geld for $5\frac{1}{2}$ hides. These 40 ploughs can till. Thereof the King has 2 hides and 8 ploughs in demesne, and the villeins have $3\frac{1}{2}$ hides and 40 ploughs. There the King has * 60 villeins, 16 serfs, 10 swineherds, also 38 beasts, 15 swine, 160 sheep, 500 acres of wood (land), 80 acres of meadow, and pasture one league in length and another in breadth. In this manor is also a park (parcus bestiarum) for beasts. It pays 30 pounds a year by tale. Of the aforesaid land Torman the Parkkeeper (custos parci)

has $1\frac{1}{2}$ virgate worth $12^s \ 6^d$ a year. (Hollacombe in Winkleigh) Goscelm has it at farm". ^{12.}

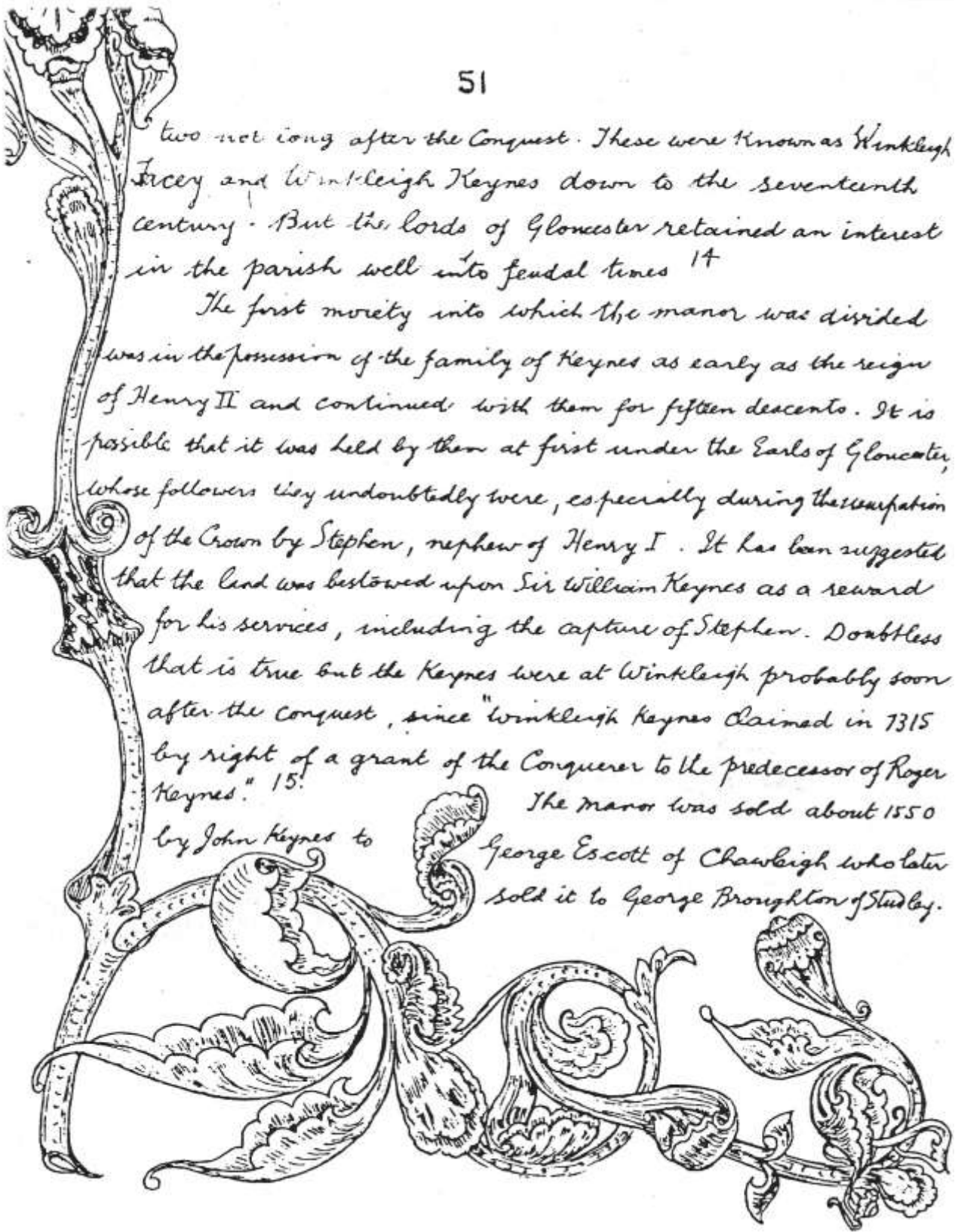
The honour of Gloucester (including the manor of Winkleigh) reverted to the crown on the death of Queen Matilda in 1083 and was settled upon William Rufus, who bestowed the property, soon after his succession, upon a Norman Baron Robert Fitz Hamon ^{13.} the restorer of Tewkesbury Abbey. In 1107 he died without male issue. His oldest daughter Mabel, married Robert, surnamed the Consul (natural son of Henry I) and through this alliance, acquired the honour of Gloucester and assumed the name of Robert Fitz Roy. He was soon after Created Earl of Gloucester.

