

## THE MANOR OF STOCKBRIDGE

By ROSALIND HILL

THE manor of Stockbridge lies in and to the east of the valley of the Test, almost midway between Andover to the north and Romsey to the south. The river valley is at this point about half a mile wide, bounded on the east and west by steep chalk hills. The old village of Stockbridge is built, for the most part, between the two largest branches of the river, the main Test on the western side and, on the east, the Marsh stream, the course of which was diverted during the nineteenth century to provide a place for the building of the railway line. It crossed the main street originally at a point a little to the west of the modern roundabout, and skirted the western edge of the old churchyard. The old church itself, together with a few houses, lay on the hard chalk at the base of Winchester Hill and made up the settlement which preserved, down to the present century, the name of Street.

The common lands belonging to the manor consist of a strip of marshy but very fertile pasture, lying to the south of the main highway, and a triangular area of downland on the hills, starting about a mile to the east of the old church. This downland, which has yielded evidence of considerable prehistoric settlement, rises to a height of more than five hundred feet at the earthwork on its summit, which is called Woolbury Ring. The down has traditionally been used for sheep-pasture, and the marsh for the pasturing of horses and cattle. The area of swine-pasture is not known, but it may have lain in the forest of Bere Ashley, to the south of the present road from Winchester to Stockbridge. The

history of the manor is closely bound up with that of the borough, which will be discussed in a later article.

Our first evidence concerning the manor of Stockbridge comes from the period just after the Norman Conquest. It was then known as Sumborne Alba or Sumburn Album, 'White Somborne', probably because of the prominent white scar of chalk which is visible to the south-east, on the hillside below the Romsey road. This scar seems to have been caused by the digging-out of chalk to pack into the solid artificial causeway across the Test valley on which the settlement of Stockbridge already stood in pre-Conquest times. In the twelfth century the place was sometimes called White Somborne and sometimes 'Lestrait' or 'Le Strete', in allusion to this ancient causeway. The name 'Street' is often associated with Roman roads. It persisted in Stockbridge, but its use after the thirteenth century seems to have been confined to the bridgehead of land beyond the Marsh Stream. The name 'Stockbridge' was in general use to denote the whole settlement at least from the early thirteenth century. It is found in many forms, the most common being Stocbrigge, Stocbrug or Stokbregg, with variations dictated by the unconventional spelling of the times. It appears occasionally as Briggestok.

The Domesday entry concerning Stockbridge (wrongly identified in the Victoria County History as relating to Up Somborne) runs as follows:

'William de Ow holds Sumburne of the King. Tol the Dane held it of King Edward.

It was then assessed at 14 hides, now at 7½ hides. There is land for 12 ploughs. In the demesne are 2 ploughs, and there are 19 villeins and 5 bordars with 18 ploughs. There are 13 serfs, and a mill worth 10 shillings, and 68 acres of meadow, and 9 houses of burgesses which pay 12 shillings and 2 pence. T.R.E. it was, and is now, worth £14, but it is farmed for £16.' (Doubleday 1900, 491)

These houses of burgesses, together with the presence of three more in the Bishop of Winchester's manor of Houghton, which adjoined Stockbridge across the Test Bridge (Doubleday 1900, 462), make it clear that Stockbridge, the only place in the northern part of King's Somborne hundred later to develop burgage tenements, is the place indicated. Moreover the existence of a mill must show the presence of a constantly-running stream of a reasonable size, and this fact makes it clear that William d'Ow's manor lay on the Test.

Stockbridge belonged to William d'Ow until his conviction for treason in 1096, when, together with the rest of his lands, it escheated to the crown. Some of William's property was soon granted out to other holders, but Stockbridge, together with King's Somborne, seems to have been retained in the royal hands. Henry II farmed it out to Hugh de Gundeville, who at one time held the office of sheriff of Hampshire. The date of this arrangement is unknown, but it must have begun before 1157, when Hugh already owed £6.9s.7d. by way of arrears of the farm (*Pipe R.* 4 H.II, 174), and it continued until his death in 1179 or 1180. After he died his successor as sheriff, Geoffrey Fitz-Azo, was no longer held responsible for the farm of £36.6s.0d., nor do the Stockbridge lands appear among the possessions of Hugh's heirs, his nephews Robert and Hamelin de Gundeville (*Pipe R.* 27 H.II, 174). They probably continued to be part of the royal demesne. During the reign of Stephen there had been a brief scuffle at Stockbridge when Earl Robert of Gloucester was captured there,

