

Langford Manor, Fivehead

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IN setting out to trace the history of a Manor of which, as far as I know, no definite record has been made prior to the year 1518, certain points arise which are not of necessity connected with dates; and before I attempt to bridge over the years 1251—1518, it might be well if I were to make a few prefatory remarks on matters connected with the Manor which may be of interest.

The name of Langford is obviously the Long Ford. At a certain point to the east of Langford, the road from Swell drops very steeply. From time to time this road has been raised, but in ancient days, throughout the winter, the higher ground of Langford must have been, at any rate for those journeying on foot, the means of communication between Fivehead and Swell. In the year 1255 it was known as La Langeforde, and in the Cartulary of Muchelney Abbey is to be found "Grant and Confirmation by Richard de Waleys, the Lord of Staweye to the Abbot & monks of Muchelney . . . of 2 acres or about that of arable land of his demesne at Staweye of which one lies on the west side of la Langeforde, next the road and the other in the culture of Staweye. . . ."

Muchelnye, A.D. 1255, 3 Kal., June.¹

The late Preb. E. H. Bates Harbin informed me that Sir John Speke, when he bequeathed the Manor to the Cathedral of Exeter in 1518, held it of the Abbot of Muchelney. Mr. Bates Harbin did not give me a reference, and I have been

1. *Som. Rec. Soc.*, XIV, 86.

unable to find Langford among the possessions of the Abbey in Dugdale's *Monasticon*; but, if this is so, presumably Sir John Speke was the Freeholder but not the Lord of the Manor, and the Abbot had no rights over Langford, in his Lordship of the Manor, beyond the receipts of the said rents or services, which in process of time became more and more unsubstantial, till they ceased to exist.

I have dealt with Sir John Speke's bequest later, but the following may be of interest. It is from the Return of Chantries, 2 Edward VI, 1548, *certificate* 42. "The Chantry founded by Sir John Speke, Knight, in the Cathedrall Church of St. Peter in Exeter in the County of Devon. Lands, tenements and other heriditaments lying and being within the Parish of Fivehead, aforesaid in the tenure of sondery persons by Indenture for terms of their lives *xjli.—xvs.—xd.* . . . The Dean & Chapter of Exeter in four years last past sold 19 acres of wood growing on the premises prayed at *ixli.—xs.*—"

The first mention of the Manor of Langford, generally styled Langford Fyfehede, of which I am cognisant occurs in 1251, when Sybilla de Gundevill quit-claimed to Sabina del Ortiay, the lady of Curry Rivel, all her rights in Chory and Langford (*Ped. Fin.*, 35 Henry III, 82, *S.R.S.*, VI, 151). For this and certain later entries, I am indebted to the late Prebendary Bates Harbin.

The next owners take their name from the place. In 1309 Roger de Langeforde at his death held two carucates of land in Fyfehede Langeforde (*Inq. P.M.*, 3 Edward II, 43). In 1327 John de Langeforde was the sole taxpayer in Langeforde (*S.R.S.*, IV, 74). He died in 1343. In *Ped. Fin.*, 18 Edward II, 1324–25, I find the following: "At Westminster in the Octave of Michl between John de Langeforde and Joan his wife, querents by Rich^d de Welleford in the place of Joan and Walter de Ildesle, deforciant; for a messuage, two hundred acres of land, forty acres of meadow and 30 acres of wood in Fyfehede Langeforde. John acknowledged the right of Walter as by his gift. For this John (Walter?) granted the same to John & Joan to hold to them and their issue: then to the right heirs of John."

