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Berkshire Local History Association

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EARLY ENCLOSURES IN STRATFIELD MORTIMER

Colin Woodward

Introduction

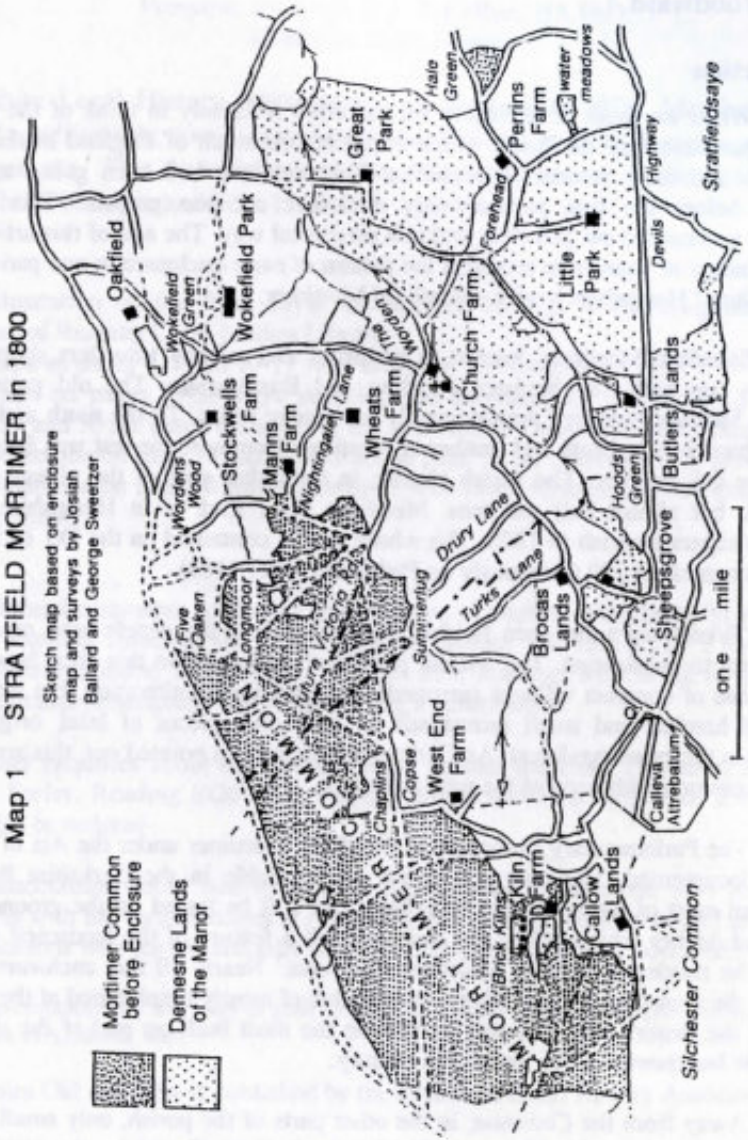
When we think of enclosure we too often tend only to think of the great wave of parliamentary enclosure which swept across much of England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But enclosure had been going on for centuries before the first parliamentary enclosure act was passed.[1] This early enclosure was carried out privately and in a piecemeal way. The aim of this article is to use a variety of sources to establish the pattern of early enclosure in one parish on the Berkshire / Hampshire border - Stratfield Mortimer.

Stratfield Mortimer, known to motorists and railway travellers simply as Mortimer, lies half way between Reading and Basingstoke. The old parish of Stratfield Mortimer covered approximately ten square miles. To the north and west were the pine woods, heath and heather of Mortimer Common; the rest was farmland with some oak coppice. The parish church, in the oldest part of the village, is in Berkshire, but almost half the area, Mortimer West End, is in Hampshire, and became a separate parish in 1870. The whole area is contained on the OS 1:25 000 scale Explorer sheet 159 (previously on Pathfinder sheet 1188).

'Where were the open fields?' asked over half the people who read this article prior to publication. The ancient pattern of settlement in this area, however, was not one of compact villages surrounded by traditional cultivation, but rather a scatter of hamlets and small farmsteads on their own pieces of land, originally clearings in the extensive forest. As Christopher Taylor has pointed out, this area has more in common with parts of the west country.[2]

The Parliamentary Enclosure of Stratfield Mortimer under the Act of 1802 is well documented. The map and award are available in the Berkshire Record Office and most of the enclosure boundaries can still be traced on the ground; the banks and ditches which define the plots are still a feature of the landscape to the west of the residential area of Mortimer Common.[3] Nearly all this enclosure took place on the common; an area of gravelly heathland mostly uninhabited at the time, although the eastern end of it was to become the most built up part of the village during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Away from the Common, in the other parts of the parish, only small areas of roadside woodland and 29 acres of arable land were affected by the 1802 Act,



scattered plots that suggest the final tidying up of earlier enclosures. Most would now be hard for even an experienced field worker to discern without referring to the enclosure map by George Bedding which well defines them. The work took from 1804 to 1806.

No such documentary record exists of any earlier enclosures; if any were held in the parish they were probably destroyed when the churchwarden's home caught fire in 1681. It is difficult to find any traces on the ground due to the removal of many hedgerows, even some that once defined lanes. Only by close study of available maps, plans and title deeds, therefore, can the relevant areas perhaps be detected.

Old rent rolls, terriers, title deeds, maps, etc, once held by the Englefield Estate and dating back to about 1600 have been deposited in the Berkshire Record Office. It is therefore possible to reconstruct most of the pattern of cultivation and landholding since then, although some areas, such as those once owned by the Brocas family, were poorly covered until 1840 when the tithe map and award provided a detailed picture of the whole parish.[4]

Earlier than 1600 documentary evidence of enclosures will be difficult to find. The Inquisitions of 1426, 1429 and 1552 do not help nor does the 1652 survey of demesne lands by Philip ffursdon.[5] These were not of course accompanied by maps, and even where holdings can be identified there is no way of knowing whether the boundaries have been extended by enclosure.

With much time wasted in an unsuccessful search for documents I decided that it might just be possible to deduce some of the early enclosures from a close study of the shapes of the fields and the pattern of occupation as revealed by the tithe map and such earlier plans as can be found in the estate papers, backed up by field work where traces remained. I based my studies on a composite plan of the village which I had made. Commencing with a base map of the 25 inch first-edition OS plan, (surveyed in this area in 1872), I superimposed details from the tithe map of 1840, the enclosure map of 1802 and such earlier estate maps as I could find, the most important of which were the 1775 plans of the demesne lands of the manor by Josiah Ballard and various estate plans by George Sweetzer.[6] All these, of course, were from the Berkshire Record Office. (I did not attempt to incorporate John Rocque's 1761 map of Berkshire although I frequently referred to it.[7])

A Working Plan - Types Of Enclosure To Look For

Different areas of the village show much variation in field pattern, from which it should be possible to distinguish several kinds of enclosure. A rough classification may be as follows:

1 Early forest clearance (assarting);
2 Later clearance of forest and rough pasture;
3 Enclosure of common pasture;
4 Enclosure of common arable;
5 Enclosure of roadside and other waste.

When trying to reconstruct any pattern of early agriculture there is need to take the terrain into account and consider the difficulties and opportunities it offered. The harnessing of animal power enabled early farmers to plough the heavier soils that produced the best crops. The light, easily-worked but not very productive uplands were then often abandoned in favour of fertile valleys. Not until a rising population needed more land under cultivation were those gravelly uplands again considered. It is reasonable therefore to look for unrecorded enclosures on higher ground bordering land long under cultivation.

Mortimer Common has been described as a dissected plateau, a raised, flat area of scrubland, with heather, gorse, birch and pine growing on infertile gravel overlaying an acid podsol. All around the edge of the plateau, springs emerge. Streams cut through the gravel to the heavier clay and widen to create fertile valleys, known to our ancestors as slades. These merge into the gentle undulating plain of the River Loddon and its tributary brooks, the ancient farmland of Stratfield Mortimer. Nearly all this land was marked as 'old inclosures' on George Bedding's enclosure map of 1802.

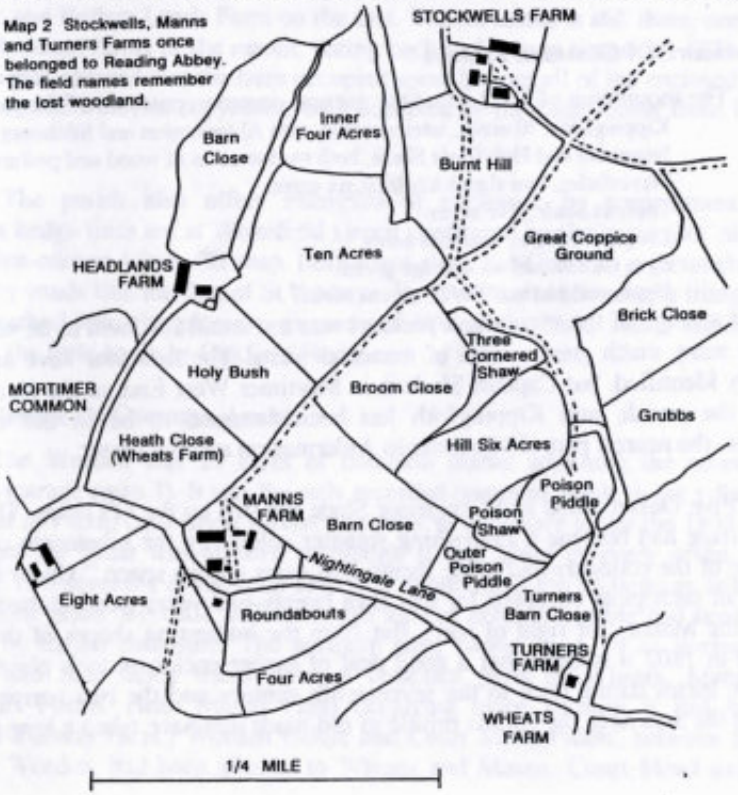
The Berkshire Part Of The Parish

1 Early Forest Clearance

Boundaries left by assarting, the conversion of woodland, scrub or heath to agriculture, are usually obscured by the later extensions of farmland considered below but are in places to be seen where old enclosures abut directly onto common land. The northern edge of the fields between Drury Lane and Turks Lane make such a line against Summerlug Common. Summerlug was one of the several hamlets which once made up the scattered parish of Stratfield Mortimer, but only one of its ancient cottages remains.

2 Later Clearance Of Forest And Rough Pasture

The area of Manns Farm presents a very interesting field pattern on the tithe map. The straight lines of the later intakes show up against the curves of older fields. North of Nightingale Lane (map 2) field names such as Heath Close echo the extension of farmland onto the unrewarding gravel. Heath Close was an arable field belonging to Wheats Farm, half a mile away. The adjacent Eight Acres and Ten Acres, however, were fields of the adjoining Manns Farm but all three appear to form part of the same enclosure scheme, as does Five Acres, its earlier name of Holy Bush perhaps marking clearance of a holly thicket. New enclosures seem often to have been allotted to established farms some distance away, suggesting an organised scheme of enclosure by agreement. The farms concerned were originally copyholds (later enfranchised when the tenants purchased the freeholds); two of them, Manns and Stockwells, on land once held by Reading Abbey. Wheats Farm, however, was



Map 2 Stockwells, Manns and Turners Farms once belonged to Reading Abbey. The field names remember the lost woodland.

not an Abbey farm. The Abbey Manor had its own independent Court Baron before the dissolution so these intakes probably took place afterwards, when one Manor Court was responsible for the whole of Stratfield Mortimer.