trying to protect the retreat of his sister Matilda from Winchester. Otherwise the history of the place in the twelfth century was, so far as we know, uneventful. It three times paid the *murdrum* fine (paid when someone whose relations could not prove his English descent met a violent death, and the killer could not be produced) (*Pipe R.* 21 H.II, 196; 32 H.II, 174; 34 H.II, 176). In 1176/7 it paid, at the rate of a hundred shillings, a special aid levied on boroughs and prosperous villages (*Pipe R.* 23 H.II, 174), and in 1186/7 it contributed to the tallage levied on royal demesne lands (*Pipe R.* 33 H.II, 200).

In 1190 Richard I granted the lands of King's Somborne, Sumburn Album and Ashley, with the right to hold a weekly market in Lestrait, to his beloved and faithful servant William de Briwere (*Cart. Antiq.* 27), No. 31). This grant was confirmed by John in 1200 (*Rot. Chart* I, 39). William was a man already well established in royal favour, and he appears as a solid, reliable and fairly conservative influence in the councils of four successive kings. His family was already established in Devon at the time of Domesday. (His name appears to have been derived from Bruyère in Normandy, itself drawn from the Latin word *brueria*, which means 'heath'.) His grandfather had been warden of the royal forest of Bere Ashley, and William himself held the office of sheriff of Devon in 1179. He made a good marriage with Beatrix de Vaux, the young widow of Reginald, Earl of Cornwall, who was himself a son of Henry I. William and Beatrix were remembered as the founders of four religious houses, among them Mottisfont Priory. There is unfortunately no truth in Fuller's pleasant story that William was a foundling, cast away by his mother under a briar-bush in the New Forest, where he was discovered in the course of a hunting-expedition by Henry II, who had him brought to court and reared to become 'the honour of all foundlings' (Fuller (1840) I, 431). The origin of the tale is not known, but

it aroused the wrath of John Prince, who in his 'Worthies of Devon' declared that 'Fuller gives us a scurvy account of the birth and origins of this gentleman'.

In addition to Stockbridge and his extensive West Country estates, William held King's Somborne, Ashley, Longstock, Marshcourt, Eldon and Mottisfont, together with the wardenship of Bere Ashley forest and the advowson of King's Somborne, which he later granted to Mottisfont Priory. He died in 1226, leaving one son and five daughters. On the death without issue of his son, another William, in 1232, the Hampshire estates were divided between two of the Briwere heiresses, Margery and Joan. The banks which marked the boundary between the estates of these two ladies were still visible in the woods between Stockbridge and Little Somborne as late as 1939.

Margery Briwere was already the wife of William de la Ferté, who held in Longstock lands adjoining those of her father. Their daughter and heiress, Gundred otherwise called Agnes, married some time before 1219 Pain de Chaworth. It was a highly suitable match. The Chaworths were a rising family in south-western England and the southern marches of Wales, and Ela de Longespée, Countess of Salisbury and foundress of Laycock, had Chaworth blood on her mother's side. Pain and Gundred had a son, Patrick I, who acquired the lordship of the strong marcher castle of Kidwelly. When he was killed in battle against the Welsh in 1258 Stockbridge formed part of the dower lands of his wife Avis (*Cal. Pat. R.* 1258-66, 32), and passed from her successively to the two sons of the marriage, Pain II and Patrick II.

The house of Chaworth was high in royal favour both under Henry III and Edward I, but its members seem to have formed a complete contrast to the steady, reliable Briweres. The Chaworth men were essentially fighters, who showed their mettle in Gascony and the Welsh wars (*Cal. Pat. R.* 1258-66,

231, 625), and were sometimes in trouble for being too much given to tournaments when wars were scarce (*Cal. Close R.* 1237-42, 363). Three of them accompanied Edward I on his crusade (*Cal. Pat. R.* 1266-72, 440). In 1277 Patrick II was put in command of the forces of South Wales against Llywellyn, and although he was still quite young he appears to have done well (Lloyd 1935, 197-8). He married Isabel de Beauchamp, a daughter of the Earl of Warwick, and on his early death in 1282 his estates passed to his only child, an infant daughter named Maud. This little girl, heiress to lands in Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, Cardigan and Carmarthen, together with the custodianship of Kidwelly Castle, was naturally a rich prize in the marriage market. The King granted the right of wardship over her to his brother, Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, who in 1296, when she was about fourteen, gave her in marriage to his own second son Henry (Somerville 1953, 17-70). The marriage had dynastic implications, for the House of Lancaster was trying to build up its power in South Wales in rivalry to that of the Despensers, and in this struggle Maud's castle of Kidwelly was a key position. Thus was the manor of Stockbridge, like a small boat bobbing in the wake of a liner, drawn into the complex pattern of the Lancastrian possessions.

