

THE ANTIQUITY AND ANTIQUITIES OF PLYMOUTH.

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THE recorded history of Plymouth cannot be traced much further back than the Norman Conquest. The town finds no mention in the *Saxon Chronicle*. Risdon, indeed, writing the life of St. Indractus, tells us that by the Saxons it was named Tamarweorth; and Leland asserts that much of what afterwards came to be called Plymouth was held by the Saxon canons of the ancient college of Plympton, which Bishop Warelwast made the foundation of the famous Plympton Priory. But these statements are unsupported and worthless, and the earliest undoubted and distinct mention we have of Plymouth in history is as the Sutton of Domesday, held by William in succession to the Confessor, an insignificant manor with an enumerated population of seven only. It was many a long year after this that the manor was granted by the Crown to the Valletorts, and by them in part to the monks of Plympton, and that mainly by the fostering care of the Prior and his brethren, though largely as the result of independent effort, the foundations of the metropolis of the West were laid.

But the tale of the early days of Plymouth would be incomplete if we stopped here. Plymouth herself may be a mere infant of some eight centuries' growth, but the magnificent harbour to which she owes her birth had played its part in the national life, such as it was, many a long year before the Norman Conquest; and for the first settlement on its shores we must go back at least to the days of the ancient Keltic civilisation which preceded the coming of the Roman, and in the West was never supplanted by him. The eastern shores of Plymouth Sound, in the neighbourhood of Staddon Heights, have yielded from time to time abundant traces of the presence

of a comparatively dense and cultured population. Mount Batten has given us examples of the earliest and latest British coinage in gold and silver and copper; and in an ancient cemetery hard by, below Staddon Heights, were found a host of articles of bronze—the final illustrations of the elder pre-Roman civilisation of this land. The most important of these are deposited in the museum of the Plymouth Institution. Nay, we go further back yet. Not only are worked flints of rude type found on the heights on either side of the Sound, but it is only within the past eighteen months that under an ancient house in one of the oldest streets of Plymouth, the remains of a kitchen *midden* were discovered, and beneath them a singular example of urn burial. Again, the oldest name we have for what is now called Cattedown is Hingston, or Hangstone—"Stonehenge" reversed, and in the rude sketch-map of the southern and western coasts in the British Museum, made in connection with the fortifying of our seaboard in the reign of Henry VIII, there is depicted an object which appears intended for a cromlech upon the western side of that down, while upon the Hoe is shown what may be intended for a tolmen. Upon this latter point, however, I lay no stress; the position is just one that would suit the occurrence of such a rude stone monument, but if it ever existed it has left no trace. The evidence for the hanging-stone of Hingston seems much more clear.

And further yet. I have shown you that while the origin of Plymouth itself comes well within the historic period, it has important pre-historic connections, and that indirectly its pedigree goes back to pre-Roman times. I cannot point to any evidence of its position in the Roman era. With the exception of a few scattered coins, hardly a score in all, found at various points in the neighbourhood, the Romans have left no traces of their visits here. The remains of a Roman galley are said to have been found in the silt of the marshes near Plympton, but we are not told who identified it; and as an evidence of more than the most casual Roman intercourse with this locality, it stands utterly alone. We have no means whatever of linking on the Saxon Sutton of Domesday with the Keltic settlement of Staddon, unless we are

content to fall back upon myth and legend; and they will carry us very much further afield.

I am not ashamed to say, even in this company, that there is a sense in which I can attach historical value even to the writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth. I see no reason to question his honesty when he says he is reproducing an ancient record brought from Brittany. We know he did not invent the story of Brutus the Trojan, in which I really think we have the traditionary record of the earliest invasion of this land by an historic people; and one would imagine there must have been some reason for associating the Hoe with the legendary combat of Corinæus and Goemagot, told in such striking verse by Spencer, beyond the mere similarity of name which undoubtedly gave rise to the traditional Brutus Stone at Totnes. So while I think that either Geoffrey or one of his editors erred seriously in identifying the Hamo's Port, which finds such frequent mention in his *Chronicle* as the chief port of Western Britain, with Southampton, on the single score of the "ham" common to both, I am not at all sure that these references do not point to a regular use in the Keltic era of the estuary of the Tamar for British maritime expeditions, seeing that it has descended to us at the present day as the Hamoaze. Hamo's Port is made the fitting centre by Geoffrey of some of the most stirring scenes in the traditional national life, and it is the Hamoaze that best suits the references.