The areas looked at so far probably marked the advance of village cultivation into uncleared scrub or forest, but a sad fate awaited woodland already surrounded by farmland. The land demised in 1225 to Reading Abbey also included a wood called Le Thorn, of three virgates.[8] By 1840 all that remained of those 90 acres were two small pieces of woodland, Three Cornered Shaw and Poison Shaw, each of under two acres. The adjacent field boundaries show clearly the pattern of 'bites' taken out of the forest by clearance. Nearby arable fields called Grubbs, Burnt Hill, and Great Coppice Ground formed part of adjoining copyholds later absorbed by Manns Farm.

3 Enclosure Of Common Pasture

The inquisition of 1552 listed the ancient common pastures of the parish:

Kippingfrith, 50 acres, intercommon with Aldermaston and Silchester.
Segemere and Holyforde Slade, both twelve acres of wood and pasture.
Wryeslades, two slades totalling six acres.
Caplens Slade, five acres.
Longmore Slade, fourteen acres.
Fyve Okenslade, no acreage given.
Upper and Nether Worth, eleven acres.[9]

The total acreage of these common pastures was too small for them to be confused with the main, much greater, area of manorial waste. The first four have not been positively identified, but Caplens Slade is in Mortimer West End, in the Hampshire part of the parish, and Kippingfrith has been assumed to be in the extreme southwest, the nearest part of Mortimer to Aldermaston and Silchester.

Five Oaken Slade and Longmoor Slade are still on the OS maps. This part of the village had become a flourishing squatter colony by the nineteenth century, and some of the cottagers had made themselves extra garden space.[10] Under the Act of 1802 all such plots occupied for less than twenty-one years were allotted to the Lord of the Manor 'for right of soil'. But from the interesting shapes of the areas excluded in 1802 it is clear that a good deal of earlier enclosure took place there. There are leases dating back to the seventeenth century and the two narrow lanes that cross the area have the hollow profile of old roads that have taken a long time to create.

Upper and Nether Worth have sometimes been identified as the 29 acres of common arable known as The Worden, but they are more likely to have been Upper and Lower Wordens Wood, on the edge of the parish near Wokefield Common. Their names suggest wooded common pasture rather than arable. By 1840, although known as Middle and Lower Worns Wood, both had become arable fields.

Hale Green and Hoods Green (map 4) were two more of the small hamlets of Stratfield Mortimer. The 13 acres of Hale Green near Beech Hill remained unenclosed until the Act of 1802, by which time most of the old houses had gone. Hoods Green, which must have been enclosed much earlier, lay on the north side of The Devil's Highway. Rocque's map of 1761 may be a trap for the unwary where field boundaries are concerned, but here it gives a good impression of a settlement now quite swept away by modern farming.[10] Rocque shows the Green still surrounded by the dwellings of the copyholders, with Ticklecorner Lane on the north and west, and Butlers Lands Farm on the east. Butlers Lands is still there, one of the ancient demesne farms of the manor, dating back to Norman times. By 1775 Josiah Ballard's plan showed that the farm occupied some but not all of the enclosed green, which it shared with two copyholds, both occupied by the Lane family from 1426 to 1730.[12]

The parish also offers examples of enclosure by emparkment. John Rocque's hedge lines are at Wokefield Green confirmed by the surveyors' sketches for the first-edition 1 inch OS map. Both maps show the Green as a rectangle criss-crossed by roads like the flag of St Andrew. By 1840 the south-eastern triangle had been absorbed into the pleasure grounds of Wokefield Park, and a similar fate overtook the little green by Oakfield House.

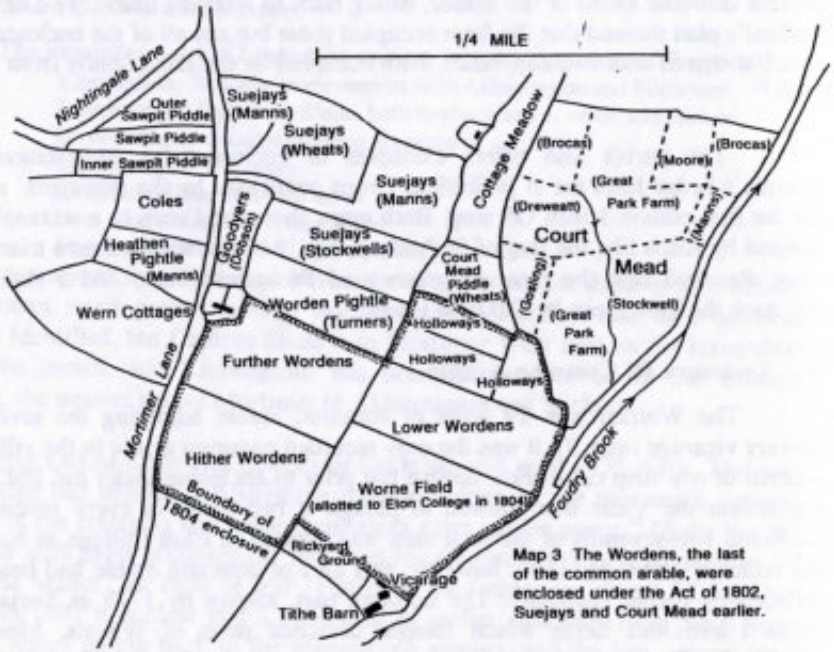
4 Enclosure Of Common Arable

The Worden was 29 acres of common arable adjoining the seventeenth century vicarage (map 3). It was the only recorded common arable in the village. No records of any strip cultivation survive but prior to enclosure under the 1802 Act of Parliament the Vicar was allowed to plough it two years in every seven. When enclosed, two-sevenths of the total area was allotted to Eton College as holders of the rectorial glebe. By 1802, however, this area of common arable had been much reduced by earlier enclosure. The northern part, known by 1779 as Suejays, was divided into four fields which formed detached parts of Wheats, Manns and Stockwells Farms. (with Manns Farm occurring twice because it had by then absorbed Turners Farm.) Worden Piddle and Court Mead Piddle, between Suejays and The Worden, had been allotted to Wheats and Manns. Court Mead itself was

once a lot meadow but was by 1840 enclosed and divided unevenly between seven farmers.

5 Enclosure Of Roadside Waste, Etc

Where Nightingale Lane joins Mortimer Lane (map 3) there was a $4^1/_2$ acre triangle of ground which the tithe map of 1840 shows divided into three pieces called Inner Sawpit Piddle, Sawpit Piddle and Outer Sawpit Piddle. The lane swerves to avoid this triangle but the divisions on the map clearly suggest that it earlier passed directly through, forming the centre strip. This narrow plot of one acre belonged to John Stockwell, whose farm was nearby but not adjoining. The outer two plots were both detached parts of Manns Farm, also nearby. The whole suggests enclosure of a roadside plot of wasteland used by woodmen to prepare timber.

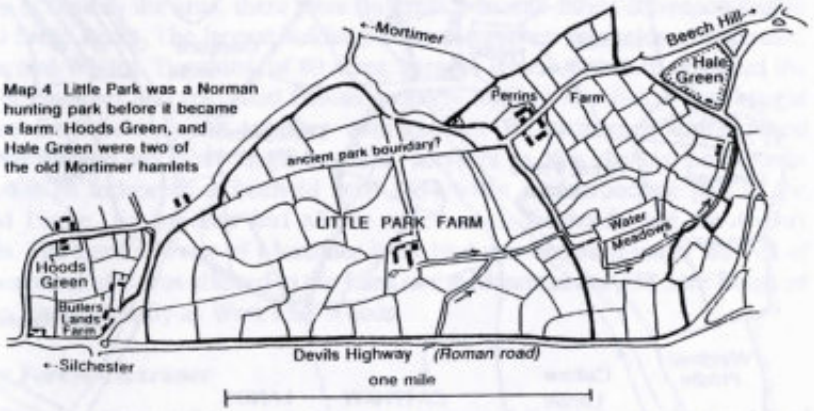


Map 3 The Wordens, the last of the common arable, were enclosed under the Act of 1802, Suejays and Court Mead earlier.

Enclosure of roadside waste may have given rise to a dispute during the last years of the Commonwealth. The four most northerly fields of Little Park Farm (map 4) lie outside a long continuous line of hedgerow which strongly suggests the

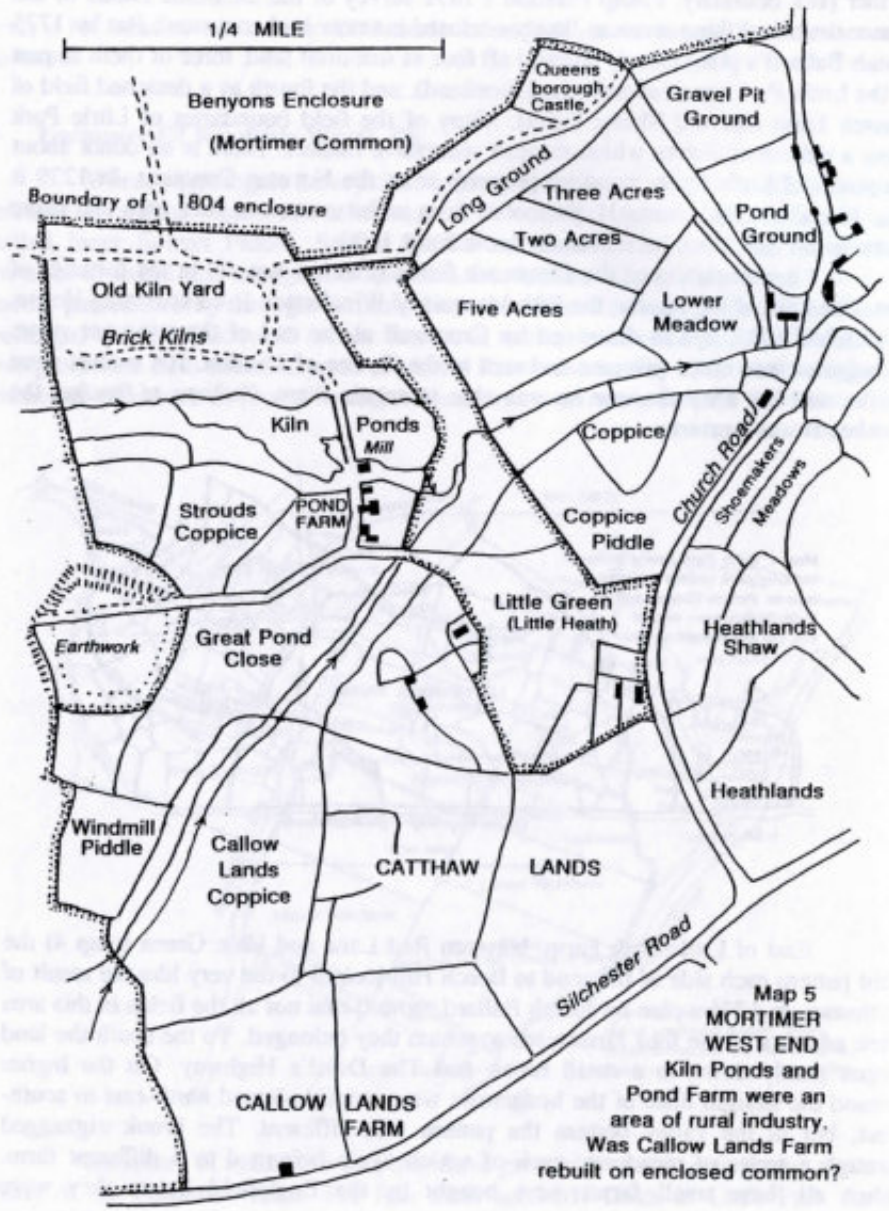
former park boundary. Philip Fursdon's 1652 survey of the Demesne Lands of the manor described these areas as 'lately enclosed but now laid common'. But by 1775 Josiah Ballard's plans clearly showed all four as manorial land, three of them as part of the Little Park (one called Picked Forehead), and the fourth as a detached field of Church Farm (the old Manor Farm). Many of the field boundaries of Little Park show a pattern of curves which suggest successive intakes. There is no doubt about the status of Little Park, manorial property since the Norman Conquest. In 1239 it was, like Great Park (map 1), promoted from rabbit warren to deer park and came under forest law. They both became farms about 1600.

