

## PUCKINGTON IN THE LATE MIDDLE-AGES

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### INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE consists very largely of an analysis and interpretation of a survey of the manor of Puckington carried out in 1525 on behalf of Cecily, Marchioness of Dorset, Lady Harington and Bonville (the then lady of the manor of Puckington). She was the final descendant of the Haringtons and Bonvilles. The survey extended to a total of 79 manors and other properties held by her, comprising about 30,000 acres and a rent roll of about £1,000. In addition to these properties, all in the west country, she held others in Bedford, Cumberland, Essex, Hampshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, London, Northampton, Warwick and Yorkshire. She was one of the richest landowners in the country. CECILY'S ESTATES descended to her grandson Henry, 3rd Marquis of Dorset, created Duke of Suffolk, who was executed for treason in 1554 together with his daughter, Lady Jane Grey. The estates were forfeited to the Crown and, in 1557, the manor and advowson of Puckington were bought by Sir Henry Portman, at prices based on the 1525 valuation. It continued in Portman ownership until 1920 when it was sold, almost entirely to the sitting tenants. THE ONLY FREEHOLDERS mentioned in the survey were Alice Flynte (who held a freehold in Barrington) and Thomas Marschal (who held "free lands" in Gosebradon). He may have been of the same family as Edward Merschall, a tenant in Puckington. Neither freeholder is listed as holding a house or land in Puckington.

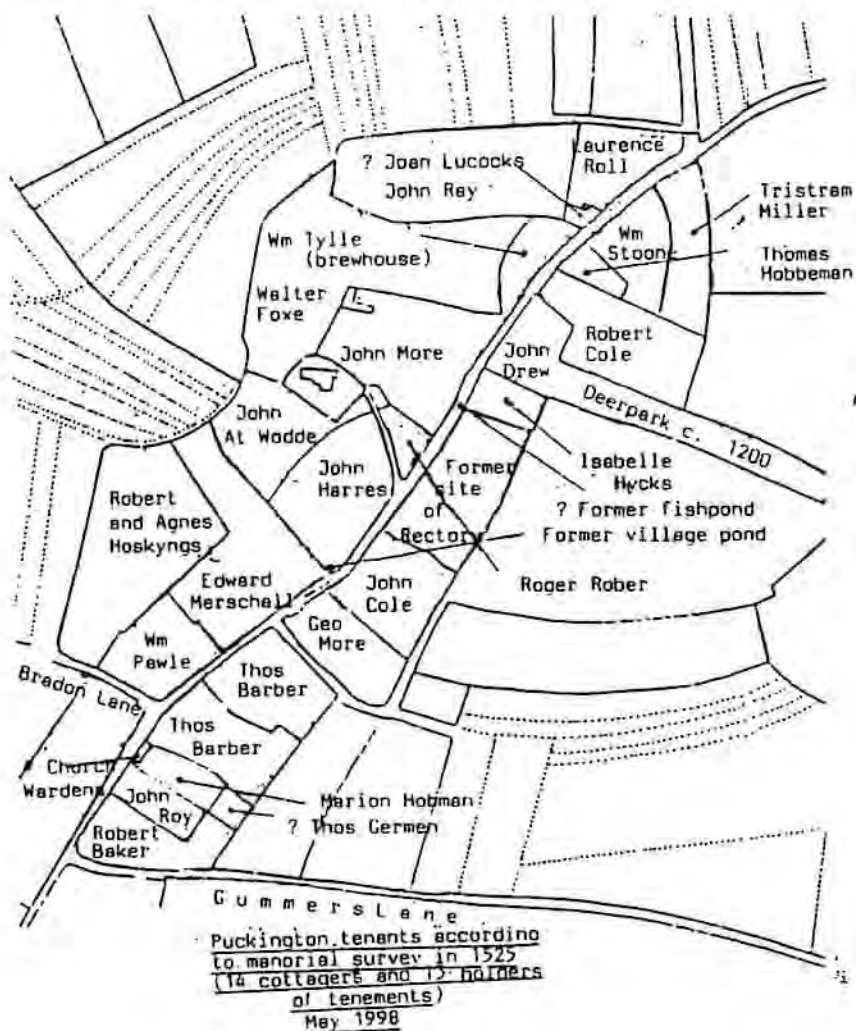
THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT, in latin, is at the Public Record Office (Ref. E315/385). An English translation by T. L. Stoate, together with an interesting and informative introduction, was published by Somerset Record Society in 1979. It can be seen at Somerset Studies, Taunton Library. The above details are from his introduction.

