

**From THE BUSHLEY, LONGDON, QUEENHILL AND HOLDFAST ALMANACK AND YEAR
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SEVERN HAM

We do not often go outside the boundary of our three parishes for the subject of our short historical article in this Publication, but as Tewkesbury Ham has been for nearly 260 years part of the Pull Court Estate, and many of our readers are Tewkesbury people, we hope that the following notes may be not without interest.

The name of Ham is commonly applied in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire to those meadows by the side of the Severn, the Avon, and the Teme, which lie at the bend of the rivers. Some of our best etymologists think that these bends have some connection with the name Ham, one meaning of which is crooked or curved - as in our word ham for the thigh and buttock of a pig.

Tewkesbury Severn Ham, as distinguished from the Avon Ham, is the large meadow (about 190 acres in extent) bounded on the north and west by the Severn and Avon, and on the east and south by the Mill Avon.

Before the construction of the Mythe Bridge in 1820, all the traffic, not only from Bushley but from the whole of the country on the west of the Severn - even from Hereford and Wales - had to pass over the Ham by way of the Upper Lode Ferry to enter Tewkesbury by the Quay Bridge. It is difficult for us to imagine such a state of things, but there was no other way. Doubtless most of the traffic was by pack horses, but we have seen in a previous article that carriages from Pull Court had to be ferried over Severn at the Upper Lode in 1761, and then to make their way over the broad meadow - without any road - to the Bridge at the Quay.

The *Key* Bridge, as it is spelt in the Corporation books, being the only means of entry to the town from the north, was of great importance. Tolls were exacted from all persons, whether inhabitants or not, for the passage of carriages, carts, or wagons, either from or to the Ham and places beyond.

This toll was often strenuously resisted. In 1736 John Williams, of the King's Head, not only refused to pay the toll, 2d., "*which time out of mind has been always paid to this Corporation*", but also, in contempt, pulled down an iron chain which had been put across the bridge, "whereby he broke down and greatly damaged part of the said bridge". He was ordered to be prosecuted. In 1800 Messrs. Easthope, Hartland, and others gave notice to the Town Clerk that they should contest the payment of the toll unless the Corporation should make their claim to it clear.

The Town Clerk found sufficient evidence to establish the legality of the toll, and quoted the above case of John Williams, who had paid the debt and costs in the action brought against him.

The toll was probably done away with when the Mythe Bridge was built in 1826.

Very little is known of the earliest history of the Ham. It is clear that all through the Middle Ages there were two Manors here quite distinct, each comprising a certain portion of house property in the town and of the surrounding land. One Manor was held by the Abbot of Tewkesbury, the other by the great feudal Lords of the Honour of Tewkesbury. Each of these Estates was held and disposed of separately.

The Ham was no exception, but was divided pretty equally between the two.

Thus we know, that Joan, the wife of Gilbert de Clare died possessed of 83½ acres on the 15th of May, 1307, and Hugh le Despenser, who succeeded the de Clares as Lords of the Honour of Tewkesbury, held 85 acres 1349. Their Estate in the Ham 200 years later is given as 94 acres.

The rest, or nearly all of it, as we shall see, belonged to the Abbey at the dissolution in 1559. But although the freehold or actual ownership of the land was thus apportioned, it did not exclude the rights of certain of the Burgesses of the town to turn out their sheep and cattle over the whole of the meadow from after hay harvest till February 2. This was a right which had belonged to them from time immemorial.

In the Charter of King Edward III, in 1337, it is specifically provided: "That the Burgesses aforesaid should have common pasture as they have been accustomed to have"; and in 1611 (274 years later), when the Bailiffs of the town sold 2 acres in the Ham to Margery Kings, they recite: "That the Burgesses and Inhabitants have heretofore for time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary, yearly had and used common of pasture over the said parcel of land, as in right of their several burgages according to a certain proportion known and used".

The same right existed also at Gloucester in 1269, when the Burgesses complained that they had been kept out of their rights by the Constable of the Castle.

The right of Common of Pasture extended each year from August 12, after the hay had been gathered in, till February 2, and was restricted to certain, householders. Moreover, the householders were restricted as to the number of horses, cattle, or sheep that each was entitled to turn out; and moreover, only such cattle as were his own property. But an Act of Parliament was passed in 1808, by virtue of which the right of Common of Pasture was extinguished, and trustees were appointed in whom "the aftermath " of the Ham was vested.

It was their duty to let the aftermath, or to sell it by auction at the best price that could be had, and to divide the rents and profits between such burgesses and householders in Tewkesbury as then had the rights of common over the said meadow. It continues so to this day.