An explanation of the Foreheads fields situation may lie in the fortunes of war. The Lord of the Manor, the fifth Marquis of Winchester, lived at Basing House. In October 1645, it was destroyed by Cromwell at the end of the two-year siege. Winchester was taken prisoner and sent to the Tower of London. His estates were confiscated but after the war he was able to regain them. Perhaps re-fencing the Foreheads was a priority.



Map 4 Little Park was a Norman hunting park before it became a farm. Hoods Green, and Hale Green were two of the old Mortimer hamlets

East of Little Park Farm, between Red Lane and Hale Green (map 4) the field pattern each side of the road to Beech Hill looked to me very like the result of enclosure. In 1775 a plan by Josiah Ballard showed that not all the fields in this area were adjacent to the four farmsteads to which they belonged. To the south the land slopes gently down to a small brook and The Devil's Highway. On the higher ground the straight lines of the hedgerows were strictly aligned north-east to south-west, but in the valley bottom the pattern was different. The brook zigzagged through a series of meadows, each of which again belonged to a different farm. When all these small farms were bought by the Englefield Estate they were



Map 5
MORTIMER WEST END
Kiln Ponds and Pond Farm were an area of rural industry. Was Callow Lands Farm rebuilt on enclosed common?

amalgamated into one large one. George Sweetzer produced a plan of Perrins Farm, as it became known, in 1815, and showed four of the meadows coloured blue.[13] Driftways gave access to what must have been an ancient system of water meadows, one of them, Redmead, the subject of much dispute between the Abbot of Reading and the Mortimer Family in the thirteenth century

I concluded that the high ground had been enclosed from roadside waste and the water meadow area was the relic of a much older pattern of cultivation.

Mortimer West End, Hampshire

The Tithe Map of 1840 covered the whole of Stratfield Mortimer, which was then partly in Berkshire and partly in Hampshire. In 1870 Mortimer West End became a separate parish.

The map shows that the field-pattern of West End differed in several interesting ways from the Berkshire part of the village. This probably reflected the ownership of land in the area; there were no great manorial farms corresponding to Great and Little Parks. The largest holdings were the ancient freeholds of Hammes, Tyrwhitts, and Whites. Tyrwhitts, of 80 acres, became Brocas Lands. It absorbed the 60 acres of Hammes and remained Brocas property until 1872 when it was bought up by the Englefield Estate together with the six Brocas-owned enfranchised copyholds. Whites, the other large freehold, survives to this day as Lovegroves Farm. It was an independent freehold until 1834 when it also became part of the Englefield Estate. So by then had all the other small freeholds and the twenty copyholds. The Lord's Waste of Mortimer West End was enclosed under the Act of 1802, when most of it was allotted to the Lord of the Manor as the 358 acre Benyons Enclosure, known locally as West End Woods.

1 Early Forest Clearance

There is a line on the map that may once have defined the northern edge of early farmland. It mostly follows a right of way which starts about 200 yards west of the Turners Arms on the West End Road, just past a group of four typical Benyon farm cottages on the left. A footpath runs forward diagonally across the field, skirting Simms Copse as it plunges steeply down to cross a tributary of West End Brook, which flows into Foudry Brook. The ancient boundary seems to have continued straight ahead along an old hedgerow and behind West End Farm, but the right of way today follows a farm road to pass in front of the farm and rejoin the old line along Back Lane, a byway which comes out below the Red Lion in Mortimer West End. There can be few old boundaries more pleasant to explore.

2 Later Clearance Of Forest And Rough Pasture

Apart from the few large farms referred to above the agricultural land of West End was divided into about thirty small freeholds and copyholds, many of them with several detached portions, interlocked in a jigsaw pattern of very small fields, some of a peculiar and impractical shape, each with part of a different farm for a neighbour. Unfortunately the scarcity of Brocas documents has resulted in some areas on my maps with no information earlier than 1840. There is enough, however, to suggest an area of intakes of former wasteland to the north of Silchester Common.

Just south of Benyons Enclosure stood Pond Farm (map 5), also known as Kiln Farm. This was manorial property as far back as the seventeenth century and probably earlier, and although almost surrounded by common land was, like all such farmland, excluded from enclosure under the 1802 Act. Here beside the two ponds there was once a fish hatchery, a mill and at least four brick kilns. The larger pond was the millpond, held back by a substantial dam pierced by brick arches. A short leet alongside the lower pond led to the wheelpit. This is still discernible, but the mill itself and the farm have quite disappeared. The lower pond is held by a smaller dam which incorporates a fish grating. These two ponds were also used for an almost-forgotten way of posturing cattle that involved draining the ponds in turn and using the land for grazing in the same way as a water meadow.

A lease of 1675 for the 'mill and mill house with the maulting house, etc. and all that parcel of meadow ground and several parcels of arable land with the mill pond, mill coppice, cottage and two acres of land' was worth £3 1s a year and two fat pullets. By 1714 the rent had risen to £15 and three brace of carp and by 1725 to £20 and 'eight brace of good fat and well fed live carp in full season and not under twelve inches long from eye to fork.' This lease also conveyed 'liberty to dig gravel and dig clay and sand in any of the Commons for the making of bricks and tiles and also free liberty to cut and take Furze, Heath and Fern . . . for the burning of the bricks and tiles.'

These are the first of the leases traced to feature a brick kiln here and so may be a clue to the date when the kilns and claypits took over part of the common. The kilns stood on the steep north bank of the larger pond, and the boundaries of the site are marked by very straight lines, no doubt the enclosure commissioners' way of tidying up the edge of an area of rural industry, the exact boundaries of which were undefined.

3 Enclosure Of Common Pasture

Two of the commons referred to in the 1552 inquisition are in West End, Caplens Slade and Kippingfrith.

Caplens Slade can still be found on the current $2^1/_2$ inch map where it appears as Chaplins Copse just north of West End Hill on the Mortimer road. The enclosure map of 1802 shows a graceful double curve defining a bite out of the wasteland. It was excluded from enclosure as one of the areas settled for over twenty-one years. In 1840 the tithe map has it as farmland with names such as Great and Little Chaplins, Furze Pightle and Rogers Lands. Just outside its northern boundary is the mysterious New Pond, (new in the same way as the New Forest?) man-made by damming the embryo Foudry Brook. The area was one of the six copyholds (Aberys, Avords, Catens, Leggs, Matthews and Mills - all named after previous tenants) that were acquired by the Englefield Estate and amalgamated to become West End Farm. The clear outline of Chaplins Copse has in recent years been blurred by tree planting.

Kippingfrith is described in the 1552 inquisition as being 'intercommon with Aldermaston and Silchester'. It is reasonable to assume that its 50 acres would have been near to those places and therefore in the south-western part of the parish, although no plot of land bearing a similar name has been traced. Aldermaston Soke would appear to be a contender, but must be ruled out as it has its own place in the history of the parish.

The small modern farmstead of Catthaw Lands (or Callow Lands, see map 5) lies just to the north of Silchester Common, on a tract of high-lying stony ground. It was outside the area considered as commonable land suitable for enclosure in 1802, and is marked as part of the 'Old Inclosures' on the map. It does not appear on the Tithe Map or as one of the ancient freeholds or copyholds on any of the various rent rolls, but may have been one of the farms re-located from the low-lying ground beside the West End Brook after 1840 and rebuilt on land that was earlier enclosed from part of the common.

Where the Silchester Brook crosses The Devil's Highway there were some meadows each of about four acres, each as usual owing allegiance to a different farm. Adjacent to them was a four acre piece called Broad Mead still divided in 1840 into seven strips, used by three different farmers. This is referred to in several old terriers as 'the common mead'.

4 Enclosure Of Common Arable

None appears to have existed in Mortimer West End, and there are no areas that look as if they might have been farmed as strips.

5 Enclosure Of Roadside And Other Waste

It is only since World War II that Odd Lane and Love Lane were ploughed out, leaving only hard-to-follow rights of way through the crops. Ticklecorner Lane, which once surrounded Hoods Green, has also been reduced to a single field boundary. The last few hundred yards of The Devil's Highway as it approaches the east gate of Calleva must have at some time have suffered the same fate. The road has disappeared, with only a footpath to mark the original line.

It is worth recalling, however, that Roman roads were commonly very wide, some as much as seventy feet. Today, and as far back as maps go, The Devil's Highway is shown as a narrow lane closely confined by hedges. This suggests that some early farmers saw no reason to let such valuable roadside land go to waste.

Conclusions

Hedge patterns and field names alone do not provide enough evidence to define the areas enclosed before the 1802 Act. The main weakness of deducing such events entirely by reference to maps is the impossibility of dating any of them other than by guesswork. Such clues as have emerged would have to be followed up by fieldwork and by reference to the histories of the farms concerned. Fieldwork could include the dating of hedges by species count and a search for remains of pre-enclosure vegetation. Perhaps early field drainage could be dated by the kind of tiles used. Some local historians may have the necessary skills, but most of us would defer to the superior knowledge of the botanist and agricultural expert.

Researching the early history of the farms in this area would be a frustrating task. All intakes on the big manorial farms seem to have been carried out even before the survey of 1652. Many of the other farms were created by the amalgamation of copyholds. The tenants would be likely to have thrown away most of the paperwork, for which they probably had little regard. Certainly very little seems to have survived. Rough and ready as such interpretation of the old maps may be, it can add greatly to an understanding of the probable development of the village landscape.

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The Social Consequences of Enclosure

A series of five seminars at the RURAL HISTORY CENTRE (University of Reading).

Wednesday 26th May: **'Who had Common Right before Parliamentary Enclosure?'**
Leigh Shaw-Taylor (University of Cambridge)

Wednesday 2nd June: **'Enclosure and Waged Work 1700-1820: Evidence from Rural Middlesex.'**
Paul Carter (University of Middlesex)

Wednesday 9th June: **'Regional and Temporal Variations of Enclosure.'**
Dr John Chapman (University of Portsmouth)

Wednesday 16th June: **'Enclosure and the Allotment Movement.'**
Dr Jeremy Burchardt (Rural History Centre)

Wednesday 23rd June: **'Enclosure, Common Rights and Women: Further Thoughts.'**
Dr Jane Humphries (University of Oxford)

All seminars will take place at 2 p.m. in the seminar room at the Rural History Centre, University campus, Whiteknights. (follow signs from the main entrance into the campus)
All those with an interest in rural history are welcome to attend.

