

Transcription of a talk given by

Walter Brown in Peasemore Church in November 1997 on

SOME MORE HISTORY OF PEASEMORE

Ladies and Gentlemen

There was an interesting period in our Peasemore history back in the middle ages when for a time the whole of our Parish became crown property owned by the King. We have not recorded much of that period so far, but over the years Stephen and Dorothy, Donald Lindsay and I have researched some of our old Peasemore history. Between us we examined a large number of old parish deeds, Manor Court proceedings, wills and other documents, which have given us a good deal of information about Peasemore through the ages; though undoubtedly there is a great deal still to be discovered.

In the 14th century there were two main properties here, Peasemore Manor and Priors Side, the old name for Peasemore House, but in addition there were a number of small tenanted farms and small-holdings. These were different from what we consider a small holding today, when we usually visualise a house or cottage with perhaps ten, twenty or thirty acres around it, often within a ringed fence. Back in the middle ages, and in fact right up to the time of the General Enclosure Act in the middle of the last century, these small holdings were usually based on a house or cottage here in the village. Many of these houses faced onto the village street with a small amount of property around them, but mainly in a strip at the back of the house always termed the backside in the old deeds. This backside usually contained a vegetable garden, an orchard and some farm animals - a cow or two, perhaps a pair of oxen and a horse, some chickens and a few pigs. Any sheep owned were held elsewhere out in the parish.

In those days, the arable land was distributed around in strips in the common fields. For instance, one small holding might have four and a half acres up on South Field Hill going up towards Gidley, another two and a half acres on Le Heron - sometimes called The Hearn - and another five acres up on Hailey field, and so on. Alongside these would be other strips of other farmers. Each common field was in the same crop rotation and the rotation here used to be: the first year winter wheat or rye, the second year was usually spring barley or oats, and occasionally some beans, peas or vetches and the third year was fallow; then it was back to wheat again.

Malt was always produced here in the village and every small holding brewed its own ale. Hops didn't arrive until the end of the sixteenth century and then for a time we grew our own hops. The hop garden, as it was known, was just across the road from our village pub. There was plenty of common grazing for the livestock. There were

the meadows adjacent to the village and there was common at the back of the rookery, (that is the old rookery up on the hill) between there and the Green Lane, where it joined onto Beedon Common and Pillern. There was also common up at Burlands in the north of the parish adjacent to Sheep Leaze lane. There was a good deal of downland here in the old days. Roughdown Farm was almost entirely downland and, although we pronounce it Rowdown, it is spelt Rough; also the large field which we still today call the Downs although it is now under cultivation, that is the field on the west of the Warren Down track. That field goes all the way down to Priors Copse, over a hundred acres of it and it used to be all downland. It was across that downland that our ancient avenue of sarsen stones went from east to west heading into the old stone circle at Hill Green.

We used to have a lot more woodland here - although we are planting again now - and Hailey Wood, Lower Hailey and Little Hailey, today three copses, used to be one large wood. Priors Copse was about four times the size of the present wood and it stretched out towards the north.

One old deed mentions a hundred acres of marsh though it doesn't say where it was; but when the springs are high that little Winterbourne which rises down at Chapel Copse still occasionally floods the bottom of the Warren Down meadow on rare occasions. Centuries ago when the water table here was much higher, before so much drainage had taken place everywhere, it would have flooded higher up the valley. It is thought that one branch of our Winterbourne probably rose up at Hailey Bottom and flowed all the way down the valley. There is a bit of land up there that goes by the name of The Slad and that means a marshy area. A thousand years ago, when we know that the water table was so much higher, it is very likely that there would have been some standing water and marshy areas in the bottom of some of our valleys up here. Hence the names of Peasemore, Catmore and Stanmore: the old names were Peasemere, Catmere and Stanmere.

On the edge of the parish there used to be a lot of undeveloped land, which in the old deeds is described as heath or sometimes as furze or gorse and occasionally just as waste. Over the many centuries this has gradually been brought under the plough.

