

THE TOPOGRAPHY OF MEDIAEVAL ERISWELL

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This has been written to correct a number of mis-statements which have been published in the past.

The West Suffolk duplex manor of Eriswell cum Chamberlains (in Domesday Eriswell with Coclesworth) is coterminous with the ecclesiastical parish of St. Peter with St. Laurence. It is roughly an isosceles triangle with its three and a quarter mile base standing north and south along the edge of fen (Fig. 28). The blunted apex of the triangle lies nearly five miles away to the east, in the heart of breckland.

The pattern of mediaeval habitation in the parish has no connection with that of Roman-British times: the arrival of Anglo-Saxon settlers began a new pattern which persisted virtually until the Enclosure Award of 1818. There were throughout the Middle Ages two groups of habitations, both standing on the low bank which lies just back from the fen edge, one, Eriswell St. Peter, is at the northern end of the triangle's base, the other, Eriswell St. Laurence, a mile and a half to the south. The dwindled remains of the former now appear on maps as 'Little Eriswell' while the latter has captured the name 'Eriswell': a road, 'the Street' connects the two—it is the continuation of the road which enters the parish from Lakenheath to the north.

From the middle of the 12th century the lords of this duplex manor were of the de Rochester family. On the death of the last male in 1269 a married sister carried it to the de Tudenham family. At the execution of the last de Tudenham male in 1461 a married sister carried the manor to the Bedingfeld family with whom it remained until sequestrated by Cromwell's government.

ERISWELL ST. PETER

At Eriswell St. Peter today stand the scanty remains of the Parish Church (TL.721807, now the 'Dovehouse'), a small group of cottages (all reconstructed in the 19th century), the Old Rectory and Eriswell Hall with its Great Barn. Although the Hall may basically be a mediaeval building, neither there nor in the Old Rectory are there any visible signs of mediaeval work. In the remains of the church are plentiful signs of a reconstruction in Norman style, and stones carved in that and later styles are embedded in neighbouring modern buildings. A very large window

