

## CHAPTER II.

*Norman Conquest—Roger de Poictou—Wigan and the Domesday Book—Local Saxon Families—Wigan now and then—Records of Out-townships—The Conqueror in the North—Slave Trade—Blank in Wigan's History.*

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**T**HERE are strange coincidences in the histories of men and nations. Man goes through his cycles of change and decay, and so do nations, although, in both cases, many nations and men disappear without reaching maturity. The mutability even of nature, from youth to old age, has many marked stages. Impetuous youth is far more severe with human failings than sedate old age. The trials and experience of active life smooth the ruffled tempers and dispel melancholy, as the ever restive ocean smooths the rugged rocks into symmetrical pebbles. Internecine and foreign wars have been the fierce agents of civilisation in bringing countries to national eminence. As change of habit often changes a man's countenance, so do the rapid strides of civilisation change the manners, customs, and even physical appearance of a country. A small accident, or an insignificant incident, often changes a man's career, and the success or failure of a policy may increase, or mar, the glories of a kingdom. There are few old men, successful or otherwise, who cannot look back upon some special turning point in their career. So, too, there are eras in a nation's history, and the most marked epoch in the youth of our country is the Norman Conquest.

One of the most distinguished generals at the battle of Hastings, in 1066, was Roger de Poictou, the Conqueror's cousin, who gallantly led the centre division of the Norman hosts. To the faithful Normans were given the estates of defeated Saxons. To Roger de Poictou, for his military daring and success, were given no less than 398 manors, in different parts of the country, one of which was Newton, in which Wigan was situated. He had been faithful to the Duke, and he himself had many such followers equally anxious and deserving to share the spoil, and as he could afford to give great rewards he bestowed the barony of Newton on his faithful friend and follower, Warinus Banastre. Unfortunately, De Poictou, so richly rewarded, was

unfaithful to his king during the Saxon rebellions, and for his misconduct was deprived of his baronies, so that the estates of Newton became the king's property, although Banastre still retained them as Baron. The result of this disloyalty was that Wigan was not mentioned in the celebrated Domesday Book, because the king held all the lands between the Ribble and the Mersey, the value of which was given, according to the custom of inquiring about royal demesnes, without specially naming all the divisions and subdivisions. The value of all this land taken from De Poictou, from the Ribble to the Mersey, is stated in the Domesday Book to be £120, and if £1 then were reckoned as worth £120 now, its value in present money would only have been £14,400; yet, when the property tax existed in 1814, the same land was valued at £2,569,761, showing an increased value of £2,555,361. Upholland and Orrell were not in the Newton barony, and have the distinguished honour of being mentioned in Domesday Book. Banastre, the patron of Wigan, was a second-rate baron, or baron of the county, holding his barony from another at a nominal fee. In the reign of William II. the confiscated estates were again given to Poictou, with the hope that he might espouse the cause of the usurper, which he did; but on the death of Rufus he declared for the real heir, Robert, against the recognised king, Henry, for which he was again deprived of all his estates, and banished in 1101, and the Banastres became chief barons, under De Musli and Greslet, and were succeeded by the family of Langton in the reign of Edward I.

At this epoch of English history many new families settled in the neighbourhood of Wigan, as well as in other parts of the kingdom. Estates were taken from the Saxons and given to the Normans, who sold part of their possessions to Normans or Saxons who were willing to pay. In a few instances estates were given back to Saxon holders who gave proof of their adherence to the king. Such was the case with the old Saxon family of Bradshaigh. There also settled on the estates of Haigh and Blackrod, shortly after this, the Norries or Norrys, after whom came the Bradshaighs by the marriage of Mabella Norries, heiress of her father's vast estates, to Roger Bradshaigh, and then again by marriage Haigh came into the possession of the present honourable family of Crawford or Lindsay. Albert Gredle, the third Baron of Manchester, whose name, by the way, is spelled in thirty-four different ways, gave one knight's fee or six caracutes in Dalton, Parbold, and Wrightington, to Orm (whose name is still preserved in Ormskirk, Ormeshaw, Ormsher), son of Ailward, when he married his daughter Emma early in the Norman period. Because of the possession of this property Orm would have to provide one juryman to attend the assize court at Lancaster. The fourth Baron Gredle gave three caracutes to Thomas Perpoint, in Rivington, and for ten shillings he gave two caracutes in Heaton to William Norres, who was doubtless connected with the Norries of Haigh. The

same baron sold two oxgangs of land for three shillings to Henry of Lathom. A caracute was as much as could be tilled in one year by one plough and extended to eight bovates or oxgangs, an oxgang being thirteen acres.

