

Mediaeval Kinber
and neighbourhood



by Frances E. Campbell

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1. WORCESTERSHIRE NATURALISTS CLUB (1913)
Extracts from Lecture by W. W. A. Tree, LL.B.
2. EXTRACTS FROM "BIRMINGHAM GAZETTE"
By Cartwright Timms (1950)
3. ANCIENT KINVER CUSTOM
By Miss Mabel Timmings (1963)
4. EXTRACTS FROM "ROMANTIC KINVER"
By Frances E. Campbell (1950)

"KINVER'S ROYAL FOREST"

AFTER the departure of the Romans (475 years from Cæsar's first invasion) came the struggle between the Britons and the Saxon invaders, which was especially fierce in the Severn Valley. The Saxons forced their way up the course of the Severn, and also by way of the Stour, and as marking their course the large number of Saxon settlements having the terminal "ley" meaning "place or pasture" is very interesting. There are at least a hundred of such places in this neighbourhood — Wolverley, Iwerley, Alveley, Hagley, Gothersley, Dunsley, etc.

Our interest in Kinver and its surrounding countryside is wrapped up with the huge forest to which it gave its name until about the 14th century. The name Kinver implies the presence of Royalty. Its earliest form is to be found in a Charter of Ethelbert, King of the Mercians An. 736 granting lands on the Stour adjoining the "Wood called Cynibre," as an endowment for a monastery to be founded at Husmere (near Stourbridge). The meaning of Cynibre is "Royal Hill," but as appears by a Charter of 964 the name at that time had become *Cynefare*, meaning "Royal Road," as the village was on the way to the King's House (near Wolverley) upon a Roman way from Chester, Worcester and Bath. This is still known in places as "Chester Lane."

A Royal Forest was a territory of woody grounds and fertile pasture privileged for wild beasts and fowl of the forest to rest and abide in under the protection of the king, and a forest could only be in the hands of the king by a special grant. He alone had power to constitute such commissions as were necessary to the existence of a forest, particularly in appointing a "lord justice in eyre" of the forest, and also the various courts held therein.

In the Salt Collection of Historic Staffordshire appears the following version (abridged): The peramble of the Forest

of Kynefare, in the county of Staffordshire, made before Rogier Brabazon, Sir William Boutevilleyn, Sir John Druel, and Sir Henry de Guldeford, Justices of our Lord the King, in the presence of Johan fitz Phelip, Warden of the forest, Richard de Preswode; Forester in fee, Johan de Perton, Phelip de Lutteleye and Waryn de Penne, Verderers of the said forest, and by the oaths of twelve Knights elected for the purpose, who state that the bounds of the said Forest begin at the water of Smethestall, Treselwater, the high road to Holebach, Amelcote, Wolfeswrosne by the Stourwater to various other places to the Manor of Kynefare and Wolvardesl then as far as the wood of Kynefare, Kynesfordes Mere, Arley, Quatford onto Smethestallswy, to Kynesforden Mere, Smethestalleford, at the place where the bounds commence. And they say that within these bounds exists the Forest of our Lord the King. They include the wood of Kyngesleye and the Manor of Tettenhale towards Stottord as far as Oxenford, as far as the high road to Wolverhampton, and Wythewkesforde. And they say that the villis of Nether Penn, Overton, Tresel and Seysdon, Womburne and Swyndon, and a part of Humelleye (Himley), a part of the land of Kingswinford, a part of the land of Amblecote, the ville of Wolaston apart of Pebbemor, of Haggeleye, of Brome, the ville of vennorton, a part of Yeldentre, (Iverley) of Chaddeles of Hurcote, of the waste of Kyderminstre, the villis of Dunclett, lethege, and the villis of Wolvardesley, Kynyngford, Arleye, Evenesfeud (Enville), Morfe, and Lutteleye, Bobyngford, with the wood and the wastes and the appurtenances, have been afforested since the coronation of Henry 2nd in testimony of which things the Jurors above-named have set their seals.

Although part of the lands mentioned in this account are now in Worcestershire, the whole of the Royal Forest of Kinver was included in Staffordshire.

In a charter dated 925 Aethelstan grants to his thegn Edric land at Huitunton, which may refer to the Kinver Whittington. In later Saxon times, Kinver was a King's estate of ancient escheat; that is it accrued to William the Conqueror by forfeiture of the Earldom of Mercia probably

therefore it was in possession of the Earls. Of Danish connection with Kinver there is the clear evidence of place names, Dunsley (Dane's Lea) and Dane's Well and Dane's Ford. These names may point to some definite Danish settlement, but probably this was only temporary. The camp on Kinver Edge was either built by the Saxons or an old British Camp was strengthened as a defence against Danish incursions. The great landmark in English history is the Domesday Survey. A translation of the Latin entry is: "The King holds Chenevar, Count Algar held it. There are five hides and a half with appendages. The land is divided into 16 caracutes (plough lands). In the demesne is one (hide) and three servants and 17 villiens and a dordarii (cottagers with a priest) all holding 10 caracutes. Here are two mills of 20, S. and six acres of meadow. A wood three leagues long and one broad. The value was and is 100 shillings.

The acreage of about five hides and the value of £5 are the most common units for Staffordshire parishes, and Kinver would therefore appear to be of the average size and value of those times. Its population is more than the average number, although a total of 27 or 28 heads of families, or about 150 inhabitants in all, shows that the cultivable hides was only a small part of the total of nine by three miles and that the wood, common and marsh occupied the greater part of the whole. Whether the inhabitants were mainly clustered round the church or elsewhere, or were scattered in different parts, it is impossible to say.

Where the demense house was situated or whether the houses were huts of wattle and clay, or whether the soft red sandstone was even then excavated into caves and inhabited, is also unknown. The two mills are exceptional; they were probably on the Stour, although one of them may have been on the Smestow.

The forest records of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries contain numerous entries relating to Kinver Forest.

This was a very wide area covering most of the Seisdon Hundred and the adjacent parts of Shropshire and Worcestershire and was from twelve to fifteen miles long and from ten to twelve broad and may have covered an area of 150 miles. These forest entries nearly all relate to offences against the King and making of assarts or enclosures, the cutting down of timber, and above all, the killing of the King's deer. There are two very detailed perambulations of the forest giving the boundaries of the parishes contained therein or on the borders.

Normally in a forest there were the following officers:

1. A Steward or Chief Forester, often called Chief Warden or Custos.
2. Foresters. (a) Foresters in fee, an hereditary office. These would be mostly a Knightly rank. (b) Rangers, appointed by the King for life. The Foresters were in charge of the administrative work within the forest. Under them were certain Bayliffs, who administered their bayliwicks under his supervision, but were appointed by the Crown. These bayliwicks may or may not have been hereditary, but perhaps ancestorship may have been a recommendation or implied qualification for the office.
3. Verderers. Chosen by the King through the Chief Justice of the Forests. But mainly by the freeholders of the county to maintain the forest laws.
4. Reguarders. Also chosen by the King through the Chief Justice of the Forests. They were the surveyors and valuers who made note of waste in the King's demesne, the condition of the timber, fences, etc.
5. Agisters. These men received and accounted for the monies received for herbage and pannage (putting swine out to feed in a forest).
6. Woodlands. These were in charge of woods and vert.

