**PRIVATE PROPERTIES (An Extract from History of Abbotsham H.A.Lomas 1956)**

THE earliest complete list of private properties extant is dated 1632 and described as “A Rentall renewed and made out by ‘severall antient Rentalls theire taken perused and carefully ‘examened by William Shebbeare, George Middleton, John Willett, ‘John Wood, William Gist, Richard Buse, John Osborne and ‘Vil1iam Villett.”

The Lord of the Manor is James Walsh, a Barnstaple lawyer. He holds 4 acres in Rowlisland, which is part of Cornborough, and may have included the house, though there is nothing to suggest it. He held shares in Yarnsborough, Rowlisland, Gainsborough, Wyihays, Clifton in the N.W. portion of the parish, Barton, Stone, Crofts, Hurnhay and Claws in the village; Buckpool, Redford, East Rixlade, and Westacott on the West. In each of these cases the holding is with other proprietors, and described as “houlding a farthing (or a fraction of a farthing) in free soccage by sute of Court and Relife (sic) when it shall happen by the rent of . . .“ This is hardly the tenure which one would expect for the Lord of the Manor and principal landowner of the village. I have discovered no further reference to him whatever, and he is not mentioned in the preamble, nor in the Subsidy Roll of 1624. I have been driven to the conclusion that, like his predecessors, he was a non-resident owner, either by purchase or inheritance; but it is a curious coincidence that Cornborough and Rowlisland disappear from view

until they were purchased about 1750 by Thomas Kenny, a Bideford Merchant.

The two first names on the roll refer to owners of property outside the parish. Richard Coffin of Portledge pays annually 30/- and 22 pence for Goldworthy in Parkhaam, and the Coffins continued this payment till the beginning of the last century. Goidworthy, a small cluster of cottages and two farms near Horns Cross belonged to Tavistock, and presumably paid its manorial dues at Abbotsham. When the Crown sold the Abbotsham Manor in 1601 this Goldworthy tribute must have been included in the price. But I think its continued inclusion in the Manorial rents of Abbotsham effectually disposes of Lyson’s statement that the Coffins were Lords of the Manor in 1621.

Some similar transaction must account for the 2lsd. which John Arscott paid for Annery in Monkleigh. This Manor is among those made over to the Abbey by Ordulf’s deed.

The principal “tenants“ in Abbotsham itself are Sir Edward Cary of Stantor, representing the Giffard interest, and John William and Robert Shebbeare, John Willett and William Leigh, Esq. (?of Burrough) and the Heirs of Hendry Lawrence. Richard Coffin with two men, possibly his tenants, holds Northmaster, now part of Greenacleave on the Alwington border. The Feoffees of Hartland — presumably the Abbey—hold half of Lendon. There are 30 other holders of farms or portions of farms ; and it is interesting to note that only two of these names are represented in the parish to-day. The Manorial Rent is shown as £14.lO.61 nearby corresponding with the £14.12.ll shown as the annual value in the *Valor Ecclesiastjcus* of 1540.

Some attempt has been made below to give an account of the principal properties as they stand to-day.

**Abbotsham Court**

The old name of this property until about the middle of the XIXth century was Shebbeare Town or Shebberton. There is no documentary evidence that the site was the residence of the Abbot’s factor, but it seems not improbable.

The earliest part of the present House contains a stone on which the date 1565 is cut. The owners then were the yeoman family of Shebbeare, and their history was recorded in some detail by one of the family who signed himself C.E.S. in an article published in the Bideford and North Devon Gazette of Dec. 29, 1920.

There are two members of the “Shibburge” family in the Subsidy Rolls of 1332 and 1524, in the Muster Rolls of 1569, and three as occupiers of land in the Subsidy Roll of 1624; but none of these mentions the property till the “ Rentall” of 1632.

It was occupied by members of the Shebbeare family till about the middle of the XVIIIth century, though the senior member appears chiefly to have lived in Okehampton, of which several were mayors during the XVIIth century. it was sold to the family of Hatherleigh, who held it till 1840, when it was acquired by Mr. John Richard Beste of Botleigh.

It then passed to Mr. Taylor, whose son sold the house to Mr. Houghton I.C.S. and the agricultural land to Mr. Skidmore Ashby. It was eventually purchased with a small acreage by Major General John Arkwright Strick, C.B., whose family still hold it. The openstretch of downland between it and Cornborough was purchased by Major G. J. E. Lomas in 1937 from the Trustees of Mr. Skidmore Ashby. It was used for some three years as a racecourse, but failed to attract enough spectators to pay its expenses, and was let as grazing to the adjoining owner. The remainder of the land is farmed partly with Rixlade and partly with Lake.