The law of primogeniture was not so sternly severe on younger sons then as now. All entailed estates which had come to the father as eldest son were the legal inheritance of the eldest son, but those which came into the family as part of the dowry of the mother were the legal possessions of the second son. The other sons were generally allowed to struggle for possessions and distinctions for themselves, and because they inherited no property were customarily called "Sansterre," for which reason, too, King John received that ill-omened surname long before he lost his French possessions. The Standish estates belonged to Warin Bussel, the Baron of Penworth, but when his daughter was married to Richard Spilman she received the Standish Hall estates as part of her dowry. Their eldest son inherited the entailed estates of Spilman, but the second son, who was called Standish, received the Standish estates, which had been his mother's dowry. He was the first of the Standish family.

The Saxons divided their districts into hundreds, and Wigan was situated in the hundred of West Derby and barony of Newton, but as it is not specially mentioned in the Domesday Book, Beaumont's translation concerning the whole district may be here stated:—"The whole manor, with the hundred of Blackburn, yielded the king a rent of thirty-two pounds and two shillings. Roger de Poictou gave all the land to Roger de Busli and Albert Grealet, and there are so many who have eleven caracutes and a half, to whom they have granted freedom for three years, wherefore it is not now valued."

The great barony of Newton was not actually brought to the hammer, like many valuable estates of ancient and noble families, but was disposed of by private bargain in 36 Elizabeth (1549) for £1000. The advowson of the different parishes, however, was withheld. In the indenture tripartite it is distinctly stated that from sale are excepted the advowson of the Rectory of Wigan, and all the messuages, enclosed lands, tenements, meadows, and grounds belonging thereto.

In clear weather an extensive and pleasant view may be obtained from the Parish Church tower; yet, although the contour lines of the surface of the earth are but slightly changed, the difference of scenery between this period of the borough's history, and that of the nineteenth century, is very great. A few straggling houses of very primitive construction, in close proximity to the church, was the town. Those on the south-east side of the church and south side of the Roman road were chiefly occupied by yeomen and their slaves; those on the north-west, or Hallgate, were inhabited by the retainers and slaves of the rector; a few houses on the western

slopes, by the side of the Roman road, were tenanted by yeomen and tradesmen, whose lands, in size like Irish farms, lay westward of the town; a few houses in Millgate and Standishgate completed the town. Every man's cottage could not be said to be his castle, for it would have been an easy matter to storm and take it. The walls of the town, and the united strength of the inhabitants, were the bulwarks in which they put their trust. On the sacred precincts was the churchyard, in which the already ancient rude forefathers of the town lay, whilst over the beds in which their unconscious bodies rested stray, burghers' swine burrowed the ground or roughly cropped the rank grass, in the absence of the burleyman. Within a few yards of the consecrated ground, on the southern side, was the widened part of the old Roman way, which might be seen stretching away westward, with winding gracefulness, over the ford and into the forest. About a hundred yards eastward the sister Roman road from Manchester met this westward one from Chester. From the church to where these roads met, with the fields sloping from the Market-place to the wall at the Meanes, was an open space, or common ground, on which the rector allowed his burghal tenants to graze their swine and cattle. Where the two roads met, and almost on the site of the present Royal Hotel, stood for centuries after the old ale-house. There were no carriages to wear away these well-made roads, and from the mere want of use even traces of them were beginning to disappear in many places. Travellers either proceeded on foot or on horseback, and the appearance of a stranger was certain to bring out the whole staring and wondering population. On every side was to be seen a vast, undulating forest, with patches cleared here and there for purposes of farming. From a bosky glen in the east, lying under the wooded heights of Haigh, issued the clear Douglas, and glided murmuringly along the eastern valley, with its long southern and gently sloping fertile fields, and then was quickly lost in the great forest of the west, that seemed to cover the whole space as far as the modern Ashurst Beacon. On the highway in the north might be seen the Parish Church of Standish, with its hamlet around. Now the scene is different; instead of forests of trees, and little farms ill-tilled, with a clear stream running through the vast undulating plain, and a few scattered houses for a town, with a solitary church standing in its centre, there is a thickly-populated district, with a great filthy river-drain running through its midst. There are now (1881) 290 streets in the borough (which covers 2,188 acres), a population of 48,192, whilst in the Wigan Union (covering 48,396 acres) there are 139,867 inhabitants. In the Borough there are 6,097 Parliamentary, and 6,949 Municipal, voters. Factory chimneys are more numerous than remaining old trees; mills, pits, foundries, and engineering establishments teem with industrious thousands who "earn whate'er they can." Instead of a great slave population there are over a score of cotton factories,

