

BYGONE

SILEBY



HIGH STREET SILEBY

Norman Times

No. 9

The Norman Kings

The Norman line had four kings, William the First, William the Second, Henry the First and Stephen. Their combined reigns lasted 88 years, from the Conquest in 1066, until the death of Stephen in 1154.

William the Conqueror died after an accident in France in 1087, and was buried at Rouen. He had reigned 21 years. He was succeeded by his son William, known as Rufus, who after wearing the crown for 13 years, was killed accidentally in the New Forest in 1100, by an arrow shot by his bow-bearer, Sir Walter Tyrrel. On the death of William Rufus, Henry, the youngest son of the Conqueror was crowned king. He was a learned man, and was known as Beausclerc. He reigned for 35 years, and died at the age of 67, from "a surfeit of lampreys." Stephen, the last Norman king, was the youngest son of Adela, daughter of William the Conqueror. His was a reign of violence, dissention and bloodshed. He died at the age of 50, after a miserable reign of 19 years.

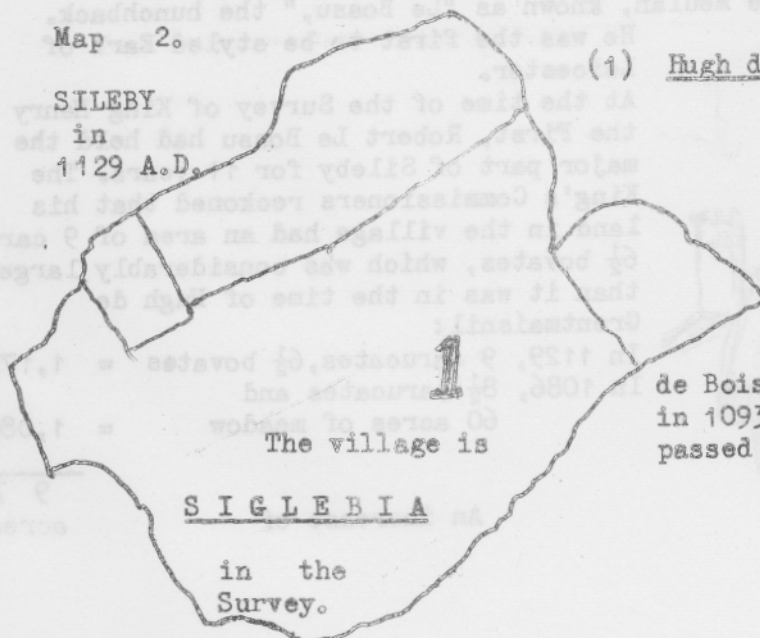
The Second Norman Survey of the Kingdom

Nearly 40 years after the compilation of the Domesday Book by William the Conqueror, King Henry the First authorised a new Survey of the kingdom, which took place between 1124 and 1129. The record of the land in Sileby, and those who were holding it, is to be found in the survey of Leicestershire. For administrative purposes, the village of Sileby was in the Hundred of Beeby, and in the Wapentake of Goscote.

T H E S T O R Y O F S I L E B Y L A N D H O L D E R S 1 0 8 6 - 1 1 2 9

Map 2.

SILEBY
in
1129 A.D.



(1) Hugh de Grentmaisnil 1086 - 1093

In the Domesday Book of 1086, the principal landholder in Sileby was Hugh de Grentmaisnil, the Lord High Steward of England, with 1,080 acres, belonging to the Manor of Leicester. At that time, it was held of Hugh by Ernald de Bois. When the High Steward died in 1093, his vast wealth and possessions passed to his son Ivo.

Ivo de Grentmaisnil 1093 - 1100

The young Grentmaisnil left England in August, 1096, on the First Crusade, and on his return, embarked on warlike acts against other lords and landowners, plundering their goods, and burning their property. King Henry the First angrily imposed a heavy fine in punishment, and the disgraced Ivo was compelled to seek the help of a kinsman of his late mother, Adeliza de Beaumont.

