

## CHAPTER XXI.

### FACTS AND FABLES.

**The Name of the Parish.** There are some Kentish historians who speak of Hartley under the name of Haesleholt. The *Textus Roffensis* is quoted as an authority for this designation, but the most ancient allusion to the name appears to be in the will of Byrthric, who lived in the 10th century at Meopham, and was the owner of much landed property hereabout.

Among other bequests he left land in Haeselholt to one Sired the son of Aelfred, and two days provision to the Monastery of St. Andrew, at Rochester.

" Et omni anno in diebus anniversariorum suorum ordinaverunt servitoribus ecclesiae sancti Andreas, firman duorum dierum de terra ilia quas vocatur Hoeslholte."

The most probable explanation appears to be that at that date the village, or part of it, was still known by its old Celtic name of Hoesland, Saxonised into Hoeslholte. And that it was not till, perhaps as late as the 11th century, that the name of Heortlea was used of the whole village.

The name of the village is found under different forms of spelling in different ages.

In the Domesday survey it is called Erclie. This spelling is, perhaps, only what we, might expect

from the Norman Scribe. The Saxon e was pronounced as our a, and the sound of the c against l is not unlike that of t and l. The native who gave information apparently omitted the aspirate. In the case of Hartley, near Cranbrook, the Norman scribe has written in Arclei. Erclai is then simply the Norman version of the Saxon Heortlea. Names in Domesday appear, in many cases, to be phonetic, and do not represent the Saxon orthography.

In other places and times the parish is referred to as Heorut-lea, Herets-ley, Herteleigh, Hertlegh, Hertley, Hertlege, Herkeleye, Hercleye, Herdie, Heortlea, Herteley, Hareley, Hertle, Hertilee, Hertele, Harteley, and finally, Hartley.

I have, in another place, explained the derivation of the name as from the Saxon Heorot, a hart and leah or lea, pasture land. But it is just possible that it may have another derivation. The Danes and the Wends have left us many traces of their occupancy of this district, as Sweynscampe, Herotfelda, and Stanchtan-dyest. And the name Heortlea may just possibly have been derived from the Wendish deity Heorotha. It was, perhaps, a somewhat vague acquaintance with such legendary association of the village with the Slavonic Olympus that induced one old historian, noted for his far-fetched etymology, to give, as the meaning of Hartley, " the pasture of the Lord."

The School. In the early half of the 19th century,. Hartley children went to school in one of the Black Lion Cottages. Twenty to twenty-five of them assembled in the little parlour. The cubic area per child must have been very small indeed and in the light of modern sanitary science the effects of this over-crowding should have proved disastrous. But it is said that everyone of the five and twenty at one time attending the school, lived to be over seventy! The room, by the way, had no



The Old School.

fireplace. In winter the children sat round a pail-ful of burning embers which stood on the floor in

the middle of the room. They were taught by two sisters who lived at Hartley Cottage.

In 1841 a school was built at Hartley Green on land that was given by Mr. Wm. Masters Smith, of Camer. An inscribed stone over the door stated that it was "For the children of the labouring, manufacturing and poorer classes." The school was intended for the united parishes of Hartley, Fawkham and Longfield.

In 1876 an infant room was added, and the school and management reorganised for Hartley only. The site for this was given by Mr. J. T. Smith, of Fairby.

In 1907 the old building was condemned, and a new mixed school built to accommodate 70 children, at a cost of £600. The land was purchased from Mr. Thomas Morton.

After the school was built in 1841, the girls wore red cloaks on Sundays and sat in the front rows in the chancel of the Church and helped in the singing.

But they were not the Choir. The Choir proper sat in the gallery with fiddle, bass-viol and other instruments.

On one memorable occasion, when some unwanted innovation was proposed, the choir struck, and, according to the legend, having collected together all the Church music and choir books, made a bonfire of them. On the following Sunday the service was carried on with the help of the little girls in red cloaks.

The first teacher appointed to the new school was Mrs. Jones. Then came Miss Emily Jane Hillyer, who was here till 1895, when Mrs. Cromar became head teacher. Miss Bragger followed in 1909, and Miss Fiddis in 1915.

**The Coats and Gowns,** The annual gift of coats and gowns, at Christmas, in this parish had its origin in the 17th century.

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth one Thomas Walter built a mansion at Pennis, in Fawkham. His son, John, who succeeded him, died in the first year of Charles I. By his will he left provision for a good dinner every Christmas Day to two poor men and two widows of Fawkham, Ash and Hartley.

They were to receive, moreover, long coats and gowns of "good russet cloth."