and thousands of fairly intelligent men and women working, at the most, ten hours a day in these busy hives of local industry. The pattering music of such an array of feet in Flemish clogs alarms and arouses the stranger from his morning slumber, and amuses him on the return at night as the intelligent eyes beam from the happy countenances peering from the shawl-covered heads. Thousands of men, of blackened countenances, determined wills, and callous looks, yet with honest and genial hearts, and uncouth, obliging manners, mostly sharing in the elective franchise, supply us with the comforts of home from the bowels of the earth. Engineering establishments provide an abundance of remunerative work to the skilled artisan, and prosperous tradesmen supply the wants of all. All professions and creeds are well represented. There are numerous churches, chapels, and schools, a public park, and institutions affording opportunities for self-culture. Of public buildings there are yet few, but such as do exist are excellent. Everywhere there are signs of unmistakable prosperity and contentment; but the rise, establishment, and progress of all burghal prosperities will be noticed in detail in chronological order. The denizens of the vast neighbouring forests were wild boars, wild cattle—ancestors of the present Chillingham breed—wolves, foxes, and deer. These were more carefully protected by the forest laws than the inhabitants were by their charters. Fine, mutilation, and death were the punishments for breaking these laws, and the barons, who had the power of hanging and drowning, were not slow to execute the laws. In 1286 no less than forty-eight persons were arraigned before the Lancaster assize court for killing and taking deer, but fines and imprisonment were the only punishments inflicted. In the time of Henry VII. two members of the Boteler (Butler) family, of Bewsey, Warrington, were tried at the assize for slaughtering two wild bulls. The last wild boar in the county was said to have been killed by the Earl of Lancaster, John of Ghent, son of Edward III.

It may be mentioned here that there are more authenticated deeds about Hindley and some of the out-townships relating to early history than for Wigan itself. The Hindley deeds have been printed by John Leyland, Esq., of the Grange, Hindley, and of themselves afford sufficient matter for writing an interesting history, but to write of them fully here would only be to swell these pages without doing justice to Hindley, and therefore Hindley and other townships will only be mentioned when their history directly concerns Wigan, the mother parish.

It took seven years of hard labour before William could justly claim the title of Conqueror. The south and east willingly submitted, but Mercia and Northumbria refused. The friendships of nations vacillate like those of individuals. A nation that is now a faithful ally may be in the next generation a deadly foe. Before the Conquest the Saxons would have done anything to drive the Danes out of the



country, but after the Conquest they humbly besought their assistance, which was given in a most substantial way, with the ulterior intention, undoubtedly, of being themselves the lords of the island. With the Danish assistance the whole of the north and west rose in rebellion, and William swore "by the splendour of God" to take a terrible revenge. He did so, and shared the suffering himself. The whole district of York was laid waste and the harvests destroyed, and, as a natural consequence, famine ensued. His own soldiers were so dreadfully overcome by hunger and fatigue that the mercenary part of them demanded a release from their obligation, which he scornfully granted, whilst the other portion of them was so reduced as to be thankful to have an opportunity of killing and eating the horses. He marched from York to Chester, and would certainly march through Wigan. So very severe was the winter during his march that the roads were in many places blocked by snow-drifts, and the Douglas and other minor rivers swollen into great and rapid torrents. The natives rejoiced at his difficulties and mutinies, and trusted that the elements were working for the destruction of a foe whom they feared. He erected numerous castles to defend the districts he had so dearly bought. He broke up the great earldoms into smaller estates, which he bountifully gave to his faithful followers, who had each to kneel before him and humbly vow, "I become liege man of yours for life and limb and earthly regard, and I will keep faith and loyalty to you for life and death; God help me." Thus, too, each under-tenant swore to his superior, and so, by this feudal system of military tenure throughout all England, there was an army ready to rise at the king's command.

