

## SOME DOCUMENTS IN THE STATE PAPERS RELATING TO HIGH WYCOMBE.

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THE voluminous series of documents collected by the late Mr. J. Parker in his "History and Antiquities of High Wycombe" have not exhausted the records which are available for the elucidation of the past history of this ancient borough. The Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts have shown that there are yet unworked mines of information among the Corporation records, and to these may now be added a series of interesting letters and other documents among the Domestic State Papers in the Record Office in Fetter Lane, a few of which only can be dealt with in the present paper.

The first of these occurs among the State Papers of James I. (139, 89), and is a striking confirmation of the saying, "There is no new thing under the sun." It is well known that in 1622 an attempt was made by the Privy Council to limit the number of alehouses, and numerous replies from magistrates and municipal authorities to the letters sent to them upon the subject are preserved. The following reply from the Mayor and Recorder of Wycombe shows that the plan adopted by the borough authorities coincided with the Local Veto scheme of the late Government, not, certainly, in the mechanism employed, but in the recognition of the principle of "local option," in the distinction made between legitimate inns and mere drinking-shops, and in the absence of all reference to compensation.

"To the Right honorable the Lords and others of his Matie's most honorable privie Councell.

"Where by your honorable Letters dated the last of December last, and directed to the Maior and cheife officers of Wicombe in the Countie of Buck., for suppressing unnecessary Alehouses, wee the Maior and

Recorder of the same Towne, whose names are subscribed, Justices of Peace there, did in obedience to your letters, with the assistance of Sir William Borlase, Knight, a Justice of Peace of the Countie, enter into examinaçon of the number and fitness of the Alehouse keepers there, and findeinge many more latelie lycensed by the Maior of the last year than eyther had been usuall or could be usefull w<sup>th</sup>in th' intent of yor hono<sup>ble</sup> Directions, wee, the said Maior and Recorder, did restrayne the number of Twentie or one and Twentie then lycensed into Nyne, whom wee then newlie lycensed, takeinge Recognisance of them accordinge to his Matie's proclamation, and discharged the residue to the number of Eleaven, amongst w<sup>ch</sup> number there was one Heather then discharged, as well by the said Sir William Borlase as allsoe by us, and w<sup>th</sup>out contradic<sup>on</sup> of Sir Ffrauncys Goodwin beinge present, w<sup>ch</sup> Heather, notw<sup>th</sup>standinge our discharge, did still after keepe Alehouse w<sup>th</sup>out lycense, presumeinge upon a lycense or promise of lycense made to him after our discharge by the said Sir Ffrauncys Goodwin, a Justice of Peace of the countie, w<sup>th</sup> the last yeare's Maior, as he allegeth. Whereuppon wee the said Maior and Recorder have made out warrant for his comittment accordinge to the Statute, as well because of his disobedience to our discharge and your Lop's letters, as allsoe in respect of the unfitness of his house and the place of his dwellinge—As for that wee conceive him disabled to be lycensed w<sup>th</sup>in th' intent of the Statute of the 7th year of his Matie's reigne for uttering Beare of an extraordinarye strength to such his neighbours as are comon and noted Drunkards, and in such extraordinarye proportion as hath occasioned much Drunkennes and Beggerye; in w<sup>ch</sup> respects, and allsoe for that yt will and doth encourage others, notw<sup>th</sup>standinge our discharge, to attempt the keepinge Alehouse again—Wee humblie desire that the said Heather may stand discharged, and that accordinge to your hono<sup>ble</sup> letters and his Matie's Charter to our Towne, wee may goe on to his punishment accordinge to the lawes, notw<sup>th</sup>standinge any promise or lycense made since our discharge by the said Sr Ffrauncys Goodwin. And further wee the said Maior and Recorder doe certifie your honnors, that since our said newe lycensinge the said Nyne, wee have for

misdemeanours discharged one of them, and one other ys dead, soe that for the present their stand but Seaven Alehousekeepers lycensed w<sup>thin</sup> the said Burrough, and the residue wee intend to restraine and punish accordinge to the Lawe, if they shall hereafter keepe Alehouse. And we have allsoe appointed the severall Inkeepers to become bounde from using any Tiplinge, accordinge to Directions given by the Justices of Assise; and wee have allsoe taken Recognisance of such victuallers and others w<sup>thin</sup> the Towne for keepinge of Lent and fastinge days as his Matie's proclamations require, and some neglectinge to be bounde, wee intend to proceed against them as his Matie's proclamation requireth. And shall in all other thinges reddilie conforme ourselves to your honorable Directions,

"And humblie Rest,

"Reddie at your honorable Commandes,

"JOHN DAVENPORT, Maior,

"THOS. LANE, Recorder.

"Wicombe, this 12th of March 1622 [1623 N.S.]"