The manor was divided into

two not long after the Conquest. These were known as Winkleigh Tracey and Winkleigh Keynes down to the seventeenth century. But the lords of Gloucester retained an interest in the parish well into feudal times ¹⁴

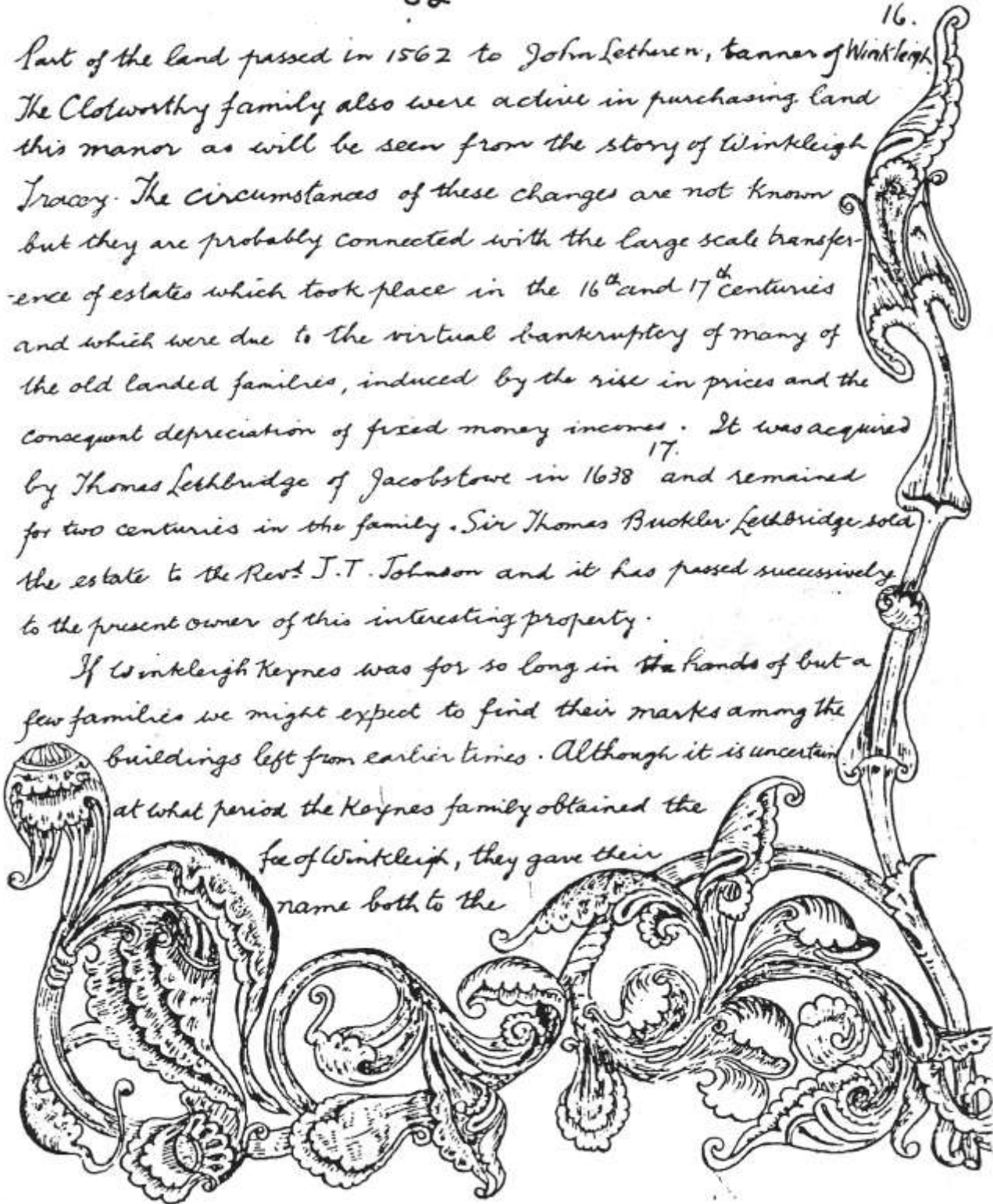
The first moiety into which the manor was divided was in the possession of the family of Keynes as early as the reign of Henry II and continued with them for fifteen descents. It is possible that it was held by them at first under the Earls of Gloucester, whose followers they undoubtedly were, especially during the usurpation of the Crown by Stephen, nephew of Henry I. It has been suggested that the land was bestowed upon Sir William Keynes as a reward for his services, including the capture of Stephen. Doubtless that is true but the Keynes were at Winkleigh probably soon after the conquest, since "Winkleigh Keynes claimed in 1315 by right of a grant of the Conqueror to the predecessor of Roger Keynes." ¹⁵

