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AN 18TH CENTURY LITTLE GADDESSEN FARMER

## WILLIAM ELLIS and his SURE GUIDE

"In Hertfordshire we say a lousy plowman and a lame shepherd are the best of their sort, because by the plowman's scrubbing he riggles the plow, and thereby makes it go the easier after the horse; a lame shepherd, because he cannot follow the sheep so fast as to surfeit them and breed the scab."

Those amusing lines were written over 200 years ago by a Little Gaddesden farmer named William Ellis. In his day he was a popular writer on agricultural topics—indeed, his "Modern Husbandman" is still quoted occasionally—but new methods and new discoveries have long since rendered most of his advice obsolete.

### GENTLEMEN—AND OTHERS

But Ellis (who, it seems, was not a particularly good farmer himself) certainly knew how to write entertainingly. I discovered this for myself when reading his "Shepherd's Sure Guide," published in 1749, in which he advised farmers on the profitable management of sheep. Had he kept strictly to the subject I would probably not have read beyond the first page, but Ellis never missed the chance of quoting examples or relating incidents to drive home an argument. Thus, in the midst of his curious "receipts," he left behind some rather mixed impressions of village life in West Hertfordshire two centuries ago.

Ellis had a keen eye to business, too. He was not above inserting an advertisement in his book giving "notice to gentlemen and others" that he was prepared to supply them with ploughs, seeds, etc. He was "ready to wait on any gentleman in any part of England or Wales that thinks fit to consult his

advice, according to the ancient or the newest methods of husbandry; and answer all letters, provided postage is paid to his house, that stands at 30 miles distance from London."

### SUNDAY GAMES

Ellis did not have a high opinion of his fellow villagers—and in all probability the villagers did not have a high opinion of Ellis when they read his comments. "I am sorry," he wrote, "I have reason to say that by an ill custom of some parts of our county of Hertfordshire, we can hardly keep our servants at home on a Sabbath-Day because of the bad example of others, who go shooting of birds, or play at bandy-wicket, pitch and chuck, Hooper's-hide, pat-ball, etc.; besides which, our poor labouring people generally frequent alehouses on the Sabbath-Day, in neglect of going to church... There is not a day in the week which God is so much offended on, as on Sundays and Saints' Days, by drunkenness, blasphemy, impiety, and other wickedness; by men's passing the day in taverns, in alehouses, and at other places of debauchery; by young people's playing, gaming, dancing, walking abroad and by sinful conversations."

Ellis quoted an example of "premeditated malice" from his own village of Little Gaddesden. A day labourer, having a grievance against one of the farmers, "cut the sinews of a valuable horse's thigh in the night time, while he was in a distant field of grass, and utterly spoiled him."

### THE WISE DOG

But here's a nicer story. In a chapter devoted to sheep dogs, Ellis referred to their sagacity and intelligence, and recalled that "Thomas Edmunds, shepherd to Scroop, Duke of Bridgewater, had a fallow-coloured dog of the smaller sort, that he brought up in so clever a manner as to give his master very little trouble in looking after a flock of three hundred sheep. This dog, as the sheep grazed on the large Common of Berkhamstead, would attend them so close with his master, that he would keep them from straying too far about; and when they were to be driven to the fold, he would fetch the stragglers together from near a mile distance, and then drive them fast or leisurely as commanded... The dog would drive them into the fold; where, if a sheep run round it and refused to enter, he would certainly take it by the ear, and oblige it to go in."

### THE FARMER'S CURSE

Like most of his contemporaries, Ellis was highly superstitious, and believed in witchcraft. He cited a farmer living at Leyburne, near Leighton Buzzard, who was "notoriously remark-

able for the frequent oaths and curses that he usually belched out in his common discourse... He one night in winter left his sheep to graze near Leyburne Brook, which is a continual running water, through a very low situation, and when he left them here, he said, here they shall be, let them be cursed and be damned and they will... Now what followed was this, that in the night time such a heavy rain fell, as floated the brook, and much land about it, by the current of which twenty of his fifty sheep were carried away and drowned." After this calamity the "wicked farmer" grew poorer and poorer, and was eventually reduced to the status of a day labourer.

### GLEANING

I won't quote Ellis on "The Behaviour, Nature and Cure of a Mad Dog." Experiments with red hot poker are not nice to read about. So let us return to Little Gaddesden and give those 18th century villagers another slating. This time the gleaners are in the pillory. Ellis maintained that they abused their privileges by entering wheat-fields before the shocks were carried home—not an unusual example of the poor helping themselves.

"I cannot but think it is a double hardship," said Ellis, "to pay three shillings in the pound to a poor rate, as we at Gaddesden did in the year 1747 (and in some parishes they pay four), and be robbed by some of these poor we otherwise help to maintain. Notwithstanding, our poor fare abundantly better than thousands of others, by the several donations left by charitable persons, to relieve and assist them for ever; besides what they enjoy by the weekly benevolence of the most noble Lord of our Manor, who, by his generous gift of money now and then, the victuals he weekly distributes amongst them, the rotten and windfall wood he allows them, at all times, to get out of one of the best-wooded parks in the Kingdom, and his employing considerable numbers of our day-labourers, may enable them to live well without stealing through necessity. A most evident proof of which was obvious in the great frosty year of 1740, when, I dare say, our poor hardly knew what want was, by these sort of benevolences, that were extended to them by the late Scroop, Duke of Bridgewater, while thousands, in some other parts, were starved to death."

Yes, despite his old-fashioned style, William Ellis is always interesting. Books on a wide range of agricultural subjects appeared under his name: besides "The Shepherd's Sure Guide" he published a treatise for brewers, victuallers and maltsters entitled "Good Malt Liqueurs," and a book called "The Practical Farmer, or Hertfordshire Husbandman." He died in 1758, having achieved national fame as a writer and the local honour of serving as highway surveyor.

\*BEORCHAM.\*

## Medicine and Food

### Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted is as follows:—

### CHEMISTS' ROTA

The week-day evening (6-7 p.m.) and Sunday morning (11.30 a.m.—12.30 p.m.) service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for the current month:—

November 1—7: Boots.  
November 8—14: Figg.  
November 15—21: Dickman.  
November 22—28: Taylors.  
November 29—December 5: Boots.

### FOOD OFFICE

The Food Office, in the Town Hall, is open on four week-days as follows:—

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 to 5 p.m.

Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

All Welfare Foods are also obtainable from Gossoms End Stores.

### LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

The Berkhamsted Branch of the County Library is open in Prince Edward Street on the following days and times:—

Monday and Friday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.; 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 5 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

Thursday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Saturday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

## Names Wanted

FOR SUNNYSIDE  
BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Visitors to Sunnyside Church will have noticed that the East End of the South Aisle has been partly furnished as a Lady Chapel. This is to be a memorial to members of the Sunnyside Branch of the Mothers' Union who have died since its foundation in 1897, many of whom helped to build our beautiful little church.

A Book of Remembrance is being compiled, and we should like to have the names, including full Christian Names, and the date of death, of any who should be included, as unfortunately we have no records more than 14 years old. About £60 is still needed to complete the work according to the design which has been approved by the Diocesan Authorities, and this we want to do by the end of the year. If, therefore, there are any friends who would like to help us we shall be most grateful.

Either donations or information should be sent to the present Enrolling Member, Mrs. Ruston, at 19 Hall Park, Telephone No. 471.

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