

**A GLANCE AT THE HUNDRED OF
WROTHAM, INCLUDING THE
PARISHES OF WROTHAM, IGHTHAM,
SHIPBOURNE, AND STANSTED, IN
THE DAY OF THE EARLY EDWARDS**

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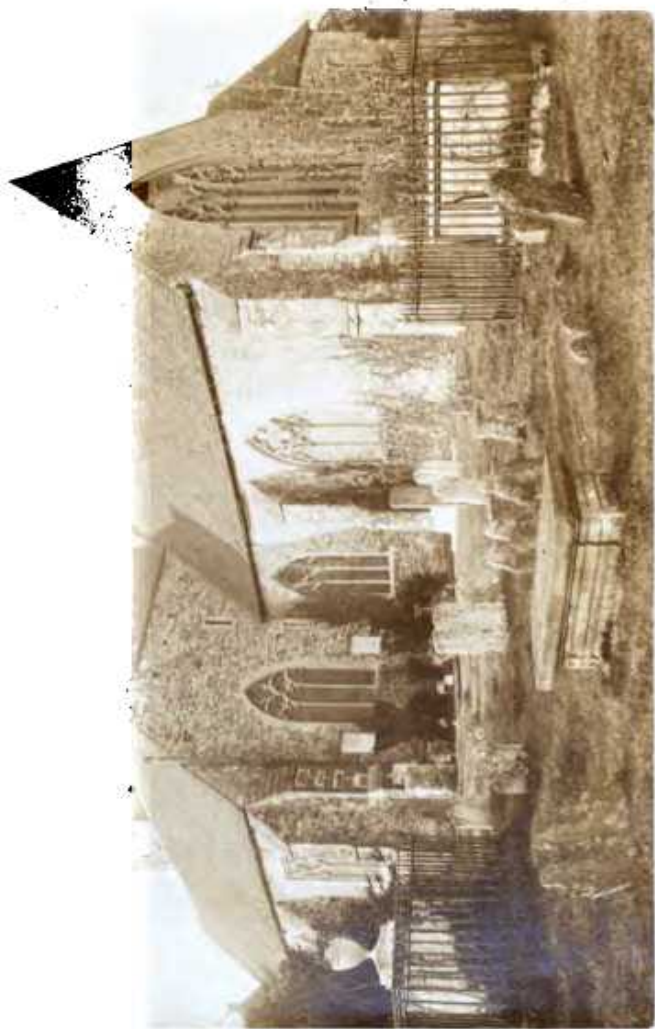
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Photographed by C. H. Carter, N.Y. 1886.

WROTHAM CHURCH.

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EDITED BY THE
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*Gift of
William Endicott Jr.*

PREFACE.

The following particulars illustrating the history of the Hundred of Wrotham, in the days of the early Edwards, have been collected almost exclusively from two Assize Rolls relating to the county of Kent, preserved with many others in the Public Record Office, London.

It is hoped they will prove acceptable not only to persons living in the district where the events recorded took place, now nearly six hundred years ago, but to others who have a taste for studying the mediæval history of the country, and are interested in hearing about the circumstances under which our remote ancestors passed their lives, and of some of the dangers to which they were exposed.

The Assize Rolls are, from their very character, simply records of Accidents and Offences. It will not therefore excite surprise if this "Glance at the Hundred of Wrotham" should seem to have been taken under unfavourable circumstances. The calendar of crimes is certainly heavy enough, but it must be borne in mind that it represents an accumulation of some fourteen years; for Pleas of the Crown were held only when the Justices Itinerant went on their circuits, every seven years. It must also be remembered that the age was one in which the rights affecting life and property were most imperfectly observed. When this is taken into consideration there is room for satisfaction that the catalogue of offences is not larger; and especially in noticing that the state of society in the Hundred of Wrotham compares very favourably with that in other Hundreds throughout the county of Kent—a conclusion justified by an inspection of the remaining portion of the Rolls.