Let us now return to the ownership of the fee simple of the land. The Estates of the Secular Lords, the de Clares and Despensers, came by marriage to the great Earl of Warwick, and eventually, on the attainder and execution of his grandson (Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick) it came into the hands of the Crown in 1499, and for nearly 50 years (that is till 1547) it was managed for the King by Stewards, who were usually distinguished men in the county.

The lands owned by the Monks were confiscated by Henry VIII. at the dissolution of the Monastery in 1539. So that by this time the whole of the Ham was in the hands of the Crown to be disposed of according to the King's will. In the same year (1539) King Henry VIII. sold to Thomas Stroud, Walter Earle, and James Paget "the site and premises of the late Monastery of Tewkesbury, and all houses, barns, orchards, gardens, &c., belonging thereto, together with the Gastons, Southwyke Field, the Vineyard, and the Severn Ham" (acreage not mentioned) for £2,280, besides another £591 paid to the Exchequer for the costs of the transaction, equal to nearly £30,000 of our money.

These gentlemen were doubtless some of the many speculators in land that sprang up when the great estates of the Monasteries were thrown upon the market at the dissolution. They bought with the simple intention to sell again at a good margin of profit.

How they disposed of the whole of their property we do not yet know. All that we do know for certain is that the bulk of it came eventually into the possession of two great families. The Earl of Essex in 1725 was holding the Great Abbey House, with the orchard and little meadow belonging thereto, then in the occupation of Charles Wynde; another messuage called Amerie House, in the occupation of Brydges Nanfan; other house property in the town, the Hammocks and waste ground at the Quay, and 44 acres in the Severn Ham, then in the occupation of Charles Dowdeswell. All this he bestowed as settlement on his wife, the Lady Elizabeth Russell. These 14 acres were situate all together in the north-west corner of the Ham at the sharp bend of the river at the Upper Lode.

These 44 acres of Lord Essex did not include the Upper Lode House and Ferry and garden, which had been leased originally to William Wyatt by Philip and Mary in 1554, and later on sold to Richard Robson by Queen Elizabeth in 1564. Robson sold it in turn to the Wyatts, who were his tenants, and they eventually sold it to Mr. Dowdeswell in 1687.

Another portion of the Monks' lands, consisting of about 11 acres, had been purchased by Lord Craven's family, and remained in their hands till 1858. This land was situated close to the town by the Abbey Mill, and the rest of the Monks' property in the Ham, which stretched from the Abbey Mill

down to the junction of the Mill Avon and Severn, seems to have been held by several small proprietors, one of whom was Mr. John Dipper, who had bought the Tithes of the Ham, and had been given a portion of 4 acres in lieu of Tithe.

Between Lord Essex's 44 acres at the extreme point of the Ham at the Lode on the one side, and the land of Lord Craven and others along the bank of the Mill Avon on the other, lay a wide strip of meadow which extended the whole length of the Ham from the Severn on the west to the Avon on the east.

This large portion of the Ham, containing 94 acres, seems to have been preserved intact in the hands of one proprietor, and was known as the Warwick and Spenser lands, which we shall treat of below.

There is little more to say about the Abbey lands. Lord Essex sold his 44 acres to Mr. J. E. Dowdeswell in 1826, and Lord Craven retained his 11 acres till 1860, when they were bought by Mr. William Dowdeswell.

The smaller parcels were continually changing hands. Mr. Dowdeswell bought Mr. Dipper's 4 acres in 1846.

Among other holders of small parcels at the present day are: - The Trustees of the Tewkesbury Consolidated Charities (about 4 acres), Severn Stoke Poor, Bredon School, Messrs. Rice, and others, holding between them about 22½ acres.

Let us now return to the Warwick and Spenser lands which, as we have seen, came to the Crown in 1499 on the attainder of the unfortunate young Earl of Warwick by King Henry VII. This Estate was farmed for the King by his Stewards throughout the reign of Henry the VIII. It was not till 1547 that his son, King Edward VI, granted the freehold of it to his uncle, Sir Thomas Seymour, Lord of Sudeley. The grant comprised, besides the 97 acres in the Ham, valuable property in the Oldbury Field and the site of the Manor of Tewkesbury.