Not only all officers, but all residents in a forest were compelled to take oath to be true to the King and his game.

The following was the oath to be taken by residents above twelve years of age:

"You shall true liegeman be unto the king's majesty
You shall no hurt do unto the beasts of the forest,
Nor anything that doth belong thereto
The offence of other you shall not conceal,
But to the uttermost of your power you shall them reveal
Unto the officers of the forest
Or to them that may see the same redressed
All these things you shall see done
So help you God at's holie doome."

Besides the before mentioned officers in the forest there were also viewers and riders who by their tenure and holding of land, had power to ride and perambulate the ground and township of every lord, to oversee the highways and water courses, and to take care that the hedges were properly made for preservation of the deer, for which purpose the verderers carried a staff called a standard, 2½ feet high, this staff the bearer put over the hedge till it touched the ground on the other side and if the highest part of the hedge was higher than his armpit the owner of the hedge was to be fined, "according to the conscience of the viewer." After the Norman Conquest the Kings claimed that hunting was vested solely in the Crown. The forest districts were largely added to, so as to gratify the Royal sportsmen, and great injustices were inflicted on the people. At this time the Royal forests in Mercia were those of Kinver, Cannock, Needwood, Uttoxeter and Leek.

Much misconception seems to prevail as to the agriculture and husbandry in England in the Saxon times. The earliest conception from records which come down to us show that, partly in consequence of the Roman Occupation, the already advanced husbandry greatly improved. Fields were divided by hedges and ditches, there were commons of pastures, and private meadows and arable lands, where ploughing, sowing and reaping were being carried out. Severe laws existed to ensure dividing hedges being kept up, also in protection of woods and timber.

All Saxon Kings who had ruled over principalities large and small had their Royal Forests. In fact, Kings and Queens only could hold a forest—the greatest of the nobility could only possess manors, woods, parks and chases, within their own lordships. Royal forests extended over great areas, and smaller woods stretched in all directions to protect farms, sheep and cattle from the bleak winds, and to supply timber for building purposes. The idea that Britain was a continuous dark damp forest is absolutely wrong.

The great delight of lords and commons in those days was the hunting of wolves, wild boars, deer, hares and rabbits. The Saxon Game Laws were mild and liberal; before the kings went to hunt no one was allowed to disturb the woods, but at other times every man might pursue game on his own land. The forests were not enclosed, but lay in open country, and their boundaries were declared by law within certain mete and bounds. They were not all necessarily wooded, but were localities set apart for the rearing and collecting of game. Public roads were continued across, and villages grew up in them.

Hawking and hunting were not to be practiced by any common person but only by kings, earls, barons and noblemen of the realm or high ecclesiastics, nor could even the owners of freehold lands in the forest "do as they liked with their own," in the slightest way without grant or charter from the king or his justice in eyre. To cut down his own woods without such licence rendered him liable to be proceeded against for waste or damage. No hunting was to be allowed for forty days before or after the king's hunt, so that the "wild beasts may not by any means be disquieted of their rest and peace." A dweller in a forest might keep a mastiff (a word corrupted from "maize thief" or "thief frightener") for his own defence, provided the dog was lawfully expeditated, i.e., three claws of its fore-feet cut off. An executioner was appointed at the Court of Attachments to expeditate all dogs found unlawfully in the enjoyment of their claws, which were struck off by him with a mallet and chisel on a block of wood. "Foot geld" was

a fine for not cutting the feet of dogs kept in a forest, to prevent their running after the king's deer. And there was a cutting or laming of dog's hams, "hambling" or "hoaxing" as it was termed.

The officers of a forest had the oversight and correction of the homing of dogs, and if any dogs were found to be unlawful, i.e., if they could not be drawn through a certain measure (sterop) of 18 inches and a barley corn in length and breadth, their farther two joints of the two middle claws were to be cut clean away and the master and owner of the dog was to be fined 3/1. Every year between Michaelmas and Martinmas the bailiff was "to drive the chase," and if any foreign swine (not belonging to tenants or commoners) were found there or pigs "whole eared," the same were forfeited one-third to the chief forester, and two-thirds to the lord of the forest.

Men of position and good family, in course of time, became WARDENS of Kinver Forest and were awarded "Parks" or "Manors." Often large portions of land on Royal forests were presented to gentlemen who had rendered service to the king, generally war service (providing horse, men and food, and quite often gifts of money). In this way large tracts of land became disafforested. The "CLOSE ROLLS" of HENRY III's reign contain many references to the forest of Kinver. In August, 1278, the King instructed Henry de Ribbeford to cause thirty bucks to be taken for him in the forest of Kinver and Cannock, as should be agreed upon between the respective keepers. Grimbald Pauncefote obtained three Kinver bucks in the same year. In 1281, four live hinds were granted to Ralph Basset from Kinver to help stock his park at Drayton. A further proof that red as well as fallow deer roamed over Kinver is the grant of six harts to Edmund Mortimer in 1286.

Two years later John, the son of Philip, the keeper of Kinver Forest, was ordered to deliver all eyries of falcons found that year in the forest to John Corbet, the King's falconer, to be kept for the King's use. In 1282, the King ordered the release from prison of Richard Saladyn, who was in gaol at Bridgnorth for venison trespass. Bridgnorth was the prison

for this forest, as well as for Cannock; the official calendar of these "Close Rolls" has made the amusing mistake of putting Saladyn in prison at Bruges, in Belgium. Bruges was the usual Latinised form for the town of Bridgnorth. Among Edward I's timber grants from Kinver were six Oaks to a nun of St. Wynstan, six Oaks to the master of St. Wolfstan's, ten Oaks to Roger de Clifford, a forest justice, and twenty Oaks for shingles to Anthony Beck.

CHURCH AND PARISH REGISTERS

There are two types or kinds of old Books relating both to Church and Parish (and still in safe keeping—keeping safe)—The Church Registers, The Parish Registers. These books which being compiled or made and of course under different conditions contain some peculiar references as regards names and sometimes nick-names, cause of death, and trades followed; or some trait of character or place of residence or status in the parish. Of course this would depend on the whim or fancy of the writer. It would be brief and badly spelt and often reflected the true life and character or habits of the departed. They were referred to as Honest, Old, Poor, Good, an Apprentice or Esquire; A Stranger or Soldier, a Good-wife; or born out of wedlock; or tragic causes of death or method of burial and proof if necessary of Kinver Health Record is found in many references to longevity, many reaching well over a hundred, one woman a widow of 108 and old Parr of Kinver 127 and several entries "Mr. So-and-so, wonderfully old."

It was during the fourteenth century that surnames as we know them became popular or in vogue and nearly all Christian names had a Bible origin and those appearing in very early rolls or deeds took or adopted names from parentage estates or some personal feature, profession or trade.

The Parish Registers are different in as much that they show the very early methods of administration of parish affairs and the general and domestic life as affected by Taxation, Education and Religious Influences on Kinver people.