The manor was sold about 1550 by John Keynes to George Escott of Chawleigh who later sold it to George Broughton of Studley.

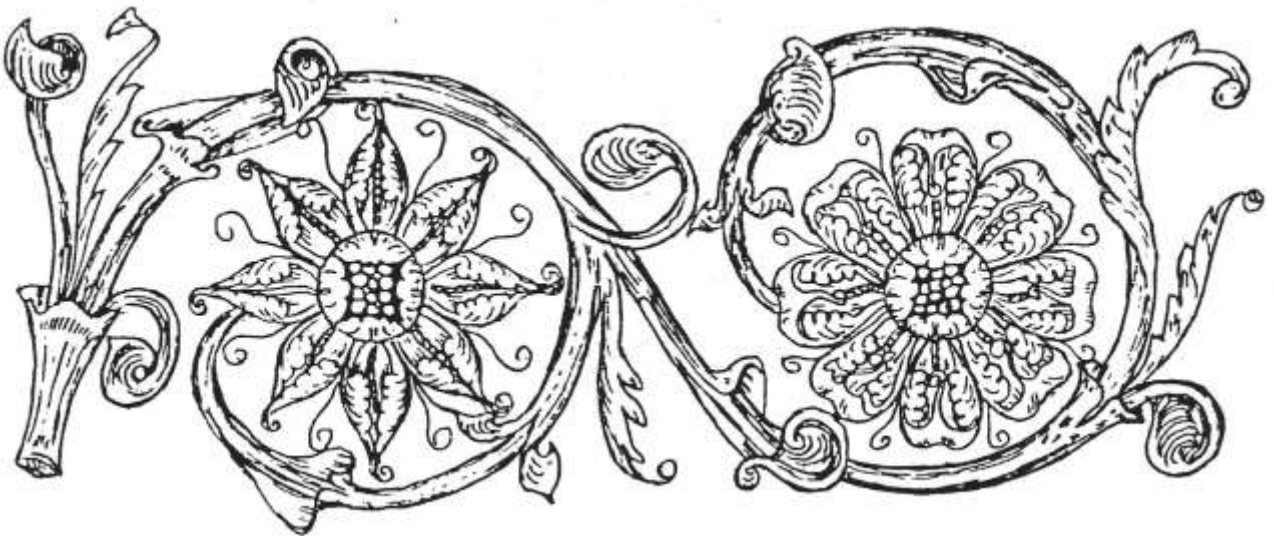


Part of the land passed in 1562 to John Letharen, tanner of Winkleigh^{16.}
 The Clotworthy family also were active in purchasing land
 this manor as will be seen from the story of Winkleigh
 Tracoy. The circumstances of these changes are not known
 but they are probably connected with the large scale transfer-
 -ence of estates which took place in the 16th and 17th centuries
 and which were due to the virtual bankruptcy of many of
 the old landed families, induced by the rise in prices and the
 consequent depreciation of fixed money incomes. It was acquired^{17.}
 by Thomas Lethbridge of Jacobstowe in 1638 and remained
 for two centuries in the family. Sir Thomas Buckler Lethbridge sold
 the estate to the Rev^d J.T. Johnson and it has passed successively
 to the present owner of this interesting property.

If Winkleigh Keynes was for so long in the hands of but a
 few families we might expect to find their marks among the
 buildings left from earlier times. Although it is uncertain
 at what period the Keynes family obtained the
 fee of Winkleigh, they gave their
 name both to the



Manor and Court House. The latter was known as Keynes Castle. There are no descriptive records of the Castle or of the Manor House which was probably built in early Tudor times, when the discomforts of Castle life generally gave place to the more comfortable dwellings of a less war-like lord than the famous Sir William Keynes. Worthy describes the estate as "et curia ibidem". The "Curia" or Court was at one time a place of considerable strength and surrounded by a moat. It stood close to what is known now as Winkleigh Court. It was from here that justice would be given at the assize of bread and beer.¹⁸ Although the manor passed on to several lords after the Keynes family left the parish late in the sixteenth century, it was left to a member of the Lethbridge family to build the Manor House as it now stands. It was at one time known as Court Barton House and in the later years as Winkleigh Court. Captain Worthy in his history of the Manor describes it as a