Barton

This property apparently included another called Stone. In spite of the much discussed name, which seems to have indicated that it was held in demesne by the Abbey; and in spite of the fact that it adjoins the Church and contains probably the best land in the parish, there seems to be no mention of it before the Dissolution.

In the rentall of 1632 there is an entry:

“James Walsh Esq. being Lord of this Manor his Customary Tenants.

**Bartonland** Walter Heard per Annum XXXII S.

**Stone** Phillip Rowe Widdow per annum XX S.”

This definitely suggests demesne property, but when it ceasto be such, does not appearIn 1756 the property, which was not included in the Bishop’s seating order, was held by William Saltren Willett of Coombe, and in 1777 by his son Augustus, who were lords of the Manor.

It was bought later by John Turner, and in 1833 his brother Richard Turner pays a Manorial fine for it. He held it in 1842 and 1856, and the property is still held by his family, round whom most of the Parish Activities centre.

**Bowood**

An account of the earliest history of this property in the ownership of the Giffard family is given in the discussion on the submanor. It passed from them through an only daughter Wilmota to her second husband George Cary of Stantor. In 1632 it was held by their son Sir Edward Cary with shares in various other properties. How long the Cary family held it I do not know, but in 1775 part of it was apparently held by Dr. Buck. Mr. L. W.Buck bought the rest of it with Pennywell in 1846 and it continued in that family till 1914 when it was sold by Sir Hugh Stucley to Mr. Squire.

The attractive old house and part of the land is now in thepossession of Mr. Surtees Baylis. The farm was sold to the Pickard family, and is now owned by Mr. Grigg.

The remains of the windmill which once stood here have entirely disappeared.

**Buckleigh**

This part of the parish has never been held as a separate estate, but consists of various small properties, transfer of some being recorded in the XIVth century. They are mostly now private houses with one small farm. For some years there was here a successful boys’ school, originally the Junior School of the United Services College at Westward Ho !, and afterwards under various private schoolmasters. This is now a Country Club. The whole of this area has been transferred for administration, but not ecclesiastical, purposes to Northam Urban District.

**Chaltaborough and Shamland**

These two properties were inherited by the Pickard family from Mrs. Mary Brayley in 1836, and were farmed together till 1939 when Chaltaboro was sold to Mr. W. J. Powell. Mr. Charles Pickard, our oldest parishioner, and former churchwarden, farmed Shamland until his recent death. The house and outbuildings of Shamland have been little altered, and are an interesting survival of the XVIIIth century farm.

**Claycott**

This is a small property, the occupation of which was the subject of a lease by the owners of Bowood to William Orator and Margaret his wife in 1561. In 1632 it was in the hand of the Lord of the Manor, James Walsh. It was acquired by the Turner family in 1825 and is now farmed by Mr. John Moase, whose family have been carpenters and wheelwrights for three generations, as a tenant of Mr. Turner.

Clifton

Formerly Clyston, this is a small property adjoining the site of the original parish church. It has passed through many hands and been united to various other properties, but its chief interest lies in the fact that in 1569 it was owned with Langdon by Sir Richard Grenville. It was then successively occupied by Nicholas Dillon and Rose Geifrey, and sold to Oliver Pearde. Pearde sold it in 1575 to George Cary, and in 1632 it formed part of the major holding of Sir Edward Cary of Stantor. It was later united to Shebbertown and to Kenwith and is now owned and farmed by Mr. Alexander Tucker, who has transferred part of it to a large and successful holiday camp.

**Coombe**

There is little doubt that this was the chief property in the parish from the middle of the XVIIth century to the early years of the XIXth. No record of it during the Abbot’s lordship has come to light. The property consisted of land in a ring fence of roads starting from the village pump to the Smithy, from there by the old bridle road now called Rocky Lane, to the top of the hill over looking the Cornborough valley, and so to Riccardsdown corner, and the high road from Northam to Abbotsham. At various times it included certain of the cottages in the village, called Claws and Hurnhay, which it is impossible now to identify.

The house was either built or added to by Daniel Berryman and his wife in 1616, whose plaster label of 1632 is on the walls of one of the sitting rooms.

It was acquired in the middle of the XVIIth century by the Willett family, and John Willett held it to his death in 1736, when he bequeathed all his property to William Saltren of Stone in Parkham, including the lordship of the Manor. William Saltren Willett was succeeded by his son Augustus, who appears to have been a vigorous magistrate and lord of the Manor. The property was sold some time before 1824 to Mr. Richard John Turner and remained in that family till 1945 when, after disposal of various outlying fields, and the residence of Keene, which had been held with it, the house wassold to Captain Eric Bean the present owner.