THE PARSON AS SLEUTH

WILLIAM TALBOT AND JONATHAN BRITAIN

John Dearing

The subject of this article is a curious episode in the ecclesiastical history of Reading, linking a prominent local clergyman, the Revd William Talbot and a forger and con man, Jonathan Britain, who went to the gallows in 1772. Talbot was an important leader in the Evangelical Revival within the established church, though less well remembered today than such men as Newton, Romaine, Simeon and the Venns. Britain was described towards the end of his life as 'one of the greatest impostors that this kingdom has ever seen' but he too is largely forgotten even in criminological circles.

William Talbot was a person of aristocratic background and it seems likely that initially he entered the church because it was the thing that younger sons of the nobility did rather than through any sense of vocation. As with many of his class, he owed his spiritual rebirth to the ministry of the Countess of Huntingdon and from that point on he was, in the words of James Hervey of Weston Favell, a man 'baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire - fervent in spirit and setting' his face 'as a flint'. Having held the livings successively of Kineton, Warwickshire, and All Hallows, Upper Thames Street, London, Talbot came to Reading in 1768 as Vicar of St Giles, one of the three ancient parishes in that town. Here Talbot's preaching of the Gospel was especially effective and it was estimated that 200 to 300 souls were converted to a personal faith in Christ during the six years of his ministry.[1] He was also much given to good works and, as well as tending to the needs of the sick and the poor, this included prison visiting.

Jonathan Britain was a Yorkshireman, born in Thirsk, to respectable parents of limited means who, in the words of the *Newgate Calendar*, could not afford 'to give him a liberal education.' Instead, he was sent to work as an errand-boy at the office of an attorney in York. The latter recognised in young Jonathan 'marks of genius and ability' and promoted him to the position of articled clerk. Britain, however, was a restless youth afflicted by 'an impatience of restraint' who found it difficult to settle into any position for long. From the lawyer's office, he proceeded to a public academy where he was employed initially as a teacher of mathematics. Once again his talents achieved recognition and he was promoted to be the principal usher in the school.

It was not long, however, before the previous pattern of events repeated themselves and his next career move was destined to be his undoing, for he enlisted

as a soldier in the 10th Dragoons. Here it was his striking physical appearance rather than his intellect which brought him to the attention of his officers. Such attention 'very much flattered his vanity' and led him into an extravagant lifestyle through a vain attempt to emulate his superiors. As a result, he found himself in reduced circumstances and was tempted to dishonesty. As the *Newgate Calendar* puts it:

> He committed a variety of frauds, most of them of such artful contrivance as to elude all possibility of detection.
>
> He had a custom of introducing himself into the company of persons who had no suspicion of deceit, and then he would so far insinuate himself into their good opinion as to take undue advantage of their unsuspecting honesty.[2]

Modern man would class him as a con man *par excellence*.

His career as a fully-fledged criminal commenced in Bristol where he passed a number of bank drafts which he had forged. From there, fearing detection, he proceeded to the capital where he wrote a series of letters to King George III, claiming that he had been implicated in a plot to set fire to the Naval Dockyard at Portsmouth. These were apparently disregarded, whereupon Britain addressed the Lord Mayor of London, offering to surrender himself and effectively turn King's Evidence. The promise of a pardon he requested was advertised in the *London Gazette* and on the strength of this Britain proceeded to Reading to meet his wife who had been very sick. However, his continuing reduced circumstances induced him to offer further forged drafts totalling £45 and on this occasion he was apprehended and found himself in the Compter, one of Reading's several gaols. This was on Tuesday, 30 July 1771.

Shortly afterwards, while awaiting examination, Britain took a hefty dose of arsenic, evidently wishing to end his life rather than face a lengthy incarceration, awaiting trial at the next assizes. However, 'when his pains grew torturing, he submitted to the use of proper medicines, and listened to the advice of sending for some Clergyman to talk to him.'[3] Mr Blisset, a grocer, one of the victims of Britain's forgeries, was concerned for the state of his soul and asked William Talbot to visit him. Talbot was at first reluctant to undertake this duty, as the Compter was 'not within the limits of my parish' but in that of St Laurence's. However, the urgency of the case persuaded him to ignore Anglican protocol in this instance. He found Britain 'not in the least degree sensible of the evil of what he had done' in attempting to take his life:

> I began to talk to him faithfully and roundly, and yet at the same time tenderly, of the extreme wickedness of the act he had been guilty of, and the perilous situation in every respect, in which I conspicuously discerned his soul to be; and to do the utmost in my power to bring him to a sight and a conviction of better things. By degrees, I obtained from him some seeming attention to me; and much conversation together,

> during the space of four or five hours, we had till every thing that I thought needful to be said had been, repeatedly and in the plainest manner, spoken to him.[4]

Talbot visited Britain again the following day and resumed his visits in mid-September after a period of convalescence on the South Coast. Britain continually affirmed his innocence of the charges of forgery, both in Reading and (as these began to come to light) in Bristol. While in prison he also returned to his allegations concerning the arson plot and wrote letters to several newspapers, claiming that Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, the Earl of Halifax, Secretary of State, the Earl of Faulconbridge and other prominent persons had been bribed by the French to 'encourage the setting fire to the dockyard at Portsmouth.' He himself, together with a Captain Kelly of the Irish Brigades in France, were the arsonists. Britain claimed to have a large quantity of incriminating evidence contained in a portmanteau sent on by him from Bristol to London.

Although at no time does Talbot appear to have doubted that Britain was guilty of deception in the matter of money, for a time he was at least prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt over the veracity of his claims concerning the dockyard fire:

> The steadiness of his assertions; the readiness with which he told his story; his being under no confinement when he originally made his offers of discovery; the certainty he had, tho' in gaol at present, of soon being at liberty again, added to the reasonable, and only, request he had made, of being brought to a trial; together with his willingness to suffer death, if he should, upon that trial, be found an impostor: all these things together, did, for a little season, and till I had time to reflect, hold me in suspense; and there were moments, in the beginning of my enquiries, in which I was strongly inclined to believe, that there was truth, in some, at least of his pretensions; but the scale soon turned; daily discoveries of his falsehoods weakened his credit with me more and more; till I was satisfactorily and perfectly convinced, that he was as errant a deceiver as DUDLEY himself.[5]

An extended stay at Bath from late October, while his wife, Sarah Talbot, received the benefits of the waters, enabled Talbot to take a trip over to Bristol to make enquiries. In regard to the alleged dockyard plot, he was able to satisfy himself that the portmanteau was a non-existent figment of Britain's vivid imagination and 'that not a paper of consequence was he possessor of, anywhere; and that the whole of the correspondences he talked of was a scandalous fiction.'[6] He also succeeded in making the acquaintance of several people that Britain had defrauded in Bristol, most of them, like their counterparts in Reading, honest trades-people who had been taken in by Britain's plausible ways, which included the practice of 'diabolical deceptions, under the mask of religion'. One of these, a barber named Arthur Sandall was clearly a man of strong religious convictions who had written to Britain,

warning him of the terrors of hell that awaited him, of 'being confined in everlasting chains of darkness, there to be tormented with Devils and damned spirits, night and day forever.' This letter had evoked a response in Britain in which he described himself as 'the miserablest man upon earth' but the note of remorse was all part of his dissembling. The villain's activities in Bristol had not been confined to forgery but also encompassed drunkenness and 'riotings', together with sexual debauchery. He had also employed a number of aliases including that of William Johnson.

It was by now clear that the charges that had been made against him in Reading were unlikely to result in conviction, because material evidence had been inadvertently destroyed by his victims. Talbot, therefore, came to the view that it was his duty to encourage Britain's Bristol victims to combine together to bring him to justice.

> I returned in the evening, to Bath; where I had leisure to ruminate upon all that I had discovered; and I was penetrated with the thought of the danger to society from such a man. So extensive a capacity and disposition to do mischief; such deep dissimulation and unsuspectable art; such unfeelingness of soul at the miseries he was creating; such treachery and baseness; and finally, so bold and daring, and malicious a spirit; all these pernicious endowments made him too dangerous to set at liberty again. I saw him also in the still more horrible light of a diabolical incendiary, scattering, through the nation, firebrands and death; forging in his inventive brain, crimes of the deepest die; and charging them upon obnoxious names, without a shadow of their existence; poisoning thereby the people's minds, and inflaming their discontents; exciting them, so far as he could, to seditious, murderous insurrections; and throwing us all into the utmost confusion; and this, only to provide a chance of his own escape from the punishment due to the villainies of which he had been guilty. Having therefore regard enough for the public, and spirit enough for the undertaking, I resolved without delay, to stop him in his career.[7]

Talbot carried out his intentions and also terminated his visits to Britain who apparently remained in ignorance of his part in the proceedings against him until he was brought to trial. Following the collapse of the case against him in Reading, Britain remained in prison, a warrant of detainer having been served against him as a result of Talbot's efforts. Eventually, he was removed to Bristol by a writ of habeas corpus and there stood trial for his several acts of forgery. At this point, however, the case took another unusual twist.

> ...being put to the bar, he refused to plead, and held in his hand the *Gazette* which contained the offer of pardon, insisting that he had given information against his accomplices who had set fire to the dockyard at Portsmouth.
> On this he was informed by the recorder that he could take no notice of the proclamation inserted in the *Gazette*. But Britain, instead of paying attention to this

> declaration, threw the *Gazette* upon the table where the clerk sat, and declared that a scheme was formed to deprive him of life, contrary to the due course of the law.[8]

Britain was warned that under a recent Act of Parliament he would be judged guilty if he continued to refuse to plead to the indictment. The trial was held up for two days while a special messenger was dispatched to London to obtain a copy of the statute. When this had been procured, Britain was at last persuaded to plead not guilty and proceeded to conduct his own defence.

> He cross-examined the witnesses in a manner that gave sufficient testimony of his abilities; but the evidence against him was such as not to admit of a doubt of his guilt, and in consequence he was capitally convicted, and sentenced to die.[9]

Talbot's wisdom in breaking off his relations with Britain were vindicated by the prisoner's conduct, subsequent to his conviction. He put out a story that Talbot had deceived him into making a confession of his crimes and had then betrayed his confidence. In its most extreme version Britain alleged that 'hearing I was a Roman Catholic,' Talbot 'came to me and told me he was a Romish priest, and then I confessed to him, and that is the way by which all these prosecutions have been set on foot.' In spite of the preposterous nature of these allegations, they were believed by a section of the public in both Bristol and Reading. As a result Talbot was obliged to rush into print with his *Narrative of the Whole of his Proceedings relative to Jonathan Britain*, designed to 'remove every blackening charge against me.' This volume was printed and sold by S. Farley, in Castle Green, Bristol. It was put on sale in Reading by T. Carnan and was also on sale in London, Oxford, Warwick, Stratford, Gloucester and Bath – evidence perhaps of the widespread interest in the case.