Sir William Borlase was the founder of the Free School at Marlow. Sir Francis Goodwin, of Wooburn, was the famous Knight of the Shire for Bucks, whose election had led to a struggle between the Lords and Commons in 1604. "The last yeare's Maior" was Richard Gibbons, who held office again in 1629 and 1631. John Davenport was Mayor a second time in 1628.

A few weeks later (S. P. Dom. James I., 142, 44) we come upon another interesting document. It is a report made to the High Sheriff of the county by Sir William Borlase and the Mayor and Recorder of Wycombe, and gives a lamentable picture of the condition of the district:—

"To the Ryght wor<sup>ll</sup> Sr William Fleetewood Knight, high Sheriffe of the Countie of Buck.

"Yt may please you,

"Accordinge to the direcion of certeine orders lately appointed by his Matie to be observed for remedieinge the dearth of graine and victuall, wee the Justices of Peace in the Hundred of Disborough w<sup>thin</sup> the same countie, w<sup>th</sup> the maior of the towne of Wicombe

w<sup>th</sup>in the same Hundred, doe hereby certifie our doeinge herein in obedience to his Matie's comand.

"1. That wee, Sr William Borlase Knight & Thomas Lane Esqr, allotted to the performance of the said service w<sup>th</sup>in that hundred, did send out Precept unto the high Constables of the Hundred requireinge them to cause to come before us the pettie constables w<sup>th</sup> two officers of every p<sup>is</sup>he in that Hundred (not beinge Corne masters) and all comon Bakers, Brewers, Malsters, Badgers, and Millers, to w<sup>ch</sup> pettie constables and other those men, wee gaue in charge the articles required accordinge to his Matie's instrument touchinge the informeinge us the store of grayne. And to the Bakers, Brewers, Malsters, Badgers, and Millers, wee gaue in charge such things as allsoe concern them by the said orders.

"2. That at another daye the Constables & others appointed by us did retorne unto us the names of such as had any corne to sell, & what quantities they had, by w<sup>ch</sup> wee p<sup>'</sup>ceived indifferent store of all sorts in this division, and that the greatest parte did come by keep<sup>e</sup>inge yt engrossed by reason of the extraordinary spoyle of Myce and vermyne, w<sup>ch</sup> this yeare are extraordinarye in abundance and doe much spoyle.

"3. The corne masters beinge to appeare before us did accordinglie appeare, and because wee then founde and yet finde the Markette there to be as well stored with corne of all kindes as ordinarilye in other yeares and that the prises were and still are somewhat abated, & for that the badgers beinge restrained from buyeinge in Markette till all the poore and country were served, and that most of the corne masters did willinglie serve them with corne at their houses uppon Trust, w<sup>ch</sup> they would not doe at Markette; in these and other necessarye respects wee haue, for the publique good, forborne as yet to lymitt them any certeine quantities to bringe to the Markette, but gaue them in charge all other things conteyned in the said book of Articles concerninge the utteringe their corne.

"4. The prises of corne in Markette are as followeth, viz: the midle sorte of wheat w<sup>ch</sup> was at viis. or thereabout ys nowe at vs. vid. or lesse. Barley beinge at 4s. the bushell ys the dearer because it is the comon foode of

the poore, & that the seede tyme is not yet paste. Beans and pease & Oats are fallen.

"5. In diverse p'ishes the p'ishon's haue of their owne purses bought Rye at London to serve the poore w<sup>th</sup> all, and solde yt them better cheape then they bought yt. And allsoe wee haue as much as in us lyeth sette the poore on worke. But wee finde that by reason of the Trades of clotheinge and Bone lace makeinge are much decayed and doe daylie fayle, the poore are greatlie hindered & impoverished, & growne into such multitudes, that wee knowe not meanes to sett them on worke, all w<sup>ch</sup> poore wee doe relieve soe farr forth as the stocks & collections of everye p'ishe w<sup>thin</sup> our hundred will extend.

"6. Allsoe wee required in every Towne w<sup>thin</sup> or hundred some to be appointed to assist the constables for apprehendeinge of the vagabonds and sturdie Beggars, w<sup>ch</sup> accordinglie was p'formed, and ys still contynued w<sup>th</sup> good effect.

"Att the last Sessions held at Aylesburye att Christmas last the strength of Beere was rated not to exceede 8s. the barrel; And the Brewers w<sup>thin</sup> this Division haue bene straightlie charged to observe the same, w<sup>ch</sup> they doe observe accordinglie.

"Not onlie the Alehousekeepers (whereof many haue bene put downe) but the Inkeepers allsoe w<sup>thin</sup> this Division are bounde in Recognisance to keepe the assise of Ale & Beere, and not to intertaine Townsmen Tiplinge.

