

WORTING IN OLD TIMES as reported by Hants & Berks Gazette Saturday Nov 24th 1894

A Lecture given by Rev Mr Bigg-Wither at Worting School , 1894

The following report, reproduced from the archives of the Hants and Berks Gazette, records an extended lecture given by the Reverend Reginald Fitz Hugh Bigg-Wither of the history of Worting. Delivered in 1894 by Rev. Bigg-Wither (1842 - 1929) it is clearly the result of years of research and study by a man educated at Pembroke College, Oxford , who was in the unique position to access the family records of the Bigg-Wither family of Tangier House, Worting. Archaeological research and historical study in the subsequent 100 years may well offer modified interpretations of specific elements of this great sweep of history, but no attempt has been made to reflect these changes. The script is reproduced as originally delivered.

An interesting and instructive lecture on the old history of the manor and village of Worting was given to a crowded audience in the Worting schoolroom on Thursday in last week by the rector. The lecture was interspersed with music and songs by Mrs Arthur Lamb, Miss Winifred and Mr Robert Lamb and Miss Ada Goodall.

The Rev Mr Bigg-Wither began his lecture by mentioning the existing evidences in and near Worting of the Britons, Romans and Danes.

1, Pack Lane is thought to be part of an ancient British track running from the west to the east coast of England .Its source is traceable through the village, past the Stag and Hounds on the Winchester road and Mr Blencows house (The Grove) formerly a public house called Skippits Inn on through Long Sutton to the North Downs.

2, The broad raised hedge-way beyond the Kitehill cottages towards Kempshott, known locally as the "Devils Castaway" ancient causeway is part of the great Roman Road from Winchester to Silchester. This road must have been a marked feature in the country 1500 years ago and for long afterwards ,no doubt it was for that reason that it was chosen to mark the boundary of the parish of Worting on the east in its whole length of two and three quarters miles from the Kempshott beeches to Withers corpse on Rooksdown.

3, Winklebury is an old British encampment which the Romans made use of and fortified to guard their great road between these two important stations. From Winklebury the ancient Briton like his modern descendant ,could look down upon the valley of the Loddon then probably a swamp, and on the site of Basingstoke, the passage over the river and swamp, stockade and guarded by the British tribe of Basinga. Tradition says that it was from Winklebury too that Cromwell surveyed the country on his way from Winchester to besiege Basing.

4, The country round Battledown farm in Worting is the reputed scene of one of the many conflicts between the Danes and the Saxons in this part of England about AD 870 when King Etheldred the first was mortally wounded in the well-known battle at Basing. In one field there are five "barrows "and the curious turn which marks the boundary of the parish at its south west angle near Lonely Farm is formed by a

Danish barrow 3 or 4 skeletons with curious armour were found close by in planting a row of fir trees in 1840 and 2 others subsequently in digging for chalk near Worting junction railway bridges.

The earliest direct reference to Worting is contained in one of the Cottonian MS in the British Museum which gives the important and most interesting information that Worting was a royal manor and that Edmund the King, who is called Ironside Son of the King Etheldred gave Wortingas(AD 1016) to the monastery of St Peter at Winchester.

With its appurtenances and privileges the next reference to Worting is to be found in Domesday (AD 1086). The lecture having briefly referred to the Saxon settlement of England and to the tenure of land in Saxon times and how it was affected by the Norman Conquest explained the object and scope of the great survey of the Kingdom made by William the Conqueror which has come down to our times with the appropriate title of Domesday, the book of laws or of judgement.

In Domesday, Worting is thus described; In (Chuteley) hundred, the Abbot of St Peter de Wincestre holds Wortinges. In the time of Edward (the confessor) and now it is assessed at 5 hides it is a territory of 5 plough lands two being in demesne. There are 4 villeins and nine borderers with two plough land, .There are also two serfs and a church, it is worth now and was worth TRW 100 shillings.