OTHER SOURCES referred to include terriers of Puckington glebe for 1571, 1609, 1634 and 1638 (Somerset Record Office), transcribed by this writer, including that part of Puckington glebe that lay in Little Puckington in Barrington; title maps of Puckington (1837) and Stocklinch (1836) (Somerset Record Office); and Alice Kelly's "Early History of Puckington" (an unpublished typescript at Somerset Studies).

### *Tenure*

THE TENANTS held their land at will, so nominally there was no security of tenure; but the lord's right of eviction was "subject to the customs of the manor". The effect was that a tenant enjoyed what for all practical purposes was a freehold. It fell short only to the extent that it could not be sold or bequeathed in a will; but a tenant could nominate his successor.

A TENANT held by copy of the court roll. In Puckington he (or she) held for a number of lives (not a term of years). The number of lives depended on family circumstances. The



most in 1525 was four lives spanning three generations (father, mother, son and grandson). Some were for three spanning two generations (father, mother, son); and others, presumably because there were no children or other family connections or because they could not afford the "fine", extended only to one or two lives (man and wife, widow, widower).

THE TENANCY was in practice as good as a freehold because parents knew beyond doubt that their holding could pass down to son or daughter and then to his or her children and so on in every subsequent generation, so long as there were children and one of them wanted to farm the land. It could pass down through the male or female line and go beyond the immediate family, e.g. to an in-law. The only condition that had to be satisfied to secure continued succession was the payment of a fine whenever the court roll was altered or added to, e.g. on entry into the tenancy when a son followed his father or when a new name was added.

THE SURVEY tells us very little about the customs of the manor apart from those relating

to tenure. We learn that there was a woodward (John Harres), who was responsible for "delivering to the tenants timber as is necessary"; and the common rights of the tenants are stated. There is nothing however concerning farming practices, and it becomes clear only from later sources, such as the tithing map, that the common arable was in strips. We do not know whether the strips of each tenant were scattered or consolidated or whether a tenant had the same strips year after year.

#### *The holdings*

TWO KINDS OF HOLDING are described: "cottages" (fourteen in number), each on its own piece of land, i.e. its curtilage; and "tenements" (thirteen in number) each having in addition to its curtilage a "close", separate from the house, usually of a stated size but not more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres.

SIX OF THE COTTAGES had no common rights. They only had their curtilages, ranging from one-eighth to one acre, although one had an orchard as well. The eight other cottages had arable in the common fields but ranging from only  $1\frac{1}{2}$  acres to eight. One of these, who had  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre of curtilage and three acres of arable, had no common rights; one, who had an acre of curtilage and five acres of arable, had common in the "West More" but only for one cow. The remaining cottagers had "full common", i.e. "for all cattle, draught animals and pigs".

TENEMENTS also had arable in the common fields of comparable size (14 to 18 acres) and, in addition, twelve of them each had six acres of arable deemed still to belong to the ancient demesne but all let. Cecily had no land in hand. It is not clear what common rights attached to the tenements, but they probably had full common. Six of them also had pasture rights for two or three oxen "in summer and winter" in "Brode Wodda" or "Brodemore" or "Brode Meade", and one of them (Thomas Hobbemen) had full common and also pasture rights for 3 oxen.

#### *Village and its inhabitants (see appendix)*

IT WAS POSSIBLE to relate each tenant to his house because the surveyor followed the long established practice of first selecting a starting point and then proceeding clockwise, naming the tenants strictly in the sequence in which they existed on the ground.

JOAN LUCOCK, a widow, was granted a cottage with a curtilage of about  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre, "because she was old and poor and prayed for the lady". She paid a rent of sixteen pence a year; and Thomas Germen was allowed a cottage with about an acre of curtilage, and he paid a rent of twenty pence "because he is old and prays for the lady".

THE STARTING POINT was found by trial and error, but it was not the church or the former rectory as one might expect but a cottage at the northern end of the village on the east side of the highway, which was occupied in 1525 by Tristram Miller, Agnes his wife and Joan their daughter. This was the site of the later Mavis Farm house. The outbuildings have recently been converted into a house, called the Old Byre.

THE SURVEYOR then proceeded house by house on the east side as far as Gummers Lane, and then returned on the west side. It is possible to check that each family has probably been related to the correct house, because there were two fixed points that had to be satisfied, the church and the former rectory. This was also a matter of trial and error, until it was found that the house of Tristram Miller was the only starting point that satisfied these fixed positions.