All through the middle ages there were a large number of sheep here. Wherever these sheep were grazing by day they were always brought back into a sheep fold at night. These sheep folds were taken round all the arable land in succession during the twelve months. This was considered most important because you could not grow a decent crop of corn on these chalk lands without the manure from the sheep; and as these sheep moved around, it used to be said that the 'golden hoof' was just as important as the meat and the wool of the sheep.

A hayward was always appointed here in the village. He had several duties, amongst them was to see that the meadows were shut up for hay at the appropriate time. He also dealt with stray animals. These were put into the village pound and a fine was taken. He was also responsible for seeing that people did not put out more livestock than they were entitled to and that they were in the right area at the right time of year. This seems to have been determined by the Manor Court each year and it was assessed according to the amount of land farmed and the rent paid. If you exceeded your quota

of animals or if they were in the wrong area you were liable to be up in front of the court. It didn't matter who you were. Looking through our Manor Court proceedings we see, for instance that in 1538 the Rector of Peasemore, who in those days was one of our larger and wealthier farmers here with his glebe land, was up in front of the court for putting his pigs out on the downs at a time when there was no right of common and as the proceedings said "where no previous rector had put his pigs". He duly gets fined ten shillings, quite a sum at that time. This remark "where no previous rector had put his pigs" is typical of those Manor Court judgements where so much was ruled according to ancient custom. Where some ancient right was won from the Lord of the Manor then it was not forgotten and it gets repeated year after year in the court proceedings. Amongst them were that copy holders might obtain timber from the woods to repair their tenements. Another was that they might have common on Yowe field and the Town Plat when the corn was off the ground; in other words they could graze there after harvest. A third one was that they may bait at Wildway when the corn was on the ground - bait by the way is a word we still use for feed. Yowe field and the Town Plat are in the valley which runs south from Hailey lane and Yowe is our Berkshire pronunciation for ewe. Wildway is that bit of our Peasemore to Chieveley road which runs along Gidley Bottom. It is an extremely ancient name and no doubt aptly describes the track through there, as it was many centuries ago. This right of bait at Wildway when the corn is *on* the ground rather surprised us. What we think it probably means is that the rainwater always runs down into the bottom of Wildway from all sides and as a result the young corn there is apt to come up rather thick, lush and weak, what we call 'frum' - another old Berkshire word. When the young corn is frum it pays to put the sheep on it for a time in order to eat it down. It then comes up much stronger and tillers properly.

In the fourteenth century Peasemore Manor was owned by Sir Richard Abberbury. He was a Knight of the Black Prince's household and he lived at Donnington Castle and owned Donnington Manor. The first record we have of him in Peasemore was in 1340 when he obtained right of free warren here; so presumably we had as many rabbits around then as we have today. The right of free warren was probably down at Worn or Warren Down. He then bought Peasemore Manor, becoming Lord of the Manor here, and attached it to his Donnington Manor. Later the two manors were bought by Thomas Chaucer. He was the son of the poet - the great Geoffrey Chaucer; and Thomas Chaucer himself was an important personality. He was a member of parliament and he became Speaker of the House of Commons and High Sheriff of Berkshire. He married an heiress and became extremely wealthy. He owned several farms down in the Vale as well as the two manors up here.

When Thomas Chaucer died all his property went to his daughter, Alice, and she of course was a very wealthy lady. She was married three times by the age of twenty six. Her third husband was William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk and he then became Lord of the Manor of Peasemore. Suffolk was the chief minister and a favourite of Henry VI who in 1448 made him a Duke; but a couple of years later various misfortunes befell the government including our loss of Normandy to the French, and Suffolk was blamed. He was also accused of corruption by parliament and he was impeached and sent into exile. On his way he was waylaid and murdered. He had a son John who was also Lord of the Manor here. He married the Princess Elizabeth who was a sister of both Edward IV and Richard III. He managed to survive the remaining years of the

Wars of the Roses. He had three sons who were all important men by the end of the century, but they were all supporters of Richard III; so after the Battle of Bosworth when Richard was killed and Henry VII came to the throne they found themselves on the wrong side. The eldest led an insurrection against king Henry and was killed at the Battle of Stoke. His brother Edmund was executed for treason and the third brother died fighting on the continent; so that was the end of the de la Pole, Suffolk family as Lords of the Manor here. All their property was forfeit and Peasemore Manor now went to the King, Henry VII; and after him to Henry VIII then to Edward VI and finally to Elizabeth. In due course Queen Elizabeth sold it and it became private property once again.

