

ON SWAN-MARKS.

BY

N. F. TICEHURST, O.B.E., M.A., F.R.C.S., ENG.

(PART I.)

THEIR NECESSITY.—Some method of distinguishing the stock of one owner from that of another, especially in districts where communal grazing was practised, must have been requisite from very early times. The custom therefore of branding, nicking the ear or placing some such recognition mark upon live-stock probably goes back to the beginnings of history. We know that horses were thus marked by the ancient Greeks, just as cattle and horses are branded in Australia, America and elsewhere to-day.* The great variety of marks used to indicate the ownership of sheep in this country is a familiar example that will occur to everybody.

If we imagine, as many have done, that the Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) was an introduced species, it would have been established, in the first instance, in moats and other private waters on the manors of wealthy proprietors, who alone would be able to afford the extravagance of importing it. We may be sure that as their stock increased these owners would take very good care by pinioning that the birds did not stray, and would place some mark upon them, whereby, if they did stray, they could be recognized and reclaimed. If, on the other hand, we believe the Swan to have been an indigenous species, there must have been a time when the process of reducing it to a condition of semi-domesticity began. The first step no doubt would have been the catching up of half-grown young birds, pinioning them, keeping them for a time shut up near the captor's house and eventually turning them out to breed on some neighbouring river or mere. These first steps need not have been, and quite likely were not, taken by people of the same exalted class, who would have been the early owners of introduced Swans, and the habits of the birds requiring that they should lead at least a semi-wild life, so soon as their numbers increased beyond a certain limit a condition of things very analogous to communal grazing would be created. The necessity would at once arise for some mark to be placed upon the birds, whereby owners could recognize their own

* *Vide* Thompson, *History of Boston*, p. 642, for illustrations of cattle marks used in the Fens in 1548.

property, not only to avoid losing the old birds, but in order that they might claim the young, as well as to trace those that had strayed or been stolen, which seems to have been a not infrequent occurrence. In one or other of these ways therefore the practice of marking Swans had its beginnings.

THEIR NATURE.—When one speaks of Swan-marks one usually refers to the nicks or other designs placed upon the upper mandibles of Swans to denote to whom they belonged. But these, although the most universally used marks, were not the only ones. They were occasionally supplemented by notches cut in one or both edges of the lower mandible, by some simple design cut in the side of the tarsus or the body of a web, by one or more slits cut in the edges of the webs, or by the removal of one or both hind toes or one or more claws. On the Arun in Sussex the side on which the pinioning was done seems to have constituted part of the mark.

In Yorkshire every owner had his foot-mark as well as a beak-mark, and all young birds were marked with the foot-mark alone at the Midsummer upping, while the beak-mark was added at Michaelmas on those that were to be kept for stock. About two dozen foot-marks are recorded for the great level of the Fens, several owners on the Arun possessed them, the Earls of Rutland used one on the Trent, and one was reserved for putting on Thames Swans that became forfeit to the Crown, but elsewhere there is no evidence of their use.

Lower mandible marks seem to have been entirely confined to the Fens at a comparatively early period. Towards the end of the fifteenth century a considerable proportion of Fen marks had them. Their use must have been a very questionable convenience, seeing that in the Swan the lower mandible shuts into the upper and its edges are quite hidden when the bill is closed. In any case their use rapidly died out and under a dozen are on record for Elizabethan times.

THEIR MODE OF RECORD.—If not before, at any rate very soon after, the passing of the statute of 1483, when a more strict supervision of Swan-keeping was instituted, all the marks used in each area, for which a deputy Swan-master was responsible, were collected and entered with their owners' names in a book or roll that was kept in his custody. In speaking of these, whether books or actual rolls, it is convenient to use the word roll for all.

There is evidence that Swans were kept and marks used in Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorset, Somerset, Hertfordshire, Nottingham, Stafford, Warwick and Yorkshire, but I have

never heard of any rolls of marks appertaining to these counties and only very few odd marks used in them have come to light.

Such rolls as I have been able to examine are divisible territorially into three groups. These undoubtedly contained the greater part of the Swan-owners in England in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and each group was presided over by its deputy Swan-master. The first and largest group I have termed the Fenland area. It included the counties of Cambridge, Huntingdon, Northampton, Lincoln, west Norfolk and parts of Leicester, Rutland and Bedford. The second, the Broadland area, included east Norfolk and the whole of Suffolk. The third, the Thames area, included Middlesex, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and parts of Hampshire, Wiltshire and Gloucester.