Sir Thomas Seymour did not live long to enjoy this property. He had married Queen Katherine Parr, the widow of Henry the Eighth, and lived at Sudeley Castle. He was put to death for high treason in 1549 by his brother Edward, Duke of Somerset, who was Lord Protector and Guardian of the King during his minority. All his property was confiscated, and thus the 94 acres in the Ham came once more into the hands of the Crown, and so remained during the reigns of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. No doubt it was farmed by the Royal Stewards as before for many years, but in 1575 it was leased by the Queen for a term of 21 years (from 1588) to Mr. Edward Perte. His son, John Perte, in 1596 assigned the remainder of his lease to Mr. John Brydges, of Eastington, who obtained from King James in 1605 a new lease for 40 years. It was during John Perte's tenancy that the Ham was set out by "metes and bounds"; some of which boundary stones remained till quite recently.

But 5 years later (in 1610) King James sold the whole of the Warwick and Spenser lands to the Burgesses of Tewkesbury for £2,453, an enormous sum in those days.

The sale included both the site of the Manor formerly held by the Monks, and the Manor of the Secular Lords of Tewkesbury, together with the Oldbury Field and house property, as well as the 94 acres in the Ham.

The town was now the possessor of the larger half of this grand meadow, but they had not paid for it. To the actual purchase money (£2453 7s 4d.) they had to add the cost of obtaining the Charter of Incorporation granted, £438 6s 0½d. So that the sum of their indebtedness amounted to £2,891 13s 5d. By the sale of part of the estates, and from other sources, they were able to raise £426 18s 8d. In 1611 the King pressed for payment, and sent down his Pursuivants to demand it. In this dilemma they were forced to borrow the money, and a sum of £2,026 13s 8d. was advanced by Mr. W. Ferrers, senr. To secure the repayment of this loan 18 of the principal Burgesses entered into a bond of £100 each. It must be remembered that John Brydges, of Eastington, still held a lease of the 94 acres, for which he was to pay to the Crown, but now to the Corporation, the annual rent of £14 13s 4d., together with the

sum of £7 10s 0d., which represented the price of a fat ox, which was one of the conditions of his tenure from mediaeval times.

Mr. Roger Dowdeswell and Mr. White were appointed Trustees to receive the rent, amounting to £22 3s 4d., for the benefit, we may suppose, of these Bondsmen.

The Corporation then set to work to raise the money by a general taxation, which produced £1168, and they sold another portion of the estate for £336, and when Mr. Ferrers sued the eighteen Burgesses who had given him Bonds, the money was paid thereon from time to time until the death of Mr. Ferrers, sen. His son, Mr. Wm. Ferrers, jun., during his father's lifetime (in 1614) bought the 94 acres for £700, and at last the debt was paid.

But to do this the Corporation had been obliged to sell the much-desired acres in the Ham, together with a large part of the rest of the estate, as we have seen. So that probably they had not gained much by the whole transaction.

This Mr. Ferrers was a remarkable man. He came of a good old yeoman family of Fiddington, and having embarked in business in London, had realised a large fortune. He had been one of the principal benefactors to the Free Grammar School at Tewkesbury, and in this and other ways delighted to be of service to his native district. He lies buried at All Hallows, London. A fine monument remains, recording his virtues, in Ashchurch Church, erected by his brother Thomas, on which is inscribed a long epitaph, and this simple couplet:

*"Live well and die never,
Die well and live for ever."*

We have no record of how or when the Ferrers family disposed of their property here, but we know that soon after 1624, Sir Humphrey Lynde as executor of Sir Robert Brett's will (who died in that year) purchased these 94 acres in the Severn Ham. Mr. John Brydges, of Eastington, still holding the Lease, which had been granted to him by King James in 1605. When he died in 1640, the lease had still 5 years to run. Immediately after his death, the lease was assigned for the remainder of the term to Mr. Richard Dowdeswell, together with another small parcel of land and the Tithes of Hay.

Alexander Lynde, the son of Sir Humphrey, who succeeded his father as executor to Sir Robert Brett in 1617 sold the Freehold of this land to Mr. William Dowdeswell, the son and heir of Mr. Richard Dowdeswell, of Pull Court. Under Sir Robert Brett's will the Trustees were enjoined to charge his estates or to purchase so much other lands as should yearly and for ever maintain the then used Lecture at West Mailing at 10/- weekly, and also to assure to 20 poor people of West Malling 10/- a week, to be bestowed in bread and meat, &c. And by a codicil he gave to the preacher at East Mailing the yearly sum of £10. It was stipulated that this money should be paid on the Common Dining Table at the Middle Temple at stated times. This sum of £62 a year was charged upon these 94 acres, which at that time were valued at a rent of £70. So that the surplus of £8 was all that the purchasers could receive from the property.

This charity has been constantly paid by the owners of the Pull Court Estate, and the money has been duly applied to the purposes mentioned in the will. Sir Robert Brett died in 1624, and has a fine monument in West Malling Church.