Maud's married life with Henry was a long and apparently a very happy one, although in his old age Henry became blind. She bore him (besides the inevitable babies who died in infancy) one son and six daughters, of whom one became prioress of the fashionable nunnery of Amesbury and the others made well-arranged marriages. In 1322 Henry's elder brother Thomas was defeated at Boroughbridge while in revolt against the King, and subsequently put to death. He had no children by his wife, Alice de Lacy, heiress of the Earldom of Lincoln. His brother Henry, who was not implicated in the rebellion, subsequently received his whole heritage,

enriched in 1324 by the addition of the Earldom of Leicester, to which his son in 1337 added the Earldom of Derby.

Henry of Lancaster died in 1345. His only son, another Henry, had already made a name for himself in the French wars, and in 1351 his good service was rewarded by the raising of his title to that of Duke of Lancaster. He is remembered as a commander much loved by his men, and as the author of a rather remarkable devotional work called 'The Book of the Holy Medicines'. Henry must have been one of those devout lay people, like Margery Kempe and Cecily Duchess of York, whose piety made so deep a contribution to the religious life of the later Middle Ages. He excuses himself for the rusticity of his Anglo-French style 'because I am English and have no skill in French, . . . also I am not a good writer' (Arnold 1940, 244). He is in fact a very good writer, clear, direct and vivid in style. Much of his imagery must have been drawn directly from his own experience, either in the French wars or in his periods of enjoyment upon his English estates. He pictures the state of man's soul as that of a wounded knight, stricken with seven terrible blows (the deadly sins) and afflicted also with agues and fevers (the venial sins) who is being restored to health by the sovran power of Christ the Good Physician and the tender nursing of His Mother. Our Lady binds up the sinner's wounds in fine white bandages (her Seven Joys) in order to keep them from dust (the flesh), air (the world) and flies (the devil) (Arnold, 202). On how many bitterly-fought fields in France had Henry learned this treatment? There are other passages in his work which show with equal vividness his interest in country life as he lived it in his English manors, passages some of which seem to breathe the very spirit of life in the Test valley. Our Lady, he says, is like a very clear stream of water full of cress (and he could well have been thinking of those truly crystalline streams which run through Stockbridge), for the grace of God

grows in her abundantly, and a man may pick as much of it as he will (Arnold, 113). Country remedies come to his mind – the man sick of a tertian fever should be fed upon chicken broth, and told to drink goat's milk for his health (but how much better is the milk of that most debonnaire and gentle Ewe who suckled the Lamb of God?) (Arnold 1940, 135). He compares the expulsion of sin from the heart of a penitent to the digging-out of a fox from its earth, when the parkers and foresters (representing priest and confessors) stop up the holes, except for one into which they put the terrier of Conscience to keep the fox at bay; and when he is dug out, 'the first thing men say is "Fie, the devil, how he stinks!"' He observes that sin-hunting is apt to come to an end after Lent, although fox-hunting has a longer season (Arnold, 103-7). Foxes' skins are kept and hung up in a man's hall, where it is not the custom to hang the skins of tame beasts; even so a man should set no store by his virtues, but keep the memory of his sins constantly before him (Arnold, 115). As one reads the 'Book of the Holy Medicines', one is constantly brought into the world of Henry of Lancaster's Hampshire manors.

Much of Henry's character must have been inherited by his daughter, Chaucer's patroness and 'blisful tresore', the enchanting Duchess Blanche. By her marriage to her third cousin John of Gaunt, the third son of Edward III, Blanche carried the Lancastrian inheritance, and incidentally Stockbridge, into the royal house. She died young in 1369, but in accordance with 'the courtesy of England' her husband continued to hold her estates until his death in the spring of 1399. Before the end of that year Henry, son of John and Blanche and in their right Duke of Lancaster, had succeeded to the crown as King Henry IV. Stockbridge, as part of the Lancastrian inheritance, was to remain a part of the sovereign's lands until its sale in 1824.