DURING the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Kinver became famous for its iron trade. There were slitting mills on the River Stour: at Whittington, Hyde and Gothersley. Much charcoal was used for the smelting of iron, and so much timber was being used during the Civil War that the ironmasters became concerned. It was at this time that Dud Dudley introduced sea-coal. A charter was granted by Charles I for the digging of this mineral and many free-miners came into existence. They dug up surface coal and required only a few workers at each pit. They never went below the ground more than 100 feet and required only one shaft and cage. Boys called trammers removed soil away from the coal as it was being mined. The free-miners built their homes round the head of the pits and with their helpers started a coal mining industry. They also kept sheep to eke out a living. In due course of time these small pits disappeared when deep coal was mined at Cannock Chase.

There was a flourishing woollen industry in Kinver. It was noted for the manufacture of scarlet cloth. This industry, however, became transferred to Kidderminster. An interesting sideline came into being at this time when churchwarden pipes were made from white clay found near Dunsley.

Kinver enjoyed at this time a period of prosperity. Many light industries came into existence, trade was good and generally speaking the village life was self-contained but happy. The ironmasters from Stourbridge and district formed the Beecher's Club which met at the Stewponey Hotel. It was a superior sort of friendly society which drew a large membership from the artisans of Stourbridge and Brierley Hill area. It was established on March 24th, 1842. Its patrons included Foley, Brindley, Lee and Seabright families with other local gentry. Their medallion of membership had on one side The Good Samaritan (St. Luke chapter 10, verses 25-37), signed J. Baker, Birmingham.

There was a brass band in the town which practised at Whittington, where the founder, Mr. Dagger, lived. The Dagger Brass Band accompanied all processions on special

occasions. It accompanied the Sunday Schools on their way to Moscow End for their annual treats. There were prizes for climbers, runners and other competitions. These prizes consisted of caps, clothing, toys, sweets and groceries.

Village life was very different in the old days from what it is today. There were only horse-drawn vehicles and strangers were not welcomed. Many pack horses used the White Hart Inn yard. It was called the Nailers Yard, where the horses were loaded with nails, screws, brushes, shovels, spades and so on, to start their long journey to Birmingham and even as far as Bristol.

For sport the villagers enjoyed pigeon shooting. They were bred in the village and sold at 6d. each. They were released from a box one at a time and shot at. Hare coursing at Hill Farm was another important event. Three times a year the most important greyhounds in the county came to compete. Fox hunting took place three times a week during the season. Frog jumping was done from a springboard and often they were thrown higher than a house. There was cock fighting with spurs, but this was considered a cruel sport. The village possessed a few champion walkers. Badger drawing was considered questionable sport.

In the course of time the iron trade with improved machinery moved into larger towns and the slitting mills were no longer needed. Some of the villagers left and there seemed to have been poverty among the remaining inhabitants. Charities were instituted. Bread and coal were distributed by the Church. Some of these still obtain today but have somewhat changed in character. Money was also left by the wealthy for the education of needy children. Lady Stamford visited the poor at Christmas and provided Christmas dinners and warm clothing.

Kinver actually possessed workhouses about 500 years ago. A half-timbered building was acquired with three adjoining cottages at the foot of Church Hill. This building was held in trust by the Church in 1600. The Parish Church officials met here for their Vestry once a month. The clerk was paid

4d. per meeting. He was yearly appointed and was responsible for parish activities. On occasions he used the Town Crier to announce special events. He appointed the resident doctor and the Head Constable (sometimes called Mayor). The workhouse cottage tenants were pioneers in light industries, but poor people's maintenances were farmed out to contractors. There was parish pay for others every Friday. An official from Trysull gave out the dole.

About 1800 there are notices of the founding of a free school—the beginning of the Kinver Grammar School. Kinver was rather a self-contained community. The High Street had six inns, and there were four maltsters and two coopers. There seems to have been two butchers and two smiths and wheelwrights, two hatters and several nailers' shops, and one woman barber and one resident doctor.

Early Saxon, Norman and Plantagenet Kings favoured Kinver Forest for Royal Shooting Lodges. Coton was the most favoured. It was one of the earliest Christianised centres in West Mercia. The old Roman Road was used as the King's Portway, the Royal Road running through what is recognised as Coton Park. The ancient demesne within the Park is the one used by the Saxon Kings. The Norman Kings had a military station and these guarded the King's Court during their stay. There was a monastery and Priests' College. Coton possessed a Domestic Chapel. This still stands, but has no roof at present. The Domestic Chapel originally had two storeys. The lower was the private chapel and the upper room was the Coton Manor Court Room presided over by the Ecclesiastical Lord, who had complete rights over the little kingdom which now forms a parish.

This two-storied building was altered to one storey by Eldred Lee. The Lee family entered into possession after the Royal visitors left the district. The family used the chapel for marriages, christenings and burials for nearly 500 years. John Lee of Chesham and Coton married Sir John Romney's daughter and had eight sons. One of these, Richard, emigrated to America and founded the famous Lee family of Virginia,

later to produce General Robert E. Lee of Virginia. Eldred Lee (1650-1734) married Isabella, daughter of Sir Henry Gough, and had eleven children. They were all baptised, married and buried in the Domestic Chapel of Coton.

