

NOTES FROM "THE STORY OF ENFIELD CHASE" BY DAVID PAM

The Domesday Book of 1086 describes the forest as large enough to supply pannage (food for pigs) for 4,000 pigs - 2,000 from the manor of Edmonton and 2,000 from the manor of Enfield, i.e. the area was probably managed as one estate.

The wood was enclosed and converted into a chase by Geoffrey de Mandeville (to whom it had been granted by William the Conqueror) about 1136. The original lodge was possibly at Camlet Moat (in the woods of Trent Park, Hadley Road, Enfield)

The Chase was described in the 12th century as "a great forest with wooded glades and lairs of wild beasts, deer both red and fallow, wild boars and bulls". The extent of the Chase was 8,000 acres.

Adjoining landowners had to fence, hedge or ditch their land to prevent the deer from escaping. Except for the lodge keepers, no people lived in the Chase for 700 years.

In 1421 the Chase passed to Henry V as his father, Henry IV had married Mary de Bohun, the heiress of Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford.

The Chase was of great importance to the peasant commoners. They could pasture their animals there and thus

obtain manure to fertilise their fields. Even the poorest cottager could keep a cow or a pig and have a side of bacon hanging in his cottage to feed him in the winter, while the timber kept him warm.

In 1419 the Chase was divided into 3 walks. It is probable that the 3 lodges, East Lodge, South Lodge and West Lodge, could have originated about this time.

In 1522 the bailiffs were accused of selling wood and cutting down mature trees. They said that when King Henry (Henry VIII) hunted in the Chase a great many noblemen and gentlemen waited for him to come back from hunting and commanded large fires to be lit, thus using a lot of firewood.

In 1535 Richard Wilson, the keeper at West Lodge, caught some men with a hare which they had poached from the Chase. In the subsequent fight he alleged that "blood by the quantity of two gallons flowed from my veins."

Princess Elizabeth hunted in the Chase while living at the Bishop's Palace at Hatfield. Elizabeth enjoyed hunting and the splendour of ceremony as her father had done. Among the many stories told by Nichols, in his "Progress of Queen Elizabeth", he records that, in 1557, she was escorted from Hatfield to Enfield Chase by a retinue of twelve ladies in white satin, on ambling palfreys, and a hundred and twenty yeomen in green, on

horse back, so that she might hunt the hart. On entering the Chase she was met by fifty archers in scarlet boots and yellow caps, armed with gilded bows, each of whom presented her with a silver-headed arrow, winged with peacocks' feathers. When the buck was taken, the Princess was pleased to be allowed the privilege of cutting his throat.

In 1576 Lord Burghley, who was building his great mansion at Theobalds nearby, became keeper of the Chase and ordered a survey. He found there were 6,000 oaks and 30,000 hornbeams and other trees. However, this was only 4½ trees per acre so the grazing by animals must have created extensive glades.

In 1583 to repair West Lodge (then called Norris Lodge), 2,000 bricks were necessary for the kitchen and the hearth, 3,000 tiles for the roof and 600 boards for weatherboarding. These with lime, sand, nails and wages, together with the thatching of the barn and hay-house, cost £10.

In 1583 the ancient wood court of Roundhedge, which had ceased to function about 40 years earlier, was set up to control the Chase, particularly the timber, but it solved nothing, as there were too many people claiming the available wood and too many sheep and cattle for the remaining pasture.

In the "little ice age" of the 1590's, the hard winter caused even more raids on the Chase by local people carrying away timber by the cartload.

King James I was an enthusiastic hunter in the Chase. Within a few months of his arrival in London in 1603 he was dining at West Lodge (then called Padis Lodge) which, they said, had been very prettily trimmed up by the keeper, John West. In 1633 there were 3,473 deer in the Chase; by 1645 the number had dropped to 1,548.

After the execution of King Charles I in 1649, Parliament resolved to sell a third of the Chase, plus the lodges, to raise money to pay for arrears of salary for the Army. West Lodge, then known as Potters Lodge, was a brick and tile structure of three stories with outbuildings and a small garden plot. It also had an enclosure of 85 acres with 662 trees growing there. The house and estate were sold to John Nelthrop, the adjutant general, for £1,494. At the same time South Lodge was sold for £904 and East Lodge for £712.

In 1659, about a third of the Chase, 1,500 acres, was put up for sale. The land was mostly bought by high ranking Army officers. The loss of the commoners' rights caused great anger, and the breaking down of the new fences. Soldiers were brought in to deal with the rioters but were beaten off by crowds of countrymen armed with pitchforks.

While Charles II was in exile he gave honours and perquisites around rashly, sometimes giving the same benefit to several people. In the case of the West Bailey Walk and West Lodge, he gave these both to the brothers Thomas and Henry Batt, who moved in, and also to Charles, Lord Gerard, Baron Brandon.

The latter complained that West Lodge was the only house in the Chase suitable for the residence of a chief keeper. Former monarchs had been accustomed to stay there and had always been entertained there by the ranger himself in the evenings, when the huntsmen had returned from their sport. The dispute was settled on a technicality by the Lord Chancellor in favour of Lord Gerard.

By 1660 there were no deer left on the Chase. A vast amount of the wood had been cut down and the fence on the northern boundary destroyed. However, paddocks were then enclosed, one of them at West Lodge, and stocked with deer from other estates.

The Right Honourable Henry Coventry was appointed principal secretary of state in July 1672. The following year he was provided with a convenient country residence near to London by his appointment as keeper of West Bailey Walk in Enfield Chase. All the offices on the Chase were granted to him in July 1675. John Evelyn, the diarist, visited him at West Lodge the following summer. He described it as a "very pretty place, the house commodious, the gardens handsome, and our entertainment very free, there being none there but my lord and myself. That which I most wondered at", he went on, "was that, in the compass of twenty-five miles, yet within fourteen of London, there is not a house, barn, church or building besides the three lodges". Henry Coventry resigned as secretary of state in 1680, and retired, his health in ruins, to West Lodge.

In 1673 Henry Coventry spent two days

examining the state of the trees in the Chase, in the company of his woodward. He observed that there were considerable numbers of young, thriving oak, beech and ash, but as yet these were of very small growth; they required careful conservation so that in time they would be fit for timber. At this time however there were no timber trees on the Chase ready to cut. Much of the beech and hornbeam had been lopped, but was now fully grown again. He proposed that no trees should henceforth be lopped except so many as would be sufficient as browse to feed the deer, otherwise, he said "the beauty of the Chase would be impaired and the covert destroyed".

Henry Coventry obtained a great concession in 1685 when he was granted permission to cut glades or ridings through the Chase, a measure ostensibly for the convenience of King James II when he came hunting. In reality, the very large amount of wood which would have to be cut would provide opportunities for considerable profit. There was however no time for Henry Coventry to reap the benefit for he died in 1686 and in June 1687 his executor conveyed all the offices to Adam Viscount Lisburne. Among the many bequests contained in Henry Coventry's will was that of £100 to Henry Baron, son of a former servant. The response of the Baron family was little short of sycophantic. The Hadley parish register records the baptisms of two sons, Henry and Coventry and two daughters, Secretary and Ranger.

The opportunity to cut ridings was too good to miss, and by 1691 a vast number of trees had been cut down. Officials for the Duchy of Lancaster saw 36 stacks of wood ready cut in West Bailey Walk, now in the hands of Sir Rowland Gwin.