After attending Church they were directed to assemble at "*his dwellinge howse* " and there to receive his bounty, for the due discharge of which he had "*tyed and bowned* " certain lands "*for ever.*" The gift was to commence after the death of his wife, Dorcas, and to "continue to the end of the world."

For three hundred years the long coats and gowns have been bestowed annually upon the twelve deserving people, but for more than a century a

later and smaller house has stood on the site of the old Elizabethan Mansion.

Till recent times the "*plentiful dinner* " was still provided there or at Scudders farm, but the chosen recipients now, in lieu of the dinner, each receive the sum of five shillings.

**Why the Rectory  
is so far  
from The Church,**

Surprise is sometimes expressed at the Rectory being so far away from the Church. It was formerly very near and stood upon the site of what are now called the Parsonage Cottages. Towards the end of the 18th century it fell into so bad repair that by the Bishop's permission, two Rectors in succession resided outside the parish, the one at Greenhithe and the other at Wilmington.

The latter was quite content with his home near Dartford. He was a man of means and drove to and fro in his carriage and pair. But there came a time when the Bishop, to his great annoyance, said he must live in his parish. He was obliged to acquiesce but obtained permission to exchange the glebe, and choose his own site for the new Rectory.

This he did, and built a house which was more commensurate in size with his private income than the revenues of the living. He was given to hospitality and so the legend goes, said that he could not

expect his many friends from Dartford to toil up the long hill to the other end of the parish to dine with him, and therefore built his house at the bottom, and two miles nearer to his former residence.

**Two Legends.** Wm. Granville Evelyn, Lord of the Manor here, was a lineal descendant of John Evelyn, the diarist, and there is a tradition that some of the famous diary was written at Hartley Manor. It may have been so, notwithstanding the fact that the Evelyns were not Lords of the Manor here till long after the diarist was dead. He would be, almost certainly, well acquainted with his contemporary poet and dramatist, Sir Charles Sedley, and so may have visited Hartley in his time.

There is another tradition which associates the parish with a famous author. It is said that Daniel Defoe at one time lived in a house near the Black Lion Inn, and that it was here that he wrote the immortal history of Robinson Crusoe. The book was published in 1719, and it is a fact that Defoe was then in this neighbourhood, for he held, at that time, a government appointment at Tilbury.

**The  
Smugglers  
Caves.**

If tradition may be relied upon, and sundry hide-holes in the parish cannot be otherwise explained, we are forced to believe that in former days smuggling was as rife in this village as in certain others in the neighbourhood of Gravesend.

It was indeed, a well established industry, if so it may be called, throughout the county of Kent—and there was a reason why.

Tradition has it that the Kentish folk were never conquered by the Conqueror, but that a compromise was made. They preferred their allegiance upon certain conditions, and among them that ancient rights should be retained. In return for men and ships the Kentish shores were to be free for the import of silk and wine and other good things from the continent.

For many centuries, so it is said, no caves or other hiding places were needed. The goods were landed in full cognisance of the excise authorities.

But times came when the government of the country ignored the ancient pact. And then the men of Kent stood up for their rights. All along the shore, in the marsh lands and in many an inland town and village, hiding places abounded. Some of the most respectable inhabitants of town and village engaged in the traffic. Local tradition tells

us that up to comparatively recent times the parish of Hartley was not behindhand in asserting her rights.

The chief depot for this neighbourhood, at one time, was Red Cow farm, and the owner, a churchwarden of Meopham, was the hero of many daring exploits. It is said that when the copper at the old farm grew too hot for the lace and tobacco they were conveyed by stealth to the chalk hole in Hoseland wood. But there were other hiding places in Hartley parish. There is a hole in the ground which gave the name to Pit-field. There is a cavernous retreat at Hartley bottom, and there are legends of tunnels which run from the Churchyard to Gravesend.

There were times when the farm yard barn or the Rector's hay loft were commandeered, whether with or without permission tradition does not say, but it does tell us that on these occasions, when safe removal had been effected, a keg or bale would be left behind for the farmer or the parson.

**Our Ancient.** I believe it to be a fact and not a  
**River-bed,** fable that "once upon a time"  
 along the valley we call Hartley  
 Bottom there flowed a wide river.

It is interesting to think of this spot as a riverside village, to picture our primitive predecessors

here fishing for food as well as hunting beast and bird, and in their little skin-covered skin's paddling here and there on the face of the water.

Sometimes perhaps they ventured down the stream as far as the Thames, a river of much greater importance in those days and a tributary of the greater river still which flowed along the site of what is now the English Channel.

I think the ancient ford which went down to the water edge and from which they set sail and re-embarked is now the lane which runs by Hartley Hill Cottage down in the North Ash Road.