Almost every word in this extract from Domesday said the lecture requires explanation but when you once understand it you will understand what Worting was like the number of its inhabitants how they lived, and how the land was cultivated in Worting 800 years ago. In the hundreds of "Chutaley": From very early Saxon times the whole country was divided for the purpose of order and government into shires, hundreds and tythings. The hundred was territory of a 100 families. In Domesday Hampshire is divided into 50 hundreds .The hundreds of Chuteley included beside Worting: Monk Sherborne, Hannington, Baughurst, Church Oakley and Wooton St Lawrence.

The Abbot who held Worting was, of course the Abbot –Head of the great Monastery which King Alfred had founded close to where the Cathedral is now ,afterward removed to Hyde , on the north side of Winchester.

Hyde Abbey owned several other manners presented to it by Saxon Kings e.g. Stratton, Micheldever, Popham and later on Laverstoke.

To understand the rest of the extract from Domesday we must call to mind how the land was cultivated in those days, the territory which formed the manor which in Worting was co-extensive with the parish was then quite open.

There were no hedges or enclosures; it was divided into three great open fields with an expanse of meadow and down land beside. These three fields constituted the arable land of the parish, and they were cultivated on what is known as the three fields system of tithe, grain ,etch, grain and fallow i.e. one third of the ploughed land was suffered to be fallow every year the rest divided into spring and summer sowing.

There are two things to especially to note here.

1, The entire arable land of the parish or manor was cultivated in narrow strips separated from each other (not by hedges) but by green balks or spaces of unploughed turf. The size of these strips was generally 40 rod in length by four in width. These strips were in fact roughly cut acres of the proper shape

for ploughing. These strips lay side by side in groups forming larger divisions of the open field and were called shots or furlongs, for the furlong is the farrow long, i.e. the length of the plough before it was turned and this by long custom was fixed at 40 rod.

2, These strips did not represent a complete holding; but the several holdings were made up of a number of several strips scattered about in these open fields. [Here Mr Bigg-Wither exhibited a very interesting ancient map, of the manor of Woodgarston, illustrating the old strip culture of the country]

The meadow land was also divided into strips like the arable land for the purpose of the hay crop.

Upon the down land (in Worting 128 acres) which was not in strips were pastured the sheep and cattle under a common Hayward or cattle keeper and a common shepherd. As soon as the crops were off the ground, the open field were subject to the common rights of pasture.

The sheep and pigs wandered and pastured all over the strips and balks of the arable land, while the cattle and cows of the village were daily driven by the Hayward after Lammas day (August 1st) when the hay had been secured to Lammas meadow.

These fields were the common fields of the village community, living and working together and having common interest under a manorial lordship.

This system of open fields and of numbers of scattered strips forming one holding while it had certain advantages e.g. in securing uniformity of cultivation throughout each field according to the then received rules of rotation of crops and fallow in the three seasons had of course great disadvantages, and judged from a modern agricultural point of view, was so absurdly inconvenient and uneconomical that we are astonished it lasted so long even to the days of the grandfathers of the present generation.

This system it was the object of the numerous Enclosure Acts that were passed between 1760-1844 to remove.

They were all drawn in the same form, reciting that the open and common fields lie dispersed in small pieces intermixed with each other and inconveniently situated, that divers persons own parts of them so that they are incapable of improvement and that it is desired they may be divided and enclosed and definite shares set out and allowed to each owner.

Under the award of the Enclosure Commissioners the "balks" were ploughed up, the open fields divided into the shapes that you know, hedges planted and the whole face of the country changed.

Meanwhile let us go back to Domesday and see what sort of people lived in Worting in those days and what their business was with the land and with each other.

Domesday proceeds (At the time of the King Edward (the confessor) and now it is assessed at five hides).

Hide from the Anglo-Saxon "hyd" a house or habitation from hydam to cover or hide was a portion of land sufficient to support a family. Five hides was a Knights fee. So the hide came to be used as a land measurement for recording the assessed value of the manor. The ordinary hide was about 120 acres but it was often double that amount as appears to have been the case at Worting.

Where the hide of 240 acres multiplied by five would give the area of the manor and parish as shown in the particulars of the manor dated 1620 which I possess.