picturesque Manor House. It is indeed in picturesque surroundings, but a plainer Manor House would be difficult to find. It is large, only in the sense of being the largest in the parish and has little if any architectural features worthy of note, other than the Georgian characteristics of strength and compactness. There is a tradition that the Rev J T Johnson intended building a Manor House near the fishpond, and that the bricks of unusual proportions used in the octagonal summer-house built on the Castle earthwork were originally intended for the projected Manor House, which never materialised.

The second moiety of Winkleigh (known as Winkleigh Tracey) was given at an early period to the Traceys. Risdon states "Oliver Tracey held one fee in Winkley, in the reign of Richard I" (circa 1189). It would appear from the Calendar of Inquisitions¹⁹ that Winkleigh Tracey was a sub manor of Winkleigh Keynes, as the tithing "presented" at the Kings Court (*curiam regalem*) from time out of mind, but





ceded from the Major Court in 1353.

Previous to this it had been an Outcourt and thus in a subsidiary position. This action seems to have been a parallel with that of Wermund de Portus Mortuo a century earlier, as will be seen when Holcome Manor is considered.

Little other information is available but the Close Rolls show that the Manor reverted to the King (Richard II) in 1400. This occurred when the Earl of Huntingdon, John de Holand rose in revolt. His failure cost him his fee and his life.

Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester and others were then authorised to receive payments from the Manor of Winkleigh Tracey. In 1565

Thomas Clotworthy bought the manor from the Earl of Richmond.²⁰

The manor eventually became re-united to the other portion of the parish (Winkleigh Keynes) in the person of some member of the Lethbridge family. As with Winkleigh Keynes Manor there are no descriptive records of the Castle and tradition is silent with regard to material or structure.

