

Churchill Court and Manor.

BY C. J. SIMMONS, ESQ.

COLLINSON, in his history of the county,¹ assumes that Churchill was one of the possessions of Roger de Corcelle, to whom in *Domesday* book it was supposed to pass as an appanage of a small manor therein described as "*Blachemore.*" There is a small portion of the parish known as Blackmoor, but a larger portion of the land so named is in the adjoining tything of Burrington and in the parish of Wrington. It seems, therefore, improbable that any portion of the present parish of Churchill could have passed under that name.

Later writers have more or less followed Collinson's lead. Churchill was, and in fact is, part of the manor and parish of Banwell, and as such appears in *Domesday* to have been in the possession of the Bishop of Wells. So it has continued to be to the present time. In the perambulation of Banwell (which appears in the Society's journal, 1878), Churchill is unquestionably included. Banwell, with its chapelries of Churchill and Puxton, was, until modern legislation altered the arrangement, a peculiar, and under the visitorial jurisdiction of the Dean and Chapter of Bristol. The Bishop, as Lord of the Manor of Banwell, is vested with all manorial rights, such as waste lands and minerals. His title is recognised in the Inclosure Act, 35th George III. The owners of the estate, presently referred to as Sir J. Churchill's, and those who derived their title from this same source, recognized the Bishop's title and accepted enclosures of common lands in respect of their freeholds.

(1). Vol. iii. p. 579.

For reasons before suggested, it seems doubtful if Roger de Corcelle was possessed of property in Churchill, and the ingenious endeavour to connect Sir J. Churchill with his name needs better authority than has been adduced. In the perambulation of the forest of Mendip, 1298 (the original, in Latin, is in the Bishop's Registry at Wells), the "village," under the designation of "Churchford," is incidentally referred to in connection with "Langeford," and both described as the estate of Roger Fitzpaine), as having been disafforested by virtue of the Charter of Forests. In this perambulation different localities are distinguished as "belonging to," or "the lands of," "held by," "the manor of," "the fee of," "the estate of," "the property of," "a manor appertaining to," etc., etc. All these terms seem to have been carefully selected as appropriate to each place. Churchill and Langford fell under the category of "*the estate of Roger Fitzpaine.*" That portions of the possessions of the Bishop became vested in freeholders at an early day, and were dealt with as subordinate manors—or parts of manors—is evident, but no very early deeds showing how this happened are, so far as I am aware, known to exist.

The earliest deed (24th April, 6th Eliz.) appearing on the title at the present day is a "release of right" from Sir William *Sentlowe* to Ralph Jenyns and his heirs of the manors of "Pokevelston als *Purton*, *Edingworth* als *Edingsworth*" and of "Churchill" (6th January, 15th James I).

From Ralph Jenyns the property passed to *John Jenyns*, Esq., who in 1636 is described as Sir John Jenyns, Knight.

In a deed dated 21st March, 14th Car. I, this gentleman is described as *Knight of the Bath*. He was succeeded by his son, Richard Jenyns, Esq., and by indenture dated 1st July, 1652 (enrolled in Chancery), he and Frances, his wife, and Dame Alice widow of Sir John, joined in a bargain and sale of the manor of Churchill to John Churchill, Esq. It would seem that the sum of £5,900, the consideration for this pur-

chase, was not fully paid until 12th July, 1655, when by a deed of that date Richard Jenyns released the purchaser from that amount. It is assumed that the "manor" so conveyed consisted of certain lands in and near the Mansion House, which appear by the church rate to have consisted of 132 acres, besides other estates detached therefrom, situate in other parts of the parish, which were held under leases for lives from the Jenyns family.

No part of this property is known to have been called "The Park," as suggested by one of the county historians.¹ Such a designation, it is submitted, could not at that day have been so applied to other than a *veritable* park. The "Park" existing in the parish is still known by that name, and is part of the Bishop's manor, and in it are the remains of fish ponds.

John Churchill, Esq., in May, 1654, married Susanna, the youngest daughter of Edmond Prideaux, Esq., of Foord, described in the marriage settlement, dated 13th May, 1654, as "Attorney General to Oliver the Lord Protector." The births of four daughters to Sir John are recorded in the register—the entries being evidently in the handwriting of their father, on a page of the book which seems to have been reserved for such family entries. The youngest, Caroletta (afterwards the wife of Colonel Anthony Hastings), born in 1666, is the only one whose *baptism* is registered here. There was no son of the marriage.

John Churchill was knighted in 1670, but I have not ascertained if that occurred on his becoming Master of the Rolls, which appointment he held.

In the *Bristol Annals*² he appears (it would seem by the Corporation of the city) to have been appointed, in 1682, Recorder of Bristol—"Sir Thomas Atkins, Recorder, having too much abetted with the fanaticks, did resign, and Sir John Churchill appointed."

In 1684, Charles II granted a new Charter to the city, in

(1). Rutter, p. 107.

(2). Evans, p. 226.

which Sir J. Churchill was named as then being the Recorder.

In the same *Annals of Bristol*, above quoted, it seems that in 1684, "the Countess of Castelmaine" (Duchess of Cleveland) "came to Bristol, and was attended by the Recorder, Sir J. Churchill," and Seyer, in his *History of Bristol*,¹ quotes the contemporary record that her ladyship "rode into this city in her coach in great pompe, attended by Sir John Churchill of Churchill, together with Sir Thomas Bridges of Cainsham, with their ladies; that they alighted at Alderman Olive's at the Three Tuns in Wine Street, and that she was there entertained at the costs and charges of Sir J. Churchill."