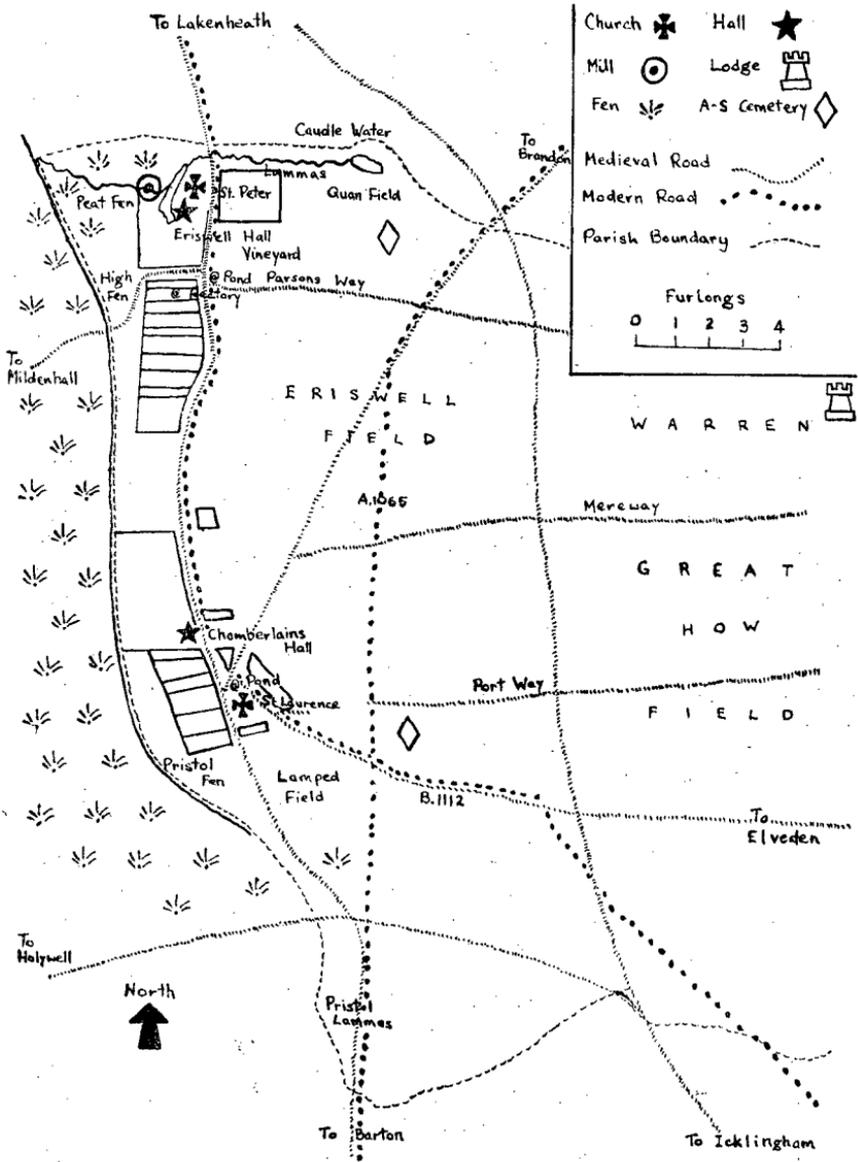


FIG. 28.—Eriswell.

in Decorated style is known (from an 18th century sketch: Camb. Univ. Lib. MSS. 22.3) to have been inserted in the eastern part of the nave's south wall, and another, smaller, in Perpendicular style can still be seen opposite it, in the north wall. This last may well have been inserted with part of the £40 Lady Margaret Bedingfeld left in 1474 for beautifying the church. She and her grandfather, Sir John de Tudenham, who willed to be buried in the chancel in 1392, are the only two lords of the manor known to have been buried in Eriswell—the family had other manors at which they were more at home. It is not known how soon after the Reformation the church became derelict but the sketch mentioned, made about 1720, shows it already roofless and without a chancel: it was finally demolished in 1754 except for the eastern one-third of the nave. Throughout its traceable history it consisted of a tower some 12 feet square, a nave 43 by 27 feet, and a chancel about 21 feet square: there were neither aisles nor chapels. On the ground the outline of the foundations can easily be traced. Lady Margaret willed to be buried 'before the image of the Holy Cross near the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the nave': this altar being in front of the respond of the chancel arch, her grave would be beneath the Perpendicular window. It is possible that the three second-hand windows in the rubble-built seventeenth century addition to the west front of Lakenheath church came from the chancel of Eriswell St. Peter.

The apparent reason for this settlement of Eriswell St. Peter is Caudle Head, a pond 100 yards long in a chalk basin where cold water wells up the whole year round. The water from this spring, rising a half-mile inland from the fen edge, flowed until modern times to a water-mill on the western side of the Hall—a mill worth 20s. in 1249. Close to Caudle Head a number of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon graves have been uncovered (TL.732805) presumably the cemetery of the first settlers of Eriswell village—the grave-goods are in the Moyses Hall Museum in Bury St. Edmunds.

Along the west side of the Street, southward from the Hall closes, can still be traced a series of over a dozen more closes which represent the tenements of mediaeval Free Tenants and Bond Tenants. On the ground outlines of many of their buildings' foundations can be seen. With only narrow frontages upon the Street, the far ends of these closes reach down to the fen. One of the larger, Birds Close of ten acres, was held for an annual payment of two pounds of cummin seed (which could be commuted for 4d.). Two other closes, Cokes and Dauncets, were amalgamated in the 15th century, and the resulting 13 acres were given in 1474 to endow a chantry, together with one Liberty of Foldcourse attached to it, and 42 acres of arable land in the Common Field: this large close

is still called 'Chantry'. The endowment of a chantry does not entail the provision of a building, only of a priest's stipend.

Lying between the western ends of the closes and Pavior's Lode (which ran up the western boundary of the parish and was probably Roman) was a strip of Common Fen which provided summer bite for the Great Cattle (besides rushes), and, at its northern end, peat turves for firing. Here, at its northern end, Caudle Water entered the Lode from the east. On the banks of Caudle Water, going up stream, lay first Caudle Lammas Meadow, then Caudle Common giving a small area of winter bite. In the Caudle itself was a fishery worth 2s. in 1309.