THE BREWHOUSE, occupied by William Tylle and his wife Joan, was believed to be another fixed point (and turned out to be so), because hops still grow in the hedge there.

THE ACREAGE of each curtilage also served as a check. In almost every case, the acreage given in the survey coincided very closely with the OS6 acreage. There were only

a few mismatches, and these could be ascribed to the difficulty of estimating sizes in the days before there were reliable maps. It is remarkable that the boundaries have not significantly changed since 1525. It is a good illustration of the virtual indestructibility of property boundaries, at least in the rural areas.

PUCKINGTON lent itself to analysis on the above lines, because it was (and still is) quite small. Today there are fewer than fifty houses. It was in particular an easy subject because then (as now) it was a linear village with houses on both sides and nowhere else. A nucleated village would be much more difficult to assess.

#### *By-employment*

ACCORDING TO THIRSK, (1) a holding of less than thirty acres was generally too small to require hired workers.

THOMAS BARBER and his wife Alice were the biggest land holders in 1525, having two tenements totalling 44 acres of arable and 24 acres of meadow and pasture, and they had three oxen. There was no other tenant with more than 24 acres of arable. The Barbers had between them three children old enough to be on the court roll (one male and two female), so their need to employ outsiders was probably minimal, both in the fields and in the house. The other holders of tenements would seem to be too small to employ anyone except casually. It seems therefore that all the cottagers in Puckington would need by-employment of some kind.

THIRSK (2) says that by-employments were of considerable importance and, even of those labourers who were wealthy enough to leave an inventory, nearly two-thirds took up some form of casual or part-time work or cottage industry. She cites spinning or carding of wool and flax. "Wherever travellers went", she says, "in scores of parishes in Somerset [and other counties], they would have heard spinning-wheels turning or seen the distaff twirling in countless farm labourers' cottages".

FIGURES based on labourers' probate inventories suggest that, in Somerset, some 44% of labourers had by-employment in spinning and weaving, 22% in woodland crafts and 22% in other activities. There is some double-counting, because some had more than one source of income: but, on the other hand, the poorest labourers—the ones most in need of casual work—are not included, because they left no wills.

BARRINGTON COURT must have been a continuous source of employment—for girls in the house and men and boys outside—from the early sixteenth century to recent times, when the house ceased to be used as a dwelling.

#### *Enclosures*

THERE WERE NO ENCLOSURE ORDERS for Puckington except in respect of pasture rights outside the parish, in West Moor (just over a mile away) and West Sedgemoor (about five miles), which Puckington shared with several adjoining parishes.

THERE WERE NO ORDERS because from 1557 to 1920 the whole of the moor, except the glebe, was in the ownership of the Portman family and, before 1525, to Cecily and her forbears.

SINGLE OWNERSHIP meant that changes, such as enclosures, could be made without the difficulty of seeking agreement of other owners; and enclosing did occur and at an early date, i.e. before 1525. By that date, all thirteen of the holders of tenements had closes as well as their curtilages and their arable acreages in the common fields. These closes were small—not more than two acres in extent—and, surprisingly, most of them can be identified in the tithe map of 1837 and in the early OS6 maps.

THERE IS A GROUP OF SIX in the NE corner of the parish, bounded by the highway: OS 157 ("Little Long Wood"), 156 ("Pauls Ground"), "Whillers Close" (OS number unknown), 109 ("Young Orchard"), 98 ("East Leaze"), and 99 ("Little East Leaze"); and

three more in the SW corner bounded by the parish boundary and Bradon Lane. They are OS21 ('Hobmans Close'), 22 (name not known) and 23 ('Pauls Close'). Most if not all of these closes have disappeared following removal of hedges. Their sizes coincided reasonably closely with the 1525 acreages. The village map in the Appendix suggests that there was a fourth close now occupied by the houses on the highway frontage. Clearly, however, it was still essentially an open-field settlement.

### *Demesne*

THE DEMESNE consisted in 1525 of 72 acres of arable, a close called the Hay of two acres of pasture and two closes each of three acres of orchard-pasture. The name Hay has been lost. All the arable was 'lying in the common fields' and was let in equal amounts to twelve of the thirteen holders of tenements; and the three demesne closes were also let to three of them.

THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT that these three closes were originally the demesne on which the manor house stood. Their combined area in 1525 is given as eight acres, and they are now represented by OS plots 36, 37, 38, 39 and 45, which total 7.9 acres.

THE SITE was centrally placed in the manor. It had an unbroken boundary—and still has—and it gave direct access to the church, the highway and virtually all the common fields. It is bounded by the cul-de-sac to the church, the highway and Bradon Lane, and these bounds must be as old as the village itself.

