

## NOTES ON THE FEE FARM RENT

*BY A.F.FENTIMAN*

This short essay is about an annual rent assessed against the Manor of Sutton at the time of the Charter of 1528 and paid thereafter for almost exactly 300 years. It was commonly called the Fee Farm Rent, which is a rent imposed on land or property in perpetuity, and, according to one authority, equal to a quarter of the total rentable value, but other authorities differ. In the case of Sutton Coldfield it amounted to £58 per annum.

Before the grant of the charter, the income derived from Sutton by the Lord of the Manor is given in an account of 1480<sup>2</sup> (the total receipts amounted to £45.12s.8d.). No mention is made of a direct treasury payment, but the Manor was made responsible for the payment of a number of officers nominated by the Lord of the Manor (King Edward IV in this case). These were the Chaplain; the Steward; Bailiffs of Hillwood, Lyndrich, Berwood and the Coldfield; Keeper of the Park and Keeper of the Woods. The usual salary was 2d a day, with some perks and lodgings, a total of £22 odd. By the time of the Charter some of these had been consolidated and in the hands of favourites of Henry VIII, but still a charge on the Manor.

During negotiations for the Charter the Treasury Barons revised the sums outstanding and made increases, possibly to take account of inflation, possibly to correct previous undercharging. These are all set out in the Charter<sup>4</sup> in a confusing and repetitious manner, but amount to a charge of £33 previously paid with an additional charge of £24 odd of new charges, a total of £58, and this was the sum assessed against the newly-formed Corporation, to be paid in full only after existing contracts expired. This they did with the death of John Wellsbourn in 1547.

The earliest local evidence we have that this payment was actually being made is contained in a batch of Warden's Accounts from 1622 onwards<sup>5</sup>. Here Edward Willoughby, after having detailed his receipts, starts his expenditure with the phrase:

"Imprimis payde the ffarme lvij<sup>6</sup>"

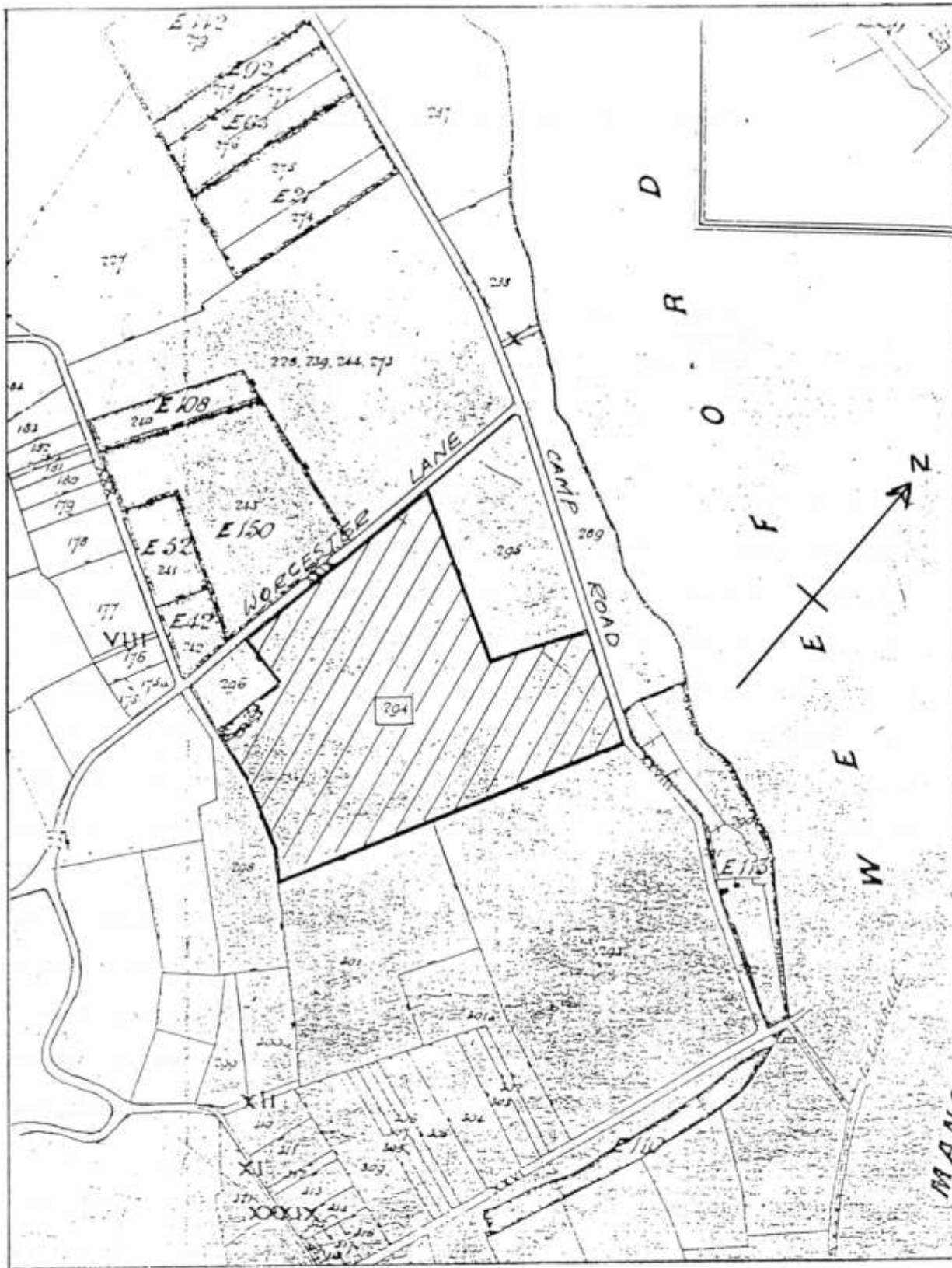
Neither this nor one of its two successors indicate that payment was made other than to the Treasury, but in the accounts of Gawen Priest, Warden in 1696, payment was being made to a Mr. Vere, so the rent had been, as it were, privatised. Mr. Vere, apparently, was an inhabitant of Hints, and probably should have been called de Vere because he was thought to be a member of the Earl of Oxford's family whose family name that was.

