

Old Documents

Papers throw light on the past

There has recently been a very interesting "find" of documents relating to St. Gennys' parish and some other places in Cornwall. These documents were found in an old box on an estate in Sussex this year by a Mr. Batchelor, who is a direct descendant of General Batchelor, who purchased the manor of Crackington in 1889 at a price of £15,000.

No one can say now why these documents were not handed over when the General sold the manor some years later to the late William James Harris, but it is a great piece of good fortune that they have at last come to light. It happened that Mr. Batchelor's son visited St. Gennys recently, knowing that much of the parish had once belonged to his ancestor, the General. He also acquired a copy of Mr. Roger Parnall's history of St. Gennys, and contacted the author when he had found the old box at his home containing the documents. More than twenty old deeds and documents were in the box, mostly in good condition, and dating from 1565 to about the year 1800. Six documents are dated prior to 1600 and four more prior to 1628. Some are written in Latin, and others in medieval script. The earliest deed relates to Tremoutha (described in the deed as Lemouth), comprising a dwelling house, garden, orchard, 30 acres of arable land, 12 acres of meadow, 10 of pasture, 10 of wood and 20 of heath. This document shows that at that time Richard Roscarrock was interested in the ownership of the property. His family came from Roscarrock in St. Endellion parish.

The second document in date is even more interesting - dated 28th March, 1566, and made between the famous Richard Grenville of Stowe and George Rolle, of Marhayes, in Week St. Mary. It relates to the sale to George Rolle of Grenville's half share of the Manor of Crackington which he and Rolle had jointly purchased in 1563 from Henry, Earl of Huntingdon.

The third deed dated 7th June, 1589, records a release of Tremoutha and a tenement in Week St. Mary by John Roscarrock to George Rolle and bears the signature of John Roscarrock in great clarity and beauty. Little did he think as he signed in 1589 that we should be admiring the quality of his script nearly 400 years later!

The fourth deed dated in 1589 relates to the acquisition by George Rolle and his wife Margaret of a house, two gardens and 182 acres in Trehole and Hillparks, St Gennys. The last two of the XVI'th Century deeds relate to the sale on the 20th June, 1589, by John Roscarrock, Esquire, to George Rolle of Marrays, gent; and Andrew Rolle, his son and heir apparent, of all the lands in St. Gennys and Poundstock which came to John Roscarrock through Thomas Roscarrock his father. These lands included Tregoele alias Tregawle, Mellooke and Penwarne. Tregoele, of course, is in Poundstock, Mellooke should need no explanation and Penwarne is now part of Trelay in St. Gennys.

A VANISHED NAME

Four more deeds represent the years from 1602 to 1627. In a deed dated 30th March, 1602, George Rolle, then described as of East Orchard, Marreys (Marhayes in Week Saint Mary parish), released to his son and heir Andrew Rolle all his rights in Penwarden and Penwarden Wood in St. Gennys. You will not find the name Penwarden on any current map today, but it forms part of the farm known as Trelay in St. Gennys.

On 20th June, 1603, Andrew Rolle of East Orchard, son and heir of George Rolle (then described as deceased), granted to Henry Rolle, of Stevenstone in Devon and Robert Rolle, of Ghanton, in Devon, Esquires, his manors of East Orchard, Marreys and Crackington.

On 20th September, 1615, Walter Hickeman, of Kew, Surrey, Esquire, sold to Robert Hooper, of St. Gennys, Yeoman, a fourth part of Tecliffe, alias Cliffe, West Tresmoren and Penkey, St. Gennys. Those, who like interpreting place-names will instantly recognise Cleave, as it is called today. The price was £53. The last of the XVIIth century deeds is a lease dated 1st February, 1627, made between Andrew Rolle and Thomas Bray, of St. Gennys (described as a husbandman), of five fields known as Hill Downe Park, with the meadow and garden adjoining in St. Gennys, lately held by Edward Rawle. The letting was for 99 years on the lives of Thomas Bray, the tenant, and of Peter and Edward, the sons of Thomas Hallett, of St. Gennys, Yeoman. That was in 1615. It is interesting to recall, as evidence of the manner in which Christian names are handed down in families, that there was a Thomas Hallett living at St. Gennys in the present century. The Halletts were always said to have been men of some substance in St. Gennys. The description "Yeoman" in 1615 and the place-names "Halett's Shute" and "Hallett's Lane" confirm this.

The only other deed in the box was of much later date. On 15th February, 1811, the Right Honourable John Lord Rolle, of Stevenstone, Devon, leased to Stephen Smeeth (another good old St. Gennys and North Cornwall name), described as of St. Gennys husbandman, two waste plots adjoining. the road leading from Wainhouse Corner in Jacobstow to Sparrett (Tresparrett) Posts in St. Gennys. This was a lease for 99 years on the lives of the tenant and his children Mary and Loveday, then aged 5 and 3 respectively.

The remaining documents in the chest consisted of three identical copies of a Rental and Valuation of the Manor of Crackington, un-dated but circa 1800, and two further copies with information as to existing lives on which the various tenancies depended.

Other interesting papers in the collection include a list of lands in the County of Cornwall referring to property in Stratton, Launcells and Week St. Mary, and also to Hartland and Horwood in Devon.

Lastly, and perhaps surprisingly, here are five letters dated between February 1712 and June 1713 from John Buller, of Morval, near Looe, relating to family matters and thought to have been sent to Sir John Coryton.

Through the generosity of Mr. Batchelor, all these invaluable documents have been donated to the County Museum (the Royal Institution of Cornwall) at Truro.