We have now traced the descent of the land in the Severn Ham through five centuries. We have seen that the monks had possession of the land next to the ferry at the Lode, which was the highway into Tewkesbury from the north and west, and a belt of land on the Banks of the Mill Avon next to the Abbey Mill, and their Bowling Green and Tannery. Forty-four of these acres had come to Lord Essex, eleven to Lord Craven, and about twenty-two to smaller Proprietors, while seven of the acres had probably been added to the eighty-seven once the property of the Lords of Tewkesbury, making up the 94 acres of the Warwick and Spenser lands, which formed the great central portion of the Ham. The Town had bought this estate from King James, but had been obliged to sell it again to the Ferrers

Family, and eventually it was bought by Mr. Wm. Dowdeswell in 1647, heavily charged under the will of Sir Robert Brett with his West Malling Charities.

When Mr. Dowdeswell had purchased the land of Lord Essex in 1826, and Lord Craven in 1856, and some of the smaller parcels, he became the Proprietor of nearly the whole of the Severn Ham.

It was at this date, 1856, that the great scheme for making the Locks and the Weir at the Lode was carried into effect by the Severn Navigation Company. Mr. Leader Williams had first broached his plan for deepening the river so as to render it navigable for ships in 1835. A Bill was brought into Parliament in 1837 which failed to become law, but in 1842 another Bill was introduced and passed, and the Locks at Lincombe and Diglis were opened by 1844. Dredging was carried on extensively for many years, but it was found to be impossible to obtain a uniform depth of 6ft. at low water between Tewkesbury and Diglis. Consequently an Act for the formation of a Lock and Weir at Tewkesbury was applied for and obtained in 1853.

The plan comprised the cutting of a new course for the river, constructing a lock and weir, building houses for the lock attendants, and damming up and partially filling the old water course. They had to buy about 18 acres of land from Mr. Dowdeswell, and about an acre from the Trustees of Barnes' Charity, and moreover to compensate the burgesses for the loss of the aftermath on about 18 acres, by payment of £733.

When the work was completed, the Navigation Company sold to Mr. Dowdeswell the land that they had not used, together with the great bank of earth which they had excavated from the new cutting and the Locks. This proved to be clay of the best quality for brick-making, and for nearly fifty years Messrs. Jaynes and Awford were employed in converting it into bricks till the whole of the clay had been exhausted, and their works were closed.

The Weir is 500ft. in length and 36ft. wide at the base, and the two locks when thrown into one are large enough to accommodate a Steam Tug and as many Barges as it can draw.

The opening of the New Lock on August 10th, 1858, was made the occasion of great rejoicing in Tewkesbury, the Mayor and Corporation attending in State.

The crowning act which was to complete the work was the final blocking up of the old course of the river. This was done by sinking a large barge across what remained of the opening. It was successfully performed to the satisfaction of the great company of spectators, and the procession of boats and barges, led by Mr. Leader Williams in his steam yacht and followed by the Commissioners, passed through the Locks and up the new cutting successfully.

Unfortunately, during the night the dam broke before it had been permanently filled in, but it was very soon rectified and made safe. Now, after a lapse of 50 years, it would be difficult for a passenger on the water to detect where the new cutting had begun, so completely has Nature clothed the banks with verdure.

One result of the construction of the Lock was the closing of the Ferry House at the Lode as a public-house, which had certainly been a licensed house since the time when Queen Elizabeth granted a licence to sell wine and beer to her old servant William Wyatt in 1565.

Another was to cut off the Ferry House, and the land on which it stood, from the rest of the Ham by the new cutting which separates it from Tewkesbury, so that the Parish of Tewkesbury at this point stretches across the river.

We must not leave our history of the Ham without noting that at one time Races were held here under distinguished patronage. In 1721, the Prince of Wales, afterwards George II., gave a gold cup of the value of fifty guineas to be run for, which was won by John Brydges, Esq., of the Mythe, and another Cup of the same value was given by the Prince in the following year, which was won by Lord Tracy. These Races continued to be an annual event for some years, but ceased at the commencement of the

19th century. They were revived in 1826 under the patronage of the Members of Parliament and the principal residents in the neighbourhood, but were again discontinued in deference to the wishes of a number of the inhabitants of Tewkesbury who objected to the number of "loose characters" attracted to them.

My friend, Mr. Rusling, has supplied the facts on which this paper is founded, at the expense of much skill and research among the old deeds at Pull Court and from published records. Our thanks are due to him for all his work in this matter.