

A History of Tracy Park, Doynton

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The Early Manors

The Tracy family, who gave their name to the park, held the Manor of Doynton for 300 years and it is of that family and its predecessors that the earliest written records survive.

John Tracy is reputed to have purchased the manor in 1246 from Thomas de Deinton. But this Gloucestershire branch of the family had its main residence at Toddington near Tewkesbury. The Inquisitions Post Mortem of this period do not show the holdings of the Tracys in any detail, since they were not tenants-in-chief of the king but held the land of the de Clares, Earls of Gloucester, and then of the Earls of Stafford. These refer, in 1363, to John Tracy holding the manors of Doyntone and Southwode. Later references, up to 1403, write of him as holding two knights' fees at Doynton. Within these forty years the value of the manors had doubled from 30 to 60 pounds.

This raises the interesting point whether the two manors were administered from two houses or only one. The earliest deed, in 1595, does not refer to a demesne at Tracy Park but to 'the manor of Doynton and the park commonly called Tracys Park'. We might conjecture that Tracy Park was a survival of the forgotten manor of Southwood, if we could find any continuity of the name near that site.

The last mention as a manor is in 1363. In the 1595 deed, when Arthur Player (q.v.) purchased the manor and park from Sir John Tracye, the properties are described as being within the parishes, towns, hamlets etc. of Doynton, Sowthwood, Coldayshton, Bitton, Weeke, Alston and Pucklechurche. Three years later, in 1598, Arthur Player of Bury House makes a specific exception to the sale of the manor of Doynton with regard to a close of pasture, demised to Agnes Tyler with reversion to Patrick White (q.v.). In 1685, in a deed still kept at Tracy Park, Richard Ridley (q.v.) conveys 'an inclosed ground called Southwood or Widow Tyler's Leazes'.

The Langton family papers kept at Taunton Record Office contain a deed of 1610 referring to a close of pasture called Sow-wood, 5 acres, abutting on a pasture ground called Tracies Park on the S.E. and by a close of pasture, formerly of Agnes Tyler, on the S.W. This property was held as tenants by three Thomas Francombes in succession and the second one built two houses on the land. These two little houses are mentioned in a Tracy Park deed of 1633. In 1791 Grace Davis, as tenant of the Langtons, worked Court Farm and also farmed the messuage and tenement known as Sowd, together with 27 acres belonging to it including a field called Rushy Soud. When her tenancy was renewed in 1800, she no longer held these and, from later references, it is likely that this small farm formed part of an exchange of land between the Langtons and Robert Bush, then of Tracy Park. For in 1820, when Bush sells to Davy the close called Home Ground, he describes it as being formed, in part, from Rushy Soud and Soud Mead.

These various deeds do not always refer to the same piece of land but to various parts of the original Southwood. Nevertheless, it is likely that Tracy does occupy the site of the original manor and it would also seem that the two little houses that have now disappeared are the site of the hamlet of Sowd referred to in the 18th century histories.

The site of Doynton Manor is equally deductive, but no more than that. In the present Church, the North transept is occupied by the Bury chapel and this name would seem to date from the end of the reign of Elizabeth I. We know that in Player's time Bury House was the site of the manor and demesne. There was a free chapel earlier, but evidence of 1546 shows that this, too, was within the Church and not attached to any manor house. It is in the light of this positioning that one must try to estimate the value of the following points:

- (1) the assertion by our oldest inhabitant that the foundations of a large building were seen to the north of the church during the drought in the earlier part of the present century;
- (2) the persistent village memory that the manor lay in that position close to the church;
- (3) the nomenclature of Court Farm or Manor Farm alongside that site.

If this were the site of the early manor it must have been moved to Bury House at a date well before any deeds that have survived to us. An answer could only be hoped from excavation, but as a position it looks very feasible from the aerial photography and would make a tight nuclear village on the mediaeval plan as opposed to the present dispersed parish.

The Park covered approximately 100 acres at the bottom of Freezing Hill and partially overlapped the Iron Age encampment there. It shows its boundary construction in the form of a double bank, of which the inner ought to have had a palisade. This then was the larder for the Lord of the Manor, and since for 350 years it was held by the Tracys jointly with the manor of Doynton it would have needed no large building. The extent of the park appeared on the first Ordnance Survey map of 1830.

The park appears in the records of a court case in Chancery during the reign of Elizabeth I, which shows that in 1505 the park had been demised by William Tracie unto Willian Attwood and his sons Edward and John for their lives. It is the first of these, William, who having married a Berkeley heiress, has the monumental brass, of 1522, in the church. The second, John, in his will of 1567 described himself as yeoman and four years earlier he was a signator of the following laconic presentment to the bishop on the state of Doynton church.

That the chauncel is so in decay that they can have no service in hit.

That the parsonage is in decay.

Item; they present that they lack a curate otherwise in order.

The Elizabethan Structure

We know that Arthur Player bought Tracy Park from Sir John Tracye in 1595. At the Gloucester County Records Office there are genealogical notes made by a member of the Player family in the 18th century. Starting from a small family stock that had settled at Wick by 1577, Arthur Player had become bailiff to Sir William Wintour, Lord of Dyrham, by 1571. Sir William was a keen contender for commercial advantage during the rebuilding of the fleet to set against the Spanish Armada and his bailiff seems to have been no less successful in the local field, for when he died in 1591 he held five manors and was styled 'gentleman'. His son, Arthur, started selling the property in the Wick - Doynton area three or four years later and Tracy Park itself was bought by Patrick White, a merchant, of Bristol. He too was of a family that had risen fast at the end of the Elizabethan period, for in a will dated 1594 of William Prewett, draper of Bristol, he is described as a servant although an honoured one. Patrick White did not hold Tracy for long for he died in 1600 and his will refers to making over of his property to his wife before his death. This must have included the house that he built there and called 'Well House'.