In 1372 Sir Thomas de Langeforde sold Langeforde to



LANGFORD MANOR, FIVEHEAD
From a Photograph by H. Montague Cooper

Francis de Scoland (or Scotland) of Cathanger in the same parish, and in 1411 Ernestina, his widow, held Langeforde (*Subsidy Roll*, 13 Henry IV). They had an only daughter, Eleanor. In *Ped. Fin.*, 8 Henry VI we find Langeforde Fyfehyde in the hands of Thomas Beauchamp and Aleanor, his wife. The year 1518 was a momentous one in the history of the Manor, for in this year Sir John Speke, who married the heiress of Sir Thomas Beauchamp, conveyed by legal process to five gentlemen, one of whom was his son, the Manor of Langeforde Fyfehede with appurtenances and two messuages, one garden, 130 acres of land and 52 acres of meadow in Fyfehede and Aschyll (32 acres of the meadow being in Aschyll), to be by them held for the performance of his last Will, which was that immediately on his decease they should convey the said lands and hereditaments to the Dean and Canons Residentiary of Exeter "to the entente that they shall ffynde or cause to be found yearly for en^d an honest and a sadde pryst to sing and say Masse Wekely and daily as ofte as he shalbe thereunto dysposed in the new Chapell of Seynt George made and founded by me W^t yn the seid Cathedrall Church of Excet': yn the North side of the quere of the said Church for the Sowlys of me the seid John Speke my father & moder my Chyldren Ancestres and speciaall frynds and for all Xtsen Sowlys. . . ."

The original of this is in the Archives of Exeter Cathedral, and thanks are due to the Dean of Exeter for allowing copies to be made of this document and of the various leases which ensued; for the Manor of Langford was retained by the Dean and Chapter for over three hundred years.

Before entering on the subject of the tenants who occupied the Manor house, under the Dean and Chapter, it might be of interest to give a brief account of the house in which they lived. The house is built in the shape of a double **E** and a little to the east of it is the Steward's (or "dairy") house. These are presumably "the two messuages and one garden" which are referred to in Sir John Speke's bequest. I have been unable to ascertain who built the house, but an eminent architect, who made an investigation of the roof, gave it as his opinion that the house was of two distinct dates. He considered that the east wing and the great hall, of which the

curved beams in the roof are still extant, and which ran at right angles to the east wing, are considerably pre-Elizabethan in date. The date of the west wing and the porches he placed at about the middle of the XVII Century. This is borne out by the fact that, about 1650, one Nathaniel Barnard, of whom presently, acquired the freehold of the estate during the Commonwealth. His name is carved on a Ham stone fireplace in a room above the porch, and his initials on the porch itself.

The chief features of the house are the Ham stone porches and fireplaces, mullioned windows, vertical panelling of pre-Elizabethan date, mostly in elm, and the Tudor staircase of oak and elm built round an elm newel, each bend consisting of five steps. The gables have crow-foot terminals. To the west of the house stands an ancient dove-cote, square-built and at one time having a four-gabled roof, with a turret for the birds and a potence. It contained probably about 1000 nesting-holes. The roof, turret and potence have disappeared, and about 750 holes remain. The original design of the house, it may be presumed, was in the shape of the letter **T**, the addition of the west wing and the two porches in the XVII Century, bringing it to the shape of the double **E**. It is built of the local grey stone, and possesses a dignity which only age and the severity of the architecture of the period can produce.

To return to what may be called the second period of the history of the Manor, namely that of the ownership by the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, the first tenant of interest is John Clifton of Curry Rivel, afterwards Sir John Clifton of Barrington. In the year 1574, John Clifton of Curry Rivel is granted a lease of Langford Wood by the Dean and Chapter for a period of twenty-one years at 13*s.* 4*d.* *per annum*. The year 1592 is prolific in leases and documents. There is a sealed lease to Sir John Clifton of Barrington (on consideration of surrender of a lease for a term yet unexpired) of the Manor and Farm of Langford and 33 acres of meadow for twenty-one years. An unsealed lease to Jarvis Clifton, Amias Clifton and John Clifton, sons of the aforesaid Sir John, for the Manor and Farm of Langford. An unsealed lease of Manor and Farm of Langford to John Seymour and Walter Seymour, sons of Edward Seymour of Cathanger in the parish of Fivehead "for

the terme of their naturall lives," and a Bond in £1000 by Edward Seymour of Cathanger and William Seymour of Powderham, Devon, to the Dean and Chapter to indemnify them against claims by Sir John Clifton concerning the Manor or Farm of Langford. About this time Sir John Clifton died, the result of all this being that in 1593 his eldest son, Gervise Clifton, was granted a lease of Langford and Speke's Woods, and in 1594 John and Walter Seymour were granted a lease of the Manor and Farm. In 1625, the sons give place to the daughters, a lease of the Manor and Farm being granted to Arthur Champernowne and Christopher Blackall for the lives of Margaret, Mary and Amy Seymour, daughters of Sir Edward Seymour, Bart.