Robert de Beaumont 1100 - 1118

Ivo turned to Robert de Beaumont, Count of Meulan, a favourite of the King, to plead for mitigation. In return for this service, Ivo was forced to surrender most of his estates, including Sileby, to the Count for a period of 15 years, and to consent to the marriage of his son to the niece of his influential relative.

Once his affairs were settled, Ivo went off on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and died overseas. Robert de Beaumont kept the Grentmaisnil estates, and in this way, most of the village of Sileby passed into his possession.

Ordericus Vitalis, a Benedictine monk and chronicler of the Norman period, wrote that Robert de Beaumont, "by royal favour and his own address, got the whole place into his hands, being created Consul in England, his wealth surpassed that of every other peer of the realm." Robert, who died in 1118, is remembered for establishing the Merchant Guild of Leicester, reconstructing the Castle and building the church of St. Mary de Castro, "for the salvation of his soul."

Robert Le Bossu 1118 - 1168

Robert de Beaumont was succeeded by his surviving twin son, Robert Fitz Robert de Meulan, known as "Le Bossu," the hunchback. He was the first to be styled Earl of Leicester.

At the time of the Survey of King Henry the First, Robert Le Bossu had held the major part of Sileby for 11 years. The King's Commissioners reckoned that his land in the village had an area of 9 carucates $6\frac{1}{2}$ bovates, which was considerably larger than it was in the time of Hugh de Grentmaisnil:

In 1129, 9 carucates, $6\frac{1}{2}$ bovates = 1,177 $\frac{1}{2}$ acres.

In 1086, 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ carucates and
60 acres of meadow = 1,080 acres

An increase of 9 7 $\frac{1}{2}$
acres.



The Survey makes no mention of meadowland, so it is supposed that the 1,177½ acres refers to both arable and meadow belonging to the Manor. The increase of 97½ acres since 1086, was the result of wood and wasteland being cleared and cultivated by the villagers.

Despite his physical disability, the Earl of Leicester was a most able administrator and statesman. He was Justicar, or the chief minister of the realm 1155-1156 (in later times the Justicar was the title used by the Lord Chief Justice). During 1158-1163 and in 1166, when King Henry the Second was abroad with his army, the Earl was Regent of the Kingdom. With his intimate friend Thomas a Becket, he filled the highest stations next to royalty.

(2) Hugh Lupus Earl of Chester 1086 - 1119

The Domesday Book records that Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, held 250 acres in Sileby, as part of the Manor of Barrow-on-Soar. He died in 1119, possessing enormous wealth and estates.

Richard Earl of Chester 1119

Hugh Lupus was succeeded by his son Richard, the second Earl, who married Maud, the daughter of a Norman nobleman, Stephen de Blois.

Both were drowned in an accident the same year, and died childless.

Ranulf de Meschine 1119 - 1128

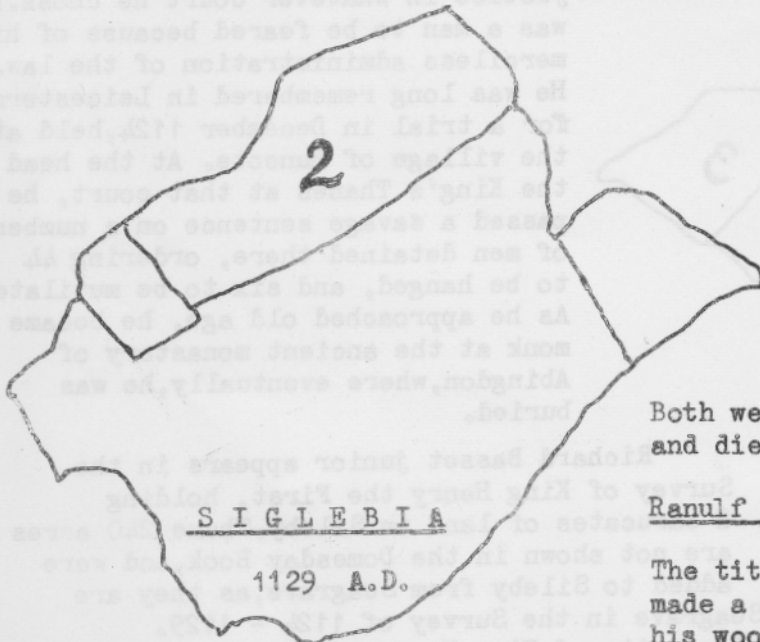
The title passed to Ranulf de Meschine, who made a gift to King Henry the First of all his woods adjoining the Forest of Leicester,

