

The
Ostrich Inn

AND

VILLAGE of WHERSTEAD

BRIEF NOTES ON
THE OSTRICH INN
AND VILLAGE OF WHERSTEAD

The Village

THE parish of Wherstead lies to the south-east of Ipswich on the Borough boundary, and comprises some 2264 acres, now administered by the Samford Rural District Council, but in former times it was a part of the Hundred of Samford. Like that of most villages, its early history is obscure, but it is said to have possessed a church at the time of the Domesday Survey, though this was not the present building. It does not seem as if there were many inhabitants, or that the village produced much income for either the Lord of the Manor or the Lord of the Hundred. In 1274 the Lord of the Hundred was Ralph de Ufford, while a little later the Lord of Wherstead was a certain Robert de Roydon. The poverty of the village is apparent in 1327, when Parliament granted a subsidy of one-fifth of all the belongings of all persons above the status of labourer and not including those of the Church. Wherstead was assessed at twenty-five shillings, which, even allowing for the much higher value of money in those times, was a small sum, and less than the contribution of any other village in the Hundred. As the purpose of the subsidy was to enable the boy King, Edward III, to lead an army against Scotland and avenge Bannockburn, Wherstead's quota was not calculated to take him very far. As it fell out, the Scots met him at the border, out-generalled him and forced him to acknowledge their independence. Other meagre information in the Subsidy Return is that the village supported a fuller and two bakers, and that even at this time there were houses along the Strand, or that portion of the parish bounded by the River Orwell.

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The Inn

The Ostrich Inn is situated in the fork of the Shotley and Manningtree roads, just beyond Bourne Bridge, and was originally a brick and timber building of the late Tudor or early Jacobean date. It stands upon land which once formed a part of the Manor of Bourne Hall, and which, in the time of James I, was the property of the great lawyer and Chief Justice, Sir Edward Coke. He is famous as the decidedly brutal prosecutor of Sir Walter Raleigh and Elizabeth's favourite, Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex, and he contrived to amass a large fortune before his independence as a judge and activity as a member of Parliament moved the King to dismiss him from the bench. For some years before this, Coke had been investing his money in land for the benefit of his family, the Cokes of Holkham Hall in Norfolk, and Bourne Hall Manor was one of his many purchases, being acquired in 1609 from one Thomas Hall for £1,600. He also bought Wherstead Hall in 1600 from William Barrow for £1,400. It is owing to these transactions that the Inn came to be called the Ostrich, for the Coke crest was an ostrich standing upon a cap of maintenance and holding a horseshoe in its beak, but there is no evidence that Coke ever lived in Wherstead. Until recent times the Ostrich on the Inn sign carried a horseshoe in its beak, and this seems to dispose of the ingenious suggestion that the name of the house ought to be "Oyster Ridge", because of the oyster beds in the River Orwell in early times. These oyster beds certainly existed, and in 1612, the alleged date of the building of the Inn, Ipswich records show that some persons were prosecuted for the illegal dredging of oysters. At other times the charges were of disposing of these oysters in markets outside Ipswich, and the cases were heard before an Admiralty Court, often held at Nacton, which appears to have had power to try cases of piracy, but no opportunity to do so.

In 1615 the local Justices of the Peace drew up rules for the licensing of inns and alehouses. They were only to be licenced by magistrates living nearby, and there was only to be one alehouse in a village which possessed an inn, and was within two miles of a large town. Wherstead's alehouse was called the Cock

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(now Pepper Farm), and its keeper and the landlord of the Ostrich held their licences on condition that they "uttered" ale and beer to travellers, and did not permit the local population to tipple in the houses "otherwise than the law alloweth".

During the year 1614, Robert Gooding, a Wherstead man, attained the honour of being elected one of the two Bailiffs of Ipswich, who until comparatively recent times jointly exercised the functions of a mayor. Gooding continued as a borough magistrate the following year, but he died in 1618 and is buried at Wherstead. A few years later, in 1624, the Borough decided to repair Bourne Bridge, then a wooden structure, although its then boundary did not extend so far. The present brick and stone bridge was built in 1775, and in 1891 was extended to add a further fourteen feet to the width of the road, this time by the County Council. Upon the completion of the work a lunch was given at the Ostrich, in the course of which the then Vicar of Wherstead proposed the health of the Council.

