

THE HISTORY OF RUDGE

On October 6th an audience of no fewer than 32 listened to Hugo Pellew's talk on the "History of Rudge".

The name of Rudge may well go back to, or beyond, the Domesday Book because Lustleigh was a thriving community even in pre-Norman times. Domesday lists ten or eleven farms and Barne-Court but, as it does not name them individually, one could well have been Rudge.

Although Rudge does not appear on the Devon Lay Subsidy list of 1332 wherein only Pepperdon, Foxworthy, Caseley, South Harton, Pethybridge, and Boveycombe were wealthy enough to be subject to the "subsidy" (a form of tax) this again does not rule out its existence at that time.

The first known mention of Rudge is in an inventory of the Manor of Lustleigh made in 1615 after the death of Nicholas Wadham who had been Lord of the Manor. Rudge, or as then rendered "Rugge", was at that time occupied by a John Conyn or Cuming who held the farm in copyhold with his wife Elizabeth and his son, Cyprian.

At this time there were three types of tenure for properties.

1) Freehold was originally granted by the Lord of the Manor for services rendered and obliged the freeholder to pay a small annual "quit rent" to the Lord, to help the Lord with the harvest, and to bear arms in his levy. By 1600 this latter obligation had gone but the quit rent remained. Freeholds in Lustleigh were Pepperdon, Foxworthy, Casely and Stockner, a farm which no longer exists; its site lies on the course of the railway line about a mile towards Mortonhamstead.

2) Lease by indenture of two deeds, one signed by the Lord and the other by the tenant. The two were placed one on the other and cut with a wavy line to eliminate the possibility of forgery at a later date; the two halves would have to coincide when referred to. Boveycombe, South Harton and East Wrey were held thus.

3) Copyhold. The only document of title the tenant had was a copy of the relevant extract from the Manor Rolls stating his tenancy. This held for two generations and in addition the copy-holder's widow could remain in the property so long as she remained "sole and chaste". When the tenure passed to the second generation there was a charge to be paid to the Lord of the Manor called a "heriot". This could be in the form of money, or live stock. In the case of Rudge the heriot was the best beast on the farm. The tenure could be extended to a third generation by the payment of a "fine". This, in the case of Rudge would, have been £38, a large sum of money in those days.

Although it might seem that this arrangement was very much in favour of the Lord of the Manor, it was not really disadvantageous to the copyholder who had security of tenure and could improve his house and his land in the knowledge that his wife and heir were both assured of continuity of possession, and this could, by payment, be extended to further generations.

Rules, known as "Customs of the Manor", were also laid down for anyone wanting to become a tenant in the Manor. By the "Vow or Frank Pledge"

they had to avow that they were not a thief or an assistant to a thief, swear loyalty to the King and to the Lord of the Manor and pay a fee to him, and to find someone to act as a pledge or security for him in order to be admitted. As tenants they had to grind their corn at the Lord's mill and were only allowed to sublet for one year and then only for grass.

At this time Rudge would have been a long low thatched house. With the house went a large number of fields in a rough triangle, bounded by the Wray Brook on one side, the River Bovey for part of another which then took in a lot of Trendlebere Down before the third side cut back to the house and on to the two mills which were also owned by Rudge. The land holding and field names were not very different in 1837 when the tithe map was drawn.

In 1625 Henry Wilmead, a tanner from Hennock, and his wife Helen contracted a lease of 1/3 of Rudge by indenture (99 years or three lives). The property by then had 51 acres and a moiety of 200 acres of Trendlebere. In 1633 Cyprian Comyn died and in 1639 John Comyn died, but his widow, Elizabeth, survived until 1658 outliving the Wilmeads who never enjoyed their lease!

The Civil War arrived in Devon in 1645. Exeter was besieged by Fairfax, Cromwell's army moved along the Teign valley from Moretonhampstead, there was a skirmish at Canonleigh and a full scale battle on Bovey Heath which the Royalists lost. The rural population was generally Royalist and there is the account of the officers who were playing cards in Front House, Fore St., Bovey when the Roundheads came to the door. The officers threw their money out of the front windows and whilst their foes were picking it up, escaped by a back entrance!