who in turn presented them to Robert Le Bossu, Earl of Leicester. Ranulf died in 1128.

Ranulf de Gernons 1128 - 1155

Ranulf de Gernons succeeded his father as the fourth Earl of Chester, and married Maud, daughter of Robert, Earl of Gloucester. Ranulf gave the Parish Church of Barrow-on-Soar and its Chantry Chapel at Quorn, to the Abbey of St. Mary de Pratis, by the river Soar, in Leicester.

In 1086, Hugh Lupus had held 2 carucates of Sileby land, but the Survey of 1129 shows Ranulf de Gernons with 3 carucates, a new total of 360 acres. The additional carucate had been added to the Manor of Barrow-on-Soar, from the Royal Manor of Rothley.

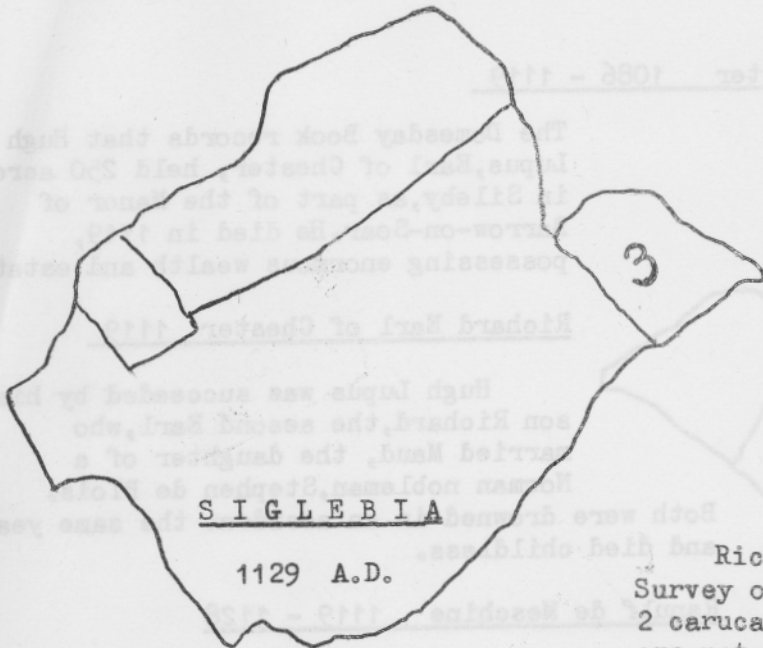


(3) Richard Basset

One of the new landholders in Sibley since the Domesday Survey, was Richard Basset. His grandfather, Thurstan Basset, who had come to England with William the Conqueror, had part of the Manor of Drayton in Staffordshire.

Richard, the father of Richard Basset, is mentioned by the historian-monk, Ordericus Vitalis, who recorded that he was raised from a low condition to places of trust and honour.

Richard Basset senior became Justice of England during the reign of King Henry the First, and his authority was so great, he administered justice in whatever court he chose. He was a man to be feared because of his merciless administration of the law. He was long remembered in Leicestershire for a trial in December 1124, held at the village of Huncote. At the head of the King's Thanes at that court, he passed a savage sentence on a number of men detained there, ordering 44 to be hanged, and six to be mutilated. As he approached old age, he became a monk at the ancient monastery of Abingdon, where eventually, he was buried.