IT IS POSSIBLE, but not certain, that the demesne arable was not consolidated in 1525 and presumably never had been, but consisted of separate parcels. The most likely reason for this was the absence of a resident lord from an early date.

ACCORDING TO ALICE KELLY *op cit*, who lived at the rectory from 1878–1894, Sir Gilbert de Knoville claimed and occupied Puckington in 1271 in right of his wife, Hawise, on the death of her mother, Joan de l'Isle (nee Avenel), but was required to acknowledge Matthew de Fourneau as overlord. Joan held Puckington as dower and was resident. Sir Gilbert died in 1315, two years after his elder son, also called Gilbert. The lordship of Puckington then went to his grandson, Sir John, who died in 1316, leaving a widow, Alice, and three under age daughters: Cecilia, Amice and Alianor. Alice continued in residence and presented to the church for her last time in 1325 (3). She may well have been the last resident lord of the manor.

THE DE KNOVILLE FAMILY having died out in the male line in 1316, it was probably inevitable that the chantry, established by Sir Gilbert at what must have been considerable cost to himself, fell into decay. According to Gerard (4), it died 'of inanition ere the close of the fourteenth century'. The last priest was presented in 1362. This writer will propose in a future article that the land with which de Knoville endowed his chantry was the land in Barrington that came to be known as Little Puckington.

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT that Sir Gilbert and others of his family were buried in the south transept, the chantry chapel, and their remains are still there, unless they were disturbed when Anna Maria Susanah Donne Donnishorpe was buried there in 1852, as commemorated by the communion rail. It was provided by B.I.M. Donne 'her gratefull relative'.

### *The glebe*

GLEBE TERRIERS for Puckington were drawn up in 1571, 1609, 1634 and 1638. (5) Each lists Puckington glebe in Puckington and also Puckington glebe in Little Puckington in Barrington. The former consisted of about 40 acres and the latter of about 74 acres.

IN PUCKINGTON, if the details given in the terriers can be relied on, the glebe was in four closes in 1571 (totalling 35 acres), five in 1609 (35 acres) and six in 1634 and 1638



(31 and 34 acres), implying that two additional closes were formed by subdivision of existing closes, without involving any additional land.

THE GLEBE consisted of arable, pasture and meadow, but there were no glebe houses in Puckington other than the rectory. Small parcels of land not in closes would add 3–4 acres and give a total of about 40 acres. Small discrepancies can be accounted for by errors in the estimated acreages. The glebe did not include any common field arable except for the odd small parcel.

IT SEEMS that the Puckington glebe in Puckington was all enclosed by 1525 except for small pieces here and there which were too small to enclose. The closes included Breach (OS 76a and 78), which was almost certainly taken in from the then woodland, and seven acres of Summer Leaze (the manorial "waste"), so both woodland and waste were being eaten into at an early date.

THIS MEANS THAT, in the manor as a whole, there were 20 closes, none of more than two acres except for two of the three closes formed from the demesne at the manor house, which were of three acres each.

#### *Village fishpond*

THERE WAS AN L-shaped fishpond with its horizontal leg on the highway frontage of OS49 (the former site of the rectory). It is now separated from the carriageway by a grass verge about three metres wide. The vertical leg was in OS54, close up to the boundary of OS49, and has recently been filled-in in the course of conversion of the farm buildings on OS54.

THE HORIZONTAL LEG is still visible as a ditch about one metre deep and about 25 metres long and three metres wide. The width of the grass verge suggests that the pond was originally wider than the present ditch; it must have been affected by many years or even centuries of erosion and sitting-up. The pond—and now the ditch—drained into a normal ditch and then into Gummers Lane.

THE WATER SUPPLY came from a ditch or stream which runs along the toft line of the eastern side of the highway. This minor watercourse also discharges in Gummers Lane. It is now frequently dry. It formed part of the boundary of the early 13th century deerpark and may have been dug for that purpose; and in addition it provided a supply of running water without which a fishpond would not have been possible, with consequent loss of an important food supply. It also watered the field called Peel Mead, enhancing its value as a meadow, and gave a measure of protection to that end of the village, especially on the east side, from the heavy run-off from Oak Hill.

#### *Captain's Close, Captain's Wood, Hat Pin, Hackpen and village pound*

THE FIELDS called Captain's Close and Hat Pin (Puckington tithe map of 1837), together making OS No. 1, totalled 6.7 acres. They lay to the east of Oak Hill and were bounded on the west by the pale of the thirteenth-century deerpark and, on the east, by the parish boundary. They no longer exist as separate fields, following removal of hedges.