Just down stream from Caudle Head, east of some manor closes, was Quan Field which, together with Peaseland (now Paisley) Field, across the Street from the tenants' closes, formed perhaps some sort of in-field. The Common Field (all of which lay within three-quarters of a mile of the Street) was divided in post-mediaeval times into three Shifts or Wents: West (now Waste) Shift, Mill-field Shift (on which may be presumed a late mediaeval wind-mill) and Rainbird (later Rainbutt) Shift. Each Shift was divided into three or four Furlongs (of which only the post-mediaeval names are known), which in turn were divided into numerous Acres, few of which were a statutory acre in area. In the 18th century the area of the whole Field was 612 acres, of which at least 100 appear to have been taken from the Warren not long before. Dividing Wents, Furlongs and Acres were baulks called Heaves and Meres.

Opposite the Rectory gate (where stood the tithe barn: its post-mediaeval reconstruction has only lately been demolished) ran Parsons Way towards the east. Starting at the Pond on the small Village Green, it passed the Vineyard, of which nothing is known except that its gentle south-facing slope probably belonged to the church. Then, two and a half miles further to the east, in the centre of a 'small warren of coneyes of 2,000 acres' stood the Warren lodge. On the analogy of Thetford and Mildenhall lodges, of which the shells still stand, Eriswell Lodge would have been a two storey tower about 15 feet square, of flint with corners and windows of imported stone: modern farm buildings now on the site have blocks of Barnack stone embedded in the walls. During the Napoleonic Wars the much diminished Warren was alleged to be producing up to 25,000 rabbits a year.

To the south of the Hall closes another road left the Street towards the west. This provided access for the tenants to High Fen and its products. The road continued over Pavior's Lode at Fat Bridge, and then went on to Mildenhall—it was the mediaeval road between Lakenheath and Mildenhall.

ERISWELL ST. LAURENCE

A mile and a half to the south stands the dependent settlement of Eriswell St. Laurence, the Domesday Coclesworth. As in the case of Eriswell St. Peter a pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon burial ground has been uncovered on the heathland hill half a mile behind the present settlement (TL.733778): the grave-goods are in the Elveden Estate Museum. The Domesday name of Coclesworth appears in documents of the 12th and 13th centuries collected in the Cartulary of Colchester Abbey (Roxburgh Club 1897) as well as in others. The Domesday lord of the duplex manor gave the Abbey two-thirds of the tithes of Eriswell and Coclesworth and they continued to be paid until about 1220 when the Rector, Peter, redeemed them for an annuity of 60s.: this continued to be paid until the Dissolution (afterwards to the Crown and then Ely Bishoprick). The name Coclesworth appears for the last time in a conveyance of an Acre of three roods (BM. Add. Chart. 5494) dated 1301: the land lay in Coclesworth on Portway in Grethowefeld. Great How Field was the mediaeval name for the Common Field of Eriswell St. Laurence. The lords of the manor severed their connection with Colchester Abbey about 1220, making a down payment to redeem all their liabilities. About 1240 a short connection with Royston Priory began when William de Rochester gave 'lands and villeinages': he was succeeded by his brother who made further grants in 'Eriswell and Coclesworth' (Chart. Rolls. 35 Hen. III. mem. 7). Whatever the exact legal position of the Priory may have been, these villeinages became known as Roystons Manor and appear as such at the taxation of the clergy in 1254 (Norwich Taxation). The Priory seems to have disposed of these holdings by 1291 since Roystons manor in Eriswell does not appear in 'the taxation of Pope Nicholas'. At the middle of the 13th century the Chamberlain family begins to appear: John de Camera was a witness at the inquisition at the death of William de Rochester in 1249: in 1291 another John de Camera was one of the sureties in £100 in a dispute with the Abbot of Bury (William of Hoo, 209): William de la Chaumbre appeared in 1327 as plaintiff in another dispute with the Abbot (Cal. Inq. Misc. 973): a series of Final Concords traces acquisitions of land by the family during the first half of the 14th century. Both the disputes with the Abbot were about land (perhaps the same piece of land) in Eriswell St. Laurence. In 1448 the family finally disposed of 'the Manor of Roystones . . . in Ereswell', including 1,574 acres of land, 13 messuages and 4 liberties of foldcourse (FF. Suff. ed. Rye. 26 Hen. VI. 24). Ironically with their departure what had been called Roystons became Chamberlains and has been ever since.