John of Gaunt's name is still commemorated by 'John of Gaunt's deer park', the

boundaries of which are outlined by very ancient yew-trees, at King's Somborne. In Stockbridge the House of Lancaster may have left other memorials. In 1922 the then Lord of the Manor and his wife, visiting Portugal, were forcibly struck by the close resemblance between a Stockbridge burgess, whose local connections could be traced back at least until the early seventeenth century, and the contemporary portraits of Prince Henry the Navigator. Henry was, of course, a grandson of John of Gaunt on his mother's side. It has justly been observed that all of us are descended from kings as well as from slaves. In Stockbridge such royal descent may well have left a lasting mark.

The absorption of Stockbridge by the Duchy of Lancaster explains why no ancient manor-house has ever existed in the place, although William de Briwere had a castle at Ashley and John of Gaunt a hunting-lodge at King's Somborne. It explains also why the seventeenth-century seal, which still exists, displays the royal leopards of England (mounted, incidentally, upon the haft of a knight's fighting-mace dating from the fourteenth century), and why upon the ceremonial mace of Stockbridge borough the red rose of Lancaster takes precedence over the other insignia of the royal arms. Among the possessions of the duchy, however, the place taken by Stockbridge was an extremely lowly one. Much probably remains to be discovered by patient research in the Public Record Office, where the muniments of the Duchy of Lancaster are voluminous and in many cases unexplored, but it is unlikely that Stockbridge the manor, as opposed to Stockbridge the borough, will be found to have made any great mark upon English history. It was an ordinary, rural community. The courts were certainly kept up, and in addition to maintaining their practice of electing, in the person of the bailiff, a returning-officer for the parliamentary elections of the borough, they chose also, in the person of the hayward (whose staff still exists), an officer to control

the 'stint' of animals pastured upon the common down and common marsh. When in 1832 the borough was disenfranchised, the problem of the 'stint' remained. It accounts for the survival of the courts, which still regulate the opening of pasture on the marsh. The techniques of modern farming have deprived the down of sheep, but they still pastured there until the decade before the Second World War, and a few years earlier it was a familiar sight to see their shepherd seated on a point of vantage upon one of the hillsides, employed in the traditional shepherd's pastime of knitting woollen socks. Hampshire shepherds were traditionally buried with a tuft of wool in their coffins, in order to make it clear to their Saviour (who, being a shepherd himself, knew the difficulties of the profession) that it had not always been possible for them to go regularly to church (cf. Evans 1965, 157).

In 1824 the manor of Stockbridge was sold by the Duchy to Joseph Foster Barham, who had for many years represented the borough in parliament (Stockbridge Court Records). His motive in buying the manor seems to have been to win back that influence over the Stockbridge voters which he had lost by the sale of so much of his local property to his political opponent Lord Grosvenor. In the event, the parliamentary representation of Stockbridge was ended in 1832. Since there was no local manor-house to grace the lord's position, there was little incentive for anyone to retain a controlling interest in the manor unless he were a racing man who desired to train his horses upon the down. Racing in fact brought some prosperity to the place, and provided a substitute for parliamentary elections in the field of local entertainment. Races were held upon Danebury Down until just before the First World War, and seems to have drawn a crowd of fashionable spectators. The late hayward, Mr. Sam Carey, used to recall how as a small boy he used to join in the scramble for pennies thrown from the carriage of the Prince of

Wales (later Edward VII) as he drove up to Danebury from the railway station at Stockbridge.

Joseph Foster Barham died in 1832. His son John inherited the manor but died without issue, and as part of his widow's dower it passed to her second husband, George Earl of Clarendon. From him it passed by sale through various hands, first to George Maitland, then to Charles Warner, then to Francis Hardinge and from him to Hicks Withers Lancashire (Page 1911, 484). None of these men seems to have taken much interest in Stockbridge for itself, although some of them tried to exploit their rights over it. Maitland in 1867 sold to the Houghton Fishing Club the commoners' rights of fishing on the common marsh, which were bought in good faith but could by no stretch of the imagination be termed a part of the estate which he as a private individual had purchased. Lancashire, a man much given to litigation, impoverished himself by lawsuits, including a notable one in 1893 when he was taken to the House of Lords by the inhabitants of Stockbridge, whose rights to use the down for lawful recreation he had challenged. He lost the case, and was left much poorer after he had paid its costs. In order to recoup his expenses he pawned the manor to the London firm of Attenborough. The courts ceased to be held. In 1902 Lancashire, unable to redeem his pledge, sold the manor outright, and Attenborough's firm took possession of it.