Besides other MS. material of coeval date, this paper is based on a study of thirty-one of these rolls, fifteen Fenland, ten Broadland, two mixed Fenland and Broadland and four Thames. Swan-marks are depicted on these rolls in two different ways, but with much variety of detail. Usually a conventional outline of the upper mandible in plan is drawn, either vertically or horizontally, and the nail at the tip and the knob at the base are generally indicated. Occasionally the head and eyes are drawn also. In a good many instances the whole head is drawn in profile, but in these cases the bill is always drawn in plan, so that the whole mark can be exhibited in its right position. What therefore appears in the drawing to be an outline of the culmen is actually the opposite margin of the bill.* The fact that this is so is generally indicated by the position of the nail.

In both types the outline and the marks are drawn in black, while sometimes the bill is filled in with red paint.

Where lower mandible marks are recorded they are either depicted as triangular notches projecting outwards from the lateral margins, or a description of them is written across the bill, *e.g.*, Edmund Thompson of Sutton St. Mary, Lincs, had "a tick att the bills end on the farr side on the nether chappe,"

* Whoever was responsible for drawing the marks of the Corporation and the Bishop of Norwich in Yarrell (*B.B.*, IV., p. 339) had not appreciated this. They were evidently copied from one of these profile rolls (most Broadland rolls are of this type) and the artist, thinking that only half of the marks were shown, has, in transferring them to his outlines which are in plan, doubled them. What should therefore have been depicted as nicks down the far side of the bill have become transformed into diamonds down the centre!

and John Woode of Fulbourne, Cambs., had "tow tickes on the nether beake on the nere side."

Foot-marks were occasionally drawn also, but were generally written in the same way, *e.g.*, part of the mark of Tattershall College, Lincs, was "A penny crosse on the legge," and Thomas Gray of Wisbech, Cambs., had "both the out webbs slyt."

The question is sometimes asked, how many Swan-marks were there? It is really an impossible one to answer. As will be seen later on the same mark underwent variations from time to time, while old ones died out and new ones were created in continuous succession. It would no doubt be possible to arrive at a rough figure by a very laborious process of comparison, but it would be impossible to arrive at any conclusion as to how many were actually in use at a given time. Just by way of illustration, Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 6301, which is a representative Fenland roll of early James I. period, contains 802 different marks, but whether they were all in use at that time is quite doubtful. The Record Office roll records 184 different marks, which appear to have belonged to owners almost entirely resident in the Hundred of Holland, S. Lincs. It is about 100-130 years anterior in date to MS. 6301, and but a very small proportion of the marks are to be found in both. The Chetham Library roll contains 469 different marks of early Elizabethan date used on the Thames and its tributaries, the Loseley roll has thirty late Elizabethan marks for Surrey, only one or two of which occur on the Chetham roll, while there must have been 130 at least belonging to the Broadland area. At one time or another therefore there must have been considerably more than 1,500 marks in use in these parts of England alone.

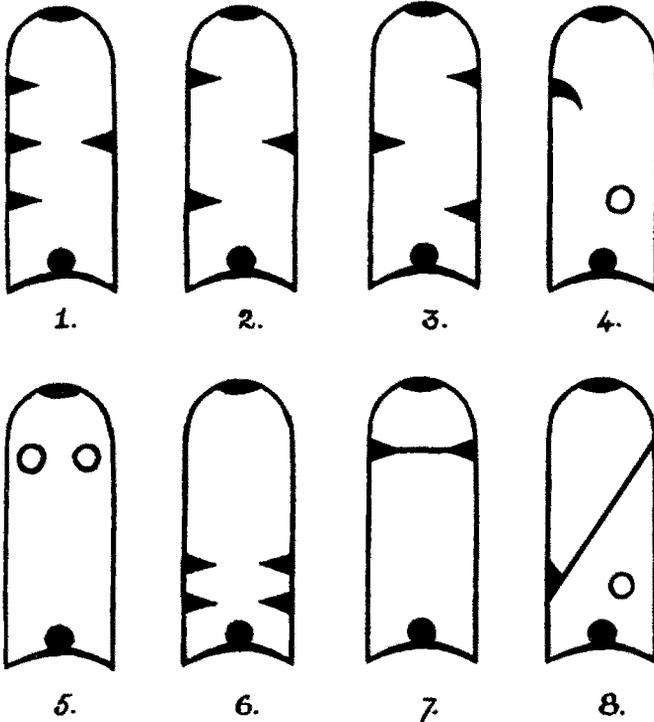
THEIR DERIVATION.—There can be no doubt that all landed proprietors, whether lords of the manor, heads of religious foundations or other, in mediæval times had each their own mark or marks, which they used to indicate the ownership of their stock. There is also considerable evidence, though but little of it has ever been collected, that the same custom prevailed throughout those of yeoman, and even inferior, rank. Each man had his family mark which was placed upon his house, his cattle and horses, his sheep, goats and pigs, and even upon his ducks and geese.* The same mark also he