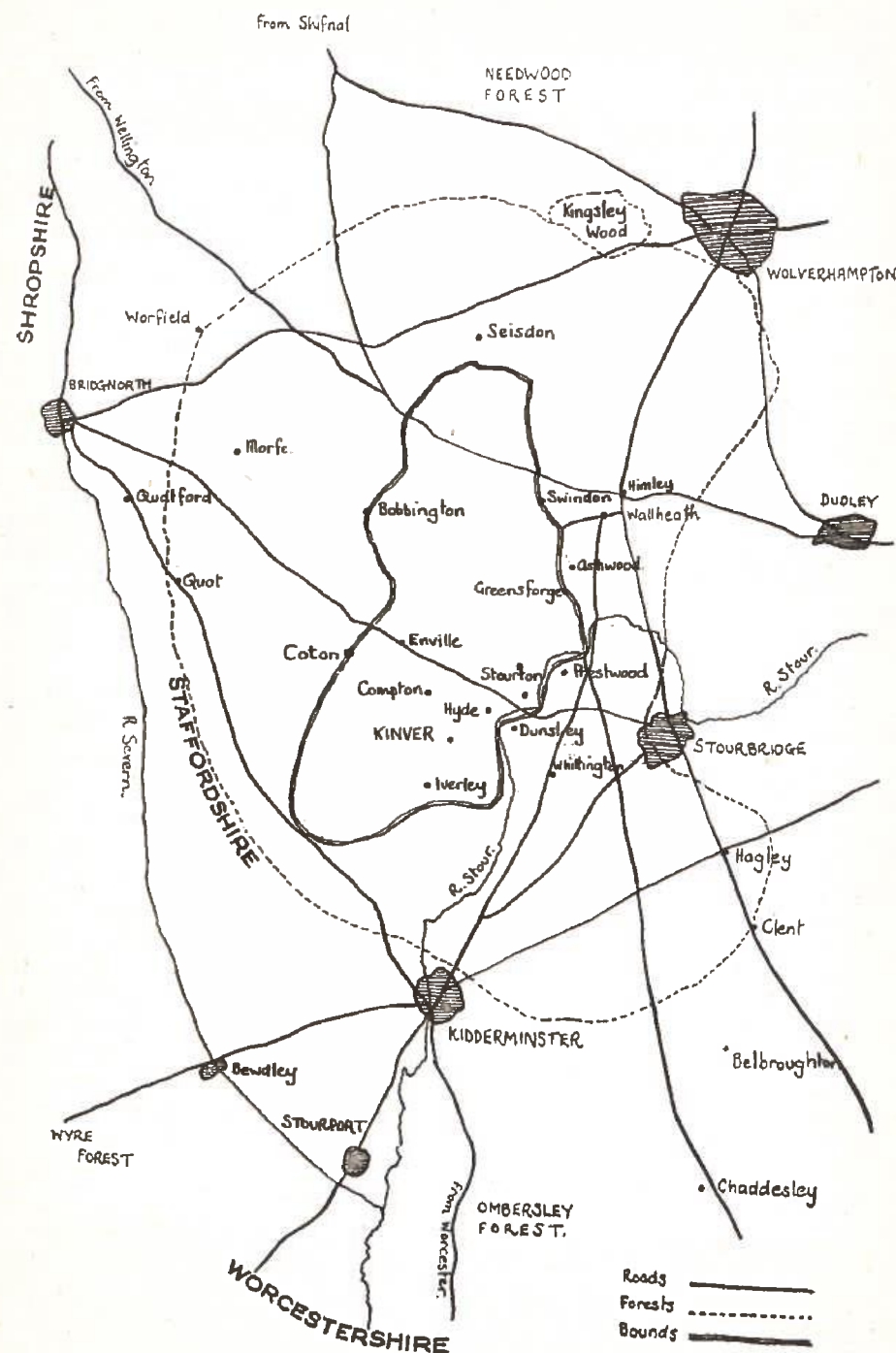
There is a second layer of vaults under this chapel and it is believed to contain the bodies of Crusaders. (It is well known that the bodies of three Crusaders lie in Enville Churchyard.) An open-air service is still held twice a year. It is hoped to restore the Chapel when circumstances permit. As for the monastery, there is little left except a few old oak beams and a ruinous portion used at one time for a cowshed. For many years Divine Service was held in the old oak room, but today there is a Mission Church at High Trees. Services are held on Sunday evenings and Communion once a month by the Vicar of Arley. At one time the Vicar of Kinver undertook this duty. There is a quiet valley nearby still known as the "Dean and Chapter."

At Coton Hall there is a celebrated tree said to be over one thousand years old. It is known as St. Cuthred's Tree. It was used for the administration of Court Leet—to hear forest pleas. Cuthred was King of the West Saxons from 740 to 756. The tree is mentioned in a Charter as "Cuthredes Treow."

In an interesting Charter Deed of 1511 there is related an article on the foundation of Kinver Grammar School, in which the first priest and schoolmaster, one S. Thomas Rondyll, was bound to "say Mass at the Altar of Our Blessed Lady" in the church of Kinfare, not bounden daily, but when he is disposed, and to teach Latin or grammar to poor Kinver boys. He had a special institution of this office and stipend of eight marks per year, with a right to school fees. It was separate from being vicar of the parish (who was at that time under the Abbot of Bordesley Abbey).

In 1448 conditions were such that Kinver people purchased their freedom from manorial service. There was a market held weekly and a fair three times a year. The old six-pillar Market

KINVER, FOREST and DISTRICT



Hall stood in the centre of the street in the village, and a pound for straying cattle.

The Church possessed a peal of three bells which were rung daily by Royal decree. The curfew was rung until the present century.

Windmills were also to be seen working during the 16th and 17th centuries—a time when apprentices were engaged in the local trade of weaving, cloth dyeing, glove, rope, button and brush making. In later times heavier industries were established and nails, spades, shovels and screws were made here. Hyde Lane was the scene of the first mills in the Midlands. Here iron was cut by water-powered machinery for the local nailers and blacksmiths. Nailers Row off High Street still exists. The packer's yard, with the pack horses, was at the White Harte Inn.

A sport which really started visitors coming to Kinver in the old days was "Badger Drawing." The badger was placed in a particular shaped box and had to be withdrawn by a dog. Many four-horse vehicles used to arrive, chiefly on a Sunday afternoon, with men and dogs for this questionable sport.

Frog Lifting was another peculiar pastime. This was held in front of the blacksmith's shop in the village street. A trestle, a plank and sledge hammer were used and, of course, the frogs. A frog was placed on the back end of the plank resting or balanced on the trestle, then the man with the hammer would strike the front of the plank and so impel the frog forward and upward, the winner having sent the frog the greatest distance. Incidentally, it was not unusual to see the frog soar clean over the house tops on the other side of the street.

In those days people were largely confined to their own district. Unless one possessed a horse and vehicle, the only alternative was to walk. There were, however, uncertain journeys by a carrier, when parcels could be sent to nearby places or carried by passengers. There were, however, great competitions for champion walkers. Football was not allowed, but archery was encouraged.

OLD LOCAL CUSTOMS

A CONSIDERATION of this subject may prove of some practical use in illustrating the way in which our forefathers dealt with some of the problems which perplex statesmen and social reformers at the present day. It is said that the tendency of modern legislation is to unduly restrict individual freedom. This may or may not be so, but a study of the customs of past ages appears to show that the restrictions upon individual liberty were much more stringent in the days of our ancestors than they are at the present day. We should, for instance, deem it nowadays a most unwarrantable interference with our daily habits to be compelled to go to bed at any particular time, yet until World War I Kinver Church bell rung a curfew at 8 p.m., this being a survival of the old custom which has now lost its significance.

It served to remind us of the days when everyone was required under certain penalties to observe the signal for covering up their fires and retiring to rest. The nearest approach to legislation of this kind in the present day is the "Daylight Savings Bill," but this is an attempt to induce people by an artificial change of time to get up earlier in the morning voluntarily rather than to compel them to do so. The tendency of modern times has been to observe much later hours than formerly. In the Middle Ages shops used to open at 5 or 6 a.m., the Law Courts sat soon afterwards, and the general hour for dinner was 11 a.m. In some local churches after the ringing of the curfew, a number of tolls corresponding to the day of the month was given to remind people of the flight of time. A bell which used to be rung in some districts was called the "Day Bell." It was rung every morning at 4 o'clock. This was discontinued in 1750, the modern habit of getting up later was coming into vogue and people objected to their slumbers being disturbed at so early an hour in the morning.