Priors Side at that time was owned by Poughley Priory. Poughley Priory was tucked away up in the Welford woods three or four miles to the west of us. It was an old Augustinian Priory founded in 1160 and the Peasemore property was given to it very shortly after its foundation. A century later some more Peasemore land was added, so Priors Side occupied quite a large area of our parish here. Some of us remember what remained of the old Priory building back in the 1930's. It was then a farmhouse in not very good repair. It was bought by somebody - I think he was a retired solicitor from London - and he went to a lot of trouble and expense in doing it up. He had just started living there in 1939 when the war came. The Air Ministry was looking for additional airfields and there is some good level ground up there and that became the Welford aerodrome. The old Priory building became the officers' mess, so this poor chap then had to vacate his home at extremely short notice; and I think I am right in saying that he then returned to his flat in London to find that it had just been bombed!

Poughley Priory was quite a wealthy Priory. It owned a good deal of land round this part of Berkshire and it led an uneventful life for the next four hundred years until the time of Henry VIII. In 1525, which was several years before Henry started on the dissolution of the monasteries, Cardinal Wolsey obtained permission from the Pope and agreement from Henry to dissolve Poughley Priory and some other ecclesiastical establishments, in order to raise funds to build Christ Church, Oxford. So now Priors Side went to Cardinal Wolsey for his Cardinal College as it used to be called. The Great Chapel of Christ Church is now our Diocesan Cathedral, so I suppose we can say that it owes something to Peasemore for its foundation; not that it was our diocese in those days, because at that time we were in the Diocese of Salisbury. In fact we started off by being in the Diocese of Ramsbury. Ramsbury was absorbed by Salisbury back in the 11th century; and it was an early Bishop of Salisbury - Bishop Osmund - who came here to Peasemore in about 1090 to consecrate our Norman church and churchyard. The great Bishop Osmund was later canonised, so we have this rather unusual distinction of having had our Norman church and our churchyard here consecrated by a saint. We remained in the Diocese of Salisbury for the next eight hundred years until 1836 when the Archdeaconry of Berkshire was moved into our present Diocese of Oxford.

To return to Cardinal Wolsey and Priors Side. In 1525 Wolsey was at the height of his powers, extremely wealthy, very powerful and autocratic and he had made a lot of enemies. Then shortly afterwards he failed to obtain from the Pope permission for Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon so that Henry could marry Anne Boleyn. His downfall followed. All his property was forfeit and went to the King. So

we now find the whole of the parish of Peasemore owned by the King, Henry VIII, because he already had Peasemore Manor and that meant he held all the tenanted farms as well, the advowson of the church with its glebe land - the lot. However, he didn't hang on to his Poughley Priory property for very long, because he wanted to get hold of some land in the middle of London, roughly where St James' Park is today. That was owned by St Peter's Monastery, Westminster, attached to Westminster Abbey; so a swop was arranged. Henry got his London property and we now find Priors Side owned by St Peter's Monastery, Westminster. So it was for several more years until Henry got going on the dissolution of the monasteries, when St Peter's Monastery went the way of the rest. Once again Priors Side went to the king; but shortly after that Henry, with his vast monastic lands, started selling them off and Priors Side was granted to John Carlton of Walton-on-Thames. He owned it for a good many years and then sold it and it has continued as private property ever since.