* In the Hundred Court of Seaford, Sussex, 1583-4, the Jury presented "John Comber for markyng of thre duckes of Edward Warwicks and two ducks of Symon Brighte with his owne marke and cutting owt of thaire markes." (*Sussex Arch. Coll.*, VII., p. 99); *vide* also *Archæologia*, XXVII., p. 386.

used to append to deeds and other formal documents in place of signing his name, which in most cases he was incapable of doing.

EXAMPLES OF SIMPLE MARKS.

1. The Bishop of Norwich. 2. Lord Morley. 3. Stockton Hall.
4. Lord Fitzwalter. 5. Claxton Hall. 6. Smallborough Hall



7. Sir Miles Stapleton of Ingham, d. 1466. 8. The Prior of Bromholm.
(These are all Broadland marks, 1 to 6 from Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 4977,
7 and 8 from Add. MS. 23732.)

Lord Morley's mark (2) is particularly interesting, as it is unique, having been used by him both on East Anglian waters and on the Thames. Other owners having Swans in different areas all had a different mark for each.

While no doubt the earliest Swan-marks consisted of merely one or more notches or holes, cut or punched in the bill or through one or more webs of the toes, many of these early

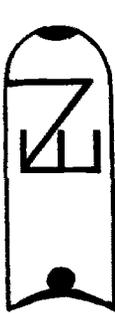
manorial and yeoman's marks would be nothing more elaborate. What is more likely than that many of the earliest Swan-marks should consist merely of an extension of use of marks already existing to another species? So few of these marks have hitherto been brought to light, that though it is possible to say that there is a striking similarity between some of them and some recorded Swan-marks, it has not yet been possible to establish any direct association between them. If any such connection should ever be proved it is most likely to be found in the case of certain marks used in the Broadland area. Many of these consist only of different numbers of triangular notches, variously arranged on one or both sides of the upper mandible. Such simple marks are comparatively rarely found in other parts of England and strongly suggest a more ancient origin.

Anyone desirous of designing for himself a mark, whether for Swans or other stock, after the permutations and combinations of simple notches have been exhausted, would probably think first of a letter or combination of letters, such as his own initials. A good many such instances are to be found amongst Swan-marks, some simple, others more or less fantastically arranged or in combination with other devices. The majority are however of somewhat late origin. In some cases, probably of more ancient date, the connection has been lost through change of ownership, the mark as recorded in rolls now extant being under the name of a later proprietor.

A second possible method of composing a Swan-mark that would occur to most people, especially in the times with which we are dealing, would be to utilize some charge from their armorial bearings. A fair number of Swan-marks are of a quasi-heraldic character, but no more than one or two instances have hitherto been cited by antiquarian writers in which any connection can be demonstrated between the mark and the owner's arms, while the extreme rarity of any such relationship has several times been commented upon by them. Most however have been writing on a single roll, and it must be remembered that changes of ownership were frequent, so that the clue to the actual origin of a given mark of heraldic character might easily be absent. I have so far been able to establish a definite connection between the mark and the owner's coat-of-arms in some two dozen cases; there are probably a good many more awaiting discovery, but it would seem that this mode of origin is really a comparatively rare one.

EXAMPLES OF MARKS DERIVED FROM THEIR OWNER'S NAMES.

9. Sir Edward, first Baron North, of Kirtling, Cambs., d. 1564.
 10. Lewis Mordaunt, third Baron Mordaunt, of Turvey, Beds, and Drayton, Northants., d. 1597.
 11. Sir John Hamby of Tathwell, Lincs, d. 1675.
 12. William Prentice of Wiggenhall St. Mary Magdalen, Norfolk, *viv.* 1523.



9.



10.



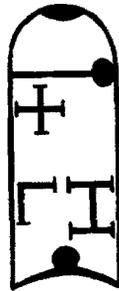
11.



12.



13.



14.



15.



16.

13. John Vaughan of Ockham, Surrey, *viv.* 1566.
 14. Sir Henry Lee of Ditchley, Oxon, Ranger of Woodstock, d. 1610.
 15. Thomas Orpwood, Mayor of Abingdon, Berks., 1575.
 16. Sir Lawrence Tanfield, of Burford Priory and Great Tew, Oxon, Chief Baron of the Exchequer and Deputy Swan-Master for the Thames, d. 1625.
 (9 to 11 are Fenland marks from Add. MS. 6301 ; 12 is a Fenland mark from Add. MS. 4977 ; 13 is a Surrey mark from the Loseley roll ; 14 to 16 are Thames marks from the Chetham Library roll.)