There used to be a custom for the "Plum Pudding Bell" to be rung a month before Christmas. Within recent years, in the New Roman Catholic Church, Bewdley, the "Pancake

Bell" was rung at 12 a.m. on Shrove Tuesday in preparation for the season of Lent. It revived the old custom of four tolls; pot-off-pan-on. The custom of ringing the "Passing Bell" is still observed in many churches. Originally a bell of this description used to be rung when a person was supposed to be dying so that people might pray for the departing soul, but in recent years the bell is tolled after and not before death. In the reign of Henry VIII parish clerks could ring no other than the passing bell for poor people unless an honest householder and he a citizen, nor could the bell be rung for "children, maids, journeymen, apprentices, day labourers and any other poor person." In the articles of visitation for the diocese of Worcester in 1662 is the following: "Let the parish clerk or sexton take care to admonish the living, by tolling of a passing bell, of any that are dying, thereby to meditate of their own deaths, and to commend the other's weak condition to the mercy of God."

Before passing from the subject of bells, it may be interesting to refer to a legend in connection with a local saint, St. Catherine, who lived in the reign of Edward II and whose name has given rise to an old custom which used to be observed in Worcester on the day on which she was commemorated. In obedience to a revelation that she should not rest till she came to a town where the bells should ring of their own accord, Catherine and her maid wandered from place to place till she came to Ledbury, where she determined to spend the rest of her life, for this was the place where she heard the bells ring though no ringers were there. She and her maid built a hermitage and lived on herbs and milk.

The 23rd November (St. Clement's Day) was one of the ancient quarterly periods of the year, and the Dean and Chapter of Worcester used to close their audit on the 25th. It was their custom to distribute on that day amongst the inhabitants of the College precincts a rich compound of wine and spice, called "The Cattern Bowl." In many villages in the county boys and girls used to go round to the farmhouses on St. Catherine's Day asking for apples and beer, and singing some quaint carols, of which the following is an example:

"Catt'n and Clement comes year by year,
Some of your apples and some of your beer.
Some for Peter and some for Paul,
Some for Him who made us all.
Peter was a good old man,
For his sake give us some.
Some of the best and none of the worst,
And God will send your souls to roost.
Up the ladder and down with the can,
Give me red apples and I'll be gone.
St. Clement's, St. Clement's, a cat by the ear,
A good red apple—a pint of beer.
Some of your mutton, some o' your veal,
If it's good gie us a deal,
If it's naught gie us some salt,
Butler, butler, fill the bowl—
If you fill it of the best
God will send your soul to rest;
But if you fill it of the small
The devil take butler, bowl and all."

The custom of "Going a Cattering" is said to have been observed in Worcester when Queen Elizabeth visited Worcester on St. Catherine's Day. Until quite recently the scholars of Enville School visited Enville Hall on the 23rd November each year and sang the usual doggerel, afterwards they were regaled with cake and apples. They were then granted a half-holiday.

In the Middle Ages there were many harrassing restrictions to which our ancestors were subject in nearly every department of life. For instance, prices of the necessities of life were fixed by assize, no one could trade in a town without being heavily taxed for the freedom, cottages could not be built except under very special circumstances, lodgers and "incomers" were so narrowly watched that they were nowhere admitted without the opinion of the constables and churchwardens of the parish first being set down in writing that there was no danger of their burdening the town. The brewer dare not sell one drop of liquor till "some sadde and discreete" person from the Corporation had tasted it and given his approval. The black-

smith had the length of his horseshoe nails prescribed to him, and even the poor cobbler was admonished as to what leather he should use.

Butchers were an especial object of jealousy to the authorities. It would seem that they were much in the habit of selling flesh at unseasonable times and killing their pigs in the open street. These and sundry other amusements of theirs called down special bye-laws on them, compelling them to keep their stalls and boards close to their shops, and to sell hides only at "All Hallow." Butchers could not sell meat in Lent and on fast days, the pretext being not a theological one, but to promote the consumption of fish so as to encourage sailors and thus benefit the Navy. These orders were enforced by recognizances, and if the butchers did not appear and enter into the recognizance, or sold flesh, or if a person had flesh in his house for consumption in Lent or on fast days, he was liable to indictment.

The profession of the law was also from very early times an object of suspicion and jealousy to the rulers of the townships. A local statute of the time of Henry VII made it compulsory on attorneys to be dressed in a certain style of clothing, and limited their fees to 4d. a day, with a penalty, on infringement, of permanent discharge from attorneyship. Schoolmasters also were subject to restrictions, which would be greatly resented in the present day. Under a statute of James I, if any person kept a school without the previous leave of the Bishop, both the master and those who allowed him to set up his school incurred penalties. In 1608, John Tandy, of Evesham, schoolmaster, was indicted for keeping a school without first having obtained the Bishop's licence for that purpose, and the Mayor and Corporation of Evesham were also indicted for allowing Tandy to carry on an unlicensed school within the borough.

Unlicensed trading was another frequent ground of prosecution. Persons infringed the guild system by carrying on a trade to which they had not been apprenticed. In 1592 John Simon, of St. Michael's in Bedwardine, was charged with exercising the art or mystery of a tallow chandler without

having been apprenticed thereto for seven years. In 1617, William Maulton, of Evesham, was charged with having exercised the art or mystery of a glover without having been apprenticed thereto for seven years. In 1634, Thomas Vizard, of St. John's, and Samuel Linton, of Doddenham, were charged with voluntarily carrying on and exercising at St. John's the craft or mystery of weaving without having been apprenticed for seven years, and Thomas Burton, of Bewdley, for voluntarily exercising and carrying on at the same, as a trade for seven years.

Another class of cases was either of an illegal trade, such as forestalling, engrossing or regrating, or carrying on a legal trade in an illegal way, as badging. Forestalling was buying merchandise or victuals coming to a market to be sold, so as to raise the price of merchandise or victuals already in the market. Engrossing was the buying up of the whole of a particular article in a certain market to sell again (the old way of making a corner). Regrating was the buying up of the goods before they reached a particular market to sell again, in the same market.

In 1599, Henry Arron of Bradley was indicted for badging and carrying corn from market to market without licence. In 1607, William Buttell and eleven other persons living in the villages round Pershore were indicted for being common badgers of corn without probably selling dough cakes. A baker could only then legally sell four kinds of bread—white bread, wheat bread, household bread and horse bread. Making or selling any other bread was held to be breaking the assize of bread. To "dowl" is to make up bread or cakes in a hurry, hence dumplings. It would seem that these innkeepers instead of giving their customers bread, gave them dough cakes or dumplings. In 1601, the Grand Jury presented four inn holders at Hartlebury as being "common dowers" and dowering at Hartlebury.

Recognizances show the strength of the guild system. If a member of any trade was bound over to appear, the sureties were almost always members of the same trade, brethren of the

same guild, a butcher would have as his sureties butchers, a baker bakers, a glover glovers, and so on. Each trade seems to have been able to stand up for itself, and further to enforce its rules by prosecuting any person who set up a trade in any place without having become a member of the guild.