The dependent chapel of St. Laurence has been used since the

dereliction of St. Peter's as the Parish Church. The oldest part is the Early English south aisle and chapel. In the walls are worked stones of Norman style used as rubble, and there is no reason to suppose that it stands elsewhere than on the site of the Domesday church of Coclesworth. This early 13th century portion may be presumed to have been the complete church of that time; with a nave of 36 by 16 feet and a chancel 20 by 16 feet, it was smaller than the parish church. During the first half of the 14th century, we may suppose with Chamberlain money, the present tower, nave and chancel were added, increasing the area of the church by three. The old chancel was screened off to become the chapel of St. John Baptist: it is tempting to believe that it was the chapel of the guild of that name mentioned in wills, and whose goods were worth a marc at the 1524 subsidy. So here are to be seen stones of a church which was standing up to 250 years before the name Coclesworth appears for the last time in a document.

Chamberlains Hall and its Great Barn, both rebuilt, still stand where the Street enters the settlement, coming from Eriswell St. Peter in the north. To the south of the Hall until the Enclosure Award was a Green of some size (its vestige now called 'the Square'), and around it were grouped the tenements of the settlement. Opposite the Hall was Drinkmilk Close (Robert Drynkmeleke was a beneficiary under a will of 1473). It has not yet proved possible to identify the mediaeval occupiers of all the other closes. The Street entered the Green at its north-west corner: from the north-east corner ran a road to Brandon called East Street (later Town Overway). At the south-west corner is the Pond (now called the Moat). This is a small perennial spring and may well have been the magnet which attracted the first Anglo-Saxon settlers. To the south of the Moat was one tenement, and then comes St. Laurence's Chapel. To the west of the Moat began the road to Icklingham Bridge, passing the west door of the chapel it continued as Lamped Lane to Codson (then Goding) Hill, where it joined the road from Holywell. At the south-east corner of the Green began Field Lane which, continuing as Portway, led to the Common Field of Eriswell St. Laurence.

This, the Great How Field, was a good mile square, and its near edge was a mile from the church. In the 18th century it covered an area of 894 acres of which up to 100 seem to have been brought into cultivation from the Heath only a short time before. In post-mediaeval times this field, then called Great High Field, was divided like that of Eriswell St. Peter into three Wents, and the post-mediaeval names and the sizes of these and the Furlongs into which they were divided are all known. At the Field's northern edge ran Mereway (now Mareway), and, parallel with it, across the

Field's centre, Portway along a baulk now called Portal Heave. South of the Middle Shift was yet another road, to Elveden and Thetford, which it is tempting to identify with a Wrogbrad Way of a 1469 will. In this settlement, too, there are suggestions of an infield: Town Field, Church Croft and Lamped Field are all candidates for inclusion.

There was a tenement to the south of the church, and to the south of that, westwards from Lamped Lane, a short road gave access to Pristol Common Fen and its products. At the southern tip of the parish was Pristol Lammas Meadow. On Priest Hill (from which Pristol derives) the parties to the 1291 dispute with Bury's Abbot, on an autumn Sunday, were persuaded to meet for discussion. Here, in the swamp, was the mediaeval Tanning Field.

Though the areas of foldcourse and sheepcourse of the nine post-mediaeval flocks within the duplex manor are fairly clear, there is insufficient evidence to delineate the areas of mediaeval fold-free. Enough to say that in addition to the Warren there were large areas of Heath available for bite.

This paper must end with naming two areas which may be taken as later mediaeval assarts from the Warren. Cooksey, known in 1652 as Cookeshaw when it contained 75 acres, lies at the end of Portway, two miles from the Street. Cranhouse, which at the same date was called Crannes and contained 118 acres, lay north of Mereway, a mile from the Street. Both were at that time whole-year lands and not divided into Acres—on neither is there any sign that there were habitations during the Middle Ages. In his will of 1421 (Nor. Hynnyng 79f) a Rector mentions his nephew, John Cooke: John Cranewys was an executor of Katherine de Tudenham's will in 1383 (Nor. Heyden 211).