The outbreak of the great civil war between Charles I and his Parliament in 1642 caused a certain amount of uneasiness in Ipswich, and probably also in Wherstead. The sympathies of the county were with the Parliament, which made folk apprehensive that Royalist forces might march in and lay waste the countryside. Ipswich lost no time digging in, buying muskets and powder, and sending to Colchester for an engineer to fortify the town, while public spirited citizens armed themselves and took turns guarding the streets at night. But East Anglia proved to be a Parliamentary stronghold, and the countryside settled down under a Puritan regime which, by modern standards, seems to have been overfond of rather lurid sermons and a code of Sabbath observance which must have left the people of Wherstead with little to do on Sunday but walk about slowly, and not smile too much.

Witchcraft

But if the inhabitants were forbidden to run races, ride, attend cockfights or swim on the seventh day, the government appears to have provided ample facilities for witch-hunting, and East Anglia was invited to submit all suspected persons to the

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scrutiny of Matthew Hopkins, the Witch-finder General, and his assistants. Large numbers of old women were brought to confess that they had had dealings with Satan, and had brought ruin or death upon their neighbours through the agency of the imps they suckled. The examinations, with their tales of demon dogs offering to destroy village constables, and flocks of imps kept for the destruction of crows, would be more amusing had they not been obtained by methods involving torture and third degree examinations, and resulted in bringing large numbers of eccentrics and crazy old women to the gallows. The year 1645 was the heyday of the witch-hunt, and though there is no evidence that Wherstead contributed any victims, the Widow Mixer of Shotley was indicted, together with Rebecca Prick and Mary Goddard of Belstead, and Jane Rivet, Susan Manners, Alice Muntford and Mary Skippon of Copdock. Ann Marsh of Tattingstone was watched for two days and nights to see whether her imps would come to her for sustenance, and tiring of it, told "those that thus used her that she would be revenged of them". This was unwise, for when one of the watchers returned home, he found that one of two children, left unattended in a room with an open fire, had caught its clothes alight and died of the burns. Ann was promptly charged, but for some reason the grand jury did not believe the evidence, and threw out the case. It is very probable that all these women were brought to the Ostrich for examination before John Thurston of Hoxne and his fellow Justices, for in the absence of special courts or offices in the Hundreds, it was the custom of the magistrates to conduct their business in the parlour of any convenient inn which was sufficiently large.

The Administration of Justice

For information that the Ostrich was used for such meetings, we are indebted to Devereux Edgar, an Ipswich gentleman, who became a Justice of the Peace in 1699, and whose Memorandum Book is preserved in the Ipswich Public Library. Edgar and his friends Bridgman and Serjeant-at-Law Charles Whitaker favoured the Ostrich, as being in Samford Hundred and yet close to Ipswich: but Joseph Thurston and Philip Skippon preferred the Pelican at East Bergholt, since their respective homes were at Little Wenham

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and Boxford. As a consequence there was a rivalry between these two groups of Justices as to which could first send out warrants to the villages of the Hundred, appointing their favourite inn for the session, and if possible selecting a day when they knew their rivals could not be present. The business transacted consisted of assessing window tax, land tax, poor rates, seeing to the repair of the roads, receiving information about crimes and misdemeanours, and licensing inns and alehouses. This last was a profitable sessions, for out of the seven and sixpence paid for each licence, five and fourpence went to the Justices' clerks, and Edgar notes that on one occasion his clerk Mansur got as much as fifty-five shillings.

Wherstead, like all villages at that time, did all that was possible to keep down its Poor Rate, and its Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor were active in bringing all needy or undesirable strangers before the Justices, to be ordered back to the villages where they had a legal settlement, or had been born. Thus, on the 27th March 1711, while Robert Hamblin, the landlord of the Ostrich, was coping with a crowd of parish officials, the Justices despatched Ann Rivett back to her native Framden. She appears to have been a lady of easy virtue, and this was not the first time she had been transported back to her birthplace. In June 1712, thirteen year old Henry Snell of Wherstead was bound an apprentice until the age of twenty-four to a Harwich fisherman. In November of the same year, William Sparrow, a farmer of Wherstead, complained against Thomas Clarke and William his son, disorderly and idle persons, for breaking his hedges and stealing his turnips. The Clarkes were brought before Edgar at his Ipswich house, and falling on their knees in his hall, begged pardon. "It was passed by upon large promises of reformation."