Peasemore Manor was sold by Queen Elizabeth and she granted it to the Lyford family. The Lyfords had prospered as Merchant Tailors in the City of London and were now living at Stanford Dingley. They acquired Peasemore Manor and so became Lords of the Manor here. Back in those Elizabethan days two of our oldest Peasemore families were tenant farmers here. The Hatts were the tenants of the Manor Farm and the Heads of Priors Side. Both families can trace some of their descendants in our church registers from that period into the present century; and although we have fairly recently lost both names here in Peasemore I am glad to say that we have still got some of their descendants with us. We have several wills of the Hatts and the Heads of that period and we have put some transcriptions of them up in the chancel amongst our various exhibits. We put transcriptions rather than photostats because the originals are written in that early English script which is extremely difficult to read unless you are an expert.

The will which I find the most interesting is the one of Alice Hatt dated 1560. She and her husband Henry had jointly been given the tenancy of the Manor Farm and after her husband died Alice Hatt went on farming it on her own. Reading her will, she sounds a delightful person who went to the greatest trouble in allotting her various farm animals and other possessions, first to her children and then remembering other relatives and friends. She starts off her will by leaving one bushel of rye and one bushel of malt to everybody here in the village who as it says "does not have the use of a plough of their own going for them". Well that really means everybody here in the village who was less well off than she was. She then goes on allotting her various farm animals beginning with - again as it says - "my Sybil's cow to my son" "my white pied cow" goes to one of her daughters and "my grey horse on which I was wont to ride myself" goes to another daughter. Looking at our church registers we see that her daughter Sybil aged twenty had died very shortly before this will was made, so undoubtedly that first cow was her daughter Sybil's pet cow. She then goes on allotting her numerous sheep, first to her children and then to various nephews, nieces and godchildren: each receiving one ewe and her lamb and a bushel of barley. There is mention of some of her clothes: one daughter gets her best gown, another her russett frock and her sister gets a red petticoat. They also receive other items including a pair of sheets, one of canvas and one of locrum, which was a type of linen. There is an inventory of her farm implements which includes her plough and a set of harrows. There is also her side-saddle and bridle. There is a well bucket with its rope and

chain; and that reminds us that some of us remember when there were still about fifteen wells here in the middle of the village dotted about on either side of the village street. Many of those wells would have gone one to each small holding. There is also mention of a cheese press several cheeses and a bacon hog hanging in the roof. I suspect that the bacon hog hanging in the roof had probably been smoked there in the old fashioned style, because although most of the larger and wealthier houses now had chimneys, many other houses still had an open hearth from which the smoke had to find its way through the rafters and out of a smoke hole in the gable. There is mention of some of the household furniture, which was pretty basic at that time. It includes a wooden chest, a trestle table and form, two chairs - chairs at that time were few and far between and rather special - and one carpet which was likely to have been embroidered and then used as a wall hanging, because most houses had rushes and herbs strewn on the floor. There is also mention of some of the kitchen utensils and equipment. There was an andiron which was a fire dog and a cottrell which was an iron bar on which the cooking pots were hung over an open fire. There was a quern which was a hand operated stone mill used for grinding corn and there were pewter plates and twelve wooden trenchers. The only eating utensils were spoons, because people used their fingers in those days, and there were two dozen tin spoons. Anyway it does give one some idea of how the rather better off than average family lived here in Peasemore four hundred years ago.

We also have a description of Peasemore Manor when the Lyfords arrived and it was very much the same then as it is today. The front door faced the church and it mentions the backside with the farm animals there. Today we enjoy walking through the yard to fetch our cream from the dairy to find that the backside still has its cows and calves, its chickens and the old muscovy ducks wandering about as of old.

The most basic cottage of the village at that time had a timber framework, walls made of wattle and daub, a thatched roof and an earthen floor. It consisted of just the one room though sometimes it was divided into two, the sleeping quarters and a living room. It was a design which went back all through the middle ages to the old saxon longhouse. The last cottage we had of that description here in Peasemore was just across the road from our village pond. It was diagonally across the road on the opposite corner; and the last inhabitant was old George Fidler. Some of us remember the cottage very well. It had just the one room, although it was divided into two by some old army blankets which were strung across the middle. The thatched roof came down very low on two sides so it was a bit dark and smokey but otherwise warm and comfortable enough. However, it was condemned by the district council authorities after this last war and ordered to be demolished. When the demolition took place it was found that the old timbers were in fact extremely strong, made of good oak, and it took about three days of hard work to pull it all down.