Although Westcote²¹ late in the sixteenth century, states that the ruins of both castles yet showed and a pillar of lime and stone could be found at either site at the end of the nineteenth century was still standing at Court in Risdon's day, not one stone could be found at either site at the

at the end of the nineteenth century. Probably the Castle was abandoned about the same time as Court, but there is no record whatever of any Manor House being built for the Lord of the Manor, or his tenant in chief. There are references to the Tracey Court but not none to the Manor in the Church accounts.

It is suggested that the Manor House once stood near the Clotworthy Arms, if not on the actual site for, as has been stated, the Manor Court was held at Clotworthy House.

There were also two other holdings which are now included in the parish boundaries. These were

the estate at Leusdon and the sub-manor of Hollacombe.

The Domesday Survey records the Manor of Leusdon as follows:-

"(1086) Goscelm has a manor called Lollardesdoma which Alovic held TRE and it paid geld for $\frac{1}{2}$ hide. These four ploughs can till. There (G)oscelm has 5 villains in demesne 1 virgate and 2 ploughs. On it (G)oscelm has 5 vilkins, 3 borders, 2 serfs, 10 beasts, 10 acres of wood (land), 8 of Meadow and 50 of pasture. It is worth 20^s a year; when he received it 10^s.
22.
Under North Tawton Hundred the Geld Roll

informs us that for half a hide which lies in the Manor of Winkley, the King has no geld. Where was this half hide? Domesday mentions two estates at Lensdon, within the parish of Winkley, and both assessed at half a hide. It seems likely that the remark referred to the second estate, held by Walter de Clavill. From the assessment of the whole Manor of Winkley it seems that the amount for Lensdon is recorded twice over. The same is possibly true of Walter de Clavill's Lensdon. The further position of this estate is almost



impossible to trace. It is mentioned in the Calendar Close Rolls of 1377, when the moiety of one Knight's fee in Lensdon and Brussheford (the other holding of Goscelm in 1086) is granted to the Courtenay family. A little later, in 1406, there is mentioned a quitclaim of all services due. Worthy points out that in the thirteenth century, the estate appears to have belonged to Robert de Cole and after passing through the Cole family reached that of Bury by marriage where it remained for several centuries, for they were in possession when

Risdon was writing. If this is so, then the ancestors of our three county historians, Pole, Westcote and Risdon (through the Burrys) all appear to have held property at some time or other in the parish of Winkleigh.

There has been some controversy over the early ²⁶ history of the hamlet of Hollacombe. A "Holcumbe" is mentioned in Domesday, but it seems clear that it does not refer to Hollacombe, Winkleigh. What is clear, however, is that Hollacombe was a sub-manor of Winkleigh until 1268. At this date Wlerrmund de Portus Mortuo seceded and set up his own court at Hollacombe. A corruption of his name led to the estate

being known as Holcombe Taramore. The Court Leet no doubt functioned through ²⁷ the centuries. At one time the Manor possessed a castle which dominated the surrounding countryside. There was a special grant to Richard Englys, King's Yeoman (Vallets) and his heirs of free warren in all their demesne lands belonging to their manor of Upholcombe, together with a further grant and gift of licence to fortify his manor with a wall of stone and mortar and to crenellate the same. ²⁸ Although the chapel of this manor remains to this day, there is no trace of the castle or castellated Manor.

House. It is possible that the old Barton farmhouse (which was partially destroyed by fire 1932) was at one time part of the mansion. The ancestors of the present occupiers (H. Stevens Esq) were once Lords of the Manor. Further, some of the panelling at the eastern end of this building has a wainscot of oak three inches in thickness, on which the adze had been used. The grooves for the panelling were made with a primitive chisel. There are seventeenth century renovations discernable on the North side, probably done at the same time as the building of the Gidley Chapel in the Parish Church. For the work is similar.