At this period, and for centuries after, slavery was quite a recognised trade in the country. Englishmen and English children brought a high price in the foreign market. Pope Gregory was so well pleased with the appearance of several youthful English slaves in the markets of Rome, that he inquired kindly of the owners from whence they came; and when he was told they were heathen Angles, from the country of Deiri, and subjects of King Alla, he replied, "These Angles, angel-like, should be delivered from (*De*)ira, and taught to sing *Allalua*." In Wigan and other towns children were bought or kidnapped, carried to the slave market towns, of which Bristol was the chief, and then transported by professional traders to other countries. Liverpool was not yet even a parish, much less a slave town. William the Conqueror, however, made this slave trade illegal, although it still clandestinely flourished. But surely no kind of slavery could be worse than that which was sought to be placed on poor idle beggars by an Act passed in 1547 to suppress vagabondage. Thus ran the law:—"All former Acts against vagabonds and sturdy beggars being repealed, it is provided that every man or woman, not being prevented from working by old age, lameness, or disease, who shall be found

loitering or wandering, and not seeking work, during three days, or shall leave work when engaged, may be lawfully apprehended and brought before two justices of the peace; who, upon confession, or on the proof of two witnesses, shall immediately cause the said loiterer to be marked with a hot iron on the breast, the mark being V, and adjudge the said person living so idly to his apprehender to be his *slave*." The apprehender was "to have and hold the *slave* for two years; and only giving him bread and water and refuse food, to cause the said *slave* to work, by boating, chaining, or otherwise, at such labour, how vile soever it be, as he should put him unto." If, on again running away, the slave was apprehended and convicted, the punishment was increased. He was to be branded on the forehead or cheek with the letter S, and condemned to life-long servitude with his apprehender, or he might be sold to anyone who would "starve, chain, and beat him according to the tenour of this statute."

The first part of Wigan's history can only be written from relics, and a dubious sentence in Arthurian history; but from the time of the Conqueror to the thirteenth century there is but a long blank of conjecture, with a few stones of Norman architecture that remain, like solitary historical sentinels of the period. It is the last great blank, but it is justifiable to say that, even in that time, it was a town in a very prosperous state, for when it is next mentioned it is said to be one of the opulent and influential towns of England. From the thirteenth century there is a chain of evidence which, when followed up, reveals its history from then to the present day, a period of six centuries. That history is gathered from local references in other authenticated old histories, old documents lately published, or for the first time publicly appearing in these pages, from charters, letters, registers, and the churchwardens' accounts, &c.

Among the most influential local families of this early period were those of Norrys, Winstanley, Worsley, Standish, Banastre, Gerard, Farington, &c. Edmund de Winstanley, in 1239, married one of the Standishes, and was also connected with the Worsleys of Worsley.

Farmers, and not farmers only, are always growling and grumbling about the weather, and wishing for the good old seasons; but how would they like a repetition of seasons as thus chronicled:—In 1086 a very heavy season, and a swinkful and sorrowful year in England in murrain of cattle, and corn and fruits were at a standstill, and so much untowardness in the weather as a man may not easily think; because of the badness of the weather 1087 was a very heavy and pestilential year in this land, in winter there was so great a famine over all England that many men died a miserable death through hunger; 1089 was a very late year in corn and every kind of fruits, so that many men reaped their corn about Martinmas

and yet later; 1095 was very unseasonable, in consequence of which throughout all this land were all the fruits of the earth reduced to a moderate crop; 1096 was a heavy-tryed year through all England, both through the manifold tributes and also through the heavy-tryed hunger that sorely oppressed this earth; in 1097 a very heavy-tryed year in all things, and beyond measure laborious for badness of weather, both when men attempted to till the soil, and afterwards to gather the fruits of their tilth; 1098 was a very troublesome year through manifold impositions, and from the abundant rains that ceased not all the year, nearly all the tilth in the marsh lands perished; 1103 was a calamitous year, murrain of cattle and scarcity of crops. The chronicler depicts almost every year up to 1131 as being a repetition of famine and murrain, and yet there was less grumbling than there is now with the advantages of sanitation and drainage.