Old George Fidler by the way was a Peasemore character who was an extremely useful cricketer - in his own style. By the late 1930's George had stopped playing, as the years had gone by, until one day Peasemore found themselves a man short. Somebody remembered old George and he was asked to come along and make up the side. By then our village cricket was becoming a bit more sophisticated than of old and George came along smoking his old clay pipe as usual. Incidentally Geoff Jacobs was telling me the other day that when his mother ran our village shop here, those clay

pipes used to be sold two for a penny; and Geoff's got a good story about old George and his clay pipes - but I must continue. George came along in time to go into bat. He removed his jacket revealing his corduroy trousers tied round below the knee with the old 'Yorks' and held up with an ancient pair of braces; and I think the opposition reckoned he wouldn't give them much trouble. There were three balls remaining in the over when he went in and he then proceeded to despatch them one after the other clean out of the ground!

When the Lyfords arrived, they as Lords of the Manor had the gift of the living here. Peasemore Rectory at that time, like many of our country livings, was quite a wealthy one with its glebe land and the tithes which were paid to it; and so the Lord of the Manor frequently retained it either for himself or for one of his family. We now had three generations of the Lyfords at the Manor and two Lyford rectors here. The property then went to a daughter who married the Reverend Coward of Bucklebury and we then had two generations of the Coward family who were both Lords of the Manor and Rectors of Peasemore. Again the property came to a daughter, Mary Coward the daughter of the Reverend Thomas Coward and she became Lady of the Manor. The tombstones of both of them are just down there in the aisle. Mary Coward married the Reverend Ralph Shirley who was already Rector of Welford and Wickham and he now became Rector of Peasemore in addition. He remained our rector for the next fifty-one years, during which time he lived at Wickham rectory. He outlived his wife so that when he died he was both Lord of the Manor and Rector of Peasemore. His daughter married the curate, the Reverend Robert Ready and Robert Ready now became Rector of Peasemore but not in fact Lord of the Manor, because the Manor was sold and it went to the Archer family of Welford. They in due course became the Archer Houblons and they retained the Lordship of the Manor of Peasemore. We then had two generations of the Archer Houblons as our rectors in the last century. Some of us remember the last one. He was a great character who went from Peasemore to become Rector of Wantage and Archdeacon of Berkshire. He died in the 1930's and is buried here in our churchyard.

During this century there have been many changes and the Lord of the Manor no longer has the gift of the living here. Today our patron is the Bishop of Oxford; and Lords of the Manor no longer have the privileges and responsibilities that they used to have. Today it is just an honorary title which is apt to get bought and sold at auction. The Lordship of the Manor of Peasemore was sold about a year ago and it was bought by somebody who lives in Vienna.

You may wonder why we had a curate here in this small parish, but we needed a curate for various reasons. Sometimes when the Lord of the Manor was also rector, sometimes because the rector was a pluralist with more than one living. The eighteenth century was a rather notorious period for some clergy having several parishes from which they drew the stipends and then appointed a curate to look after the church. The Reverend Coward when he arrived here as rector was already Rector of Bucklebury, the Reverend Shirley had his three parishes and the Reverend Robert Ready had two parishes.

There is an interesting document up in our chancel amongst our exhibits there. It is the Visitation of the Bishop of Salisbury in I think about 1770 and, reading that, we

see that when the Reverend Robert Ready was our rector here he was in fact living at Betterton six miles away down in the Vale. He also had the living of Buscot which of course is miles away near Faringdon. Another reason for having a curate was that since the end of sixteenth century Catmore came under Peasemore; not that that was a very onerous job for our curate, because although Catmore was once a sizeable village - it even had a fair there back in the thirteen hundreds - of recent centuries it has consisted of just the church, the farmhouse, a cottage and a few farm buildings and the tiny hamlet of Lilley. As a result it used to get one service every quarter. Today it comes under Brightwalton and it gets three very well attended services during the twelve months. It is a lovely small church and you walk through the farmyard to get to it. In the old days we never locked our churches and the church door there was always left open; and I expect some of you know the little story of when the parson turned up for his quarterly service on one occasion, he was met by the vergers who said "do you mind preaching your sermon from the chancel steps this morning because the old turkey is sitting in the pulpit".