Our ancestors seem to have had the same trouble in dealing with the evils of drink as we have today. For instance, Bayton, a village on the outskirts of Wyre Forest, is often mentioned in the Worcestershire Records as a place where very strong beer was sold. A petition was presented there in 1612 of the many disorders, assaults and misdemeanours that had occurred in the town of Bayton through the selling of very strong ale and beer by the beer sellers, and it was alleged that John Kempsteis and Thomas Byrde, alehouse keepers at Bayton, sold extraordinarily strong ale at 1d. a pint, whereby many assaults and misdemeanours had been committed. This objection to the sale of strong drink was not made, it is said, in the cause of temperance, but to prevent the consumption of malt and by limiting that to increase the supply of barley available for bread.

The anxiety with which the Government watched the malting trade is very remarkable; for instance, Thomas Pardoe was presented because he usually bought barley to convert into malt notwithstanding he had very much to spare from his tillage for feeding of his own house. The sworn ale taster in the Leet for the Manor of Alfrick complained of an ale house there, that the landlord sold ale by unlawful measure and suffered disorderly persons to drink and swill the whole night together in his house. Many other cases of this kind might be mentioned.

A very ancient custom existed at Pershore till recent times, of selling beer without a licence on the three days of the fair held annually in that town in the month of June; and the houses at which beer was sold on these occasions were distinguished by a bush being hung over each door. This custom prevailed for centuries, but at length the authorities decided to put a stop to it, and in 1865 informations were laid with this object and

heard by the magistrates. The proceedings excited much interest owing to the right claimed by the Excise to over-ride an ancient charter or immemorial custom.

Henry III, on the 4th of May in the eleventh year of his reign, gave "to God, our blessed Lady, and St. Edburgh of Pershore, and to the Abbot and monks there, a fair on the feast of St. Edburgh and two days following." Edward II recited this charter and conferred a further patent, which was rehearsed and renewed by Henry V and Henry VI, and under that charter Pershore Fair continues to be held on 26th June.

The use of a bush as a sign is of great antiquity. A bush was hung out as a sign that something good was to be had within. The proverb "good wine needs no bush" obviously means that nothing is required to point out where good stuff is on sale, as its merits soon becoming known in the vicinity, would be sufficient to attract customers without the invitation of a sign. At Pershore instances have been known of a bough being suspended from a pole, but this does not appear to have formed part of the custom proper. The Pershore people generally used oak and elm boughs, though a cabbage was sometimes substituted.

The use of the bush at Pershore was not attempted on other occasions than fairs, a confirmation of the popular tradition that the two privileges of holding fairs and selling by the bush had in some way a common origin, and descended together as a twin legacy from remote antiquity. The informations laid by the Excise at Pershore had the effect of putting a stop to the ancient custom there in 1865, but one spirited old dame still continued to carry it on, by calling upon her customers for the money and procuring the beer from an inn close by so that they might drink it upon her premises.

Referring to the restrictions upon the building of cottages, it is interesting to notice that a statute of Elizabeth I made it an indictable offence for any person to build a cottage and not let it with four acres of land, thus anticipating the "three acres and a cow scheme." Another provision in the same statute provided that there should be no inmate or more families or

households than one dwelling in any cottage unless in the case of a poor person allowed by the Sessions or the churchwardens or overseers with the leave of the Lord of the Manor or by an Order of Sessions. This gave rise to a good many indictments. For instance, in 1610 a clergyman at Broadway was indicted for receiving or keeping an undertenant in his house. The next year two more persons at Broadway were indicted for a like offence, and in 1635 John Beaseley, of Shipston-on-Stour, was indicted for placing an inmate in a cottage.

There were also repressive measures of another kind altogether. It is not surprising that in the days when so many restrictions were imposed upon the citizens that attempts were made to bridle the "mother tongue" of the fair sex, as may be gathered from the following item in a Worcester record in 1623: "Allowed the money for whipping one Rogers and for carrying of several women upon the gum stool."

The gum stool was apparently the ducking stool, or more properly the "cucking stool." This was an engine for the punishment of scolds and unquiet women by ducking them in the water. Cooken or Cucken Street (now called Copenhagen Street) was probably the scene of these processions and duckings in the river. It is said that this machine was much in use among the Saxons who called it the "scealding-stole." This punishment was also inflicted on brewers and bakers transgressing the law, who were thereupon in such a chair or stool to be ducked in stercore (some muddy or stinking pond). It was anciently called the "gaging stole" and in the Domesday Book "cathedra stercoris."

Another instrument of punishment in such cases was "the bridle," probably used for the bridling of scolds. It was of the shape of a helmet, in which the head was inserted and the vizor drawn up tightly so as to darken completely the eyes and cover the nose. Above the helmet was fixed a little square box, with a hole which was probably intended to receive the end of a pole fixed in a wall, from which the culprit was to be seen hung up with some armour in the Guildhall.

In the Worcestershire County Records reference is made to one Margaret Bache, who was said to be a common scold and a source of strife among her neighbours. One of the charges against her was that she had been presented for misbehaving her tongue towards her mother-in-law, and had been excommunicated at a visitation at Bromsgrove. Unless things were very different then from what they are now, if the Sessions had to try everyone who misbehaved their tongue against their mother-in-law, they must not have wanted for work.

Some of the restrictions I have already mentioned seem to us nowadays very extraordinary, but the attempts which were made to interfere with certain kinds of sports are still more amazing. What would be thought in the present day of a proposal to abolish football? Yet this was at one time an illegal pastime. By a statute of Richard II, servants and labourers in husbandry were forbidden to play (amongst other games) at football, the object of the statute being to encourage archery.

The Act of Richard II was repealed by an Act of James I, but certain games, football among others, were still unlawful if played by persons not of suitable condition, such as husbandmen and labourers. In 1633 some of the parishioners of Cropthorne and some visitors, husbandmen and labourers, indulged in a game of football, for which they were brought before the vicar and committed for trial at Sessions, "to abide such order as shall be enjoined to them concerning the usage of the unlawful game of football contrary to the statutes of the land."

There were also some curious regulations relating to plays and pageants. The "crafts" or trading companies were in the 15th century "ordained" to have five pageants in the year—three on Corpus Christi Day and two on the Sunday following. Among the Worcester orders on a "law day" in the time of Philip and Mary is the following: "The whole company of the common council of the city to accompany all processions, and the stewards of all these companys and fellowship shall likewise be at the said processions and shall go in decent order

one after another as hereafter shall be appointed by the bailiff and not upon heaps as heretofore hath been accustomed, upon pain of 20s.—and all companies shall prepare their shows upon Corpus Christi Day as hath been of old accustomed." In 1565, in the Worcester accounts, an allowance of 20s. is made to Henry Hibbins "towards his great charges concerning the setting forth of a play in September."

Travelling companies of players were licensed by the Crown, and many of them assumed the name of some nobleman as their patron. They were admitted to play and received their pay from the Corporations of the various towns through which they passed.

In 1583, an order was made in Worcester "That no players coming to this city shall play at the Guildhall by night, neither in summer or in winter, nor any plays, played before Mr. Bailiffs or their brethren." This was to ensure due order being kept, as it appears that during the plays there was much tippling going on in the hall, and the windows were broken. Moreover, no one could legally hold any show or play or exhibit, any athletic sports, such as tumbling, vaulting, sleight of hand and other such like feats of activity, without a licence from the Master of the Revels, who by the King's commission, under the Great Seal, was authorised to grant such licences. All unlicensed shows were to be put down.