There is evidence that the same craftsmen were employed on both pieces of work²⁹.

Although there were three manors, each holding their particular court, and probably a fourth (Leusdon) exhaustive search has failed to discover a single original grant, what evidence exists is circumstantial or confirmatory in character. The earliest record is that of Philip Keynes being cited as Bailiff and Provost of Winklesigh in 1166.³⁰ But it is reasonable to suppose that the Burg or Borough Court existed well back into the period of Saxon domination. There might well have been a "gerēfa" or King's man at Winklesigh.

with his authority in the Saxon "burh"; perhaps Goscelm held the position under Bristric at the time of the Conquest. Certainly the Normans altered the system but little, the great change being in the owners and their tenants. Thus the courts probably were continued with only slight alterations in terminology (for instance "gerēfa" being latinised to "prepositus" and hence to provost.³¹

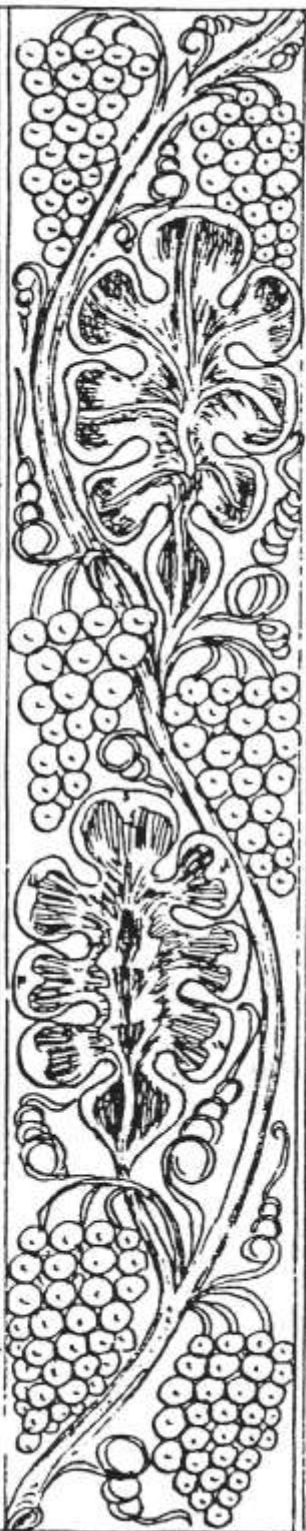
The Winkley Court has been variously described in different documents.

(1) The Church deeds of 1426 call it the "Borough and Town of Winkley". (2) The Church accounts of 1548 record "I'm for fyne of suet to the Burg Cort iiij^d (3) The



will of Bartholomew Gidley enumerates "land in the Borough Town and parish of Winkley." Whether this title of "Borough" was ever actually granted by some Royal Charter or was merely a presumptuous style, probably will never be known for certain. But contemporary legal documents are unlikely to convey assumed privileges which had no basis in law. When the Winkley Manor was eventually sold by John Keynes about 1550 the deed of conveyance specified the Manor, Hundred and the Burg Court. Three hundred years later, when the Manor was sold to the Rev Peter Johnson, the

Borough Court was again included in the transaction. Further, the mention of burgages (a form of tenure in the ancient borough and held directly from the king) associated with the transfer of Winkleigh Keynes manor, is significant but not conclusive. Of the manor grant and of the Hundred grant we have confirmatory evidence. (see notes 14 and 23) Then the grant of the title "Borough" also may be assumed. Until 1835 ("The Municipal Reform Act") there was no exact legal definition of Burg or Borough and their attendant rights, duties and privileges. It seems to have been



loosely applied to any small town, irrespectively of mayoralty, so long as there were authorised persons in charge of the natural economic centre which, in the case of Winkleigh represented the whole Hundred.

