

Berkhamsted in 1607

# 'ONE REDD ROSE' FOR THE CASTLE

By 'BEORCHAM'

ANYONE who imagines that questionnaires are a modern infliction should spare a kind thought for the jurors of Berkhamsted and Northchurch who, in 1607, gave 'veredict and aunsweres' to a long string of questions about the Honour and Manor of Berkhamsted.

One of James I's sergeants-at-law, Sir John Dodderidge, with several commissioners, held a Court of Survey, almost certainly in the Court House. Thirty-two 'articles of enquiry' ranged from manorial boundaries, tenancies, courts, customs, fairs and markets to common rights and fishing rights.

## HUNDREDS OF ENTRIES

Some of the jurors were rich landowners and farmers, some were humble tradesmen. Three could not write their names: one made his mark with X, another with OO, and a third with M. But every man had great local knowledge

and possessed a memory that was sharpened by the lack of reference books and papers.

Capable clerks recorded the 'veredicts' on parchment rolls. To historians the most valuable (and by far the largest) section of Dodderidge's Survey is a list of 'landes and tenementes' in Berkhamsted and Northchurch. There are about 420 entries, each giving the name of the freeholder or copyholder, a description of the property, its situation, and the quit rent paid to the lord of the manor.

This information was considered so important at the time of the law-suit which followed the frustrated enclosure of Berkhamsted Common in 1866 that the whole of Dodderidge's Survey of 1607 was printed in book form, together with Norden's Survey of 1616. With an index, the two surveys run to over 200 pages. A very limited edition was printed for private circulation; I am the

proud possessor of one of the few copies still in existence.

The first task of the jurors was to 'sett downe' the boundary of the manor, which comprised the parishes of Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

## LYONS CORNER

Imagine trying to describe the boundary of the Berkhamsted urban district without a map; it would be a very wordy exercise. How much more difficult was the task in 1607, when there were so few houses and landmarks. Yet an admirable description of the boundary was produced, starting and ending at Lyons Corner, near the point where the present road from Northchurch to Ringshall leaves the Common for Ashridge Park. In a later issue it may be possible to give the description in full, accompanied by a map to show the sites of Pytte Meade Corner, Picked Close Corner, Hitchin Gate, Nun Corner, and other long-forgotten places. The description of 1607 ends with the words: 'This wee take to bee the true perambulation of the utmost Circuite Buttes Bounds and Lymittes of this Manor'.

Not surprisingly, the jurors could 'say nothing directlie of our own knowledges' when asked for information about the many Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire manors in the Honour of Berkhamsted. (An Honour is a collection of manors). Some of the 'townshippes, villages and hamlettes' were as far away as 'Daventree'. There is poetry in such names as Charleton juxta Newbottle, Hanging Houghton, Brundesthorne,

Weydon in the Vale, Dingley, Linford Magna, Woughton sup le Greene, and Furstoo cum Cosgrove. Altogether there were some 55 manors in the Honour of Berkhamsted.

#### **NORTHCHURCH PEST HOUSE**

A clear answer was given to an enquiry whether the jurors knew of any freeholder who had committed a felony or treason: 'There hath been none committed within our memory'. But some encroachments on commons and greens were recalled, and mention was made of a cottage erected by the churchwardens and overseers of Northchurch on the Shootersway roadside waste. The cottage was provided to lodge and succour 'poore and impotente persons of Northchurch in the tyme of common sickness, or other great necessities'. One day, perhaps, someone will locate the foundations of this pest house, which stood between the top of Bell Lane and Durrants Lane, on the south side of Shootersway.

As already mentioned, the Survey consists largely of particulars of lands and houses. Here is a typical entry, taken from the list of freeholders:

'JOHN BISCOE holdeth to him and his heires by the tenure and services aforesaid, one messuage with a backside and orchard on the South side of Barkhamstede called by the name of the Swanne, with one close of arrable land knowne by the name of little Butfeild, conteyning by estimacion six acres, lately the land of John Biscoe, deceased. The Quitt rent per annum iijjs'.

Payment of only three shillings a year for the Swan Inn and part of Butts Meadow seems fantastic unless one is aware of the definition of a quit rent: 'A small rent paid by the freeholders and copyholders of a manor in discharge of other services'.

#### **GILLYFLOWERS AND ROSES**

Everybody has heard of peppercorn rents, which in theory involved the annual payment from lessee to lessor of a peppercorn; it was a device for giving

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a leasehold the practical effect of a freehold. A gillyflower or rose was an attractive alternative to a peppercorn. For instance, Sir Edward Cary paid 'one redd rose' a year to the King for the 'scite, Circuite and precincte' of Berkhamsted Castle, and several freeholders escaped even more lightly by payment of 'one Gellowflower at such tymes as anie Kinge or Queene of England shall be crowned in the Castle of Berkhamsted'. The possibility was so remote that it was a waste of time to grow 'gillies' merely to pay the rent!

The Swan is not the only hostelry mentioned in Dodderidge's Survey. Henry Moody paid 1s. 4d. quit rent a year for the Bull, 'with a backside thereunto adjoyning'. The Queen's Arms was a little more costly at 1s. 10d. per annum.

In Castle Street, Thomas Todde paid 2d. per annum for 'one tenement with a backside'; his neighbours, George Hill and William Axtell, paid a similar rent for their tenements and had orchards into the bargain. A larger tenement in Castle Street, for which Francis Clympson paid 7d. a year, was 'lately purchased of Thomas Waterhouse, Gent'. A descendant, no doubt, of the last rector of Ashridge, who was also named Thomas Waterhouse.

### **NORTHCHURCH RENTS**

At 'Northchurch Ende', Henry Sare held 'one Mansion Howse or Capital Messuage called Durrantes with fifty acres of land . . . meadow, pasture, arable and woodground', the quit rent being 26s. a year. But that was over three centuries before the Council built houses on Henry Sare's Durrants estate.

John Hopkins, rector of Northchurch, Richard Percivall, John Howe, Ralffe Axtell and William Willet (of Exhims) were among the freeholders who paid a quit rent of 'one gelloflower' whenever a king or queen was crowned at Berkhamsted Castle—and that was never! Another Northchurch man, Ralfe Goulding, was not so fortunate. He could not 'pay it with flowers'. For 'one tenement with a backside in Northchurch', he paid 4d. a year and also had to give half a day's work at harvest.

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### **BERKHAMSTED LIBRARY**

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