In the Worcestershire Records in the year 1630 mention is made of the case of John Jones, who, so far as can be gathered from the indictment, procured or forged a licence from Sir Henry Herbert, which purported to authorise Jones, his wife, Richard Payne, Richard Jones and their assistants to set forth and show divers feats and to pass with their show through all towns, cities and boroughs within the realm of England, they behaving themselves honestly and not exhibiting on the Sabbath Day or during time of Divine Service. This licence being false and counterfeit, John Jones was indicted for an unlawful performance of plays.

The matter has a peculiar interest for Worcestershire. Sir Henry Herbert, the Master of the Revels, was the Sir Henry

Herbert to whom Richard Baxter went when for a short time he thought of a court life. It is hard to imagine the great Richard Baxter of Kidderminster having ever entertained the idea of being connected with an office where it would probably have formed part of his daily duty to grant licences for such things as "tumbling, vaulting, sleight of hand, and other such like feats of activity," or that before these sinful acts could be lawfully done, the licence of them would have to be made out by Richard Baxter.

Heaving or lifting at Easter used to be performed on Easter Monday. A number of women would surround any man who happened to be passing and by their joint efforts would lift him in the air, the only way of escape being to pay out money for drinks. At Hartlebury, the farmhouse mistresses would give their male servants permission to heave the female domestic, on Easter Tuesday, as it was believed that this would prevent her breaking the crocks during the year.

At Kidderminster, on Easter Monday, the women, gaily dressed, would deck a chair with ribbons and place a rope across the street to prevent the escape of any man who should happen to pass. He was seized, placed in the chair, raised on high, thrice turned round, set down again, and then kissed by all the women. He was then expected to pay something towards the night's entertainment of tea and dancing. The following day the women were heaved by the men.

Another ancient custom at Kidderminster was that on Michaelmas Day. The inhabitants assembled on the election of the bailiff, announced by the ringing of the town bell, and for one hour, known as "the lawless hour," they amused themselves by pelting each other with apples and cabbage stalks.

At Chaddesley Corbett, on the second Sunday in July, it used to be the custom to put any stranger "through the whoop." At Halesowen it was a custom for a bride to sell a quantity of ale to her guests, they paying whatever price they chose, and this formed a nest egg for setting up home.

An old Worcestershire custom during hop picking was

known as "Hop-cribbing." If a male stranger should chance to pass through the hop yard, the women seized upon him, and unless he paid them a certain sum of money he was put in the crib and smothered with their caresses.

The barbarous custom of cock throwing, viz., throwing sticks at cocks fastened to stakes, was one of the peculiar sports of Shrove Tuesday and its origin has been attributed to a variety of causes, the common tradition being that the crowing of a cock prevented our Saxon ancestors from massacring their conquerors the Danes, on the morning of Shrove Tuesday, whilst the Danes were still asleep in their beds. This custom was denounced in 1743. There used to be hundreds of cocks thrown at, but this cruel, barbarous and cowardly diversion of cock-throwing was suppressed in 1763 by the Mayor of Windsor who hoped all justices throughout the Kingdom would lend a helping hand for the honour of their King and country. It was said that six weeks before Shrove Tuesday hundreds of cocks were thrown at in this horrible way.

There were, however, some amusements that were free from restrictions. The Maypole, Archery and Morris dancing will, for instance, be always associated with Merry England. There is an old custom of "Well Decking" at Droitwich on St. Richard's Day. This saint, a native of Droitwich, was long after his death held by the inhabitants of his native town in great veneration on account of some benefits which he conferred upon them. This custom is yearly observed on April 3rd, St. Richard's Day. The inhabitants keep this day as a holiday and dress the wells with green boughs and flowers. The story goes that in Presbyterian times it was discontinued and after that the spring shrank up or dried up for some time; so afterwards they revived their annual custom notwithstanding the power of the Parliament and soldiers, and the salt water returned again and still continues. This St. Richard was a person of great estate in these parts, and a brisk young fellow and a good rider. He became very devout and after his death was canonised.

There was an interesting old Twelfth Night custom near Ledbury. The farmers made twelve fires on the east side of one of their wheat fields, one fire being larger than the rest. This was known as "Old Meg," round which the farmhands gathered and drank warm cider with plum cake toasted in it. They then cheered the master and crops. Then they proceeded to the cowhouse, where a large plum cake bound round with tape was stuck on the horns of the best cow. A bucket of cider with plum cake was handed round. Each person drank the health of the cow singing a doggerel rhyme. Then the cowman approached the cow and caused her to shake her head. If the cake fell over in front, it belonged to the cowman, but if it fell behind it belonged to the dairymaid. The evening's festivities closed with a dance.

In the same neighbourhood, it was the custom for farmers to complete their wheat sowing by "Allontide," November 1st. If they finished the sowing the previous night, a cake was divided between the dairymaid and the waggoner. If the latter could succeed in going into the kitchen and cracking his whip three times before a certain time he won the cake, but if the dairymaid could prevent him she claimed the cake.

"Beating the Bounds" was a custom which used to be periodically, and is still occasionally, observed in Worcester. It has been said that there is a house somewhere in Worcester situated in two parishes, and in order to beat the bounds of both parishes effectually it was necessary for those who joined in the procession to go through a window. Sometimes on these occasions children used to be seized and their heads bumped against a landmark to make them remember the boundary. It was the custom to sing hymns, read a passage of Scripture, and to offer prayers at each stopping place.

The convent of Worcester had an ancient charter which restrained the bailiffs and their servants from bearing a mace within the church cemetery or priory of Worcester unless in the presence of the King himself or some of his children. In the reign of Henry IV, however, an agreement was made between the prior and convent, and bailiffs and aldermen (for services rendered by the latter), "That for the more worship of the

bailiffs and aldermen, their maces might be borne before them within the precincts of the cemetery or the sanctuary, although out of the liberty of the city, and likewise in the parish of St. John's in Bedwardine." In pursuance of this agreement, the mayor and officers of the corporation used to walk once a year in state into the suburb of St. John's on the Friday before Palm Sunday, which was the old fair day of St. John's and the "Court of Pie Poudre," or court of the dusty foot, for the speedy settlement of disputes arising when the fair was held.

In Worcester Cathedral the ancient graves of St. Wulstan and St. Oswald were formerly on either side of the tomb of King John and on the 19th January, the anniversary of St. Wulstan's death, these graves were annually visited by the faithful, the custom being continued down to the 18th century. It was a custom at Norton, near Evesham, on "Innocents Day" to ring a muffled peal in token of sorrow for the slaughter of the "hapless babes of Bethlehem," and immediately afterwards an unmuffled peal in manifestation of joy for the deliverance and escape of the Infant Saviour.