Between 1649 and 1660, the Roundheads desecrated churches by destroying effigies and decorations; they also had their own version of the book of common prayer printed with the Lord Protector's name instead of the sovereign's in various prayers.

Nicholas Wadham had died in 1610 without a male heir and had been predeceased by his three married sisters, who under the law at that time were his heirs. The Manor was therefore divided between their families into two parts of one third each (Wyndham and Strangways) and four parts of one twelfth each to the four daughters of Margaret Martin. Each of these inheritances comprised the appropriate portion of each property in the Manor. Individually they were not all that valuable and most were soon dispersed by sale to local tenant farmers, although the last third, belonging to the Wyndham family, was not sold until 1805 because of a complicated entailment which needed an act of Parliament to remove it.

The ramifications of the ownership of the land of the Manor and of Lustleigh Cleave have been the subject of another talk by Hugo and are set out in his book on the history of Wye Farm, a copy of which is in the Archives Room. Richard Caseley, Nick Grey of Boveycombe and George Wills of Higher Hisley bought three twelfths of the Manor for over £600. This was then split up between the three men by deeds of conveyance by Richard Caseley. Surviving deeds are:-

- 3/12 of South Barton to N. Grey sen. (held by Iris Gould of Lustleigh)
- 3/12 of Boveycombe to N. Grey jun. (deed with Iris Gould)
- 3/12 of Peck to John Beiry (deed with Amery of Bucks)
- 3/12 of Higher Coombe and 3/12 of Lustleigh Cleave to Geo Wills. (this deed is held by Mike Robertson, late of Higher Coombe, Lustleigh)

In 1658 George Wills junior, who already owned a quarter of Rudge, agreed a 99 years lease with Sir John Wyndham of his third. In 1681 Wadhams Strangways sold his third of the Manor individually to tenant farmers. In the case of Rudge, it was Geo. Wills jun. who bought the Strangways one third. This deed has not survived; the few that have of the Strangways sales are:-

- 1/3 of Higher Hisley in the Exeter Record Office.
- 1/3 of Boveycombe with Iris Gould of Lustleigh.
- 1/3 of Waye with Col. F.H. Pellew of Waye Farm, Lustleigh.

In 1805 the remaining Wyndham third of the Manor was sold to the local farmers and another George Wills bought a third of Rudge for £447. At this time the property still included the two Lustleigh mills and a third of Trendlebere Down.

There was now no longer a Lord of the Manor and the status of the local farmers, now that they were freeholders, rose as did their wealth. In 1795 the occupier of Waye Farm, a George Miller, was described as a "yeoman" but some years later in 1805 appeared as "Geo. Miller, Gent". Farmers' wives status rose with their husbands', one room in the house was converted into a "parlour" where they could entertain their friends. An inventory of Mary Miller's parlour included six silver teaspoons.

In keeping with this new found affluence, the old house at Rudge was demolished in 1837 and today's house built in its stead. - *about 1830* During the demolition an old Commonwealth prayer book was found walled up. It was leather bound with a mermaid on one cover and the Lord Protector on horseback followed by a hound on the other.

There is some mystery as to how or why it was hidden. Perhaps Thomas Comyn, Rector of Lustleigh 1607-59 during the Protectorate was involved. It is not known where his sympathies lay in the Civil War nor if he was of the Comyn family that lived in Rudge, although there are some indications that he might have been.

George Wills, the then owner of Rudge, gave it to John Mudge, the Rector who in turn handed it to the Diocese for safe keeping. Now that we have our Archives Room to store such local treasures, it would be very nice if we could have it back, or at least a copy.

Should attempts be made to trace this little book, it is recorded in the Transactions of the Exeter Diocesan Architectural Society of 1855 Vol V, part 2, page 84 under the heading " A Paper read by Lt. Col. W. Harding FGS, Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries "