

WOODBURY LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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The Life and Surprising Adventures of James Wyatt' — extracts from the book published in London in 1748

In 1709 James Wyatt aged two, the youngest of four children, was left an orphan in Woodbury. His sister sent him to school in the parish and then to work on a farm until he was 14 years old. As he did not enjoy this work she had him apprenticed to a woolcomber and dyer near Plymouth. At the end of his term he enlisted as a gunner's servant on a "man of war" and travelled to Newfoundland, Canada and Portugal. After a few years James returned to Plymouth where he met a puppeteer who taught him to play the trumpet and for four years travelled around the country with him. He moved to Trowbridge where he married and followed his trade as a woolcomber and dyer. A man with a large collection of wild beasts came to the town and being in need of a trumpeter, James joined him and travelled with him for a further four years. His next move, in 1741, was to enlist as a trumpeter on a privateer on which he sailed around the Mediterranean and Canary Islands in search of Spanish booty. He was captured by the Spanish and badly injured on Palma. James was eventually taken before the Governor in Tenerife where he was given medical attention and shown great kindness by the Governor's mother. He was sent to the castle in Lagoon where other English prisoners were kept. The Governor on hearing that he could play the drums allowed him to teach drumming in the town. James met a gentleman in the town who, on hearing what his original trade was, bought dyes and a large kettle to boil them in as well as providing him with a house to carry on his trade. James volunteered his services as a hat dresser (of which he had learnt a little) and was so successful that he earned a great deal of money. He was taken before the Court of Inquisition on the charge of being a free mason but acquitted. Though still technically a prisoner he was allowed to lodge

away from the castle but after nearly ten months as a captive of the Spanish, James, together with seven other English sailors took a boat, escaped from the island and steered a course for Gambia in North West Africa. After two weeks they landed on a small sandy island off the Spanish Sahara to try and find food and water but were captured by a large group of Moors. There they were kept, living on raw fish, frequently deprived of water, and savagely treated as slaves for four months before they managed to escape. A month later they reached the French Factory in Senegal and finally arrived at the English Factory in Gambia in December 1742. Two months later James found a boat going to England and landed at Rotherhithe in April 1743. Once home James continued his old trade as a woolcomber and dyer until he had acquired a tidy sum of money. He bought "an Electrical Machine, and some other Apparatus in order to exhibit several Philosophical Experiments". After an initial success he decided to moved around the country with his apparatus but made little money because "the people were not knowing the Meaning of the Word *Electric*", though the people of Kent were more profitable and came many miles "to be electrified". Some seafaring friends persuaded him to take his electric experiments to Jamaica and on 25th April 1747, having settled all his affairs, at the age of 40 he set sail for Jamaica, leaving behind the manuscript of his adventures for publication.

The Demolition of the Phoenix Garage and the Origins of the Site.

In July 2003 the builders moved into the old Phoenix Garage and started work on its demolition. The barn was taken down carefully to allow the cob wall to remain standing in order that it could be examined by an archaeologist from the Exeter Archaeological Unit. As the wall had been patched with brick and other materials it was not possible to date it,

but by comparing the 1798 map with the tithe map 40 years later it would appear that the wall was part of a barn which had been erected to form an enclosed courtyard with the house some time in the early 19th century. The 1798 map showed an L-shaped building on the Mirey Lane and Village Street sides of the site. When trenches were dug on the south side for the foundations of the proposed cottages the archaeologist inspected them but found only part of a cobbled courtyard which appeared to be early 19th century. A deep well from the same period was also found and at the bottom of it a large piece of leather — not surprising as the barns of Thorn Farm had been a tannery from 1808. The large underground petrol tanks, which were dug out of the Mirey Lane side of the site, had destroyed any historic evidence there might have been. The site had become a pile of old brick, cement and stones, and even with a metal detector nothing but old bits of iron and metal rubbish would have emerged. A house and barn stood on this site in the early 18th century until the middle of the 19th century called the New House on the Green. It had been erected on the site of a Tudor house, which is recorded in a survey of 1605. Woodbury Green is noted in a Manor Court of 1626 as being adjacent to this original cottage.

Window Tax in Woodbury Parish

There is a book of assessed taxes belonging to Geoffrey Dagworthy of Browns Farm in Woodbury Salterton, which was compiled by Henry Dagworthy the local assessor, and which lists all property owners who were liable to pay window tax in the year 1848. From this it would appear that tax was only payable on houses with 8 or more windows. There were 21 owners liable for the tax at this period who contributed annually to the exchequer the sum of £109.6s.9d. Sir Trayton Drake paid £36.3s for the 131 windows of Nutwell Court, by far the largest house in the parish. Of the other large houses liable for the tax Upper Nutwell House (now Nutwell Lodge Hotel) had 39 windows, Nutwell Cottage had 21, Mount Ebford had 32 and Ebford Manor had 25. In Woodbury village Oakhayes was the largest house with 23 windows. Amongst the other properties assessed were Sydney Lodge (now Bixley Haven), Critchards (demolished in the late 19th century), the Priory, Venmore Farm, Gilbrook House, Springhayes and Fairfield (the old thatched cob house which was pulled down in the 1930's) with between 8 and 13 windows liable for tax. One can see in various houses in the parish where the windows have been

blocked up to avoid the liability for paying the tax.

Medieval Open Fields

Various documents give evidence of the common fields in the parish, some of which can still be seen on the tithe map of 1840. The most obvious one is at Heathfield in Woodbury Salterton where a rental of 1523/25 records that John Ford held one tenement of 32 acres, 26 of which *lay in the common fields*. This can be traced through to Yeats Tenement in 1840 where the fields are scattered in a large block of land.

An Inquisition Post Mortem in 1361/62 of William Albermarle (the Lord of the Manor) records that one carucate (between 60 and 180 acres) of land is worth nought when it is sown because the *land lies in common*. This land has not yet been identified.

The accounts of the Vicars Choral records its manor's great field as *Cleyhullparke, Brodparke* which lay between Bonds Lane and Browns Farm in Woodbury Salterton, where there were two farms known as Cleyhill and Western Ground in the Rectory Manor.

There is a further area in the Manor of Nutwell which records strip fields in the tithe map, which was probably that manor's common field.

Programme of Meetings for 2004

- 5 Feb AGM followed by a Social Evening with refreshments
- 4 Mar "The Woodbury Salterton Lace Find - current research" an illustrated talk by Carol McFadzean
- 6 May An illustrated talk on the A30 excavations by Bill Horner (Devon County Archaeologist)
- 1 Jul Visit to the Manor House of the Huyshe family at Sand (2.30 pm)
- 2 Sep "The Religious Battle in Victorian Woodbury — Rev J L Fulford V Dr R Brent" an illustrated talk by Gill Selley
- 4 Nov "Tithe Surveys of the Mid-Nineteenth Century as a Source for Local Historians." an illustrated talk by Professor Roger Kain of the University of Exeter