Richard Basset junior appears in the Survey of King Henry the First, holding 2 carucates of land in Sibley. These 240 acres are not shown in the Domesday Book, and were added to Sibley from Seagrave, as they are missing from the village of Seagrave in the Survey of 1124 - 1129.

Richard Basset became a favourite of King Henry the First, who in 1122, gave him in marriage Matilda, the daughter of Sir Geoffrey Ridel. This marriage linked Sibley indirectly with the greatest tragedy of that age. On 26th November, 1120, Sir Geoffrey was a passenger on the ill-fated ship the Blanche Nef, when she sailed from Barfleur, in France.

Aboard the ship were Prince William, the son of King Henry the First, heir to the throne, two relatives, noblemen of England and Normandy, to the number of 140 persons, besides 50 sailors. When the ship left port most of the crew were drunk, and the Blanche Nef was wrecked on the Ras de Catteville rocks, off the French coast. Only one man, a poor butcher survived to tell of the disaster. The King was so grieved by the news, it is said that he never smiled again.



On the death of Sir Geoffrey Ridel, Richard Basset was given the custody of the Ridel estates until Sir Geoffrey's son Robert came of age. About the year 1122, he was given the fief of Robert de Buci, whose lands were in Edmond Thorpe, Grimston and Harby, and from these, he endowed the Priory of Launde. The descendents of Richard Basset held high government posts.

The 240 acres held by Richard Basset in Sileby, had been in his hands for only a few years when the Survey was made. It is evident from Text "C" that this land had come to him through marriage, and by coincidence had been held by Robert de Buci. This particular Text refers them, as in the Domesday Book, to the village of Seagrave :

" in Seagrave ij car. de feodo Matilda Ridel."

(4) Robert de Ferrers

The other new landholder in Sileby shown in the Survey, was Robert de Ferrers, the third son and heir of Henry de Ferrers, whose name is found in the Domesday Survey.

Robert, who was created Earl of Derby in 1138, held more than 10,000 acres in 23 villages in Leicestershire. In Sileby, he held only 5 bovates, or 75 acres, which had been granted to him by the King, from the Royal Manor of Rothley.

The Area of Sileby in 1129

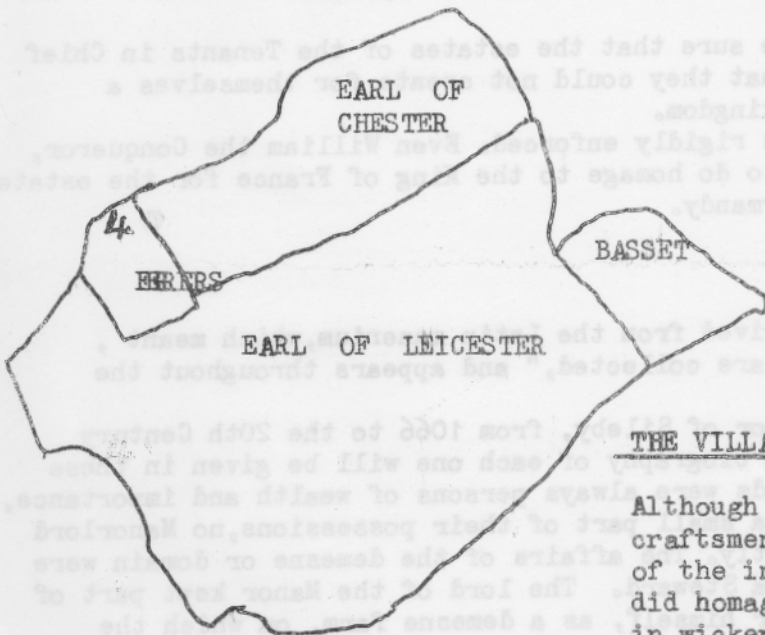
Earl of Leicester	1,177½ acres
Earl of Chester	360 "
Robert Basset	240 "
Robert de Ferrers	75 "
<hr/>	
Total	1,852½ acres

The cultivated land in Sileby shows an increase of more than 370 acres since the Domesday Survey.

