DORNEY MANOR COURT ROLLS

Bill Dax wrote in last month's DPN about the wealth of information on the Dorney History Group website. This is a treasure trove of local history material and I return to it again and again. I was delighted to read that more of the Dorney Manor Court Rolls have recently been added to the site. The manor extended beyond the village and parish of Dorney. It included Boveney, which covered Lake End as well as the hamlet of Boveney, and these were in the parish of Burnham. To the east were fields which are now part of Eton Wick; to the north the manor of Dorney stretched into Hitcham parish. The records of the manor court are full of interesting details which give insights into the lives of the people of Dorney over many centuries.

My attention was caught by the record of the manor court held in 1630, the first under the ownership of the Palmer family. This listed those who owned freehold land or houses within the bounds of the manor, giving a unique snapshot of the more prominent farmers in Dorney at this time. The records show how scattered individual landholdings were. Take, for example, William Weatherheade; he had his farm buildings and then 6 different half acres. The four arable plots were in the fields known as New Croft, Oak Stubbs, Upcotts and Thames Field; the two plots of meadow land were in West Mead and Rowmoor.

Thomas Dollin, who had taken over from his late father, had an even more piecemeal holding. Eight acres were in North Field, with his farm nearby, but the remaining 12 acres of arable, meadow and pasture were scattered between 13 locations. He also owned a half acre called Hawkland in Boveney and rented further land. The Dollin family appeared in the earliest manor court roll in 1514, when Alice, the widow of Robert, was holding the farm on behalf of her young son Thomas. It was probably this Thomas who was recorded in 1548 as having *"enclosed a certain parcel of land with divers fences in the common field called le Northefeyld containing…three acres of land, contrary to the custom of this manor"* and that he *"blocks a certain cart-way leading by the common fences next to the town of Dorney, to the grave injury of his neighbours".* He was told to take down the fences and unblock the path, or he would be fined 6s 8d, equivalent to about £100 today. Thomas was fined a further 4d for having grazed more geese on the common than he was allowed. The following year he faced a fine of 40s for verbally abusing the Steward in the court using *"evil and slanderous words",* complaining that the Steward had recorded in the rolls things that weren't true. This could have been connected with a Chancery court case concerning a farm and land which he was bringing about the same time.

The court rolls record that Thomas was succeeded by his son Anthony, whose grandson was the Thomas Dollin farming in 1630. The family line was continued by John Dollin who had the right to graze 4 cows and 2 horses on the common. When he died about 1720, he left to his son John not only his house and land in Dorney but also another house and land in North Town in the parish of Cookham (now part of Maidenhead). The farm in Dorney

) Court baron of James Palmer, knight, held there
)
the 12th day of January in the fifth year of
the reign of our lord Charles, by the grace of
God King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland,
Defender of the Faith, etc., by Humfrey Newberie,
esq., Steward there. (1630)

subsequently passed out of the Dollin family into the ownership of an absentee landlord. The manor court rolls allow us to follow a single Dorney family through over 200 years and at least 6 generations.

One name that stood out in 1630 was Henry Fellow who had a farmhouse and garden in Boveney, purchased from John Garrard. This must surely be the same as the Henry Felo whose name is inscribed on the gallery in Dorney church with the date 1634. TWE Roche in his book *"A Pineapple for a King"* writes that Henry was the Palmers' master carpenter. Earlier court rolls show that Henry had bought two tenements plus land in Dorney from John Garrard by 1616. He had two children baptised in the church – Marie in 1617 and William in 1619. Unfortunately, there are big gaps in the parish registers for Dorney in the 17th and 18th centuries and we don't know when Henry Fellow died. By 1693, the court rolls list William Fellow having the right to graze 4 cows and 2 horses on the common; this could be a son or more likely grandson of Henry. Other records tell us that William Fellow was a maltster in Dorney/Boveney, in partnership with Humphrey Clarke. Their business was destroyed by fire in 1707, and William was buried in Burnham in 1709. A later Henry Fellows was buried in Dorney in 1760, perhaps the last of the family in the village. But the name lives on today with the splendid gallery in our church.

The manor court set rules for the organisation and management of the common fields and grazing, and as we have seen fines were imposed for transgressions. The early rolls identify villagers who were chosen to oversee the implementation of the rules. In 1560, four men were elected, and were allowed to keep 8d out of any 3s 4d fine. By 1616, the role of monitoring the numbers of animals grazing on common land and checking that they were correctly identified (pigs ringed, cattle branded and so on) had been formalised in the position of hayward. It was recorded that several people had had their livestock impounded for breaching the rules, including a horse belonging to Nicholas How. Nicholas's son John attacked the hayward while he was taking cattle to the pound and effected a rescue. In 1638, the hayward was Edward Field, who received a salary of £8 a year in quarterly instalments. This was paid for by a rate levied on every farm and every acre of arable and meadow held in the common fields. By 1692 the hayward was Bartholomew Langley, who as well as enforcing the rules was required *"to look after and keep the herd of cows and beasts in the mead from the first day of August until harvest".* The hayward reported to the bailiff of the manor, who in turn was responsible to the steward. Dorney manor had a hayward well into the 20th century. In 1911 Thomas Hawkins was chosen at a salary of £14 6s and was also appointed as bailiff. There is still a hayward appointed for Dorney common at the present time.

The manor court rolls may seem archaic and of no relevance to our lives today. But the shape of the village and the continuation of livestock grazing on Dorney Common are at least in part thanks to the workings of the manor court over many centuries.

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