THE ADJOINING PARISHES are Barrington and Stocklinch Ottersey, and the three boundaries meet close to the SE boundary of OS No. 1, at a height of 82M, so Captain's Close and Hat Pin were the highest fields in the parish. Oak Hill is at a height of 70M, Puckington Hill 57M and Golden Hill 42M.

CAPTAIN'S WOOD was a section of Golden Hill Copse (1837 tithe map). It was bounded on the north by the parish boundary, which crosses Golden Hill E–W very close to its summit.

OTHER SECTIONS OF THE COPSE were called Whillers Wood and Pucker's Wood, but these names seem to be no longer used. The copse was formerly much bigger than now,

and some earlier wood-names have become field names. What remains is little more than a fox covert.

IT SEEMS LIKELY that the element Captain and the name Hat Pin are corruptions of earlier names and, in the absence of OE or early ME spellings, which are not often known for minor names like field names, any suggestion as to their early forms must be tentative.

EKWALL, in his Dictionary of English Place-names, relates the element cap (as in Captain) to OE *cape*, meaning a high place or lookout; and says that it derives from OE *capian*, to look or peer. He quotes Capton in Dorset, which was Capleton in 1278. He says: "most of the places in cap are situated high". The two Puckington fields were the highest in the parish, and Captain's Close would be a very useful lookout point. Captain's Wood in Golden Hill Copse was also high. It was at the highest point of the northern boundary of Puckington.

HAT PIN could earlier have been Hatch Pen or Hack Pen. According to Smith (6) Hatch would probably be from OE *haecc*, a hatch or gate, and hack from OE *haca*, hook, implying an enclosure that could be bolted up. It could also mean a hill thought to be curved like a hook, but there is no such hill there. The second element in both could be OE or OW *penn*, a hill or enclosure.

THERE IS A FIELD IN STOCKLINCH called Hackpen, which shares the parish boundary with Hat Pin. The Stocklinch field is also known in that parish as Bakers Hackpen. There is a Bakers Farm in Stocklinch and also in Puckington. If the name Bakers was added as a distinguishing epithet to separate the two fields, then Hat Pin must have been called Hackpen at some earlier time.

SO THERE MUST BE a possibility that Hat Pin was the village pound. It may not seem to be well placed for that, but Puckington is so small that nowhere in the parish is very far from the village.

## CONCLUSIONS

BY THE YEAR 1525, all visible evidence of the ancient feudal system seems to have disappeared from Puckington. No labour service was owed by any of the tenants. There was no manor house to be serviced. There were no payments in kind. All feudal obligations had been commuted to cash payments.

THERE WAS NO RESIDENT LORD to dominate the manor, nor had there been for many centuries; and there was no resident bailiff or steward to guard the lord's interests. No land was held in hand; it was all distributed among the tenants, including the ancient demesne. The only exception was the glebe.

A LONG-ABSENT LORD made it possible for tenants at will to establish themselves as customary tenants. A very modern-looking relationship of landlord and tenant had emerged, except that tenure was now assured.

THE MANOR COURT was a faraway place visited perhaps once or twice in a lifetime.

THE ENCLOSURES effected by 1525 do not seem to have caused any conflict, perhaps because everybody benefited to some extent: the holders of closes because they had that small degree of independence, and the rest because some of the load may have been taken off the common pastures on which they relied.

PUCKINGTON was still an open-field village. A start had been made to enclose, but only in relatively small closes, which were probably not sufficient in size or number to alter its appearance or character.

A start had also been made to convert woodland into pasture or arable, but a lot of woodland remained, and serious inroads into it do not seem to have been made until some time later. The manorial "waste", represented by Summer Leaze, was still intact except for

some small encroachments on its edges. It is a low-lying part of the parish and was probably often waterlogged in winter. The name implies pasture in summer time only. It could not be fully exploited until modern under-drainage was provided.

IT IS INTERESTING to note that the removal of hedges in recent times has restored something of the ancient landscape of large common fields.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 Joan Thirsk, Ed. "Agrarian History of England and Wales 1500–1640", p. 652.
- 2 Idem p. 425 et seq.
- 3 Ralph's Register 21.
- 4 Thomas Gerard of Trent. "Particular History of the County of Somerset", 1663, p. 142. Somerset Record Society.
- 5 Somerset Record Office, Ref D/D/Rg 315.
- 6 A. H. Smith. "English, Place-name Elements". 1987, English Place-name Society, Vol 25.