Very pretty and picturesque must have been the prospect in those days from Hartley Hill, along the river bank, but of course there were drawbacks in the life here in those days. Even the fierce little men who made their homes in the dug-outs in the chalk must have lived in wholesome awe of the savage beasts that came down out of the forest to the river to drink, and of the fearsome creatures who had their habitat in the river itself.

We may perhaps, on the whole, congratulate ourselves that where the old-time river rolled is now a green and pleasant valley, where, with the exception of the modern builder, no peace disturbing monsters are to be found.

**A Legend of Fairby.** There is a story that about 200 years ago, in the time of Thomas Young, the house at Fairby was one night raided by robbers. The inmates were gagged and bound and the family plate and other valuables packed up ready for removal. As the thieves were about to depart with the spoil, Mr. Richard Treadwell and some of his men appeared on the scene. Mary, the little daughter of the house, aged five, had slipped out unseen and run to the Farm house on the other side of, the Green. The robbers escaped, but the booty was too heavy to carry away in a hurry, and, it is said, that they dropped it down the 300ft. well which is beneath the present kitchen floor, and that there it has remained ever since.

There is a romantic sequel to this tale. The son of Mr. Richard Treadwell eventually married little Mary, and she being the only daughter and heiress, the estate passed into his possession, or rather that of his son for the property was strictly entailed. They were married in 1743, and he and his wife are buried beneath the stone slab in the aisle of Hartley Church.

**The Headless Horseman.** Whether it has anything to do with the loss of the family plate and its hiding place in the old well, or, with a claim which, after his death, was

made to the Fairby estate by the representatives of another branch of the family, it is impossible to say, but it is the Richard Treadwell, mentioned above, who is said to ride, headless, round the house at midnight on the iron grey mare on which he galloped over the farm in his lifetime.

**The**                    The population of Hartley gave a  
**Population,**        great leap at the Census of 1921,  
                              having doubled itself since 1911.

With regard to the past, the earliest statistics we possess concerning the number of the inhabitants is in the 11th and 12th centuries.

With the help of the Domesday survey we may compute the population in that age at about 110. Some advance was made by the end of the 16th century, but there could not, at that; time, have been more than about 20 houses and 140 people. Two hundred years later the census of 1801 gave 24 houses and 157 population. In 1811 there were 30 houses and 185 people. In 1821 there were 31 houses and a drop to 161 in the population. But that was the period succeeding the war with France. At the beginning of the present century there were 42 houses and 250 people.

At the present time there are 240 houses with a population well over 600.

**Fires.** At an unwonted hour, midway between the morning and afternoon services, one Sunday, in the year 1855, the Church bells rang out. It was Robert Ware, from the Parsonage Cottages, who was pulling the ropes and it was to tell the people that the Church was on fire. Mr. Wm. Bensted, who lived at the Court, had made the discovery and very soon his household staff were passing buckets of water from the pond in the farm yard to the men on the roof of the Church.

From the heating stove, which stood in the centre of the aisle, a flue ran up through the roof, and this had set the timbers alight. Fortunately, the fire was extinguished before it reached the big beams, and not very much damage was done.

The Court had a narrow escape in 1852. Merry-makers returning late at night from the Harvest Feast, which was held at the Kings Arms, found the Court barn on fire.

Desperate efforts were made to check the flames, but it was early autumn and there was not much water in the ponds. Soon the great barn and all that was in it was a roaring furnace, but the house escaped. The present barn was built on the site of the old one.

Not long after this the New House farm lost its big barn by fire. No details are on record, and all we know is that the New House peacock afterwards

walked with a limp. He had burnt his toes in the fire.

About 70 years ago the two parish cottages were one night burnt down. What caused the fire, nobody knew, but it was whispered afterwards that "Freddie," an old parishioner, had been heard to say that if the Churchwardens did not let him have one of them, nobody else should get it.

Yet another big barn, that belonging to Fairby farm, fell a victim to the flames some sixty years ago. The origin of the fire is wrapped in mystery, but, anyhow, the farm buildings were in a very awkward position. They occupied, in those days, the site of the present lawns and flower garden. After the fire the farm yard was shifted to the other side of the House and an up-to-date barn erected in a more convenient situation. And now it has been transformed into the Fairby Hall, the Headquarters of the Hartley Constitutional Association and Club.

In 1862, Hartley Wood Farm cottages were burnt down. The present ones were built where the old ones stood.

The only other fire on record, besides an occasional stack of hay or corn, was the destruction of the Blue House in 1856. The residence now called Willow Lodge was built on the site of the old farm house.