**Edway, Gainsborough, Stone and Willhay**

These smallholdings seem never to have had an independent existence. Though probably held by small tenants they were attached to one or other of their more considerable neighbours. They crown the hill above Cornborough and Pusehill, and may at some time have held an ancient stronghold, as they stand at the apex of four old roads; and they adjoin the original parish church. But of this there is no evidence whatever.

**Crofts and Hurnhay**

These are names which occur in various leases by the Willett family in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. They appear to relate to cottages and gardens in the village.

**Coombe Walter and Coombe Wakewell**

These are small farms generally owned by adjoining landlords, but let separately.

Coombe Walter was sold in 1561 by William Seward of Stokentynhed with some cottages to Robert Jagard of Abbotsham, and the tenant was John Panter. In 1632 the Willetts had it. In 1753 it was held by Thos. Cholwill, who was succeeded by

his son Digory. In 1807 the Vicar, John Walter, died owner of it. It later passed

to Mr. R. S. Vidal of Cornborough, Lord of the Manor, and fromhim to his cousin and successor Edward Urch Vidal. It was left to the grandson of the latter, E. W. E. G. Sealy Vidal, and sold in 1907 to Mr, John Turner. After his death it was sold to Mrs. Kiernander of Rixlade, and by her to Major G. J. E. Lomas.

The farm house is a good one, unusually large for the size of the property, and has been occupied as a Guest House.

An old road, now disused, ran through the farmyard to Rixlade, where it joined the old main coast road, now overgrown.

Coombe Wakewell contained the house now known as Coombe Cot, formerly Gibbs, now a separate residence. It has had a number of owners, among its more important neighbours. By the middle of the XVIIIth century it was held by John Willett, and

passed to his heir Thomas Saltren. The Wiiletts sold it apparently to Richard Street, from whom it was purchased by Mr. Richard Turner.

1**Cornborough**

This is apparently the property called Hornborough, owned by Richard Attewater in 1395, and transferred then by him with two others named, as now, Orchard and Lake, to one Walter Broyt. The three holdings adjoin, and are the subject of no less than 15 transfers recorded in the Catalogue of Ancient Deeds. The only difficulty in the identification is that they are described sometimes as in the parish of Bydeford, sometimes of Northam, and there is no mention of the Lord of the Manor. There are no such properties traceable in either Bideford or Northam, and there is no reason to suspect a change of boundaries which would bring them into any parish but Abbotsham. It seems reasonable to assume that they are the three known now as Cornborough, Lake and Orchard.

They were made over by the Broyts to their daughter Joan Beapellin 1453 and in spite of various transfers — possibly fictitious — they were held by John Beaupell in 1490 and remained in that family till at least 1542, when John Beaple of Fremington granted them to his son William. There seems reason to think that the Beaupells or Beaples were non-resident, and there is nothing to show how the land was occupied or even if a house stood there. The property disappears from view till the Rentall of 1632, by which time it had become Quarnborough, and was held by Robert Sheber, presumably of Shebbertown.

In 1750 it was bought as a residence by one Thomas Kenney of Bideford, and the Vicar reported to Dean Milles that he had built a “summerbox“ — the present watch tower ; but what land he held with it it is hard to say. It is valued in 1784 at £20. On Kenney’s death in 1772, Cornborough passed to Dr. Hewish. By 1804 it was held by Mr. Robert Studley Vidai, the author of the brochure on Kenwith.

Mr. Vidal acquired the Lordship of the Manor from the Saltren Willetts and proceeded to hold Manorial Courts at the New Inn. The record of these Courts prior to 1824 is interesting, but has the appearance of a deliberate archaism, as already noted.

On Mr. Vidai’s death in 1842, he left all his property to his distant cousin Edward Urch Sealy of Bridgewater, on condition that he lived at Cornborough and changed his name to Vidai. This was done, and Mr. E. U. Vidai reigned as Lord of the Manor till his death in 1884. His property by that time included the separate holdings of Lake, Orchard, W. Pusehili, Stone, Gainsborough, Edway, Langdon, Coombe Walter, Rowlisland, Tucksland and “Armitory” (the hill on which the Tower stands). The house, hitherto an undistinguished farmhouse, with a bare hill behind it, was nearly doubled in size to accommodate a numerous family, and surrounded by judicious planting of trees.