Today, justice is administered by officials. Before them had come a long line of men who combined with the rights of manor ownership the duties of king justice. In Winkleigh the Lord of the Manor was almost invariably the ³² bailiff and provost of the court deriving authority from his baron - the King; and up to well into the fourteenth century, ruled almost as a despot. The View of Frankpledge varied

theoretically made this a qualified despotism. The custom of Frankpledge varied so much in different localities that it is difficult to assess adequately the contribution it made towards "self" government at Winkleigh.

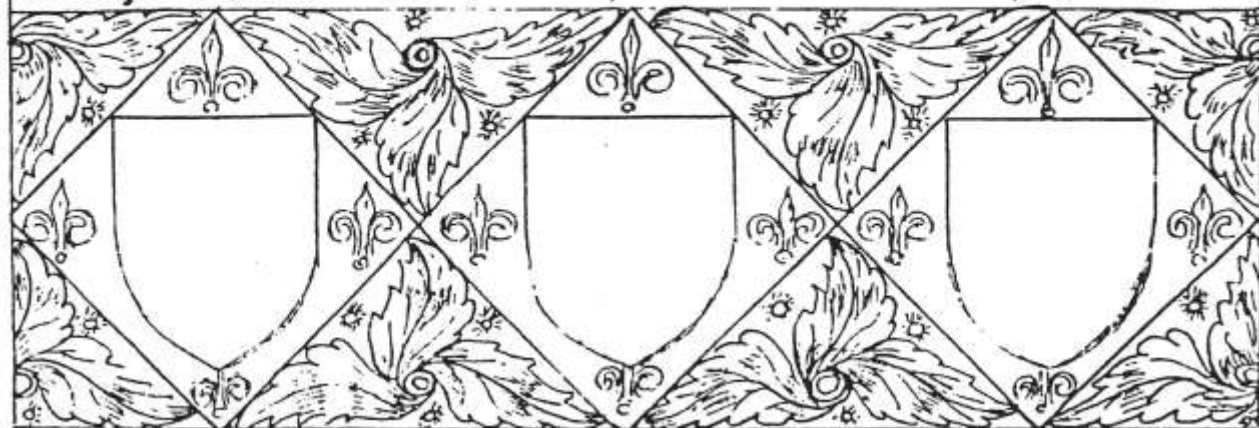
The principal clause in the document would perhaps be that twelve men, approved by the provost, stood bond for the good behaviour of all the other inhabitants under the jurisdiction of the Court. It paid the provost of the Court, financially and otherwise, to conduct enquiries into their claims and uphold their "written" rights, as we shall soon see.

The Keynes family



was most probably of Norman descent, and Keynes in Normandy most likely their habitation before the Conquest. The Norman provost would therefore have little difficulty in conducting the business of his overlord with the parishioners for whom he was responsible. But in 1273 the Commissioners of Edward 2 (Bartholomew le Jeune and Roger de Chene) were investigating the abuses of the Courts in Devon. They found that Roger Keynes (Bailif and Provost) had an assize of Bread and Beer, involving the power of life and death, and added "by what authority we know not" 33.