Even these measures do not seem to have satisfied all Talbot's accusers. One writer in the *Berkshire Chronicle*, using the pseudonym Impartial, was even moved to verse:

> A priest of late got Britain hanged.
> Ye sufferers! Cease to mock:
> Who knows? When first he has harangued,
> Perhaps he'll hang his flock.[10]

Talbot's primary aim in bringing Britain to justice was to rid the public of one whom he had concluded to be a dangerous criminal. However, initially, his concern had been for the security of Britain's soul, threatened as it then was by his suicide attempt. Although Britain exhibited, in the course of his relations with Talbot, a shameless lack of concern for his victims and no evidence of a repentant heart, the latter, nevertheless, retained a hope that when faced with the gallows he

might still be saved from damnation. This is expressed in a letter to one of Britain's victims, Daniel Wait, written while he was awaiting trial in Bristol:

> I heartily wish something may be done for the good of his soul; but this, in his present state of mind and action, cannot be. If ever there will be an opening for this purpose, it will be when he is condemned, and has lost every hope of rescue.[11]

Alas there is no evidence, in Britain's case, that the prescription was effective. He was executed on 15 May 1772 and, although he left 'a direct and full confession', withdrawing all his allegations relating to the Portsmouth fire, there was seemingly no indication of any softening of the unrepentant spirit that had afflicted him from the time of his arrest.

As for Talbot, he was determined to return to his parochial duties:

> I now gladly withdraw from the public ſtage; and, quickened by the reproofs which I have received, go back to my pariſh; there, to devote myſelf to the more ſpecial and immediate duties of my calling; and, particularly, to the preaching of that *precious Name*, ſo deſervedly *exalted above every Name*, JESUS; whoſe ſervant I am; to whom thankfully I aſcribe whatever, upon this occaſion, has been right in my ſpirit, principle, or conduct; from whom I derive all my ſupports and conſolations here, and in whom I am looking for all my ſalvation hereafter.
>
> WILLIAM TALBOT,
>
> Vicar of St. *Giles's*, *Reading*, BERKS.[12]

He was permitted a further two years of useful ministry until the attendance at the sickbed of a parishioner led to his contracting the same contagious fever, which brought an end to his earthly career on 2 March 1774. His work in Reading was built upon by his successor, William Bromley Cadogan (1751-97) and eventually resulted in the foundation of Reading's proprietary chapel, St Mary's, Castle Street.[13]

In conclusion, how are we to judge Talbot's actions in this matter? There are those today who would take a similar view to that of his 18th century detractors. One local historian, Leslie North, argued that he should have confined himself to seeking to bring Britain to sincere repentance and that in taking the measures he did to bring him to justice 'he went sadly astray - halter in one hand, crucifix in the other.' This, however, is to bring a modern, liberal Christian perspective to the issue. The 1770s seem a remote era to a society that can scarcely conceive that hanging criminals for forgery and theft was ever condoned and when the restoration of the death penalty even for murder seems an unlikely eventuality. Life in that age served, however, only to render the gift of salvation to eternal life even more precious to men. Talbot wanted both to save society from Britain and to save Britain from eternal punishment. At times, he may have accorded greater priority to the first than to the second motive but that appears to have been a question on which he exercised thoughtful, spiritual judgement rather than acting wilfully.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge the considerable assistance rendered to him by Mr North in tracking down the story of William Talbot and Jonathan Britain.

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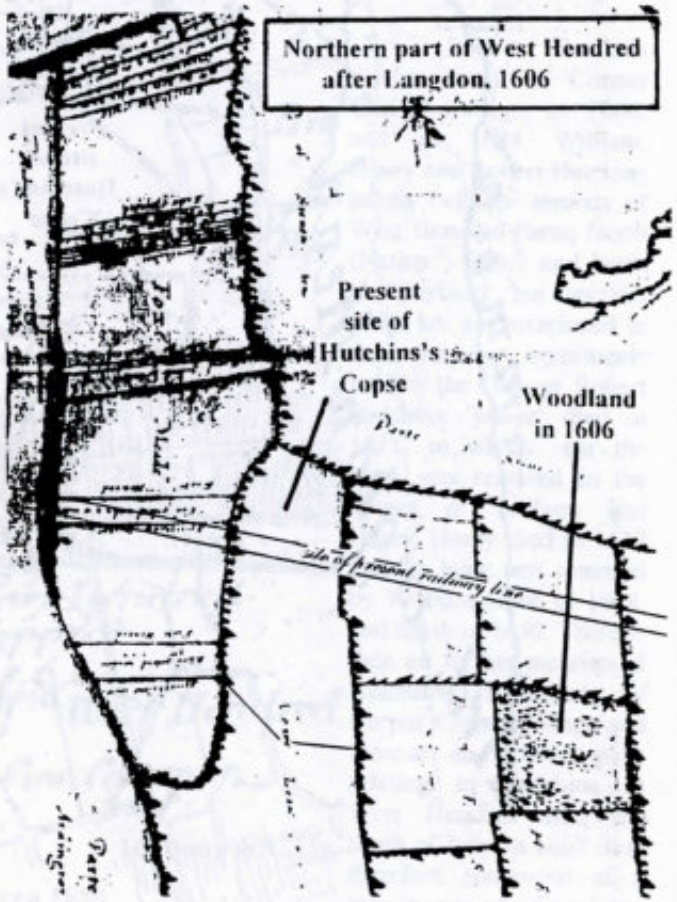
HUTCHINS'S COPSE

C A Spinage

In English Nature's *Survey of Ancient Woodlands of Oxfordshire*, Hutchins's Copse, at the northwest extremity of the Parish of West Hendred (until 1974 in Berkshire), is classified as 'ancient woodland'; that is, woodland in existence in the year 1600.[1] There is, unfortunately, no justification for this claim.

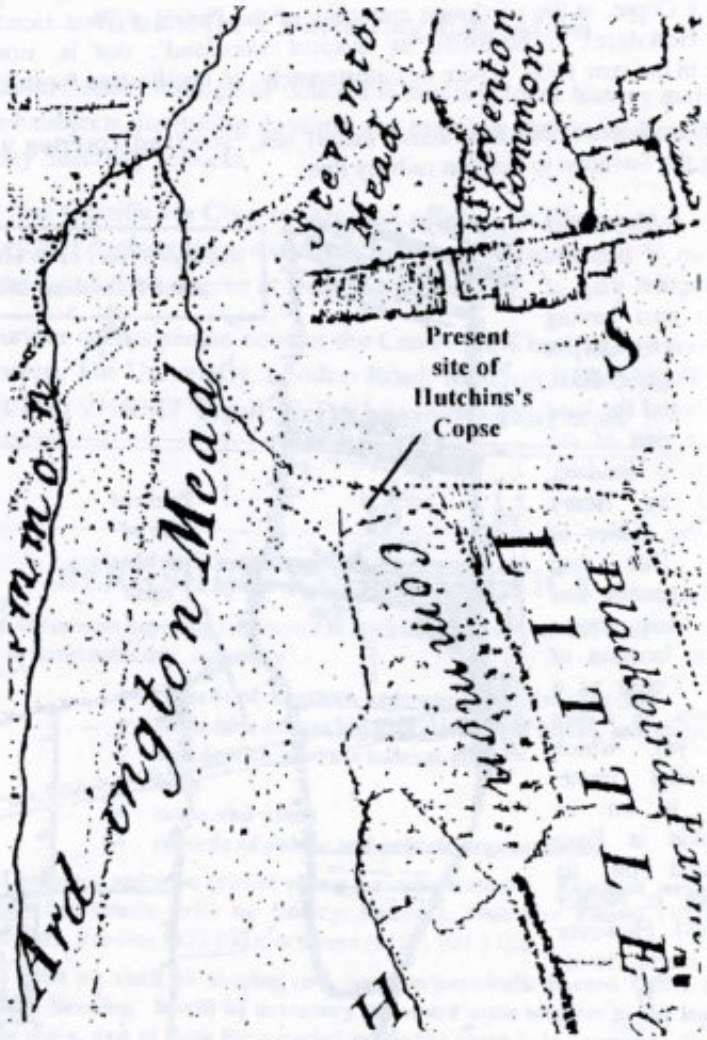
Hutchins's Copse is a mixed, mainly oak, woodland, covering 9 hectares straddling the Swindon to London railway line.

The oldest known map of the area is the Langdon map of 1606, the area having been mapped for Corpus Christi College, Oxford, which acquired the land in 1535 as part of the manor of West Hendred, exchanged by Henry VIII for the manor of Molesey.[2] This map depicts hedgerows and woodland, but shows the present location of Hutchins's Copse as a field known as Cowe Lease (Leys), which was manorial waste. Adjoining it on its western side is Foxe Meade, and on its eastern side is Nether Lease (Leys). However some 300 metres to its southeast is a fragmented copse of about 1.6 hectares called Northe Parke, while the land to the north of it



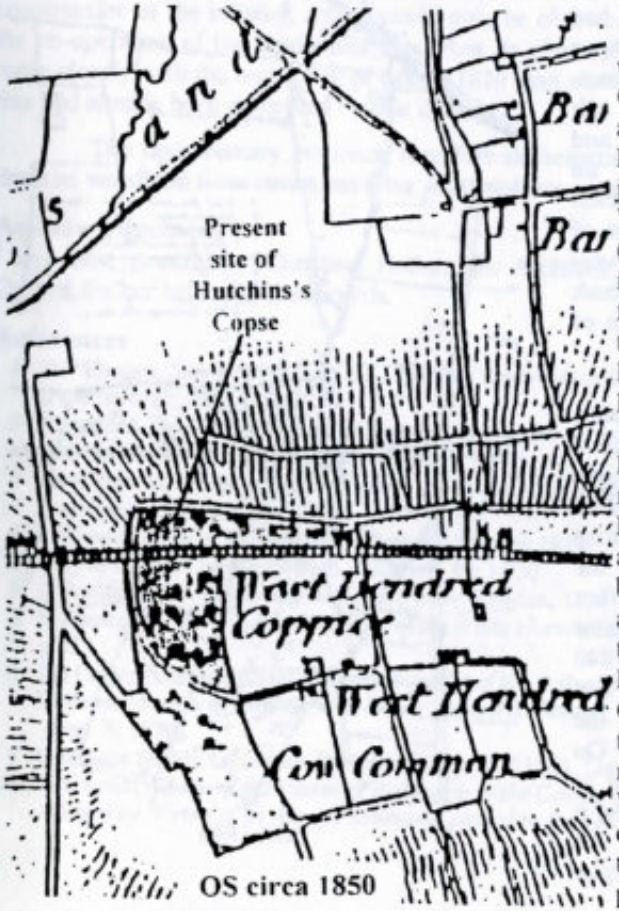
Northern part of West Hendred after Langdon, 1606

was called 'Below the Copse'. There was therefore no woodland on the site of Hutchins's Copse in 1606.



Rocque 1761

The next map of the area appears to be that of John Rocque of 1761. Again no woodland is shown here which simply depicts the area as 'Common' belonging to West Hendred.[3] A Tithe Survey map of 1841, which now shows the railway, opened in 1840, depicts the northern portion divided into thirteen lots, with an indication of scrub in the southeast corner, the divisions probably showing the pre-inclosure field boundaries, and named in the accompanying description as Cow Leys Bushes; the area now comprising Hutchins's Copse being described as pasture in the ownership of Corpus Christi College.[4] The copse to the southeast is apparently no longer in existence, although the area now forms part of a larger field known as Copse Ground and includes the field formerly known as 'Below the Copse'.