A more interesting statement in Domesday is that which declares that Worting is "A territory of five plough lands, two being in demesne"

Almost every estate or manor, whether held directly from the crown, or by subinfeudation was divided into two portions of unequal extent.

One the Lord of the manor reserved for his own use under the name of his "demesne" or home farm ,belonging to the manor house, the other was let out to tenants, who in addition to cultivating their own land , had to help the Lord of the manor to cultivate his.

A ploughland or "carucate" was as much land (with pasture and farm buildings thrown in) as one plough with a team of eight horses or oxen could till in a year. The extent of a ploughland varied according to the stiffness or lightness of the soil and was anything between 60 and 190 acres, in Worting it was nearer the larger amount.

There are four villeins and nine borderers', there are also two serfs. The villela was a tenant on the manor who held a homestead (called a messuage) and about 30 or 40 acres (called a virgate) scattered about in acres or half acres in the open fields.

He was not quite a free man, because besides having to supply one or more horses to the village plough teams, he had to give his service on one or more days a week at ploughing and harvest work on the Lords demesne, as well as making certain fixed payments in kind or money for his own holding. But he could not be turned out of his holding at the mere will of his Lord, provided he duly performed his services according to the custom of the manor.

His heir succeeded him as of right, and his messuage and land was often held for generations in one family, and this not for the preservation of the family, but because of the service due from the holding to the Lord of the manor.

In the end he often became the "copy holder"

I have little doubt that the holdings of these four villein tenants from the nucleus of the four Worting Farms.

1, Worting Wood (held for 250 years by the Mays and Taplin's)

2, Battledown held by the Hydes

3, Scraps

4, Worting Inn Farm

There were also nine borderer tenants in Worting.

The bordarius (from borda a cottage) was a kind of cottier with a cottage in the village, and with from one to five acres strips of land in the open fields of the moor.

He was in a lower position than the villein tenant, and he differed from him in that he put no oxen or horses into the village plough teams. He was above the serfs or serf, and had to do menial services and was absolutely (*adscriptus-glebae*) bound to the soil (sold or transferred with the land), but he was under obligation to supply board, i.e. if the Abbot unluckily came down to Worting these menial borderers had to look sharp, bring him eggs, meat, and drink and generally look after him during his stay. The *bordarius* was of the class which afterwards became the cottager or modern labourer.

To sum up this explanation of the Domesday Entrust, Worting 878 years ago was a manor or landed estate belonging when we first hear of it to the Saxon King Edmund, Ironside; he gave it to the great monastery at Winchester called afterwards Hyde Abbey.

The Lord of the Manor did not reside in Worting. He was represented by a seneschal or a steward who lived in the manor house (now Worting House). His duty was to hold the Manor Court where the tenants of the manor had to do suit and pay their dues and where all matters connected with changes of tenants were settled. The Lords demesne in Worting consisted of about 230 acres out of the 1150 acres of the manor. This home farm was cultivated not by separate labourers who had nothing to do with the rest of the land in the manor but by the service villata or tenants in the villenage.

These tenants sometimes supplying oxen or horses to the lords plough team, sometimes using their own ploughs and co-operation being a marked feature of their services. All this work was under the direction of one of the principal tenants, who was also responsible for the proper farming of all the land throughout the manor.

I hope I have made it clear to you that 800 years ago the parish of Worting, was the landed estate of a manorial Lord, with a village community living on villenage upon it all helping to cultivate under the jurisdictions of the Lord of the Manor.

This lasted 500 years that the manor of Worting belonged to Hyde Abbey and long afterwards. On the dissolution of the monasteries, in the year of 1538, Henry VIII, seized most of their properties and gave many of their manors to his favourites' I find by a deed dated 1541 he granted the Manor of Worting to Sir William Paulet, afterwards made First Marquis of Winchester.

In Queen Elizabeth's reign it passed to the ancient and distinguished Hampshire family of D'Abricourt who also owned Strathfield Saye. From them it passed through the Pynckes and Bumbolde in the time of King James the first, to my ancestor William Wither in 1619.

