

## MERIDEN'S CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCES(1642-46).

The idea of a compensation culture is far from new. In the National Archives are fascinating papers showing how Meriden men and women claimed against the government in 1646 for damages during the Civil War. Let's turn the clock back to when Charles 1st stayed at Great Packington Hall a guest of Sir Robert Fisher and his three sons: Clement, Thomas and Francis shortly before the battle of Edge Hill in October 1642. His troops were mustered near the 'Two Pillars' on Meriden Heath said to be a then famous land mark, long since vanished. The trained bands (a type of home guard) marched from Birmingham to Coventry by way of the village to lend support to the City's Parliamentary garrison. The inhabitants were forced to pay taxes to both sides, collected by local yeomen such as Thomas Weyman whose farm lay near the Allesley border, Thomas West of Marlbrook Hall and Adrian Shakespeare whose farm on the boundary with Fillongley no longer stands; Thomas Change an inn keeper in the village, Richard Patrick of Patrick's Farm and Robert Harper the wood monger with a business and inn on the site of 'Brooklyn' on the main road. Some of the cash was to raise or maintain Parliamentary troops, fortify Kenilworth Castle and finance the campaign in Ireland. Tax was also paid in kind such as the provisions sent to Maxstoke Castle or the free billeting of soldiers- the latter the most disliked form of payment. It is when we get down to personal details it becomes fascinating.

John Baldwin son in law of Mr Thomas Holbeche of Meriden Hall ran the high class 'Bull Head Inn' that belonged to his under-age step son where endless soldiers and horses sought free accommodation. The same was true for the widow Alice Parker at the 'Bell' an ancient inn at the foot of the Hill. She asserted she was owed £33-18-2d. Another widowed innkeeper Mary Harper, whose home still stands, now called 'Lanesfield' and opposite the present 'Bull's Head', claimed over £22. A village baker John King who lived off Leys Lane on the hill behind the original 'Bull Head' supplied bread to the value of £19. While Robert Harper ended his long, precise list of unwanted guests with, '14 supped 1 night and 3 stayed all night'. You can feel John Halsall's anger when his horses were commandeered and there was 'a whole troop of horse put into mowing grass' on a field he rented near the 'Queen's Head' or sympathise with William Field who had not received the market value of his herd of cows, 40 in all some in Meriden and others at Bellsor Belne Farm near Kings Norton. Did Thomas Paddy working one of the two mills near Molands Bridge suffer more because he was the agent for the Royalist Chief Lord of the Manor, the Earl of Derby executed in 1651? His submission is headed, 'plunder' and included amongst other items, 'a mare and a new bridle, a purse and 7/-, 4 cheeses and items of clothing' whereas I wonder did the aggressive personality of Richard Patrick gentleman, cause a reaction or was he the type of man determined to get his penny worth: every last item replaced? He lost more than anyone if we can believe him: such as 2 swords, 2 guns, knives, 3 hats, boots, purses, cash, 4 cheeses, sugar and a turkey to name but a few, in all valued at almost £40. Even the 'poorer sort' lost clothing and fodder and Widow Chaplin at Ivy House Farm, Hollyberry End one night in 1643 had as many as 18 cavalymen (all with horses) on her premises. The village was constantly overflowing with the one group of soldiers or another it seems.

As the War progressed, it was the Parliamentarians most often seen, stationed at Maxstoke Castle with another small contingent in Astley Castle. If you wanted to reclaim your horses you might need to travel to Tamworth in the hope of finding them and paying for their return and at Coleshill the much feared Scots! were left by 1646 without food and fodder scouring the neighbourhood to keep men and horses alive. There is a similar compilation of grievances by

Great Packington folk, some very near Meriden's border for example, at Dyall's (now Keatley's) Pool in the hamlet of White Stitch (then known as 'Black Stick' rather like the German term for the early sloe blossom) a whole group of cavalry bivouacked outside the house on the Green by the pool and Gt Packington Hall was ransacked, the goods piled high upon a cart including a life size portrait of Sir Robert Fisher looking as though it were the man himself. He was in fact living in Shropshire from where he family originally came but returned shortly after the War ended, dying in the next year, 1647. His sons continued to be punished for supporting King Charles I, then later after the Battle of Worcester in 1651 his son Charles II. Clement was to marry Jane Lane his college friend's sister who helped Charles II escape to the Continent. He was hidden at Boscobel House in the famous Oak Tree until a suitable route of escape could be worked out. This did not include Gt Packington though I have seen it suggested. Jane Lane and I share an ancestress in early C16th. All the Fisher estates, now owned by Sir Clement and his brothers, were confiscated again though eventually repurchased by them. .Despite this Sir Clement remained a loyal Royalist so that at the Restoration when Charles collected yet another tax called ironically the 'Gift' in 1661, Sir Clement headed the local list of donors as the major land holder in Meriden as well as the Packingtons. His words were written down for us to read today: '£10 at once for his Majesty'. Not everyone in Meriden was so generous. Many men claimed to be of lower status: husbandman instead of gentleman was a favourite ploy because the amount you paid depended upon your social status. Walsh Hall was rented out in 1660 to a cousin, Fisher Dilke also the owner of Maxstoke Castle but when he moved to another inheritance on Dunsmore Heath, Thomas Fisher, his wife and 4 children moved in.