THE VILLAGE OF SILEBY

Although there were 20 or more tradesmen and craftsmen in the village in Norman times, most of the inhabitants were peasant farmers who did homage to the lord of the Manor. They lived in wicker and mud cottages, with thatched roofs.

The richer freemen had houses of timber and stone. The living room was upstairs, entered by a staircase outside the house. The room had a curtain drawn across one end, to make a bedroom. The kitchen was a separate building in the yard.



Sileby and the Feudal System

All land in the realm belonged to the King. Earls and Barons held their land of him, and the lower ranks held the lands of the noblemen. Those who received land from the Norman Kings and lords held them the in Feudal way. The laws of feudalism were written in Norman French, and many of those words have passed into common use.

Manors and lands held in the Feudal way were called Fiefs, and those who held them, had to make certain promises to the lord who gave them. The tenant. (from the French word Tenir, meaning "to hold") was bound to follow his lord to war, and pay certain services, whilst the lord in return, took him under his protection, and defended him from his enemies. At the time the land was granted, the tenant had to do homage for it. The tenant became the lord's man (from the French word Homme). The tenant knelt before his lord, putting his hands between his, and swore in the name of God that he would be his man for life or death. When a tenant died, his son had to observe the same procedure, and then his father's lands were given to him by his lord.

Those who held lands directly from the King were called Tenants in Chief. In Sileby at the time of the Survey of 1129, all the principal land holder had received their land of the King - the Earl of Leicester, the Earl of Chester, Richard Basset and Robert de Ferrers. We are not informed of the names of those who held the Sileby lands of these noblemen.

The Norman Kings made sure that the estates of the Tenants in Chief were well separated, so that they could not create for themselves a defended area within the kingdom.

The Feudal System was rigidly enforced. Even William the Conqueror, when King of England, had to do homage to the King of France for the estates he held as the Duke of Normandy.

The Manor of Sileby

The word Manor is derived from the Latin manerium, which meant, "a house from which taxes are collected," and appears throughout the Domesday Book.

Every lord of the Manor of Sileby, from 1066 to the 20th Century has been identified, and a biography of each one will be given in these booklets. As the Manor lords were always persons of wealth and importance, and this village was only a small part of their possessions, no Manorlord ever resided here permanently. The affairs of the demesne or domain were therefore in the hands of a Steward. The lord of the Manor kept part of the land in the village for himself, as a demesne farm, on which the villagers were compelled to give their labour. The remainder of the land was divided into strips in the great open fields, and were held by the men of the village, for which they paid the Steward both rent and services. A good Steward looked after both the interests of his master and the people in the village, ensuring that neither was deprived of rights and dues.

In the domesday Book, Ernald de Bois was lord of the Manor of Sileby, holding it of Hugh de Grentmaisnil, the Lord High Steward of England. The Survey of 1129 does not reveal who held the Manor of Robert Le Bossu, the Earl of Leicester.

The Manor Court

In Norman times, justice was administered at several levels. There was the Manor Court, the Hundred Court, the Wapentake Court and the Shire Moot, held before the King's Justice.

Village disputes and petty offences of the tenants were tried and punished by fines called amercements in the Manor Court, known as the Halimote. The Court sat every other week, and dealt with cases of trespass in the woods or pastures, failure to fulfil the required work on the Manor farm or performing the work badly, brawling in the village streets, etc. A regular Court of the Manor of Sileby was held until the beginning of the 1800's. The last Manor lord to hold Court in the village was Earl Ferrers.

Trial by Ordeal

At this time in history, the innocence or guilt of an accused person was often determined by a peculiar system known as Trial by Ordeal. Some of these are described below.