EXAMPLES OF MARKS DERIVED FROM THEIR OWNER'S NAMES.

17. Henry Everard of Walpole in Marshland, Norfolk. This branch of the family bore for their arms, gules, on a fesse between three estoilles argent, a mullet sable.
18. Geoffrey Paynell of Fishtoft, Lincs, *viv.* 1520, who bore gules, two chevrons argent.
19. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, d. 1588. Taken from his badge of the ragged staff.
20. Sir Robert Bevell of Chesterton, Hunts, K.B. 1603, who bore gules, a chevron or, between three bezants.



17.



18.



19.



20.



21.



22.



23.



24.

21. John Reppes of West Walton in Marshland, Norfolk, who bore ermine, three chevronels sable, a crescent for difference.
22. Sir Drew Drewry of Catton, Norfolk.
23. Sir Robert Drewry of Rougham, Norfolk, knighted 1603.
These form an interesting pair, the Drury arms were, argent, an annulet gules, on a chief vert a cross tau, between two mullets argent, pierced gules.
24. Andrew Halse of Sutton Courtenay, Berks, who bore argent, two piles sable.

(17 is from Add. MS. 6302; 21 and 22 from Add. MS. 4977; 23 from Add. MS. 40072; 18 from the Record Office roll; 19 from the Wisbech Museum roll; 20 from Mr. Henry Cooper's roll; 24 from the Chetham Library roll.)

On the other hand marks composed of simple designs of an heraldic character, either single, multiple or in combination, form a large group. It seems convenient to adopt an heraldic nomenclature for these as being short and easily understood. Amongst them may be mentioned the shield, which is rare and usually occurs carrying a device, the whole forming a true heraldic mark. The fesse, bar, chevron, bend, annulet and roundel are all very common, crosses occur in great variety, while the crescent, trefoil, knot, fylfot, buckle, staple and lozenge are quite rare. It is clear that with such a choice of easily formed devices, especially when combined, as is often the case, with nicks, triangles, half-hoops and squares, it would be possible to compose an endless variety of easily distinguishable marks. The majority of these designs appear to us at present to be quite arbitrary, though many may have had a meaning at the time of their inception. Marks falling into this group are abundant amongst those used in the Thames area.

Another possible source of origin lies in the analogous category of merchants' marks. Quite a number of sixteenth century Swan-owners were wealthy merchants of the Staple of Calais, and it is, I think, highly probable that if their marks could be unearthed, the Swan-marks of some of them would be found to be wholly or in part identical. The few I have hitherto seen, as also the mediæval masons' marks, bear a striking analogy to some Swan-marks, though in the latter case any connection is much less probable, while both may be merely instances of development along parallel lines (*cf. Archæologia*, XXXVII., p. 383 and *Trans. Norf. Arch. Soc.* III. and IV.).

Other marks evidently had their origin in a symbolic representation of the calling of their owners. Thus many of the monastic houses and their heads took an Abbot's or a Prior's staff for their mark, sometimes doubled, as in the case of Swineshead Abbey (Yarrell, *B.B.*, IV., p. 332) or combined with other devices, such as bars, annulets, nicks, etc., of which there are numerous instances in rolls of the Thames area. A particularly interesting example in this category is furnished by the mark of the Abbey of Crowland. It may be remembered that this Abbey was founded to the memory of St. Guthlac, who, the legend states, retired to an island in the Fens, where he was nightly plagued by a number of devils, from whose importunities he was ultimately delivered by means of a scourge presented to him in a vision by St. Bartholomew. Bearing this in mind, the monks of Crowland

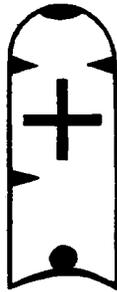
adopted as their Swan-mark a three-thonged scourge, the drawing of which in the Swan-rolls is absolutely identical with

EXAMPLES OF MARKS OF QUASI-HERALDIC CHARACTER.

25. Randall Bird of Pinchbeck, Lincs, b. 1583.
 26. Edward Hall of Gretford, Lincs, 1540-1592.
 27. Thomas Hewar of Oxborough, Norfolk.
 28. Thomas Cony of Kirton in Holland, Lincs, d. 1584.



25.



26.



27.



28.



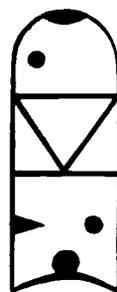
29.