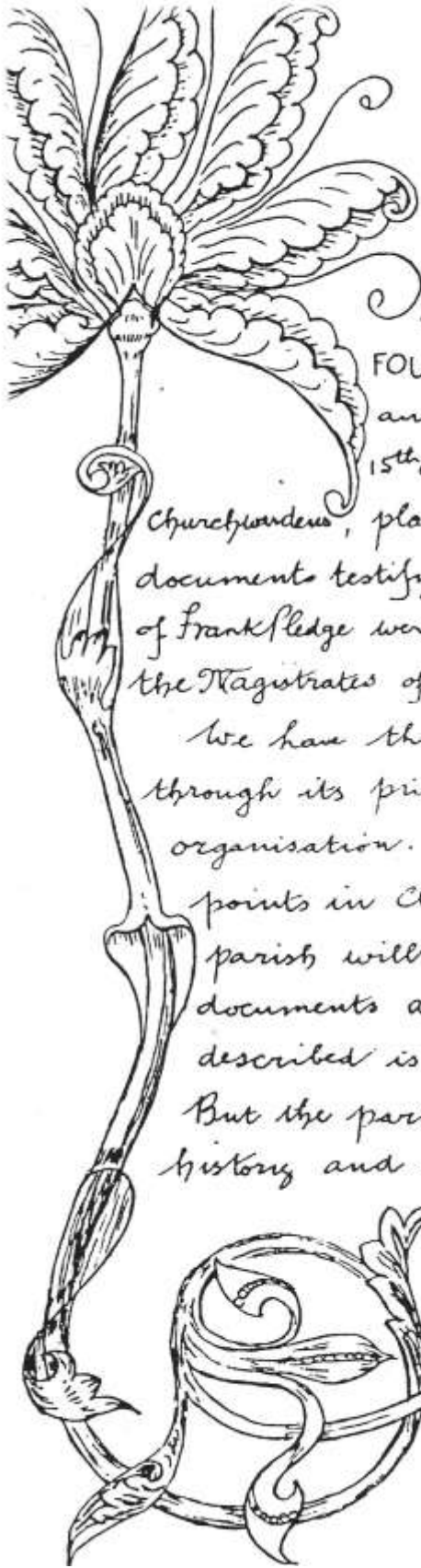
It was probably at this enquiry that the power of the courts were appropriately curtailed. Further ~~information~~ confirmation of the Winkleygh-Keynes court is contained in the Inquisition held on the 20th May 1307 at the King's Court at Wynkeleze when Gilbert (de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hereford) and Joan were jointly enfeoffed by the King of the homage and service and tenants of the fees of Wynkeleze with pleas etc of Courts and View of Frankpledge.³⁴ But the jurisdiction of the Keynes Court was nonetheless curtailed at times. A little before Edward I's Commissioners had investigated the work of the Courts Willelmus de Portus Mortuo (another Norman Lordling, holding Hollacombe Manor) "Withdrew himself and made his own two peculiar tithings to withdraw themselves from the manor court which they were always accustomed to follow."³⁵ This was a serious loss to the Winkleygh Court for it undoubtedly entailed a monetary loss as well as prestige. The Hollacombe Court no doubt also arranged its own View of Frankpledge. The authority of Keynes



Court received another wrench in 1361. The Inquisition made at Wynkeleze Monday before St Andrews 35 Ed III states that "the lithering (dec) of Wynkeleze Tracy used, time out of mind, to present the assize of bread and ale and other things pertaining to the King's Court (Curiam Regalom) but has withdrawn itself for the last eight years to the damage of each year 40^d.³⁶ This amount (3^s 4^d) may seem an infinitesimal sum today, but we must remember that the salary of the Reeve of Winklergh was only 4/- per annum about this time. The Tracy manor had not only avoided an appreciable money payment, but had secured a greater amount of freedom for Winklergh Tracey, which included the greater part of the Village. In line with the Hollacombe manor they also set up their View of Frankpledge³⁷.

It is clear that Winklergh never aspired to mayoralty status, neither are there any Charters. The Keynes family played an important part in the local government at Winklergh down to the sixteenth century. In course of time, much of





the petty civil administration was transferred to the Church, in which the **FOUR MEN** of Winkleigh (see chapter 9) and the Constable of the Hundred in the 15th and 16th Centuries, and later the Churchwardens, played a predominant part, as the Church documents testify. In 1848 the Borough Court and View of Frankpledge were replaced by the County Court and the Magistrates of the South Molton Petty Sessional Division. We have thus traced the story of Winkleigh through its primitive earthworks and its mediæval organisation. Much more will be suggested on these points in Chapter 9, when the social life of the parish will be reconstructed as fully as the extant documents allow. The course of Winkleigh thus described is not then outstanding.

But the parish has had a long and continuous history and is a proud example of thousands of estates which, if they have not developed rapidly, changing both in size and function, have yet retained their essential English Character.