The Ordeal by Water

A man accused of a crime was taken to the river, where he was bound. The right hand was tied to the left foot, and the left hand to the right foot, and a rope fastened round his waist. He was then thrown into the river. If he floated, he was declared to be guilty of the charge, and was punished for the crime, but if he disappeared under the flowing waters, he was regarded as innocent.

The Ordeal by Ploughshares

The accused was blindfolded, and required to walk down the centre of the nave of the village church, where red hot ploughshares were laid on the ground at irregular intervals. If he stepped over them without harm, he was thought to be innocent, but if he stepped upon them and was burned, he was considered to be guilty.

Ordeal by Boiling Water

A stone was dropped to the bottom of a vessel, and the accused was called upon to insert his hand in the boiling water as deep as the wrist to take out the stone. A more severe form of this ordeal required that the arm be plunged into the water to the elbow.

Ordeal by the Bier

A person suspected of murder was required to touch the body of the murdered person. It was supposed that if guilty, blood would flow from the wound which caused the death. This practice was known by Shakespear, who in Richard III, Act 1, scene 2, makes the body of King Henry the Sixth bleed on the approach of his murderer, Gloucester.

Ordeal by Consecrated Bread and Cheese

These consecrated items of food were given to an accused person by the priest, from the altar of the church, and he was required to eat them before the congregation of the villagers. If guilty, it was supposed that he would be unable to swallow the food, and if he did so, he would choke.

* * * * *



MOUNTSORREL CASTLE in the 11th and 12th Centuries

In 1080 A.D., fourteen years after the Norman Conquest, Hugh Lupus, the Earl of Chester and nephew of William the Conqueror, built a Castle at Mountsorrel. This fortress had both direct and indirect connections with Sileby through the powerful lords who held it.

The site had every advantage. First, there was an abundance of building materials - granite from the quarry and timber from the Forest. Secondly, the Castle towering high above the steep and craggy hill that gave the town its name, dominated the important road which linked northern towns with Leicester. Hence, its strategic position meant that if it fell into the wrong hands, commerce and travel could be threatened. During such periods, merchants and travellers probably changed their route between Leiceater and Loughborough via Sileby and Barrow-on-Soar.

The simplest type of castle in the 11th Century was built of timber, and surrounded by a moat, but as wooden castles offered little defence

against battering-rams. Later, masonry was used to strengthen the buildings. The Castle at Mountsorrel was a massive granite and timber structure, almost impregnable.

By the middle of the 12th Century, the Castle had passed down to Ranulf, Earl of Chester.

In a deed written about 1151 A.D., the Earl of Chester gave this stronghold to Robert Le Bossu, Earl of Leicester, and lord of the Manor of Sileby. The two powerful Earls made an elaborate treaty, in which they promised not to make war on each other without a fortnight's notice !

Between the Earl of Chester's vast northern estates, and the Earl of Leicester's extensive midland estates, there was an agreed neutral zone, in which neither Earl was allowed to build castles, or concentrate bands of armed men.