When the Reverend Archer Houblon came here early in the last century he was responsible for rebuilding our church. It is a very fine Victorian church, designed by George Street who was a well known architect in these parts in the middle of the last century; but we do greatly regret the passing of the Norman church. The middle of the century was a period when our Victorian forebears were great rebuilders of churches, but also extremely ruthless in getting rid of the old. By the end of the century they were much more conservation minded, but it was too late for Peasemore. In 1842 the nave of our Norman church which had stood here on these same foundations for eight hundred years was demolished and it was thrown out as rubble to make up the village street. This nave is twice the height of the Norman nave and our church tower which had been built by William Coward in 1737, had to be raised by several feet. You can see the different coloured brick outside. Our extremely fine spire was then added and, as you know, the top of the spire is now undergoing some very necessary but expensive repairs; so I would add that we are most grateful for any contributions towards these expenses. The chancel was rebuilt in 1864/65 and it is considerably larger than the Norman chancel; and our churchyard had to be extended by about ten yards in order to accommodate it.

When the chancel was being completed in 1864 a great row was brewing here in Peasemore concerning the dedication of the new church, because we have this very old but extremely strong tradition that the early church was dedicated to St Peada. St Peada lived in the seventh century and I spoke about him at some length and why we consider that the ancient church was dedicated to him when I was giving a history of the church about three years ago; so I won't bore you by repeating that. But in 1864 the Reverend Archer Houblon and the Diocese of Oxford, which was rather stuffy about these things, said who is this St Peada? He has never been officially canonised as a saint and we can't have him. So the new church was dedicated to St Barnabas. Much as we admire St Barnabas, Peasemore felt very strongly about the loss of our St Peada and this was supported by our curate of the time, the Reverend Wyndham Shakespeare. If you look in our church registers and our registers go back to 1538 when they were first introduced, you do not find the name of the church mentioned anywhere. This is because there is a sort of pro forma for entries in the baptism, marriage and burial registers which states that the event took place in the church of

the parish of Peasemore or wherever, but no name of the church. In 1864 our curate goes out of his way on several occasions to enter that the event took place in the church of St Peada of the parish of Peasemore. I have left open our marriage register of that date amongst our exhibits in the chancel which shows two of these entries. Donald Lindsay tells me that there is an entry in one of our other registers (our other registers are now in the Berkshire record office) where the curate has entered the church as St Peada and the rector has later spotted it and crossed it out.

If you have looked at our exhibits in the chancel you will have seen several old pictures and photos of Peasemore as some of us remember it sixty or seventy years ago. That was a time when the whole village consisted of thatched cottages and thatched barns; when we had no main water here, no main drainage, no electricity and when pretty well everybody who lived in the village worked within the parish. It was in fact a time when Peasemore would not have looked very different from Peasemore in the middle ages. Cottages were rebuilt occasionally and in particular after the great fire of Peasemore in 1736 when the whole of the centre of the village was burnt to the ground, but it was rebuilt in very much the same style. As I say, some of us remember Peasemore when it looked like that, but we were self supporting then as we always had been. We had the church, we had the village pub and a post office and a village shop. We had a shoemaker and a rope maker; we had a village carpenter, a butcher, a thatcher and a blacksmith; and we had two carriers both run by Geoff Jacob's family. Today the village not only looks completely different but the way of life here has changed out of all recognition. However, most of us agree that Peasemore has in fact developed extremely well. It remains an attractive village to live in and there are still good people around who give their time and talents to keeping our church and our village affairs going along successfully. Long may it all continue..