At this point the fortunes of Stockbridge as a community were brought to a very low ebb. The mace, seal and hayward's staff were providentially saved by the steward of the manor who, realising that they were no part of Lancashire's private property, took them into his own keeping in the hope that they might at some future time come home to their rightful owners. The crier's bell, engraved with the name of Christopher Bishop, the bailiff who acted as spokesman for the borough in the notorious election of 1790, was sold. It has recently been recovered from

an antique-shop in Surrey by a Stockbridge resident who regularly lends it for use at the courts. The fate of the ducking-stool was less happy. It was sold to an antique-dealer in Salisbury, from whom it was bought by a Hampshire lady who refused to allow it to be re-purchased on behalf of the manor. When it was last heard of, it stood in her drawing-room, rendered somewhat more comfortable by the addition of a cushion covered in chintz.

In 1920 Norman Hill, a Liverpool solicitor with a great interest in local history and archaeology, decided to retire to the Wessex countryside in which he had been brought up. He already possessed a small house at the top of Winchester Hill above Stockbridge, a house which he and his wife Mary had begun to build in 1906, but it had no source of water beyond tanks for the storage of rain-water from the roof. Desiring to sink an artesian well and to make a small vegetable-garden, he negotiated with the firm of Attenborough for the purchase of a small field. He was told that the sale was conditional upon his taking also the manor of Stockbridge, which was proving something of a burden to a firm whose main interests lay in London. He bought the manor, and spent the rest of his life in restoring its rights and researching into its history. In this he was actively helped by his son Gray Hill, a doctor who was also a keen archaeologist. Gray directed several excavations upon Stockbridge Down in the period between the two world wars, and published his findings in the Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and the Prehistoric Society. By his work the history of the Stockbridge settlements was carried back into the second millennium B.C. It was he who found the notable 'Stockbridge Hoard' of silver pennies dating from the reign of Edward the Confessor, now in the British Museum.

Fairly soon after Norman Hill had acquired the manor, he was invited by its former steward, Mr. G. R. Cawley, now a very old man, to visit him in Southampton. After some

conversation, the steward suddenly said 'I think you are an honest man', and produced from his attic an old canvas bag, containing the mace and seal, both battered and blackened with age, and also the hayward's staff. These he handed over to the new lord of the manor, explaining that they were the public property of Stockbridge. (The mace and seal are in fact the property of the borough, to which they were given by one of its sitting members of parliament in 1681, while the staff is the property of the manor, being the badge of office of the hayward, whose function it is to control the cattle on the common pasture and to keep down the thistles.) The old steward died a few months later, but not before he had seen the mace and seal restored to their original beauty and the courts held again after a lapse of exactly thirty years. Since 1921 they have been held regularly each year, with occasional extraordinary sessions to discuss matters of particular urgency.

Norman Hill died in 1944 and the manor passed to his son Gray, who was killed on active service with the R.A.M.C. a few weeks later. Since he died unmarried, the manor passed to his sister Rosalind (the ninth time since 1232 that it had been held by a woman, including the four queens regnant who held the title of Duke of Lancaster). In order to safeguard the manorial rights in perpetuity, the manor was given to the National Trust in 1947.

As it has been said, the survival of the manorial courts, which under the Duchy of Lancaster appear to have become inextricably mixed up with those of the borough, depended upon two things, the need to elect a bailiff to act as returning-officer for parliamentary representation, and the preservation of the 'stint' or share of the common pasture available for each inhabitant. The borough charter of Stockbridge is not extant, nor is there any evidence to suggest that so modest a borough ever possessed the *firma burgi*, the sum total of local rights such as

collecting taxes, imposing tolls and dispensing justice to its inhabitants. Stockbridge was always, basically, a rural community which settled its affairs in the simplest possible way. During the eighteenth century, when the practice of bribery was at its height, it was said that one of the local innkeepers would sometimes procure the election of one of his ostlers as bailiff, and carry the mace before him, in order to be the better placed to control the scramble for bribes. After the Reform Act of 1832 this parliamentary function of the courts naturally came to an end. They continued however to be needed for the control of the 'stint', since the amount of pasture available varies with climatic conditions. Also the normal date for the opening of the pasture on the common marsh, which is April 1, may be impractical in a season which is unusually cold or dry.