30.



31.

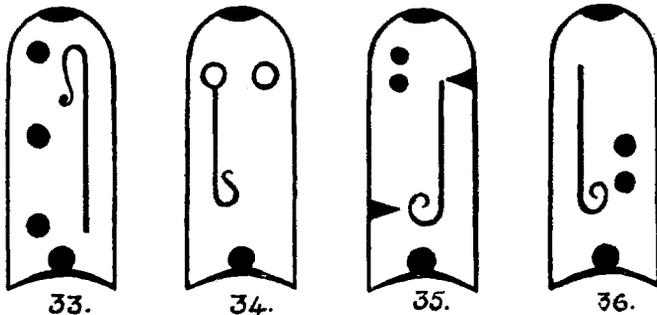


32.

29. John More of Haddon, Oxon.
 30. Nicholas Nicholas, Alderman of Reading, 1546.
 31. Richard Bridges of Shefford, Berks, d. 1558.
 32. Christopher Litcctt of Ruscombe, Berks, d. 1554.
 (25 to 28 are Fenland marks from Add. MS. 6301; 29-32 are Thames marks from the Chetham Library roll.)

that of the one being handed by St. Bartholomew to St. Guthlac in a twelfth century illuminated MS. of his life in the

British Museum. The Swan-mark, moreover, was always known under the name of "the skorge" (53 *infra*). Yarrell (*t.c.*, p. 333) referring to his figure of the mark of Lord Buckhurst from the Loseley roll states that its being composed of two keys had reference to his office of Chamberlain of the Household. This may have been so, though we have no information as to whether the date of origin of the mark was subsequent to that of his appointment to that office. The use of one or two keys alone or in combination with other objects was not a very rare device.



EXAMPLES OF MARKS DERIVED FROM THEIR OWNERS' CALLING.

- 33. The Abbot of Dereham, W. Norfolk.
- 34. The Abbot of Langley, E. Norfolk.
- 35. The Abbot of Chertsey, Surrey.
- 36. The Abbot of Medmenham, Bucks.

(33 is a Fenland mark from Add. MS. 6302; 34 a Broadland mark from Add. MS. 23732; 35 and 36 Thames marks from the Chetham Library roll.)

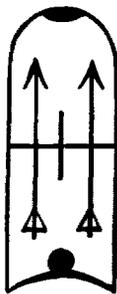
A large number of marks, particularly amongst the Fenland ones, consist of designs derived from familiar objects used in the house, in agriculture, in trade or sport, and may or may not bear any allusion to the avocation of their first proprietors. These consist, besides keys already mentioned, of such things as forks, knives, pot-hooks, bows, arrows, a cross-bow, a pike, a stirrup, spurs, a hunting horn, a boat, a rudder, anchors, punt-poles, fish-spears, ladders, dice, swords, spades, shears, carpenters' squares, hammers, baker's peels, etc., etc. These occur singly or in pairs or in combination with one another, either parallel or crossed, so that a large number of somewhat elaborate, but easily distinguishable, designs resulted.

EXAMPLES OF MARKS DESIGNED FROM HOUSEHOLD AND OTHER OBJECTS.

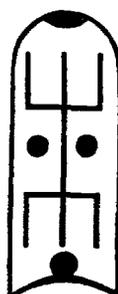
37. Richard Cecil of Burghley, Northants, d. 1553, Bailiff of Whittlesea and Deputy Swan-Master.
 38. Clement Hunston of Ruskington, Lincs, d. 1582.
 39. Francis Quarles of Ufford, Northants, d. 1570.
 40. Sir Humphrey Stafford of Blatherwyke, Northants, *viv.* 1570.



37.



38.



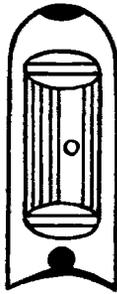
39.



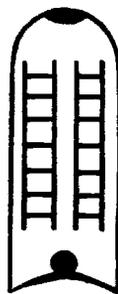
40.



41.



42.



43.



44.

41. The Parson of Fleet, S. Lincs.
 42. Gregory Pratt of Ryston, W. Norfolk, d. 1609.
 43. Thomas Gray of Wisbech, Cambs., d. 1593.
 44. Sir James Harington of Ridlington, Rutland, *viv.* 1578.
 (The above are all Fenland marks, 37 to 40 from Add. MS. 6301 ;
 41 and 42 from Add. MS. 4977 ; 43 from Add. MS. 6302 ;
 44 from Bodl. MS., Rawlinson B. 277.)

(To be continued.)