The custom of "crabbing the parson" was observed till lately at St. Kenelm's chapelry near Clent. The villagers used to arm themselves with crab apples on the wake Sunday and as the parson approached the church they fired them at him until he reached the porch; the substitution of sticks and stones for crabs led to the suppression of the custom. The origin of it is said to be that at some distant date a clergyman who served the chapel abstracted some dumplings from a pot at a neighbouring farmhouse and deposited them in the sleeves of his surplice, from which, when he ascended the pulpit, they rolled out on to the head of the clerk, who retaliated by pelting the parson with a quantity of crab apples he had in his pocket.

Weddings were celebrated by serenading the house of the newly married pair at night and firing off guns or any explosive instruments. On one occasion some people were summoned for having taken part in one of these celebrations, and the indignation of the district was aroused by the order that this custom should in future be discontinued, as it was regarded as indispensable a ceremony as the marriage vow itself.

In Broadwas, at all funerals, the bearers used to let down the coffin in the middle of the lane leading to the church and, forming a circle round it, they all bowed "most reverently."

At Evesham on Holy Thursday the master gardeners used to give their workpeople a treat of baked peas and pork. Guy Fawkes Day used to be generally observed in Worcester, but in 1789 the Corporation caused the bellman to cry down bonfires, although previously the expense of providing fuel and drink to hand round to the spectators had been defrayed out of the civic purse.

The custom of holding "Mops" for the hiring of agricultural servants seems to have died out in Worcestershire, but an annual "Mop" is still held at Stratford-on-Avon. It was an occasion for hiring agricultural servants. At the present day the whole town is given up to enjoyment. Shopkeepers board up their windows and a game of foot-ball is indulged in along the main street. The ball is of an unusually large size and some celebrity is generally chosen to start the ball.

Superstitions were much more prevalent among our ancestors than they are today. Among many superstitions it was considered unlucky to meet a squinting woman unless you spoke to her, or for the first lamb or colt of the season to have its tail towards you, or to give your neighbour a light on Christmas Day or on New Year's Day. One must never put salt on another's plate. "Help to salt, help to sorrow," is a common saying.

One should not cut one's nails on a Sunday. An old saying was "Better a child was never born than to cut his hoofs of a Sunday." To put bellows on a table would provoke a quarrel. If two knives were crossed on a table that would mean a fight. To spill salt was considered unlucky; to escape impending trouble some salt must be thrown over the left shoulder. If the Christmas holly was left up after Candlemas Day it was said that the father of all evil himself would come and pull it down.

There was a saying that if a farmer left a field unsown, there would be a death in the family before the year was out. When a fatal accident occurred in the coal-pit, the colliers used to cease working until after the funeral and a certain amount of money was spent in drink, and known as dead money. To crack a mirror would bring a person bad luck for the next seven years. There are many more customs which tend to illustrate to some extent the great difference between the habits of our forefathers and those of our own day. Many of the customs and beliefs which formed part of the daily life of our predecessors have gone for ever and "like an insubstantial pageant faded left not a rack behind."

*Worcestershire Naturalists' Club
by W. W. A. Tree, LL.B.*

Harvest: A Vanished Custom

Crying the neck

by Cartwright Timms

THE custom of "crying the neck" at harvest time seems to have died out. It was kept up until the last century, and there may be old country folk still living who remember it.

When the corn had been almost entirely reaped, so that only a few ears remained in the middle of the field, the oldest worker would catch them as they fell and fashion them into the crude figure of a man. It was bound with bright ribbons and during its construction the other workers and the village women would gather round in a circle.

Then the old reaper would reverently lower this figure to the ground, while the circle, first removing their caps, would imitate this movement.

Then they would slowly raise themselves, calling out in a long-drawn cry "The Neck!" This was repeated three times, then there would be shouts and laughing, and the men would kiss the girls. This ceremony would be most impressive, for

sometimes as many as 50 men and women would take part in it.

These reapers "crying the neck" at an English harvest never, perhaps, realised that they were taking part in a ceremony that dated back to many centuries before Christ.

In Ancient Egypt the reapers lifted their hands and cried out, lamenting the death of Osiris, the Corn Spirit. At one time it was the custom to murder a man in order to propitiate the Spirit of the Harvest and there is a reference to this in the Old Testament.

SACRED HORSE

THERE was always some reluctance to cut the last few ears of corn. In some parts of the Midlands these ears were tied in a bunch and then hatchets were thrown at them.

One old belief was that the last wisp of corn was inhabited by a sacred horse. Thus the horse became a corn god, and one was slaughtered and eaten at the harvest supper. The Red Indians used to sacrifice a horse to appease the corn spirit.

In Shropshire there was a variation of "crying the neck." This was known as "crying the mare," and was based on the old belief in the horse as the corn spirit.

Music was at one time a feature of harvesting. In Scotland a piper was employed to follow the reapers, so that the slowest worker would find the piper at his heels. Many old folk songs were sung around the harvest, during which a drinking horn was passed round.

It is to be regretted that many of these old harvest customs have died out, but it was inevitable that they should when the tractor replaced the horse.

Birmingham Gazette, September 15th, 1950

The children of Enville School have again revived the old custom of "Clemening." This tradition seems to be peculiar to Staffordshire, and its purpose is to celebrate the apple festival of St. Clement's Day, November 23rd. On this occasion the children visited Enville Hall, where they were welcomed by the butler with fruit and new pennies. He also threw hot pennies from a shovel to the children. The tradition of hot pennies is probably a left-over from the days when, on their way to school, the children had to pass the Enville Hall furnace—the source of hot water—the workmen used to throw them hot pennies at this time.

No one knows the reason for the custom once used on Whit Sunday of throwing bread and cheese to be scrambled for. It may be pagan in origin, but villagers who lived in the Royal Forest of Kinver used to save up their cheese for weeks to honour this tradition.

At one time there was great competition among the foresters as to who could manage to collect wood for the largest bonfire in the district about November 5th each year. They were something more than "Guy Fawkes" fires, they were much older in origin showing the peculiar significance of fire to the forest in the smelting of iron, and the mining of fire-feeding coal. Our ancestors burnt an effigy because they looked with abhorance on the practice of burning at the stake. In the old days boys would go from house to house demanding halfpennies or cider at the door. Then cider was more plentiful than ready money and there were few who did not pour out a cup into the old tin mugs the boys brought round with them. In houses where they were refused the boys played tricks, often lifting off the garden gate from its hinges. There were, however, no fireworks in those days.

Another custom was the tying of the church gates at a wedding by children, to whom the bridegroom had to throw coins before it was untied.

An ancient thatch-wetting custom

A HOUSE with a thatched roof provided the setting for a centuries old custom at Kinver on Saturday evening, June 8th, 1963, when the ancient ceremony of thatch-wetting took place at the newly built cottage of Miss Timmings at Hydeaway, Hyde Lane.

The details of this ceremony were found in an old book. The owner of the cottage invited well over 100 friends and relations both to watch and take part in the proceedings. First the thatched building was blessed by a local lay reader. This was followed by the "wetting," carried out by two local firemen from the village fire brigade, who flung buckets of water to the front of the roof. The watching crowds were handed refreshments, and coins were showered from an upstairs window. Then all joined in with the village choir singing "Bless This House," and other songs.

Superstitious people used this ceremony in the old days in order to protect their cottages against fire and evil spirits.

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