"8. But in the Towne of Wicombe there are, as the Maior informeth us, almost an hundred people that haue no meanes to sett themselves on worke, and in other Townes much like wante of worke, though wee doe or utmost indeiour to procure work for them, and wee finde the wante of meanes to sett them on worke ys a farr greater p'iudice then scarcitie of corne; and the inconveniencye groweing thereby ys soe great that yt inforceth many to steale or starve; though our monthlie contribucons are doubled in p'ishes amongst us.

"9. Allsoe the Maior of Wicombe for his p<sup>te</sup> complayneth that divers somes of money due and payable for reliefe of the poore amongst them are privylie detayned by some evill disposed p'sons amongst them;

and by Reason of factions and devisions stirred and mainteyned amongst them they cannot w<sup>th</sup>out great charge or extraordinarye courses taken, Recover yt.

"All these beinge thus required to be reformed by us (wherein wee haue bene willinge to doe o<sup>r</sup> duties) wee doe humblye hope may receive a favourable construcion in place where they are to be censured.

"WILLIAM BORLASE,

"THOS. LANE,

"JOHN DAVENPORT,

"Maio<sup>r</sup> of Wickham.

"Dated at great Marlowe this 8th of April 1623."

Several points in this document call for special notice. "Badgers" was a name for the licensed corn-dealers, who were allowed to buy up corn for the London market in the counties of Oxford, Berks, Bucks, Herts, Cambridge, Surrey, Kent, Essex, Norfolk, and Suffolk.\* They were exceedingly unpopular, being accused of "engrossing" corn in order to raise the price. That racy divine, Thomas Adams, in his sermon on "Politick Hunting" (1615), after denouncing the enclosing landlord as the boar, the cheat as the fox, and the usurer as the wolf, says, "There is also the badger, a beast of rapine. We have fellows among us, the engrossers of corn, the raisers of price, sweeping away whole markets; we call these badgers. The poor that comes with a little money cannot speed, but at an unreasonable rate. They engross all, and by their capacity, or rather rapacity, having so much in their hands they sell it at the place of their transporting, at their own price."

A special interest attaches to the reference to the decay of the clothing and lace-making trades. The allusion to the strength of beer seems a little obscure. In that to the misappropriation of the Wycombe charities, we find the earliest indication, perhaps, of a struggle which was not to be settled for more than thirty years.

Among the State Papers of the next reign we come upon another allusion to the "badgers."

Between the last two mayoralties of Richard Gibbons,

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\* See Strype's Parker, Appendix, Sect. xxxvi.

the office was held in 1630 by Thomas Lock, who thus writes: "To the right hon<sup>ble</sup> my very good Lords, the Lords of his Mat<sup>t</sup>'s most hon<sup>ble</sup> Privy Counsell" (S. P. Dom. Chas. I., 177, 50):—

"Right Honourable,

"It may please yo<sup>r</sup> Lo<sup>ps</sup> to bee aduertised that, according to yo<sup>r</sup> honourable L<sup>rs</sup> directed to me dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this instant moneth, I did on ffriday last (beinge the Markett day att Wicombe) take order that such liberty was given to all lycensed Badgers for the City of London, to buy such quantities of wheat for the use of that City as they desired, they buying it at such prices as by yo<sup>r</sup> hon<sup>ble</sup> letters was directed, and haue restrayned Bakers and Chandlers, as yo<sup>r</sup> Lo<sup>p</sup>'s L<sup>rs</sup> likewise required. But I did find great unwillingness in Badgers to buy as heretofore they had used to doe (yf the Markett would have afforded store) by reason (as they affirmed) that their Meale w<sup>ch</sup> they had formerly bought had the two weekes last past bene taken from them at London by direcion from the Lord Maior at lowe prices, that they, or the most part of them have lost at least Three pounds in money in every Twentyquarters. And that they were much troubled by unnecessary attendances and undue exaccions taken from them by officers before they could be suffered to sell their Meale, in so much that I find the most of them much discouraged to deal any more in that Trade; the w<sup>ch</sup> togeather w<sup>th</sup> the courses w<sup>ch</sup> haue here lately bene taken in lymittinge the ffarmers to sell at lower prices than the Marketts afford w<sup>ch</sup> are further from London hath (as I conceive) occasioned so small a proporcion of Corne to be brought this p<sup>nte</sup> day to the Markett here that their was not one ffourth part heere of that w<sup>ch</sup> was the Markett day last before, and the same presently bought upp by housekeeps for their own private p<sup>u</sup>ision at the rate of about Eight Shillings the Bushell. Albeit three of the Justice of the Peace were pleased to assist me in the earnest p<sup>s</sup>wading of the ffarmers to sell at lower prices, and the said Justices did sell (some of them of their own Corne) and others of them did procure such as they had p<sup>t</sup>icular interest in, to sell some quantities at Seaven Shillings the bushel to the poor, and gaue out of their own purses to the intent they might by their examples p<sup>c</sup>ure abatement of prices: the said Justices