Burglary

Anthony Sorrell, keeper of the Cock Alehouse, died in 1713, and in February of the following year his widow Elizabeth reported that between eleven and twelve at night her house had been "broke open, and that she saw at the same time four men and a

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boy therein, immediately after such breaking in. And that she speaking to them, one of the four men presently laid violent hands upon her, and swore if she made any noise or disturbance he would cut her throat. And soon after that, one of the said four persons (they all being unknown to her), went into another room of the said house, and there broke open a chest of drawers, and thence some or one of them took out and carried away, as she believeth, a pair of fine holland sheets, a diaper board cloth, a damask board cloth and six diaper napkins and divers parcels of small linen of the Deponent's wearing linen, and two suits of her wearing apparel, one of black and white stuff. And she further saith that her servant, Henry Noble, rising out of his bed to rescue her and to seize or affright the said four persons and boy, the said persons, robbers, or some of them, seized upon him and beat him, her said servant, and broke his head. And although she cannot positively swear to the perfect knowledge of any of the said four persons, yet she hath great reason to suspect one of them to be a person going by the name of Richard Cant, but knoweth not where his settled habitation or abode is." Some of her neighbours believed the man lived in Colchester, and warrants were sent out to Suffolk and Essex, but Edgar does not say whether Cant was ever brought to trial for his larceny, and the breaking of Henry Noble's head.

At other times justice took its course, and when in April 1711, Susan Pegg of Battisford appeared at the Ostrich, to be charged with being an idle person and one that refused to go to service, kept lewd company, and had previously offended in this respect, the Justices sent her to the Ipswich House of Correction, "to be well chastised and set to hard employment". On the following 12th May it seemed as if Susan had changed her mind, for the officers of Battisford asked for her discharge upon "her petition, submission, and great promises of reformation". This was not to be wondered at, for the Houses of Correction were prisons, where the inmates were kept chained in some cases, flogged on the magistrates' instructions, and only fed providing they earned sufficient money for their keep. Edgar hardly records a case where the victim did not beg to be released within a week or two.

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Burial in Woollen

A curious Act which the Justices were called upon to enforce was the law relating to Burial in Woollen. In order to encourage the woollen industry, all persons who died were required to be buried in woollen shrouds, and the officiating clergyman was supposed to receive certificates that the law had been complied with. But for reasons not explained, some persons neglected to see that their relatives were lawfully interred, and informers were encouraged to come forward upon promise of a reward. These were mostly the women who had been employed to lay out the deceased, and one may suppose that they laid information after attempted blackmail. On one occasion the magistrates listened to an informer alleging that one of their own number had neglected to comply with the law, and that Sir William Barker's wife had not been buried in woollen. It seems that they regarded the case as proved, for a warrant was signed for paying the informer his share of the fine imposed.

The Constable

An important figure in village life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the constable. This was not a full time office, but a duty which had to be undertaken by reputable inhabitants for the term of a year, and constables were sworn in for Samford at a special session at the Ostrich. In 1714, when John Kirke was sworn for Wherstead, Edgar noted that a Quaker whose turn it was to fill this office in another parish had been permitted to pay for the services of a deputy. The constable's task was a thankless one at the best of times, for he had to deal with all breaches of the peace in his parish, with the knowledge that if he performed his duties conscientiously he was courting a lasting unpopularity among his neighbours. Criminals, drunkards, disorderly women and those guilty of assault or of swearing profane oaths he was compelled to keep in his own house where there was no communal lock-up, until he brought them before the Justices. Then he had to escort them to the local gaol or the House of Correction, or hire a cart to transport paupers or vagrants into the next parish. If the parish bordered a main road,

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the constable had often to make a hasty journey to his opposite number in the next parish, in order to pass on the "hue and cry" after horse thieves, housebreakers or murderers, with the chance of a broken head or worse if he was so unlucky as to come up with his quarry.