It was left to the minor son of the Squire’s eldest son, but occupied by Mrs. Vidai till 1897, when Mr. Edward Wyndham Eyre Granville Sealy VidaI took possession. He sold it in 1903 to Mr. David Carlile Wingate.

In 1910 it was sold to Miss Lilian Fleming, and in 1912 to the present writer.

**Greenacleave or Greencliff**

This is a farm situated on the coast, bounded on the West by the stream known as Boat Lake, which is the parish boundary so hotly disputed in the 12th century. It now includes the three small holdings known as North and South Middleton and Northmaster in the Rentall of 1632. By 1825 they were united under John Sloly of Torrington, and in 1840 were sold to Mr. Richard Turner, whose descendants held them till 1937 when the farm was bought by Mr. George Jackman, who in turn sold it to the present writer. It is still farmed by the Jackman family and is the centre of a valley sloping to the shore on the edge of which stands the remains of a lime kiln. It is traversed by a public footpath which, by popular tradition, was regularly used by smugglers.

**Kenwith**

The house which, as already mentioned, has been accepted as occupying the much disputed site of the battle of Cynuit, was called until the early years of the XVIIIth century Hennicastle or Hennaborough. As such it does not appear in any Abbotsham records. The boundary of Abbotsham and Northam runs across the field to the East passing East of the house, and it is possible that the farm was treated as part of Northam. It is not mentioned in either the “ Rentall “ of 1632, or the Bishops seating order of 1753, or the list of Estates drawn up by the overseers of the Poor in 1784. In 1815 the recorded owner is Henry Nantes, and presumably

it was during his ownership that Mr. Vidal made his enquiries into the site of Cynuit.

By 1840 it was owned by Dr. W. C. Heywood, a considerable benefactor of the parish, who built the village school. He occupied it with some intervals till his death in 1855. It was then acquired by the Vicar, the Rev. E. Dansey, who preferred it to the then much smaller vicarage. He died in 1876 and the house was occupied till his death in 1896 by the family of General Hickman Molesworth.

About 1876 it was bought by Mr. J. R. Pinecoffin as a dower house to Portledge and occupied by various tenants, ending with Mrs. Pine Coffin. On her death in 1928 it was sold successively to Dr. Driver, to Mr. Byers and to Major Roller. During the war of 1939-45 it was lent by Major Roller to the Devon Red Cross, and

run successfully by the Countess of Orford as a Convalescent Home for Service men. It then passed to Brigadier C. H. M. Peto, D.S.O., who retired from the Army at the close of hostilities, and captured the Barnstaple constituency for the Conservatives. Abhotsham had the distinction of housing its Member of Parliament till the re-distribution of seats in 1951 transferred the whole Bideford area to Torrington. Brigadier Peto continued to represent Barnstaple till he retired in 1955 and the house was sold in 1954 to Lt. Cdr. L. C. Harding, R.N.V.R,

**Rixlade**

This is a farm adjoining Greenacleave, with a very pleasant old-fashioned residence. It was held in 1632 by the Shebbers and seems to have been generally attached to Shebbertown till 1846 when it was bought by Mr. Richard Turner. His descendants sold it to Mr. Skidmore Ashby, and it is still in the possession

of his widow. The property was increased in 1912 by the purchase

of most of the farm land of Shebbertown, which is still farmed with it.

**Westacote**

This farm on the West boundary of the parish, includes the old holdings of Loatham and Spurland. From time to time they have been in the possession of the Coffins, Lords of the Manor of Alwington, but in 1632 they appear curiously enough as part of the demesne land held by James Walsh as Lord of the Manor and his “ customary tenants.” After various transfers, Westacote is now in the possession of Mr. N. Trewin.

**Keene or Keane**

This is represented by a residence and garden now belonging to Mr. R. B. Richardson late of the Colonial Civil Service.

In 1569 it was included in a grant by Sir Richard Grenville of Stowe with Clifton and Langdon, but of what it then consisted seems doubtful. In 1575 it was sold to the Cary Estate, who held it in 1632. By 1703 it was in the hands of Robert Berry of Parkham who sold it for £200 with three cottages to John Willett of Coombe, and it became merged in that estate, with which it was valued at £30, in 1784. In 1842 it is shown as owned by Mr. James Smith Ley who does Reeve for it in the Manorial record of 1854.

Mr. John Turner bought it and it was let to various tenants till 1934 when it was purchased by Major Christopher Rawdon. He sold it in 1946 to Major Alastair Campbell, R.A., who sold it to the present occupier in 1951.

1Chancery Catalogue of Ancient Deeds, Vol. VL