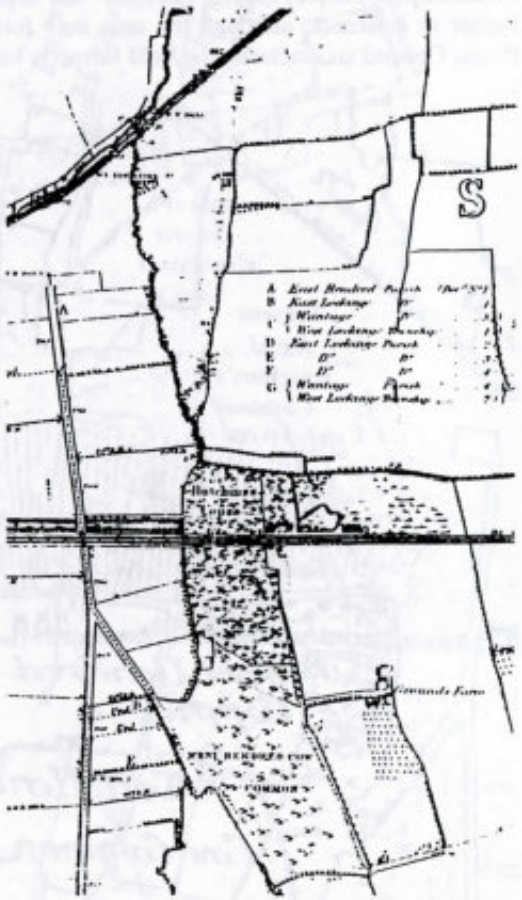


OS circa 1850

Robert Hutchins was a tenant of Corpus Christi College in 1606, and in 1624 William, Henry and Robert Hutchins jointly held the tenancy of West Hendred Farm, North (Nether?) Lease and lands in Clayfield; but specific fields are not mentioned in the tenancy agreements held by the College. Robert Hutchins 'junior' died in 1631, in which year the lease was renewed in the names of William and Henry. Henry died in 1637 and the lease was renewed by William alone in 1638, and again in 1650. There is then no further mention of Hutchins as tenants of Corpus Christi College and there are no Berkshire wills relating to Hutchins in West Hendred after the death of John in 1667. It is therefore somewhat of a puzzle as to why Cow Leys

became known as Hutchins's, as the known Hutchins tenure of lands in West Hendred covered a bare half century. A letter in the Corpus Christi College archives shows that in 1841 the then tenant sought compensation from the Railway Company for damage to trees in the area, which is referred to as a coppice. The block to the east was purchased by the Railway Company from the College for excavation for building the railway embankment, although little soil was in fact taken from this area. The Railway Company's negotiator noted that two small thin trees had been damaged, and several oak saplings cut up, stating that the wood was rather thin on the ground and not very strong.[5] This suggests that oak had been planted there perhaps about twenty years before. Between 1820 and 1850 oak required for tanning and shipbuilding reached an abnormally high price, then collapsed (with the advent of steel-built hulls).[6] Due to over-investment an oak-bark tannery in the nearby town of Wantage failed in 1811.[7]

On the first Ordnance Survey map it is shown as a woodland for the first time with the name West Hendred Coppice, but as this map shows the railway line, the survey revision (the first survey being completed about 1828) postdates the year 1840 when the line was opened, and probably dates from the beginning of the 1850s'.[8] On an 1883 edition it is shown as Hutchins's Copse, the name it has retained ever since.[9] An 1880s undated list of Corpus



OS 1883

Christi College properties mentions the name Hutchins's Copse apparently for the first time. Although a trawl through the College archives might reveal an earlier reference, this would be a very lengthy procedure.

With the placing of the railway line through the centre there was no right of way to the northern portion of the land, access formerly having been by south-north tracks. The 1808 Enclosure Map for the adjoining Parish of Ardington to the west, shows the land on the west of the site in question, and between Ardington Lane, as the 'West Hendred allotments', the adjoining Fox Mead being leased by one Edmund Coventry. West Hendred was not inclosed until 1877. Thus after construction of the railway, access could only be obtained from the west side with the co-operation of the landholder there, but its planting as a woodland coincides more closely with the high price of oak in 1820 than with the lack of access, unless this had already been perceived by that date.

The documentary evidence therefore demonstrates that Hutchins's Copse dates as woodland from sometime after 1820 and was present in 1841.

Acknowledgement

I am most grateful to Christine Butler, the Archivist, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, for her help with the records.

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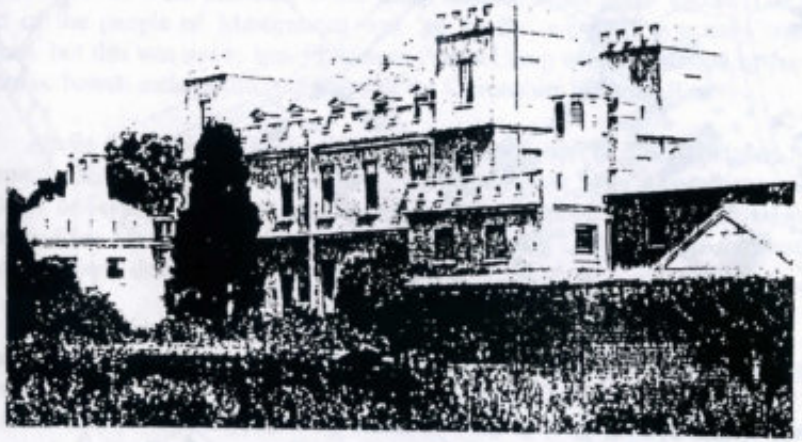
THE GERMAN OFFICERS PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

PHILIBERDS, HOLYPORT 1914-1919

Leslie Ritson-Smith

In 1905 the Army School was founded by Mr E G Beckwith (Headmaster) at Stratford-on-Avon but, on the recommendation of Sir Andrew Clark, in April 1908 the Army School moved to Philiberds, Holyport, near Maidenhead, Berkshire.[1] The School building had been erected on the site of Philiberds Manor which dated back to at least 1208 when it was in the hands of Roger de St Philibert, whose family retained it until 1352. The manor was then acquired by King Edward III who then granted it to St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, which held it until it was seized by Parliament in 1649. It was recovered after the Restoration by the Dean and Canons of Windsor, who retained it until 1860 when it was purchased by Charles Pascoe Grenfell.[2] However, following the outbreak of the First World War, the decision was taken to close the school and use the premises as a prisoner of war camp for selected officers. The first group of German prisoners of war, which included some hobbling, wounded ones on



Philiberds

crutches, arrived at Maidenhead by train at 3.15 pm on Wednesday 25 November 1914, where they were met at the station by a large crowd.[3] Few of the POWs were in uniform, although there was an impressive-looking officer wearing a heavy overcoat of light buff with vivid red facings, possibly from the Prussian Guard, a naval officer

Map compiled from 1899 and 1912 Ordnance Survey maps

in uniform and several men wearing pith helmets. There was no strict military discipline shown by their guards who wore the blue uniform of 'Kitchener's Army' and were armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, nor were there any demonstrations from the crowd at the station; the war was still only a few months old. Following a count of the leisurely strolling prisoners, numbering about 40, the POWs were escorted to the eight waiting taxis belonging to Percy Halfacre of Bray, each of which carried a sign stating 'For Prisoners of War Only', with one guard sitting by each driver. Following the three mile journey south to Holyport, they were met by the Camp Commandant (probably Major the Hon. Eustace Dawney) and the Quartermaster and Adjutant, Captain Armstrong. Two days later, at 4.55 pm on the afternoon of Friday 27 November, another batch of POWs arrived, but this time composed of rank and file soldiers rather than officers. This time there was no crowd waiting to see them although, coincidentally, the station was filled with soldiers of the Durham and Yorkshire Light Infantry who had been billeted in Maidenhead for about two weeks. All the POWs were dressed in a greyish-blue uniform and 'they appeared not in the least down-hearted and chatted gaily to each other.' Their duties were to look after their own officers and do all the inside domestic work, and so they did not have the luxury of taxis but were marched to the camp instead, again under escort. The first instinct of the people of Maidenhead was 'of kindly respected sympathy for the prisoners', but this was not to last, Philiberds Prison Camp was surrounded by barbed wire, notice boards and a guard composed of the Devonshire National Reserve.

About 15 January 1915 several naval survivors of the Falklands War engagement arrived, and these included Captain Muhlbauer, who was to become the camp dean, and who was the first prisoner of war to be captured by the English, having been taken from his steamship which had been interned at Gibraltar only ten minutes after war had been declared.

By 20 January, Philiberds held just over 100 selected officers from the German Army and Navy and about 50 ordinary ranks as orderlies.[4] They exercised daily, with football being their main preoccupation, in the large field adjoining the house at the side of the Holyport-Bray Road, and had to retire at sunset. There were also a number of temporary wooden buildings erected outside the barbed wire, and these included offices such as the orderly room, guard room and a National Reservists' barracks, whilst a house off the main drive was used as the officers' home. There was only one entrance through the barbed wire at the end of the main drive, composed of a double gate guarded by a sentry. All local tradesmen entering the camp had to read a notice about penalties for the infringement of rules, and were also subjected to a visit to the examination room. Newspapers were strictly forbidden. Outside was a cordon of sentries, each guard having his own sentry-box and being responsible for a distance of

30 yards, whilst at night a ring of arc-lamps lit up the barricades. To an extent the POWs were their own masters inside the compound, living a life of comparative luxury and enjoying the facilities of a large and well-appointed kitchen, proper dormitories and an ante-room complete with piano. There was also a large swimming bath supplied with hot water and a toilet room kept by an interned German barber, the only civilian on the premises. On 15 January 1915, an Entertainment Evening for the guards was held in Holyport, and these included Captain Campbell, late of the 60th Rifles, Major Appleton, Lieutenant May, Sergeant-Major Smith, Colour-Sergeant Pinlott and Private Wood. On Saturday 16 January, there was a small fire in a dormitory and so on the following Monday, there was a fire drill which was attended by the appliance from the Maidenhead Fire Brigade.

In the *Maidenhead Advertiser* for 27 January 1915, a short article was printed about a Mr M T E Steen of the Norwegian colony in Paris, who had visited Philiberds. He had been struck by the size and comfort of the place, and described the sitting room as having a large Christmas Tree in it, whilst in the dining room, there was an Imperial German Army flag. On the same day, the Kaiser's birthday was celebrated at Philiberds by the 150 POWs at their own expense, with the table being covered with luxuries such as salmon, oysters, wild duck and joints, whilst there was an ample supply of alcohol. However, this luxury was not appreciated by many of the locals, apart from the local tradesmen.