One more remark before I pass on to certain ground. It has been assumed that Plymouth was one of the ports to which the Phœnicians traded in quest of tin. It may have been so, but there is no proof. It has been suggested further that St. Michael's, *alias* Tristram's, *alias* St. Nicholas's, *alias* Drake's Island, may have been the Ictis of Diodorus Siculus. To that we can give a certain denial. When we are pointed to Mount Batten as the alternative, we are tempted to ask, *cui bono*? Thus when all is said and done, all we know with certainty of the origin of Plymouth is that whilst the shores of the Sound have been peopled, perhaps continuously, from distant pre-historic times, at the date of the Norman Conquest Plymouth was not, but its place was occupied by a tiny hamlet of the name of Sutton.

And why Sutton, south-town? Another question that we cannot answer, though we may guess. The old name stuck to it for centuries, and it was not until the year 1439 that the familiar Plymouth officially supplanted the older title, though it had been in occasional use at least a century before. But the growth of the community must have been very rapid. While the manor remained in the hands of the kings, little or nothing was done to develop its resources. We learn, however, from an inquiry made in 1318, before the then Sheriff of Devon, that prior to the foundation of the "ville of Sutton" there was a spot within the precincts of the manor where the fishers, whose huts dotted the shores of Sutton Pool, used to resort to sell their fish (the present market rights date from 1254), and that then, as now, and continuously ever since, they were accustomed to dry their nets and sails on the slopes of the Hoe—the high rocky hill which for long ages afterwards shut out all view of the town from the sea. When the manor passed from the Crown to the Valletorts a change came over the fortunes of the little community, though Leland states that in the latter part of the twelfth century it was still "a mene thing as an Inhabitation for fischars." Sutton became one of the places of occasional residence of the Valletort family, and the few scattered houses on the slopes above the harbour developed a centre of population. Thence the town increased, as Leland says, "by litle and litle". The Valletorts gave freely of their land to the Priory of Plympton; and the Prior encouraged settlement within his territories, hereafter distinguished by the name of Sutton Prior, which grew so rapidly as soon to distance the elder ville of the Valletorts,—Sutton Vawter, thereafter known by the name of Old Town, and now as Old Town Street. How rapid was the growth when prosperity fairly set in, two or three facts will show. While the original foundation of the church of St. Andrew certainly dates well back in the twelfth century; the Carmelites established themselves here in 1313; the Franciscans were not very much later in making their appearance; and the Dominicans were also represented. To the siege of Calais in 1346 Plymouth sent more ships and men than any other place save Dartmouth, Yarmouth,

and Fowey. The latter part of the fourteenth century found Plymouth one of the best known and most thriving ports in England, with a corporation of some kind bearing rule, and with so large a population that the Subsidy Roll of 1377 records a taxable inhabitancy of 4,837, and thus gives it the rank of the fourth town in the kingdom; London, York, and Bristol alone exceeding it. Such was the work of three centuries. In these early days of the national life, probably no town ever advanced with such rapid strides.

Such being the antiquity of Plymouth there should be fair reason to boast of its antiquities. Alas, no! There are those among us who remember when Plymouth still retained a venerable aspect and abundant traces of her former glories. But of late years the tide of improvement—real and sham—has been in vigorous flow; and very soon the few remaining antiquities of Plymouth will share the fate of their predecessors. It is painful to recall what we have lost.

Centuries ago, beyond the memory of man or course of record, there was graven in the sward of the Hoe the “lively effigies” of two figures armed with clubs, commemorating the legendary conflict between Corinæus and Gocmaget. Year by year, as occasion required, this “pyc-ture of Gogmagog” was renewed at the town’s expense; but it disappeared when Charles II built the citadel to awe the Puritan community. The older fortifications of the town dated from the reign of Richard II, and were full of interest. The great “castel quadrate” described by Leland was erected early in the fifteenth century, and the leading citizens built bulwarks in the Hoe, known thereafter by their names, as “Thyckpeny ys bolwerke.”

