The Manthorps Of Somerleyton

Places

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Very few families can trace ancestors in the Middle Ages, apart from those descended from the nobility and gentry. This is an outline of 200 years of Manthorp history up to the middle of the 14th century.
The Manthorp(e)s are extremely fortunate that, in addition to the published 1275 Hundred Rolls and 1327 tax returns, the Bodleian Library has a remarkable series of early charters recording land transactions in Somerleyton in the 13th and 14th centuries. A calendar of these records was published in 1878. Corrections have been made as a result of further work and they can be found in an annotated version in the Bodleian Library. It has now been possible to make extracts from the original documents.

We can get a picture of some members of the local community in 1275 (in the reign of Edward I) from the Hundred Rolls, a survey carried out in the Suffolk Hundred of Lothingland (the administrative area in the far north-east of Suffolk). The survey covered socage tenants (small landholders who held land directly of the King by fixed service). Among the eleven holdings in Somerleyton is the following.

William de Manthorp the elder, in the time of King Henry, the great grandfather of the now lord King, held of the said King in chief 1 gersumary socage fee, at an annual rent of 2s., whereof Robert Assheman and Emma his wife, William de Broxton and Margery his wife, the co-heirs, hold that socage fee by inheritance, paying [for it] yearly to the lord King the aforesaid rent. But Adam de Dal holds therein 4 acres of land and does no service for it.

King Henry is Henry II who reigned from 1154 to 1189 and William de Manthorp is the earliest Manthorp recorded. Hereditary surnames had only just begun to develop in the 12th century and William may have been one of the first of his family to bear the name Manthorp. We do not know where his land was situated but he must have had his origins in the hamlet of Manthorp, a small settlement on the eastern side of the village of Somerleyton. Both names, Somerleyton and Manthorp, testify to the Nordic incursions in East Anglia three centuries earlier. Somerleyton is an evocative hybrid Scandinavian-Saxon name: the homestead of the summer warrior, recalling the Viking practice of embarking on voyages of plunder during the summer and returning home for winter. Manthorp, means the outlying farm or small settlement of Manni, a Scandinavian personal name. Interestingly some of the earliest recorded versions of the surname and place name (around 1240) use the spelling "Manithorpe" and "Manethorp" . There is no way of knowing whether William was descended from Scandinavian settlers or from a Saxon family living in the vicinity or even, though this does not seem likely, from a follower of one of the Norman lords.

There is no direct mention of other Manthorps in the Hundred Rolls quoted above. However, as William is referred to as William the elder, there must have been a William the younger and when we turn to the charters we discover that Emma and Margery were Manthorps too,

indicating that the surname had become hereditary.