The spelling of all place-names and persons has been strictly preserved. At the end of the two Assize Rolls is added a Subsidy Roll, containing a list of families resident in the Hundred—which then included the four parishes of Wrotham, Ightham, Shipbourne, and Stansted—who were called on to contribute to the Grant made in the first year of King Edward III., 1327, rather more than a dozen years after the events recorded in the later Assize Roll. The amount paid by each person is given, so that a fair estimate may be formed of the position everyone occupied among his neighbours.

The original records are written in the usual abbreviated mediæval Latin, which in many places is extremely hard to decipher; the reader will therefore not regret their translation into English, which has been given as literally as possible. In illustrating and explaining obsolete customs and old legal forms, "Reeves' History of the English Law" has been found useful; and the editor gratefully acknowledges much kind assistance from Walford D. Selby, Esq., of the Public Record Office, who is always both willing and able to help a searcher when in difficulty. His thanks are also due for several hints from James Greenstreet, Esq., to whom all Kentish surnames, however quaintly rendered in ancient documents, seem to be as household words.

It only remains to state that if any profits should be realized by this little attempt to throw light upon a dark period of county history, they will be handed over to the Fund for the Organ Restoration in connection with the fine old church of Wrotham—a church which once admitted within its precincts felons flying from the pursuit of justice, but now stands daily open to welcome within its courts all those who are "prisoners of hope."

A GLANCE
AT THE
HUNDRED OF WROTHAM.

PLEAS OF THE CROWN OF THE COUNTY OF KENT,
21 EDWARD I., A.D. 1293.*

"Calendar of the County of Kent, before J. de Berewyk' and his associates, Justices Itinerant in the same County, in the twenty-first year of the reign of King Edward, the son of King Henry."

"Lathe of Aylesford. Hundred of Wrotham."

"The same John [Oliuer], chief bailiff . . . sworn."

"Walter de la Hale . . . sworn.	Ralph Wolward . . . sworn.
John de Bersted' . . . sworn.	William de Rokesle . . . sworn.
Henry Pistore de Stansted' sworn.	Peter de Croulond . . . sworn.
William de Stansted' . . . sworn.	Robert de Shyppburn' . . . sworn.
Robert le Kyng' . . . sworn.	Gilbert de Wynfeld' . . . sworn.
Richard de Sykeleshede sworn.	Henry Ffareman . . . sworn."

THE first two membranes of the Roll are taken up with recording the names of the jurymen who represented the different hundreds, half-hundreds, villatae, and cities throughout the county. The list amounts to the large number of about eight hundred and thirty, which seems quite out of proportion to the number of

* Official reference.—"Placita Coronae, 21 Edward I., Kent, M/2/32/a." m m. 1. 1 d. 30, 30 d.

cases to be tried. But it must be remembered that at this period jurors were not the same as they are at the present day; they were *witnesses* rather than *hearers of evidence*, and were selected for the knowledge they already possessed of the cases in which they were called on to give their verdict. We do not meet with jurors as *triers of evidence* much before the early years of the fifteenth century. In illustration of this statement the following remarks of Sir Francis Palgrave will be read with interest:—"Trial by jury, according to the old English law, was a proceeding essentially different from the modern tribunal, still bearing the same name, by which it has been replaced; and whatever merits belonged to the original mode of judicial investigation—and they were great and unquestionable, though accompanied by many imperfections—such benefits are not to be exactly identified with the advantages now resulting from the great bulwark of English liberty. Jurymen in the present day are triers of the issue: they are individuals who found their opinion upon the evidence, whether oral or written, adduced before them; and the verdict delivered by them is their declaration of the judgment which they have formed. But the ancient jurymen were not impanelled to examine into the credibility of the evidence: the question was not discussed and argued before them: they, the jurymen, were the witnesses themselves, and the verdict was substantially the examination of these witnesses, who of their own knowledge, and without the aid of other testimony, afforded their evidence respecting the facts in question to the best of their belief. In its primitive form a trial by jury was therefore only a trial by witnesses,