The Seymour connection lasts until 1649, when a somewhat momentous document appears. It should be borne in mind that in 1649 all Chapters were annulled and the following document marks the one break—a brief one—in the ownership by the Dean and Chapter. It is dated 29th March, 1649. Henry Seymour, one of the sons of Sir Edward Seymour of Berry Pomeroy and Henry, Lord Beauchamp, son of the Marquis of Hartford, to Nathaniel Barnard of Downside. Recited that Barnard stands seized of an estate of freehold for the lives of Margaret, Mary and Amy, daughters of the said Sir Edward Seymour of and in Langford, Ilmore and the Woods: and Release to Barnard in consideration of £2,017 of all the estate, right, etc., of Seymour and Beauchamp in the premises, so that neither the said Henry Seymour, his heirs, etc., nor anyone in the names of Henry Killigrew, Arthur Champernowne, Sir Thomas Hall, John Symes, John Upton and Robert Savary, may challenge Barnard's title—(précis). This Nathaniel Barnard was the son of Nathaniel Barnard of Downside, Shepton Mallet. The Barnards were a family of some note in the county, and intermarried with the neighbouring family of Strode, the aunt of the Nathaniel in question marrying Geoffrey Strode of Shepton Mallet, while his cousin Joan was the wife of William Strode of Barrington Court.

Nathaniel's ownership was but short lived, for the King and the Chapters came to their own again, and in 1661 we find Barnard compelled to take out a lease once more for the estate

of which he thought he was the Freeholder. In his old age, Nathaniel had married a second wife, Anne, by whom he had a boy. After Barnard's death, his widow obtained a lease of Langford from the Dean and Chapter to run for twenty-one years from July, 1683. This lease she proceeded on 29th July, 1684, to mortgage to one John Bush, and on 2nd September of the same year the mortgage was transferred by her and Bush to a certain Ralph Ingram. Anne Barnard died suddenly and intestate. Ralph Ingram filed a bill in Chancery against her son and heir, Nathaniel, an infant, to enforce his mortgage and obtained a decree that on surrendering the lease it should be renewed in his own name by the Dean and Chapter and stand charged with the amount of the mortgage debt and costs. This ends the Barnard connection with Langford.

The next tenant is Colonel Henry Brett. This is the Henry Brett who sold the Manor of Whitestaunton, held by the Bretts for so many generations, to Sir Abraham Elton for £11,642. He was buried at Whitestaunton, January 6th, 1728-9, and his widow, Ann Brett, March 20th, 1749. They had eleven children. The baptisms of all of them but one are recorded in the register of Whitestaunton.

The lands at Whitestaunton were sold in 1714 and the house in 1724. Colonel Brett bought a lease of Langford from one Joan Cole, a widow. He regularly signs the Fivehead rate-book, and in 1720 was churchwarden of the parish.

In 1726 there is an Indenture dated 6th April. This consists of a Recital of the preceding lease and Surrender of recited premises and their unexpired term therein. This is followed by a lease, dated 22nd April, 1726, to Sir Abraham Elton of the Manor of Langford for twenty-one years. He was succeeded in the tenancy by his son, in 1732, on his decease. It is to be noted that there were always separate leases for the Manor and Farm of Langford and for the 33 acres of land in Ilmore and the Woods (Langford Wood and Speke's Wood). Since the time of Nathaniel Barnard, the tenant of the Manor and Farm was also granted a lease of Ilmore and the Woods.

The Eltons appear to have held Langford under the Dean and Chapter until 1765, when Francis Wright, described as

of Creech St. Michael, Somerset, gentleman, is granted a lease of Langford for twenty-one years. He was succeeded by William Richardson of Durston, gentleman, a memo being added to the lease that he held Langford in trust for his son Francis. I do not know when Francis Richardson succeeded to the management of the estate, but it is on record that he acquired a considerable amount of land beside the Manor of Langford. He was succeeded by his son, Henry Richardson, a well-known sportsman, who kept a pack of harriers at Langford. I am not certain when Langford passed into lay hands, but Canon Chanter of Exmouth informs me that the Dean and Chapter of Exeter had estates at Fivehead and Ashill up to 1860 when they were transferred to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Henry Richardson was possessed of the manor at the time of his death.

The restoration of the house took place in 1904 under the present owner.

I should like to express my indebtedness to Mr. H. E. Trevor for the help that I have received from him, and especially for his care in the précis and tabulation of the various leases, which was no light task.