In the following year (1685) he was returned as M.P. for Bristol, in the first Parliament of James II, and died in that year, and was buried at Churchill.

It has been surmised that Sir J. Churchill purchased the property at Churchill, in consequence of his having been a descendant of the suppositious owner of the estate at an earlier period.

Is not it equally probable that the coincidence of the name of place with his own name induced him to purchase of the impoverished family of Jenyns, borne down by incumbrances incurred during—and possibly in consequence of—the troubles of the Civil War? Sir J. Churchill was, it is stated, connected with the county of Devon: his future wife certainly was, and the numerous instances in that county of the coincidence of the surnames of families with the names of their estates may have suggested to him the purchase. He must have been a young gentleman of means, and was doubtless a rising man in his profession, and may have entertained a hope of establishing a family—which, in default of an heir male, and also in consequence of heavy incumbrances with which he was subsequently involved—was frustrated.

There can be no pretence for saying (as has been said) that Sir John incurred liabilities in military operations on behalf

(1). Cap. xxx. sec. 19.

of the Crown subsequent to his purchase, at which time the Royal cause had for the time subsided. In fact, it may not unreasonably be suspected that, like his Roundhead father-in-law, he was far from being a pronounced Royalist. Certainly at a later date he threw in with the restored Monarchy. Witness the name of his youngest daughter—his courtier-like devotion to the Duchess of Cleveland—besides other minor matters disclosed by the parish accounts.

The story of the building of the house by Sir John, and the erection of the stable for the use of a fabulous troop of Royal horse is palpably erroneous. The few remains of the house point to a much earlier date, and he bought it under the description of the "capital messuage or mansion-house." As to the stable or barn, as it was described at a later date, that also was probably built long before his time, and was such as might have been suitable for a gentleman of fortune for his own accommodation; or is not it more probable that the tradition as to the stable and the troop of horse may have arisen in connection with Sir John Jenyns, K.B., who might have occupied it for military purposes? The fact that he was knight of a strictly military order, and that during the years of trouble and civil war his estate became gradually reduced by heavy charges (a fact apparent from the deeds in existence) certainly points to such a probability, though I can give no record of the part he took in the Royal cause.

In no deed of any antiquity is the house described otherwise than "the capital messuage or mansion-house." Nowhere, until comparatively recently, does it seem to have been known as "Churchill Court." That there was a reputed manor of Churchill there is no doubt. It is so spoken of in the conveyance to Sir J. Churchill, and there were formerly leases from him of portions of such reputed manor, containing covenants by the tenants to attend their Lord's Court twice a year to pay their reserved rents. So far as is known there was no *custom* of Sir John's manor, and the leases seem to have been

arbitrarily renewed, and within living memory some such leases have fallen in, and the tenants have been denied renewals.

Notwithstanding that Sir John Churchill claimed to be possessed of the manor of Churchill, it is a little singular that by a deed in my possession of 1st October, 27th Car. II, John (2nd Baron) Poulett of Hinton St. George, granted to Sir John Churchill several closes of ground (containing 44 acres), "within the parish of Churchill, and which now are, or of late were, parcel of the manor of Churchill aforesaid, and also all the estate, etc., together with the rent reversion and reversions, herriott and services of the same closes, etc." And after covenants for title there is a saving clause, "such estate or estates as have or hath been heretofore granted of the premises, or any part or parcel thereof by lease or copy, to any person or persons whatsoever for one, two, three, or four life or lives, or for any number of years, determinable, etc., by me, the said John Lord Poulett, or any ancestor, or by John Ashburnham, Esq., and the Lady Elizabeth Poulet, his wife, or by either of them only excepted." This may be taken as tolerably positive proof that Sir John Churchill recognised Lord Poulett as holding manorial rights in Churchill. It may be observed that this Lady Elizabeth was the heiress of the Kenn's of Kenn Court, and that Kenn, Yatton, lands in Wrington—others (including the small manor of Iwood), in Congresbury—and other lands in Churchill—probably Clevedon and Walton-in-Gordano—came to the Pouletts from her.

That the successors of the same Lord Poulett exercised manorial rights in Churchill, is in evidence by a lease in my possession, dated 24th October, 1750, whereby John (2nd Earl) Poulett granted a reversionary lease, for two lives, of a house in Churchill, known as the Church-house—almost contiguous to the homestead of Sir John Churchill, and described as part of the manor—to George Bisse, Esq., for two lives, in consideration of a fine and reserved rent (expressly stating, "without reservation of a heriot"), but requiring suit and

service—and with reservations of timber—minerals and sporting rights.

It is uncertain when the “Capital message or Mansion-house” was first known as “Churchill Court,” but doubtless it was so only since it became (as it recently was) a farm house, and dismantled and mutilated to such an extent as to leave few traces of its having been a fitting abode for a family of any importance. The stable—except that some years since it was reduced in length—remained substantially as it may originally have been, until a purchaser of a portion of the property at a more recent date removed most of the distinctive features of the building. As to the connection of the former owners of the property with Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, though a tradition to that effect has prevailed, it seems almost as mythical as the De Corcelle and Churchill theory—though this may be left to genealogists.