From that date until the present generation the Manor of Worting remained in the Wither family; various people have lived in the manor house, which about the year 1813 was sold by my grandfather Harris Bigg-Wither with 47 acres of land, to Lord Spencer Chichester, from whose creditors it passed into the possession of Lady Jones, great aunt of the present owner Major R.P. Warren.

Domesday mentions one most interesting fact (*viz*) that there was a church at Worting in 1086. It was therefore probably built in Saxon time, perhaps by King Edmund Ironside himself, who like other Lords of the manors, appointed the clergyman, and charged the land tithe for his support.

The present dedication of the church to St Thomas of Canterbury is interesting as implying that the Old Saxon church was entirely rebuilt sometime after 1170, when the fame and sonority of the murdered Becket was at its height. The registers begin in 1604.

The list of rectors since the Reformation contains the names of Richard White (great grandfather of Gilbert White, the celebrated naturalist of Selbourne) afterwards vicar of Basingstoke, also of Henry Bigg, Warden of New Collage Oxford and of Winchester Collage.

The younger brother of the great judge, Sir William Blackstone, who planted the oak tree in the rectory gardens, was also the rector, as was the father of Sir William Heathcoat, who was born at Worthing.

During the long incumbency of Harris Bigg-Wither the late rector, the church was entirely rebuilt from its foundations in 1848 and the site of an old malt house was added to the churchyard, helping to give the beautiful appearance which it presents to the passer-by along the Basingstoke and Andover high road.

The old school which stood in the North West corner of the church yard was replaced by the present building, built and presented to the parish by Lovelace Bigg-Wither of Manydown and Tangier in 1855.

After exhibiting some documents relating to a great fire which occurred at Worthing on May 9th 1655, whereby the inhabitants suffered a loss of £1, 1040. 19sh 6d or about (£4,000) of present money, besides the destruction of house property belonging to the Wither family, the rector went through the history of every house in Worthing and Worthing Town End.

The most interesting was that of the building opposite to the rectory gardens now in the occupation of Mr C.Harnett of Worthing Inn Farm.

This house was in 1639 (14 car 1) by order of the court of Assize at Winchester directed to be kept open as a posting inn and to be known by the name of the "White Harte" the old sign of which was exhibited on the platform.

This led to a description of the village in the posting days, before the railway was opened. Four coaches from Salisbury to London went daily through Worthing, two of which changed horses at the old White Harte, not to be confounded with the modern public house of that name in the occupation of Mr Goodall at Worthing Town End.

Where sixty years ago there stood a stable for sixteen waggon horses for the road traffic, the van horses being stabled where now stands the "Royal Oak" public house. The village shop occupied by Mr Schofield was then an inn called the White Horse much frequented by the drivers of Hop Waggons from Farnham which at the season of the Weyhill fair were often seen drawn up the whole length of Worthing Town End.

Mr Bigg-Wither concluded his lecture by a graphic account of a robbery at Buckskin Farm in 1831 when old farmer Crockford nearly lost his life, and by relating incidents in the life of the village wherein the fathers and the grandfather of the present generation the ; Worsams, Butchers, Dry, Milams, Woolfords, Heakeths and others took an active part.

Worthing he said must have been full of life 60 years ago when, besides the posting and heavy road traffic, there were four schools, two grocers, and two blacksmiths shops beside Joice the butcher, Hunt the tailor and breeches maker and Willis the shoemaker, not to speak of Ford the rat catcher who is reputed to have brought a cart load of rats to Basingstoke Market.

The long but interesting lecture was brought to a close by the audience singing with great vigour "Auld Lang Syne"

Talk by Rev Bigg-Wither (Reginald)

Villata-parish, tithing, township, a village.

Villenage –status and condition of a villein ,at the will of a feudal Lord.

Demesne-a piece of land attached to a manor and retained by the owner for their own use.

Carucate- medieval unit of land-tax assessment

Ascripi gleboe- Latin

Adscripus glebae – sold or transferred with the land.

Hide- Anglo Saxon –Hyd –a house.

Ploughland – carscate-was as much land as one plough could till in a year using a team of eight horses or oxen