CORRECTIONS OF PUBLISHED ERRORS

For two hundred years St. Laurence's Chapel has been called St. Peter's Church. In the first half of the 18th century Kirby's first edition and 'Honest' Tom Martin both gave the correct dedication: so does an incontrovertible document of 1669 (Elveden Archives. E.1), a conveyance of a tenement, which gives its southern boundary as St. Laurence's churchyard (the other boundaries given cannot be disputed). When the true St. Peter's church had become an insignificant ruin those who knew that Eriswell Parish had been put under the patronage of St. Peter were naturally misled into thinking that the surviving fine church must have that dedication: Kirby suggested this tentatively in his 2nd edition. Those who now accepted this wrong dedication, and knew that there had been

a Chapel of St. Laurence, reasonably believed this to be the ruin. Familiarity with mediæval wills alone would have prevented the switch in dedications. Every testator directs his body to be buried either in St. Peter's or in St. Laurence's. In every case where the place of residence of the testator has been determined, and they are many, it is at the church of that settlement where his tenement lay that he desires to be buried.

V. B. Redstone wrote an article about Chapels, Chuntries and Gilds in Suffolk (SIA. xii) and a note about St. Laurence's Chapel (EAMisc. 8475). On his mis-reading of a will (Bury, Hervey 66) he based his wrong conclusion that St. Laurence's Chapel was within the Parish Church. His mis-reading of another (Bury, Fuller 115) caused him to suppose a benefaction for a light in the Chapel. Unfortunately his unfounded statements have been quoted by others.

Prince Frederick Duleep Singh (EAN & Q. ns. II.220) having accepted the wrong dedication went on to identify Eriswell St. Peter (his St. Laurence) with Coclesworth, and his suggestion has been repeated without question many times as though it were fact. He also states that Margaret Bedingfeld left 40s. to St. Peter's, and that too has been quoted—examination of her will (Nor. Gelour 122ff) shows £40.

It has recently been stated (Med. Arch. viii. 250 & SIA. xix 169) that the ruins of the old parish church are known as St. Edmunds' Chapel—there is no foundation whatsoever for this. Kirby thought the ruins might be monastic, and his supposition has unfortunately been repeated as fact in a popular book now in print.

Darby in *Domesday Geography of Eastern England* p. 201 (doubtless following the Victoria County History) says that the locality of Coclesworth is unidentified. This opinion only suggests unfamiliarity with the terrain and the relevant documents. Copinger in his check-list of documents placed a port at Eriswell, one of his assistants having read the mediæval spelling of Orwell as Eriswell. This has led the writer of a pamphlet to believe that Port Way led to the port. A statement (SIA. xix 349) that the ruined church 'has no visible feature older than 1400' is incorrect.

Meaney in the *Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* appears to locate the cemetery behind Eriswell St. Peter in Lakenheath parish at TL.732809, whereas it is much to the south of this at TL.732807 well within Eriswell parish. Again, her statement that in 1915 a single burial was found behind Eriswell St. Laurence, at TL.733778, is at variance with the quantity of grave-goods found there, and which are now in the Elveden Museum—cemetery would be a more accurate description.

The present writer hopes he will not be thought frivolous if he suggests that the earliest recorded error about Eriswell may have been by Domesday clerks. The proportion of freemen was high in Suffolk, but not one was listed in Eriswell. In the cartulary of Colchester Abbey a document (p. 150) of about 1190 gives the names of five men who owned extra-manorial land in Eriswell. One of these, Baldwin the Steward, at about the same date requested a decision from the Knights of the Shire (Rot. Cur. Regis) about his ownership of thirty acres of ware-land in Eriswell. Another, Everard, appeared before the Knights in a similar dispute about sixty acres (not specifically named ware-land). The possibility that some at least of the five men's holdings had been ware-land at the time of Domesday is strengthened by the fact that our duplex manor only paid 17d. in geld in contrast with the 20d. of neighbouring communities (leaving, one supposes, 3d. to be paid direct by someone to the Hundred).

Since a gremlin has obviously delighted to confuse writers about Eriswell I would be most grateful for corrections of errors in this paper. I must point out that naming the two settlements Eriswell St. Peter and Eriswell St. Laurence was a 16th century usage and not, I think, of any other time. The name 'Eriswell' has always been used in documents to indicate two different units—either the whole of the duplex manor, or its northern portion only. So documents speak of Coclesworth (or Roystons, or Chamberlains) *in* Eriswell (e.g. BM.Add. Chart.5494 & FF.Suff. 26 Hen.VI.24) or Eriswell *and* Coclesworth (or Roystons, or Chamberlains).