During the years when it formed part of the Duchy of Lancaster, Stockbridge seems to have been left very much to its own devices, and its inhabitants acquired a capacity for working together which persisted throughout the next hundred years. The determination which could carry a case involving commoners' rights up to the Lords and win it was fairly unusual among English villagers in the nineteenth century. In 1920 there were of course many residents in Stockbridge who could remember the holding of the last court in 1890, and with the help of these (especially Mr. Berriman, Mr. Fowgies, Mr. Bethell Jacob and Mr. Parfitt), together with the records now in the hands of the new steward, Mr. Talbot of Andover, it was possible to reconstruct the form of the traditional court. This form is still in use, although since the court is a living and effective body and not simply an antiquarian revival, slight modifications are made when they appear to be needed. For example, the ancient right to a share in the common pasture seems to have been confined to people living between the two main bridges and in the bridgehead of Street. With the removal of the railway bridge

(on the site of the ancient bridge over the Marsh Stream) and the growth of new houses on Meon Hill in the district now called Roman Road this distinction was felt to be unfair. In 1972 the possessors of the right to pasture were re-defined as the inhabitants of the parish of Stockbridge.

The courts have now no jurisdictional rights, though it appears that there was an ancient custom by which the lord's steward could exact a fine of sixpence (old style) for non-attendance. Their main functions at present are the annual election of officers, the settling of the 'stint' in accordance with the state of the pasture, and the discussion of such matters of common interest as can then either be determined on the spot by mutual agreement, or referred to appropriate outside bodies. Many of these are, in fact, settled in court. The normal, as opposed to extraordinary, meetings take place during the last week in March. The crier summons the courts, using the eighteenth-century crier's bell and receiving the traditional fee of ten shillings (old style). (The crier of 1921, Mr. Dollar, insisted that during this ceremony he should wear a top-hat and carry a Union Jack wrapped about his middle, but it was generally felt that this custom, which owed as much to Mr. Dollar's fertile imagination as to Victorian propriety, should not be kept up by his successors.) After the proclamation of the courts, the steward, in consultation with the bailiff, appoints the jury and swears in its members. Since 1922 this process has been followed by a brief address given by the lord of the manor or the person who is acting in that capacity as representative of the National Trust. (This is not part of the traditional form, but the nature of a modern and effective court seems to demand it. In a medieval court someone, probably the steward, must in any case have made a charge to the jury at this point.) The address, by tradition now more than fifty years old, deals with matters of general interest which have concerned Stockbridge in the past year, and

with any problems which may require recommendations by the jury.

The jury then retires to deliberate, and to choose the officers for the coming year. On its return to the courts, its findings are considered and as far as possible dealt with. The three new officers are then sworn in. The first of these, the bailiff, holds an office of great antiquity; a certain Robert de la Dune is recorded as having held it in the thirteenth century. It is now the custom to invest the bailiff by giving him custody of the seal of the borough. The second officer was known until 1890 as the constable, and is thus described in an inscription dating from 1681 on the shaft of the mace. Since however this title is now rather an ambiguous one, he has been known since 1921 as the sergeant-at-mace. He is invested by giving him the custody of the mace. The third officer is the hayward, whose function it is to look after the common pastures and see that only commonable beasts are admitted (all unhealthy animals, together with pigs and geese, which tend to spoil the grazing, being excluded). He was traditionally entitled to a payment of two shillings from each commoner for his trouble in cutting the thistles, but this has recently been increased to one pound, in order to keep pace with the cost of living. The hayward is invested with the staff, a fine ceremonial wand of office dating from 1676 and repainted with the royal arms of the House of Hanover and the red rose of Lancaster in 1726. It is the glorified descendant of the original and much humbler stick used in driving the cows to pasture. After the investiture of the hayward, the crier declares the courts to be closed.

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the holding of these courts is not simply a matter of antiquarian interest, a fact recognised by the Law Commission when, in 1975, the courts were formally scheduled for preservation. They have proved themselves to be extremely useful as a place for the discussion

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of local problems and for the taking of decisions based on local agreement. They show in a modest way that historical institutions of long standing are often based upon traditional needs which are still relevant to modern life.

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