As the weeks went by, this life of ease did not suit all of the POWs. In the first week of April 1915, at least one of the guards had a feeling that something was not quite right with the camp security.[5] Some of the POWs had been engineers, and they had been planning a tunnel, for which they had also designed and made their own tools. The work was slow and difficult with the tunnel starting behind a high wall shielding the POWs urinals; the tunnellers soon came across some solid concrete foundations which they had to break out without the aid of pickaxes or shovels. They had pads for their knees and elbows, and the tunnel was two feet high and two feet wide with the walls and roof being carefully boarded, with the excavated soil being thrown out and used for the new flower gardens being developed by a group of interested 'gardeners'. With the knowledge of the recently appointed Commandant Major Glossop of the 5th Dragoons, taking over from Major Dawney who had retired due to ill health, the Adjutant, Captain Armstrong, foiled the attempt in what was described as a ruse. He decided to have some new drainage pipes laid, and during this operation a crowbar hit the wooden roof of the tunnel, which by now was about seven metres long. The report of this escape attempt filtered through to the higher authorities, and not surprisingly, on 20 April 1915, the Under Secretary of State was asked in the House of Commons if the prisoners at Holyport had constructed a tunnel, and if so,

had the officer in charge been reprimanded for lack of vigilance and steps been taken to ensure closer scrutiny of the prisoners' movements.[6] No direct answer to this was given at the time!

On the evening of Sunday 25 July 1915, the Chaplain at the Jesus Hospital in Bray complained that, earlier that day, as he cycled past the camp, he had seen the POWs playing football in their white attire, completely disregarding the Sabbath, but it would seem that his protests were generally disregarded by all.[7] By 22 September, the numbers of POWs had been reduced to about 80, and one particularly troublesome officer had been transferred to Donnington Hall, from where he subsequently escaped, and was believed to have returned to Germany. By now the Holyport camp was believed to be the only one which had no actual escapees.[8]

After a year of the camp's existence, over in the United States on Sunday 19 December 1915 an article appeared in *The New York Herald* about the Philiberds camp.[9] Perhaps one of the most telling comments by the writer was his first sentence which reads: 'The only difference between us and the prisoners here is that we have the keys.' By now the Commandant was Colonel Sir John Gladstone and the number of prisoners, apart from some 47 orderlies, had risen to 125, some of whom were well known in America for one reason or another, and the kitchen was now presided over by the chef of a once-famous German liner. Again when the reporter visited the camp the POWs were playing football, and in his opinion, despite their being 'splendidly-built young fellows ..... they wouldn't stand a chance against West Point or Annapolis'. Apparently, the majority of the POWs were from Saxony with some from Prussia and Bavaria. It would seem that soldiers and sailors did not mix socially, although this state of affairs did not include Second Captain Bochammer, senior officer of the camp, who was one of some 180 survivors of the armoured cruiser *Gneisenau* which went down in the Falkland Islands engagement on 8 December 1914. Those who were described as the most affable seemed to have lived in America prior to the War, and these included Ober-Leutnant Victor von Borosini Hohenstatt, who with his American wife had been living in Saglinaw Michigan, and teaching at Hull House in Chicago. He had been in Germany when the war broke out and as a retired officer had offered to rejoin; although rejected initially on medical grounds. He eventually joined the 25th Saxon Rifles and was captured at Ypres only ten days after reaching the Front. Others were Dr Arnold Kollschätter, an astronomer and formerly attached to the Mount Wilson Observatory California, Dr Karl Friedenberg, an engineer of Washington DC and a specialist on the Panama Canal, Dr George Lutz an authority on Spanish literature and Dr Kurt von Basser, a captain of cavalry but formerly of Los Angeles. Finally, there was another doctor in the camp, Dr Martin Luther, son of Pastor Martin Luther, a descendant of the sixteenth century reformer.

Luther appeared to be a somewhat solemn person, and remarked to the reporter that he was not particularly happy about English food compared with that of Germany. A Bavarian officer hearing this was quoted as saying 'English food is better than the Diet with which your ancestor was associated', referring, of course, to the Diet of Worms. The prisoners were paid by the British Government according to rank, and they clubbed together to buy their own food, which included ham, London-made pumpernickel, German sausages from Holland and Scottish lager from Glasgow, whilst the dining room was reported to be full of jam, marmalade, sweetmeats and sauces. About the lager, the reporter commented that 'forcing them to drink the latter is the nearest thing to cruelty inflicted on the prisoners.' They were visited on alternate Sundays by a Lutheran pastor and a Catholic priest. The sermons were short and they enjoyed singing 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' and 'This is the day the Lord has made'. It was also remarked that the programme of outdoor exercise had resulted in only one slight case of illness on the camp, whilst despite the original ban on newspapers, the POWs were now receiving not just English, but French, Russian and Italian newspapers as well.

Despite this life of comparative luxury, thoughts of the Fatherland were not far away for the prisoners and in the first week of February 1916, two German officers were tried by a Military Court at Philiberds for attempting to escape.[10] The gentlemen in question were Leutnant Otto Thelen of the Imperial German Military Air Service and Leutnant Hans Keilback of the German Navy. Both had previously escaped from Donnington Hall in September 1915 and, having been recaptured near Chatham, had been sent to Holyport. They were charged with escaping and damaging the King's property but, despite being indicted on being involved in digging a tunnel, their identity as tunnellers could not be confirmed and they were found not guilty on this count, although they did plead guilty to trying to escape. They were consequently sentenced to serve nine months at the Military Detention Centre at Chelmsford, and left Holyport on 7 February.

A month later, on the evening of 9 March 1916, the residents of Holyport became alarmed to hear many whistles being blown in the camp following yet another escape attempt, this time by one prisoner.[11] At 8.15 pm he had been caught tunnelling under No. 25 Bedroom by Captain Armstrong, the ever-suspicious adjutant, and Provost-Sergeant. Wren, and was sentenced to be tried by a Military Court on 21 March 1916. At this court the defendant, Leutnant Freiherr von Grote of the German Navy, was assisted by his interpreter Lieutenant Lomax in answering the charges laid by the prosecuting officer, Lieutenant A E Nias, and to which he pleaded guilty.[12] Punishment was yet again a nine-month term in the Military Detention Centre at Chelmsford, to which establishment he departed on 28 March.

In mid-April a new Commandant, Colonel J R Harvey DSO of the 4th Norfolk's, arrived to take over, but following the three abortive escape attempts, little was locally reported about the camp for six months. However, on Wednesday 13 September 1916, the Foreign Office issued a White Paper on reports made by some U S Embassy officials in London on the twenty-three British internment camps, and it was to be noted that no POW complaints had apparently been made.[13] Colonel J R Harvey, having allowed the POWs to take walks through the countryside under limited parole, had created a precedent for the other camps. It was this allowance which had resulted in the beer house in Holyport Street, known locally as 'The Eagle', being renamed 'The Belgian Arms', since the POWs, still under Captain Pochammer, had a habit of saluting the premises every time they passed it! A week later, several more batches of prisoners arrived. On Monday 25 September 1916 there was a large public presence at the station owing to rumours, albeit inaccurate, that the survivors of a Zeppelin, brought down in East Anglia the previous evening, were amongst those 20 new POWs to arrive. The following day several more prisoners arrived, two or three being noted as having the Red Cross on their uniforms.[14]

Before the first world war the Pub was called the Eagle and the sign depicted a Prussian Eagle. During the war there was a Prisoner of War camp nearby and on their daily exercises the German soldiers would stop and salute the eagle. Not unnaturally the local people were not amused and the name was changed to that of the area where the fiercest fighting was then taking place, namely Belgium.

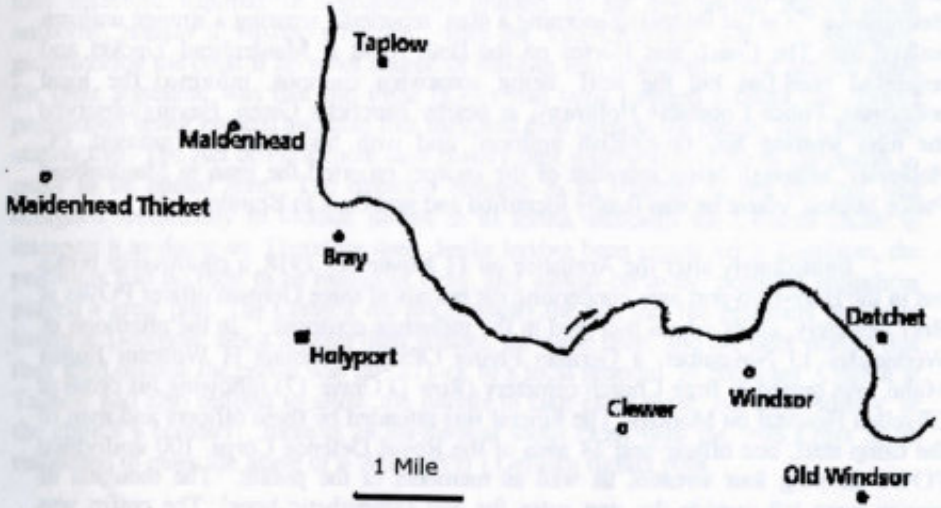
Extract from a plaque in The Belgian Arms

Things had been rather quiet regarding escape attempts during the summer and autumn of 1916, but on Thursday 7 December 1916 an escape was made by two officers, 27 year old Leutnant Anton Cmentek of the 15th Reserve Infantry Regiment and the hardened escapee 24 year old Leutnant Otto Thelen who had only just returned to Holyport from his detention at Chelmsford.[15] They were recaptured at midnight some eight miles away to the east at Old Windsor by Police Constable

Crook, who had seen two men walking along the road from Datchet wearing brown suits, brown boots and caps, one with a collar and tie and the other wearing a scarf. One man said that he was Swiss, whilst the other stated that he was from Kent, and that having just met in Windsor, they were on their way to Richmond, but PC Crook was not entirely satisfied by their German accents. On being asked their names, one gave his name as Nelson but to no avail, since they were both escorted to Clewer Police Station where they were questioned by Superintendent Jannaway. Here they confessed to being escapees, with Thelen admitting that this was, in fact, his third attempt. On turning out their pockets, they were found to have a map of London, a compass, five shillings in money, one Italian document and some chocolate. They were taken back to Holyport in a car but would not give details of how they had managed to escape.

On the following Saturday an inquiry was held into the escape, and it transpired that the waste paper on the camp was collected and tied into bundles, these then being collected by two orderlies with wheelbarrows, accompanied by a guard. The paper was locked into the stores. The two prisoners had been bound into two such bundles, along with a blanket and breathing straws hollowed out of elderwood, and having been left in the stores, they broke the lock and made their escape. At this point the inquiry was adjourned.

At the end of March 1917, reports were heard locally that the German POWs were to be transferred gradually to other camps, and that in the future, the grounds were to be used as 'an important centre for flying men', although this did not actually take place during the war.[16] Holyport remained a POW camp, and in late August 1917 another escape attempt was made, this time with slightly more success.[17] Some time previously, Captain Armstrong, the adjutant, had foiled another escape attempt in which a German officer had removed the floorboards from a hut, another prisoner covered the noise of digging by playing the mouth organ. Armstrong hid nearby and discovered what was going on. This time, however, he did not foil the escapees, for during the evening of Saturday 25 August, two German aviators escaped, having cut through eighteen strands of barbed wire over a period of several days, and were assumed to have got away, despite rumours that they had been captured a few miles away, lurking in an old dugout on Maidenhead Thicket. The prisoners, both of whom spoke little English, were Leutnant Josef Flink aged 23, described as being 6ft 1in tall with a fresh complexion, dark brown hair, dark grey eyes and a gun wound to his left hand and Leutnant Oroum Alexander von Scholtz aged 22, with a sallow complexion and dark brown hair. It transpired that they had intended to make their way to Hendon aerodrome, steal an aircraft and fly back over the Channel. Their fate was not reported locally.



