

XXVI. *Disquisition on a passage in King Athelstan's Grant to the Abbey of Wilton: communicated by WILLIAM HAMPER, Esq. F.S.A. in a Letter to HENRY ELLIS, Esq. F.R.S. Secretary.*

Read 26 March 1829.

Highgate, near Birmingham, March 9th, 1829.

MY DEAR SIR,

AS every thing connected with STONEHENGE must be especially interesting to the Society of Antiquaries; I submit to their indulgence the following Disquisition on a passage in King Athelstan's Grant to the Abbey of Wilton, although it will directly (but I trust not disrespectfully) contravene the opinions of several of our most distinguished Members, hitherto misled by treading in the footsteps of an early writer: so true is the observation, that "one man adopts a system or hypothesis, and another follows him, not examining the grounds on which the foundation was laid." ^a

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

WILLIAM HAMPER.

TO HENRY ELLIS, Esq. F.R.S. Secretary,
&c. &c. &c.

^a Sir R. C. Hoare's Hundred of Branch and Dole, preface, p. vi.

RECORDED in the venerable Chartulary of the Abbey of Wilton, forming N^o. 436 of the Harleian Manuscripts, is a Grant of King Athelstan to that Monastery, A. D. 937, and among the boundary-marks of the land so given, is the following passage; ^b *of noddre rtaþe up oþeþ eaſt cumb rpa ƿe ƿtan hƿýcȝ ƿcýt to þan hæþanne býngelȝe*, i. e. *From Noddre bank, upwards over Eastcombe, as the STONE RIDGE shoots to the Heathen Burial-place.*

When this Charter was printed in the Monasticon,^c the learned Somner, who rendered the Saxon parts of that work into Latin, affixed a marginal note, of “*fortè, Stonehenge,*” to these words; which I may venture to call a hasty and untenable conjecture, notwithstanding it has been retained in the new edition.^d I am not aware of any author who noticed this conjecture, until it was revived by the Rev. Dr. Ingram, in his “*Inaugural Lecture on the utility of Anglo-Saxon Literature,*” published at Oxford in 1807, when that accomplished scholar was Anglo-Saxon Professor. Having occasion to refer to the custom of burning the dead, as “*almost universal among rude nations from the age of Homer to that of Alfred,*” he immediately adds, “*See the Heathen burial-place, with its Hippodrome, &c. on Salisbury Plain, vulgarly called STONEHENGE, a corruption of STONE-RIDGE;*”^e and, after terming it “*a new interpretation of that wonder of the world,*”^f reprints the extract in question from the Wilton Chartulary, with an explanatory note of “*Stone-ridge, vulg. Stonidge, Stonage, Stonehenge, &c.*”^g That the opinion of Dr. Ingram, thus declared, was not weakened by time and reconsideration, we have ample evidence, from his valuable edition of “*the Saxon Chronicle,*” published in 1823, sixteen years after the appearance of his Inaugural Lecture; for he therein tells us, that “*in the Chartulary of Wilton Abbey, Stonehenge is expressly called Stan-hƿýcȝ,*”^h and also observes that he had seen “*a loose paper of refer-*

^b Fol. 60, b.^c Tom. ii, fol. 859.^d Vol. ii, p. 321.^e P. 83, note.^f P. 87.^g P. 88, where, as in the preceding page also, for vol. iii, read vol. ii.^h Appendix, p. 378.

ence to the placé, in Mr. Warton's hand-writing, in a copy of Dugdale's *Monasticon*, on which are these words: "*Stonehenge mentioned.*"ⁱ

In the recent publication of "*REGISTRUM WILTUNENSE*,"^k which renders that invaluable document accessible to the investigators of olden times, and is enriched by the illustrations of Dr. Ingram, Mr. Sharon Turner, Rev. T. D. Fosbroke, Sir Thomas Phillipps, and Sir Richard Colt Hoare, the words of Athelstan's Charter are still presumed to allude "to the pile of Stones called Stonehenge," though the conjecture is moderated by the expression of "*probably.*"^l

Having thus briefly stated the opinions of these eminent Antiquaries, I shall endeavour with equal conciseness to shew, First, from the grammatical construction of the passage before us, that it is improbable that Stan-ridge could be Stonehenge; and, Secondly, from a consideration of the localities, that it is altogether impossible.

I. As to the improbability. The line of demarcation is said to go "as the Stone Ridge shoots to the Heathen Burial-place;" and that verb, though peculiarly applicable to the position of a ridge, a path, a brook, or any other terminary object *extending longitudinally*, would very ill describe the limits of a scattered number of stones similar to those of the Druid Fane. It is appropriately used again, in the same set of boundaries, "then westward *along the Ridges*, as the Here Path shoots (rceat) to the Hill."^m

II. As to the impossibility. The Charter of Athelstan is describing the landmarks of BRYDANCUMBE, a manor called *Bredecombe* in the Domesday Survey, and now known as *Burcombe*; ⁿ but, instead of lying near Stonehenge, or being in anywise connected with it, the place is too distant to claim the slightest affinity. Unwilling to trust to maps, or to merely a general knowledge of the district, I applied to Mr. Minity, the Postmaster of Salisbury, who obligingly procured the following information for me, from a Land Surveyor resident in that city: "*Stone-*

ⁱ P. 379. ^k London, fol. A. D. 1827. ^l P. 33. ^m Registrum Wiltun, p. 33.

ⁿ Hundred of Branch and Dole, p. 151.

henge is six miles and a half from the nearest point of Burcombe, in a right line passing over the respective parishes of Great Wishford, South Newton, Stapleford, Woodford, Wilsford, Lake, and Great Durnford, where it enters the parish of Amesbury, about half a mile from Stonehenge." The Stan Ridge must therefore be viewed in the more humble light of a *Stoney Ridge*, and the Heathen Burial-place be reckoned, not as an appendage to the aboriginal Temple, but only as *one of the numerous tumuli abounding in Wiltshire*.

I must in conclusion remark, that the fancy of Somner led him to subjoin "*fortè Stonehenge*," to the *hathenum býngelrum* of *another series of boundaries*;° but, as it relates to *Eheolc* (i. e. CHALK), a place still more remote, no part of that parish being nearer than nine miles, in a direct line, from Stonehenge, the conjecture carries its own refutation.

° Monast. Angl. tom. ii. fol. 861. New Monast. vol. ii. p. 322.