There is a considerable gap in the Corporation accounts after 1700, but the Fee Farm Rent turns up again in the Land Tax returns of 1774<sup>6</sup>. Here Mr. Vere was paying a tax of £8.14s. on the rent, increased to £11.12s in 1781, far above any other payments to the land tax. This sum of £11.12s. still held in 1790, when Mr. Duncumbe took over the rent. Duncumbe was a prosperous member of the Town, Warden in 1760 and living in the Moat House. With Walter Homer, Deputy Steward, he had made the embankment which impounds Blackroot Pool. His daughter Elizabeth was his sole heir, and she married a local solicitor, Shirley Francis Steele Perkins, and he was paying the tax in 1795<sup>7</sup>.

In 1796 the Corporation, toying with the idea of inclosing the waste lands, thought they would be in a better position to effect this if free from debt, the Fee Farm Rent being the major one. A Mr. Blick, member of the Corporation, was instructed to approach S.F.S.Perkins with a view to purchase, but was refused<sup>8</sup>. Again in 1824 an approach was made and again rejected, but in 1826 S.F.S.Perkins approached the Deputy Steward with a proposal to surrender the rent in exchange for land from the Corporation's allocation. This was agreed, and the mechanics of the exchange referred to the Commissioner for the Inclosure, John Harris<sup>9</sup>. He judged 39 acres in Roughley Common and an acre in Sutton to be a fair exchange, and this was agreed by both parties. In the Warden's Minutes of 1828 and 1829 the Fee Farm Rent is paid, but not in 1830, so it seems after 300 years of life the Fee Farm Rent was extinguished.

#### References.

1. Jowett, W.A.J. *Jowett's Dictionary of English Law* 2nd. ed. 1977. (SUR 340.094 JOW).
2. Hilton, R.H. *Ministers accounts of the Warwickshire estates of the Duke of Clarence 1479-80*. Dugdale Society Publications Vol. XXI 1952, translated as *The Account of Bailly*. (QSH70.1).
3. Charter granted 16th December 1528, William Gibbons first Warden.
4. A facsimile of the original (in Latin) on a simulated parchment sheet is displayed in the local history library; a translation is located at QSH 31, and there is a summary on p. 70 of Bracken, *Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield*.
5. Sutton Borough Records 41,41a,42 and 51 (Birmingham Reference Library).
6. Land Tax Assessment 1773, 1781, 1790, Warwick CRO QS77/224.
7. Land Tax 1795.
8. Minutes of the Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield 1776-1801 pp 425,433.
9. Wardens Minutes 1801-1832 p. 526.



Land allotted to Mr. S. F. S. Perkins in lieu  
of Fee Farm Rent.