Henry VIII built little vaulted towers close to the water’s edge. Under Elizabeth the irregular works on the Hoe were extended and methodised into a well-planned fortification. To defend the town against the Cavaliers, the walls were renewed, and earthworks cast up, which were held successfully for well nigh four years. Under the second Charles, Sir Bernard de Gorme built the Citadel; and in our own day the military art has almost exhausted itself in devices of defence. Yet of the older fortifications of five centuries, beyond the Citadel itself, there is hardly a

trace. All the ancient gates have been swept away; of the wall there are only a few unimportant vestiges by Tothill Lane, Gascoigne Place, and Ham Street; the castle is represented by two puny turrets flanking a doorway in Lambhay Street; just the vault and a flight of steps at the eastern entrance of Millbay remain of the forts of Henry VIII; Elizabeth is represented by a dwarf tower at Devil's Point; almost the last vestige of the earthworks that defied a king have been destroyed within half a dozen years; and the most picturesque and interesting feature of the ancient defences of Plymouth to which I can now direct your attention, is the bold tower which crowns Mount Batten, and which was erected in the reign of Charles II.

If we turn to the ecclesiastical antiquities of the town, we are indeed somewhat more fortunate, though here too we have but a remnant of what we once possessed. Of the church and buildings of the White Friars there were important remains down to the early part of the present century, but the last traces of the ruined walls lie buried beneath the South Western goods station, which in its name—the Friary—preserves the memory of the ancient dedication. Of the house of the Franciscans there are a few bold doorways in Woolster Street; and not only here, but in other of the older thoroughfares of the town, in the neighbourhood of the quays, there are sundry characteristic though hardly noteworthy and very fragmentary relics of the elder Plymouth. In Southside Street are portions of what presumably was the house of the Black Friars—then the town Marshalsea, then the first public meeting-place of the Plymouth Nonconformists, then occupied by a band of exiled Huguenots, who maintained the worship of their fathers in the town down to 1807; now and long since the distillery whence issues the noted Plymouth gin! There was an ancient Leper-House or Maudlin at North Hill, but it was removed and a fort erected instead in the wars of the Commonwealth; there were holy wells and hermitages, but their places know them no more; and the site of the hall of the Guild of Corpus Christi (near the western end of the Municipal Buildings) is only identifiable by the recitals of deeds. Close by stood the ancient alms-

houses, pulled down for the erection of the present Guildhall, which are mentioned so far back as the middle of the fifteenth century, and in which when demolished there was found the oldest existing structural relic of Plymouth—the bold transitional Norman arch, presumably part of the original church of St. Andrew, which now adorns the entrance lobby of the museum of the Plymouth Institution.

The chapel of St. Katherine on the Hoe, mentioned by Leland, went with the “Gogmagog” when the Citadel was built. I am somewhat inclined to regard it as the oldest church of the fishermen of Sutton; but whether that be so or not, it certainly formed, in conjunction with the chapel of St. Nicholas on Drake’s Island, pulled down for the erection of defences in the reign of Elizabeth, and the still remaining chapel of St. Michael on the Rame Head, a series of guiding points—the lighthouses of the middle ages—indispensable in those days to the safe entrance of Cattewater, or Sutton Pool, in the dark. No port in England was so systematically or so well supplied with such safeguards, while for signalling alarm a beacon was always kept ready on the Hoe, and in time of known peril the chapel at Rame sheltered a watchman, who did plenty of work for very little pay.

And thus it has come to pass that of all the positive wealth of mediæval ecclesiastical edifices which Plymouth at one time possessed, we can only point our visitors now to St. Andrew and its adjunct, the so-called Abbey. And while St. Andrew itself is a fine example of the characteristic Perpendicular Gothic of the county, and its tower a very noble one, internally it, too, is but the shadow of its former glories—its elaborate screens and canopies, and rich carvings, were all swept away in the old churchwarden age, and have left not a wreck behind. We can hardly imagine what the quaint glowing beauty of the interior must have been at the time of the Reformation, and probably long afterwards. The origin and purpose of the “Abbey”, has long been a matter of sharp controversy; but the question to my mind has been settled by my discovery in the borough records of a reference to the “prysten house”, and its grant by the Corporation, 30th Henry VIII, to Sir Thomas Flyte, chantry priest,

for his sole use during life, with his chamber therein, for his great cost in repairing the "keychen" of the same.