This is the structure referred to in later histories as a small gabled building in the Elizabethan style. Unfortunately, no inventories of occupiers of the house have, for a certainty, been found. It is, however, possible that the inventory of Giles Browning of 1718 (and the Browning family possessed it then) refers to this building. In which case it contained, on the ground floor, a hall, a kitchen with a cellar below and, on the first floor, a hall chamber, a kitchen chamber and a little chamber and, above that, two cocklofts used for storing cheese. There is also a reference to a White House and barns. His valuation, at £200, was higher than the average for Doynton, but the main value was in farm stock and he did not seem to have had very luxurious furnishings, although he is one of the few to have possessed books, but they were only valued at two shillings. The immediate surroundings were not extensive and are described as the walled round orchard and garden and two little courts adjoining, called the 'Green Court' and 'Well Barton'. Beyond that there was the walled 'Inner Barton' together with barn, stable and hogstys.

The ownership for thirty years from the death of Patrick White is uncertain but in 1633 Thomas Ridley, gentleman, bought the house and grounds, including the hamlet of Soud, from William Baldwyn, a Merchant Taylor, for £2070, and the ownership descended through his son and grandson, both Richard, to the great-grandson Thomas, who died in 1714. A trust deed of 1685 shows the extent of the holding outside the immediate grounds as being approximately 200 acres.

With Thomas Ridley, the direct line died out and the descent was through a collateral line to the Brownings and then to the Francombs. But several of the inheritors had bequeathed heavy endowments not only for the family but also for founding almshouses and a school in Thornbury. It is also to this period that the undated 18th-century letter to Mr. Nicholas Jackson from his brother belongs. To settle the position a case was brought in Chancery in 1732 but no solution was found until by a deed of 1741 the three spinster daughters of William Bave, who had been the surviving executor of John Attwell, who had been the surviving executor of Sarah Ridley, who was the sole executrix of Thomas Ridley, transferred the property to Jeremiah Aimes of Bristol, Grocer, who granted a mortgage of £1000 on the property to John Browning and William Francombe. Eight years later he calls in his money so they transfer the mortgage to William Gough of Bristol, Woollen Draper. He, when he dies in 1750, leaves his assets to Isaac Burgess who grants a further £500 on the property. The property was still under mortgage when William Francombe died in 1767 and instructed that the property be sold. His wife, Ann, and her appointed councillors Thos. Whitehead, of Bristol, Insurance Broker, John Walton of St. Clement Dane's, Apothecary and John Haverfield of Kew Hamlet, Gardener to His Majesty, could not achieve a solution and again went to Chancery and the property was auctioned by Chancery and bought

by Robert Bush of Bristol, Pewterer, for £6250. The deed of transfer in 1774 had the signatures of eleven of the people involved, including H. D. Gough of Maryland, North America, who had inherited the value of the mortgage from Isaac Burgess.

Robert Bush left the house and land to his nephew, Robert, in 1798. It is not clear which of these two Roberts was responsible for rebuilding the house.

The Present Structure

The present appearance of the house on the West and South fronts is largely as created by Robert Bush, although later extensions exist to the back of the building. The reconstruction must have been complete by 1808 when the mansion house is described as being lately repaired, altered and enlarged at very considerable expense. So large that he has to raise a mortgage of £3000 from the Archdeacon of Wells. In 1820 two Robert Bushes, one the son, the other the nephew of Robert Bush, Pewterer, sell the house to William Gabriel Davy. At the time of the sale the land to it totalled 160 acres but of this Robert Bush retained 40 which he was to run from Tracy Park Cottage and he also retained a means of access to the above from the Wick - Bath Turnpike road. As this is a very long route up to Tracy Park Cottage it is perhaps a commentary on the state of Freezing Hill lane then. Before the sale the Bushes had acquired two further small estates, one from Richard Haynes of Wick and the other from John Davies and had arranged the diversion of a footpath that used to run directly in front of the house; a sketch plan of this diversion is at the Gloucester County Records Office.

William Davy paid £12,818 17s 0d but of that he had to borrow £10,979 0s 11d from his family, and by the Tithe Apportionment of 1839 he only had 69 acres of the 120 that he had bought originally. The domestic staff that he and his son needed to run the house is shown clearly in the copies of the 1851 and 1861 censuses. He died in 1856 and was followed by his only son, the Reverend Charles Raikes Davy, who was very active in increasing his holdings. He acted as Vicar's warden for many years and contributed handsomely to the building of the North aisle of the church and when the new village school was built in 1876 he played a very active part in the preliminary work. A Subscription List had been opened in 1870 and of the total receipts of £525, which had been deposited at Tugwell's Bank, Old Market Street, Bath, he and W. S Gore-Langton had contributed £100 each. He also was succeeded by his only son, William Davy, who too acted as churchwarden. He died in 1915 and his only son was killed in action a year later so the estate devolved to his daughter who sold it in 1926 to Charles Samuel Clarke.

For the last century and a half the owners of Tracy Park have lived on their property and have played a leading part in the village but in contrast, before that time, only the Ridleys lived there, and they had property elsewhere. This too is largely true of Bury House, which may have affected the character of the parish.

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