They were followed in their escape on the morning of 25 September 1917 by Leutnant Franz Bruno Henvard, described as being of light complexion with brown hair, slight build, sporting two gunshot wounds and wearing his dress uniform, who made his getaway on a bicycle.[18] On the night of Sunday 11 November 1917, two more German officers escaped from Holyport, but rather than cutting the barbed wire, they scaled it.[19] Leutnant Gerhard von Nassau and Leutnant Helmuth Burkhardt remained free for a week until they were recaptured in a Great Western Railway train at Bath station on Saturday 17 November, having in their possession tickets from Reading to Bristol.[20]

Empire Day was celebrated at the Holyport camp by the staff and guards at the end of May 1918. The inspection was carried out by the Commandant Colonel Colvin CB DSO, whose camp staff included Captain Church (assistant commander), Captain Frederick William Hancock (adjutant), Captain Devlin (medical officer) and Lieutenants Harrison and Moss (interpreters). Representing the guards, who were from the 253rd Company of the Royal Defence Corps and who had been stationed there for six months, were their commanding officer Major Barnett, Captain Legge and Lieutenants Hall, Capon, Fleetwood, May and Hartley. Other ranks involved in the celebrations were Sergeant-Major Beresford, Lance Corporal Wing, and Privates Saunders and Fletcher.[21]

Holyport nearly gained another prisoner on 3 September 1918, when Arthur Kirst of the German Navy escaped from the prisoner of war camp at Bramley near Basingstoke.[22] On the following morning a man, reportedly wearing a strange uniform walked into The Coach and Horses on the Bath Road at Maidenhead Thicket and requested breakfast but the staff, being somewhat cautious, informed the local policeman, Police Constable Holloway, at nearby Burchetts Green. Having observed the man wearing his 'un-English uniform' and with his suspicions aroused, PC Holloway, although being unaware of the escape, escorted the man to Maidenhead Police Station, where he was finally identified and sent back to Bramley.

Immediately after the Armistice on 11 November 1918, a controversy broke out in the Bray-Holyport area concerning the burials of three German officer POWs at Bray cemetery, all of whom had died in the influenza epidemic.[23] In the afternoon of Wednesday 13 November, a German Flying Officer, Leutnant H Wilhelm Eugen Mahn, was buried in Bray Church cemetery (Row D Grave 17) following his death at Cliveden Hospital on Monday. The funeral was attended by three officers and men of the camp staff, one officer and 24 men of the Royal Defence Corps, 100 uniformed POWs carrying four wreaths, as well as members of the public. 'The thoughts of enmity were left outside the iron gates for one sympathetic hour'. The coffin was placed on a gun-carriage drawn by four black army horses and was covered by a German flag. The service itself was conducted by the Reverend W Riddelsdell whilst the large German choir sang two farewell dirges. Following the final hymn 'Harre, meine Seele', the wreathes were placed on the coffin, arms were presented, the 'Last Post' played and three volleys fired over the grave. The undertakers were Messrs Partlo. This ceremony was repeated the following day, 14 November, for the funerals of Leutnant Stanielaus (sic) Mannhausen, a Catholic, and an un-named corporal (probably Uffz Stanislaus (sic) Matuszak, Row D Grave 19), who had also died at Cliveden Hospital, with the service being conducted by the Reverend Father Curtin, the Catholic chaplain to the camp. But despite the 'sympathetic hour', some local councillors and residents were furious about the interments.

During Christmas 1918 those members of the Royal Defence Corps not on leave from Philiberds enjoyed a dinner of roast beef, pork, and plum pudding, all to the accompaniment of the band of the 73rd Company of the Royal Defence Corps under Bandmaster Old.[24] The organisation of the event was in the hands of Sergeant Major Beresford, and the dinner was also attended by Colonel Colvin and his Assistant Commandant Major Loraine, but Major Barnett, the commander of the guards and the popular Adjutant Captain Hancock were absent. However, the Bray Parish Council meeting held on 2 January 1919 headed by Councillor C W Cox had not been in so seasonal a mood, for they had decided to remove the three Germans buried at Bray

Church. However, as they were not legally entitled to carry out what they had decided, they therefore required an authorisation granted by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority, namely a 'Bishop's Faculty', with the Vice-Chairman, Mr T A Saunders, guaranteeing the costs if no other source of funding was available.[25] The official basis for their argument was that the three POWs had been interred without the correct permission being granted and also that they had died outside the parish, the Chairman stating that 'The Act of Parliament says plainly they must live and die in the parish in order to be buried here.' The question remains as to whether or not the Act was designed specifically to include illness in its terms, although the Council chose to interpret it as doing so. Therefore their deaths having been registered at Burnham, the prisoners had no right to be buried in Bray. But almost certainly, personal prejudices played a great part. The Council did not consider the fact that the prisoners had been living at Holyport, albeit against their wishes, for some time, and the only reason that they died outside the parish was due to lack of a local hospital. St Nicholas' Church at Taplow had also refused to allow the burials to take place there, but interestingly, in the church's cemetery, there is an un-marked metal cross with the Iron Cross on it, rumoured to mark the grave of a World War I German fighter pilot.

On 22 January 1919, the camp commandant Colonel Colvin sent the following application to the Council: 'In accordance with Army Council Instructions the graves of deceased prisoners of war are marked with a plain wooden cross of specified pattern, bearing the name, rank, regiment and date of death. Will you please forward a permit for the erection of the above over the graves of three prisoners of war interred in Bray cemetery?' Following advice, the reply to this was 'Dear Sir, Your letter was considered by my Council, and they instruct me to say that in view of the circumstances attending these interments - which they consider ought never to have been allowed to take place in their cemetery - they object to give their consent to the proposed memorials, and will not do so except under compulsion.' Upon being questioned, the Clerk also stated that the cemetery fees had been paid for the two officers, but as the other 'fee' had been for a corporal, this had to go through another fund.[26]

Continuing their fight, the Council then decided to apply to the Bishop of Oxford, the Right Reverend Charles Gore, for a Faculty for the removal of the bodies, and for several weeks the controversy raged on, with letters both for and against appearing in the local newspaper, but at the end of January, they heard that the Bishop had refused his permission. The Council's only option now was to try and obtain permission from the Home Secretary, but at a Bray Council Meeting held in early March 1919 the Clerk, Mr A J Blake, stated that he had recently received another letter from the Bishop of Oxford, who, having consulted his Chancellor, now stated that the

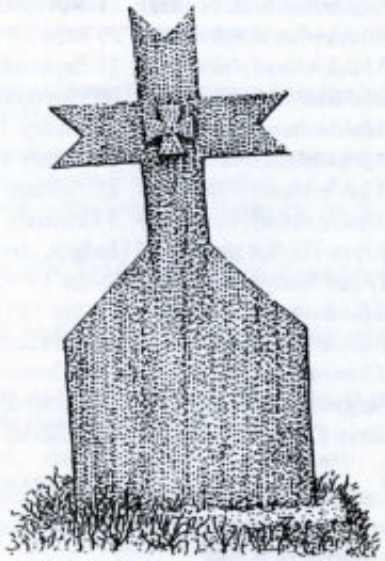
Council would require a Faculty from the Bishop's Court for the removal of the three bodies, and that the Council would have to therefore apply to the Diocesan Registrar.[27] This application would then be heard in open court and would be likely to cost the Council between £100 and £200, whereupon the Chairman, Councillor C W Cox stated that 'You would be well-advised to leave it alone' and the Vice-Chairman, Mr Saunders, stated that he had already decided to do so, despite his earlier offer of funding. One wonders from the earlier actions and words of both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and also this abrupt termination of their policy of removal, just how much of this opposition by the Council leaders was in fact due to their own personal prejudices, rather than from their proper duties as councillors. However, they still tried to reject another application by the camp commandant for memorials to be erected by referring the case once more to the Cemetery Committee.

Only two further references were made in the *Maidenhead Advertiser* at the time concerning the camp, the first being on 6 August 1919, when at 2.00 pm a hayrick caught fire and the new £1000 Maidenhead motor fire-engine, named the *Sir Roger* after Sir Roger Palmer of Glen Island, was called out on its first duty, accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Johns, the Chief Officer, 3rd Officer Emberley, Engineer Mackie and Firemen Partlo, Morris, Hooper, Randall, Oakley, Hunt and Eve. It 'passed through the town with gongs ringing in quite the London professional style', but by the time it arrived, the fire was already under control and their moment of glory was gone! Finally, on 15 October 1919, the last ever reference to the camp was, in fact, an advertisement placed in the newspaper by the Ministry of Munitions who were advertising for sale by tender 736 fir poles, being from 9 to 15 feet in length, by Order of the Disposal Board (Huts and Building Materials Section). Philiberds Prisoner of War camp would appear to have ceased operations during the second half of 1919, and indeed, the entire building was demolished.[28]

The controversy in the press over the German burials appeared to die down. On 2 May 1939 the remains of the late Leutnant Eugen Wilhelm Mahn were exhumed, following many months of negotiations between his relatives in Germany, the Home Office and the Imperial War Graves Commission.[29] Several months previously, members of Bray Parish Council had raised no objection at a quarterly meeting, when Mahn's sister had written to them and asked their permission for an exhumation, the licence being finally granted on 1 May. Mahn's sister accompanied the motor hearse from Germany to Bray, where the sole witnesses to the ceremony apart from the sister, were the German undertaker, the grave digger and the Clerk to Bray Parish Council, Mr A J Blake. The remains were then taken back to Düsseldorf for re-interment.

Twenty-four years later, it was reported in the local press that on Monday 8 February 1963, two deceased German POWs from Bray were exhumed by grave diggers from the German War Graves Commission, with re-interment to take place at the German war cemetery at Cannock Chase.[30] Unfortunately the names of the two Germans were not given in the newspaper, and here a problem arises, for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records of the re-interment give the following information: the two Germans were Unteroffizier Stanilaus (sic) Matuszak interred in Grave 16.136 and Lt (?) Gustav Wehrmann late of the 3/10 Jäger Bn interred in Grave 16.137.[31] However, there is no mention of Leutnant Stanielaus (sic) Mannhausen, although Uffz Matuszak must be the un-named corporal mentioned in the funeral of 14 November 1918. Gustav Wehrmann's name was not mentioned in November 1918, so it is possible that a fourth funeral took place at the same time, but was not reported in the press.

It may be significant that according to Commonwealth War Graves Commission records, Leutnant Mahn, Uffz Matuszak and G Wehrmann were originally buried at Bray in graves D17, D19 and D20 respectively and that Wehrmann's funeral took place on 18 November 1918, four days after the last reported funeral ceremony. This means that there may be a missing name for the funeral held on 14 November 1918 and a possible missing grave number, D18; the likely candidate would therefore appear to be Leutnant Mannhausen, whose funeral was mentioned quite specifically in the *Maidenhead Advertiser* owing to the fact that he was a Roman Catholic. Although press reports can not always be relied upon, in total three German officers and one corporal were mentioned in November 1918 and so further research is currently being undertaken in order establish whether there is a missing fourth grave or whether it is a case of mistaken identity. Finally, the identification of the German grave at St. Nicholas' Church, Taplow is also to be investigated.



The un-named grave at Taplow

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BERKSHIRE OLD AND NEW

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