Charles Church is noteworthy for the architectural student, as affording a rare illustration of the way in which here and there the spirit of Gothic architecture lingered on through the commonly debased and pseudo-classicism of the Jacobean age. A noteworthy fabric as it stands, it was much more so when it came fresh from the hands of its unknown architect, for his designs have sadly suffered from the fancies of later workers. The present spire is none of his; he did not fall back upon pine-apples for pinnacles; nor is he responsible for the dormer windows, and many other points of detail. But Plymouth until recently had yet further reason to be proud of its seventeenth century architecture in the bold and picturesque, if heavy, piles of solid limestone and enduring granite of the Hospital of Orphans' Aid, the Grammar School, and the Poor's Portion or Workhouse, which, like so much else, had perforce to be swept away to clear the site for the present Guildhall.

Of our ancient domestic buildings, I need say but little. Here and there corbel and gable and oriel still remain in low estate to show what a picturesque town old Plymouth was. Our finest Elizabethan dwelling, the grand old house in Notte Street, has fortunately fallen into good hands, and will not only be heedfully preserved, but made the central feature of a new block of kindred character. Another twenty years, and it will be nearly all we shall have left to connect the Plymouth of Victoria with the Plymouth of Queen Bess. It is not two years since the great, massive quadrangular mansion in which Merchant and Mayor Paynter is traditionally reported to have entertained Katharine of Arragon when she landed here in 1501—long known as Palace Court—was pulled down and replaced by a brand-new Board school; and, save the Notte Street house, we have not such another loss left to sustain. It is not a little singular, by the way, that while Plymouth has been the residence of many a worthy of ancient time, the dwellings of none of them are distinctly traceable. Paynter's connection with Palace Court is purely traditional. The Hawkinses for four generations were leading townsfolk, and for three held leading rank in English seamanship,

and all we know with certainty is that they lived somewhere near the present Parade—probably in Woolster Street, near the quays which they occupied in their mercantile capacities. The merchant branch of the Trelawnys (of Ham), however, without doubt lived in Looe Street, on the site of and in a house which was long the *Plymouth Herald* office, and is now tenanted. And hardly, it is all but certain, was the residence of the great Sir Francis Drake. Much confusion has arisen in regard to this matter, as with other parts of the family history, through confounding the original Sir Francis with the descendants of his brother Thomas, who, no way remarkable themselves, rejoiced in their borrowed plumes of Christian name and title; but within the past few weeks I have been able clearly to ascertain that Sir Francis was the owner of a house and spacious garden at the corner of Looe and Buckwell Streets, and of land opposite, at the corner of Peacock Lane; and his personal occupancy of this property, prior to his purchase of Buckland Abbey, hardly admits of doubt. There are no buildings of his time left upon the site; and it is only necessary further to point out that in his day some of what are now the most crowded localities of Plymouth were the most open, old deeds revealing the existence of extensive gardens where dwellings have been most thickly packed.

Only another antiquity claims notice—and of that I am reminded by the mention of the name of Drake—the fragmentary memorials in the walls of the waterworks in the Tavistock Road. These are really of four periods. The granite inscription, MADE IN THE MAIORALTIE OF IOHN TRELAWNIE, 1598, is part of the original Old Town Conduit of that date. The Portland stone carvings of arms and the reference to Drake bringing the water into Plymouth, belong to a second conduit made to replace the former, in the mayoralty, as set forth, of William Cotton, 1671. The granite trough of the drinking fountain does not, as might be and has been imagined from the inscription thereon, date back even to the later period, but only to 1747, when the original gutters of bricks and boards were replaced by wrought stone. The later inscriptions date themselves, but it may save future antiquaries some trouble if the origin of the older portions of the memorial is thus clearly indicated.