also then taking into consideraçon what might be the occasion of the small quantity now brought to the Markett, and of the meanes to redress yt, did concurr w<sup>th</sup> me in the same oppinion for the causes of scarcity at this p<sup>nte</sup> Markett and upon deliberate consideration had of his Ma<sup>t</sup>'s Instruccions, did find that they were not able to redresse the same by causinge greater Quantities to bee brought to the Markett, cheifely for that the greatest quantity of Corne that hath usually come to this Markett in this tyme of scarcity hath been out of Oxfordsheire and Barksheire, where their commission doth not extend, and hath not as in former yeares of plenty been supplied out of the Vale parts of this county where at the time there ys a great faileinge of all sorts of grayne, although noe Badgers for London do buy any there, yt beinge apparent to them (as they affirme) that the p<sup>r</sup>portions in those parts and in this County are little more then may serve for the inhabitants thereof. And because soe little store came from the Counties adjoyninge, yt is conceived that the said Counties receives some discouragement by the late courses here held for the abatemt<sup>t</sup> of prices. And that they either keepe in their Corne, or carry it to other Marketts, w<sup>ch</sup> hath produced theis effects (viz.) that many inhabitants of this Town, being Badgers, w<sup>ch</sup> at the moçon of myself and some Justices in theis parts, haue bene contented to lay out, and haue latelie heretofore bought for the use of the poore here neere an Hundred Quarters of Barley and other Grayne, and solde it out to the poore weekly at less by 6d. or 8d. the bushell then the Markett required, doe affirme that by reason they cannot goe on in theis courses of trade, they are not able any longer to supplie the want of the poor in that kinde. And the Toll of the Markett (by reason of w<sup>ch</sup> also the poor of the Town had much releife) ys soe much abated that there is not one part of ffour to that w<sup>ch</sup> hath bene usuall before this day. And the Justices did affirm unto me, that the farmers of this County whoe were forward to settle courses in their sev<sup>r</sup>all parishes, to sell to their poore at prices below their Marketts, were upon this occasion of abatement of prices ready to alter such their charitable resoluçons. Of w<sup>ch</sup> particulars I thought yt



my duty to give yo<sup>r</sup> Lo<sup>ps</sup> advertisem<sup>t</sup>, not doubting but that the said Justices (viz., Mr. Hackwell, Mr. Hamden, and Mr. Lane) w<sup>ch</sup> were eye witnesses this last friday, in the Markett, will verifie what I have here certified unto yo<sup>r</sup> Lo<sup>ps</sup> yf soe it be required. All w<sup>ch</sup> I humblie leave to yo<sup>r</sup> hono<sup>bls</sup> Consideraçon, and remayne,

“Yo<sup>r</sup> Lo<sup>ps</sup>’ most humble servant,

“THOMAS LOCK, Maior of Wicombe.

“Chepinge Wicombe, this 27th day of Decemb. 1630.”

This letter is interesting as showing the manner in which the wisdom of our ancestors dealt with the eternal difficulty of the price of corn. Protection was nothing compared with the drastic measures to which they resorted. It suggests also the inquiry whether the prominent part which the men of South Bucks took in the struggle of a few years later against Charles’s Government may not have been partly due to the hardships inflicted by an unwise economic policy, as well as to religious and political partisanship. Nor should it be overlooked that it helps to explain the unbounded popularity of John Hampden, by showing the thoughtfulness with which he had inquired into the condition of his poorer neighbours, and the readiness with which he had denied himself for their good. “Mr. Hackwell” was no doubt Hampden’s friend, William Hakevill, formerly member for Amersham, who had managed the petitions for the restoration of the franchise to the three boroughs of Marlow, Amersham, and Wendover. “Mr. Lane” was probably the same Thomas Lane whom we have before met with as Recorder of Wycombe, and whose name occurs among the signatories of the famous protest against the ship-money drawn up at Great Kimble in 1635.

In another document (S. P. Dom. Chas. I. 205, 52) we seem to have the “badgers’” side of the question. This is an undated petition to the Privy Council, which need not be here given at length, from seven bakers “of the liberties of the Citty of Westminster.” They complain that in spite of their being licensed to buy corn, Lock had refused to allow them to do so, to the injury of

their own and their families' livelihood. Yet they complain he had given permission to buy corn to John Bigg, who was a brewer and maltster, and "used badgery." He also owned a mill in partnership with his son. On these grounds they beg of the Council to intervene. John Bigg had been mayor in 1627. It is the first time that the name occurs in the list of mayors, but various members of the family held office on seven different occasions down to 1699.

In a subsequent paper it is hoped to show the revival and final settlement of some of these Wycombe difficulties during the period of the Commonwealth.

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