Recruiting

Many people have thought that conscription or National Service has been a product of the first and second World Wars of this century, and are not aware that a modified form of conscription was in force during Queen Anne's reign, caused by the Duke of Marlborough's very costly victories. Then, as during recent wars, it was found that voluntary recruiting was not enough to fill the gaps in the ranks of the army. So an Act of Parliament was passed which empowered all parish officers to apprehend any persons whom they found not to be in regular employment, and bring them before special sessions of the magistrates at which a recruiting officer was present. If the man appeared to be fit, and could not prove regular employment, he became a soldier forthwith, and was shipped off to the continent after having the Articles of War read over to him. The constable and parish officers were then rewarded for their trouble, and were sent off to look for more embryonic soldiers. It is, however, a curious fact that no constable ever appears to have brought in an inhabitant of his own parish. They were always strays from other parishes, and Robert Day of Claydon, apprehended in March 1708, is a fairly typical example. He was described as of thirty years of age, black hair, five feet five inches tall, of very ill character and fame and a common disturber of the peace, and was approved by the Recruiting Officer, and turned over to serve in the Duke of Argyle's Regiment. So Thomas set out to serve his Queen in the Low Countries, and the parish officers went home with warrants for £4, most of which would have been given to Thomas had he possessed sufficient sense to bow to the inevitable and ask to be enlisted as a volunteer.

Poaching

During the latter part of the eighteenth century and up to the middle of the nineteenth century many landowners became

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interested in the preservation of game for shooting, and the game laws were made stricter and harshly enforced by the same landowners in their dual role as magistrates. It is common knowledge today that what would now be regarded as minor poaching offences then resulted in sentences of transportation to Botany Bay and other Australian penal settlements, while the rigour of the laws and the certainty of severe punishment if caught led to recklessness on the part of the poachers which in some cases resulted in the murder of keepers. Fortunately there appears to have been no serious trouble of this kind in Wherstead, though in 1823 the Duke of Wellington, shooting in Hill Covert, nearly caused a fatality by lodging a part of his charge in the person of Lord Granville, who, according to the Iron Duke, ought not to have been standing where he was.

But poaching apparently did take place on a fairly large scale in the parish, and in 1803 when Scott, Sir Robert Harland's head-keeper came down to the Ostrich one November evening for a glass of hollands, he saw two men in the bar whom he recognised as poachers. Their names were Gladding and Tricker, and Scott noticed that on two occasions when he left the bar, Gladding followed him to see where he went. Eventually Scott left the Ostrich and went along the Strand, followed by the faithful Gladding. He attempted to take a short cut to Wherstead Lodge through the second field bordering the road, but noticed that there were in it twelve men with guns and clubs. So he changed course and went up Church Lane, and told Sir Robert what was afoot. We may imagine that Sir Robert was indignant at this threat to his preserves, but one of his guests, Lord Paget, decided that the occasion called for drastic action, and on his instructions Sir Robert's coachman was sent into Ipswich to summon a corporal and half a dozen dragoons from the troops quartered there. The troops duly arrived, and having stationed two men and the corporal on Bourne Bridge to cut off the retreat of the poachers, Lord Paget ordered the rest, together with the keeper Scott, to drive the quarry towards them. It seems as if most of the poachers were able to slip away, but Gladding and two others were driven down to the Strand, where they plunged into the river and attempted to escape by swimming. Eventually Gladding and two others had

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to abandon the attempt, and they were apprehended as they left the river. Gladding was dressed in a white smock, a soldier's helmet, and had blackened his face in order to avoid recognition. As no poaching gear had been found on him and he had not been taken in the act, he was indicted for being in possession of arms while disguised, but seems to have been acquitted at the assizes.

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And so after these few glimpses of the past of the village and its ancient inn, we come back to recent times, to find that the inn, after seeing some three hundred and fifty years of history, still preserves its original function as a place of refreshment for travellers and as a centre of recreation and entertainment for the village.