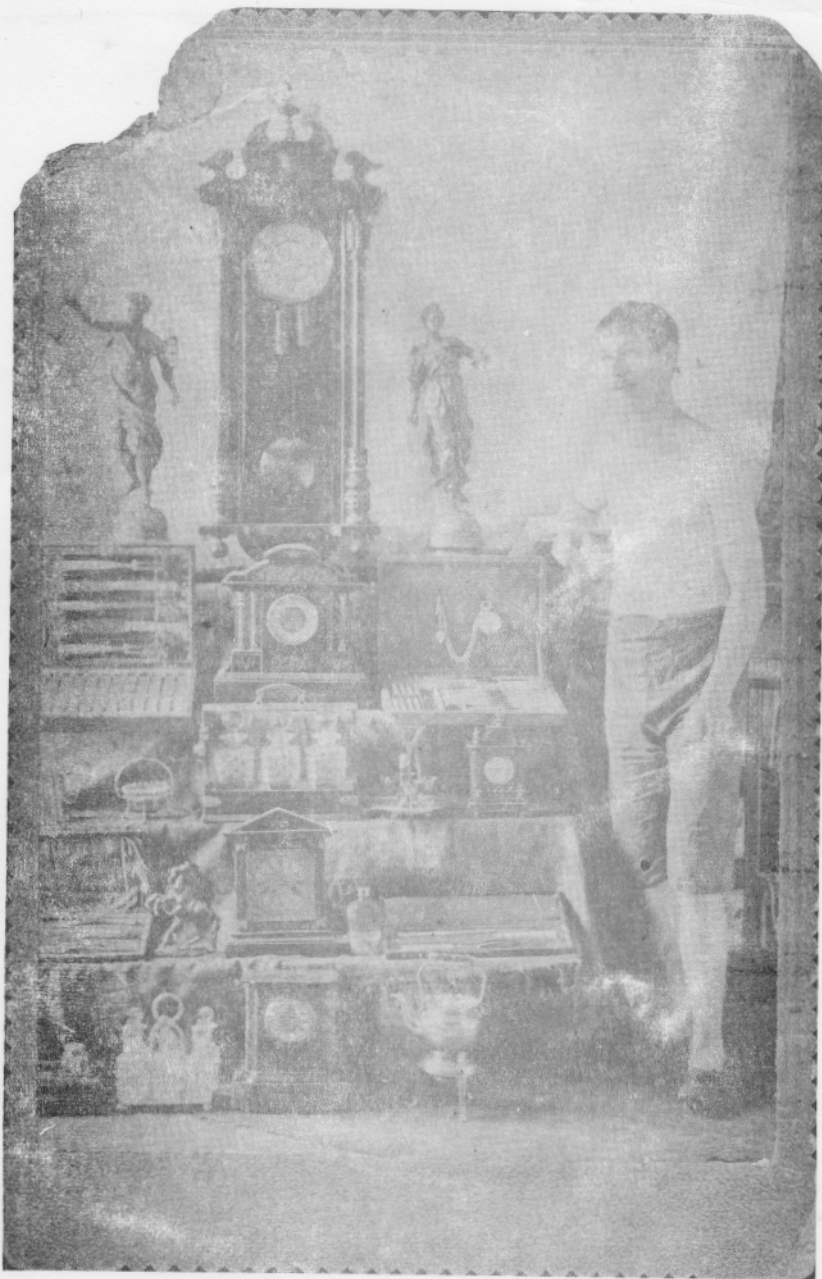
In the event of the King making war on one of them, the other Earl might assist the King - he was bound to do so by law - but he would only join in the battle with twenty of his knights. Any plunder taken during such an expedition was to be returned.

Robert Le Bossu agreed to receive the Earl of Chester and his family in friendship whenever they visited the borough, bailiwick or the Castle of Leicester.

The two Earls took a Christian oath on the treaty in the presence of their spiritual lords, the Bishops of Chester and Lincoln. Both parties gave to the Bishops great sums of money as tokens of their good faith, which would be surrendered if the treaty were broken.

Many generations of villagers who tilled the Manor lands in Sileby, looked westward across the open fields to gaze at their lord's Castle darkly crowning the Mountsorrel hill. It overlooked the surrounding countryside for 137 years after its erection in 1080 A.D.

(The next booklet in this series will continue the story of the Castle, until its destruction in 1217 A.D.)



An old photograph of GEORGE BROWN, the famous Sibley athlete, shown with some of his valuable prizes.

The story of this great runner and sportsman will be told in a forthcoming Bygone Sibley booklet called "Sports and Pastimes."

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BYGONE SILEBY

The next booklet, Number 10, is about "SILEBY WAKES." It tells how the Wakes began, the family gatherings and "Wakes Cakes," and the side-shows and amusements associated with the annual feast.