

The Navigation of the River Lea at Hertford, the Turnpikes
and the Water Works, and other matters
relating thereto.

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In the year 1600 and ante the Corporation of Hertford were keepers of the mead called "Great Hartham" and received for the turning in of cattle of the inhabitants of the ancient tenements in the borough, the *agistment* money, &c., and for this amongst other things they had to keep the fences, and make them when necessary; repair and rebuild the bridges, cleanse and scour the streams of stones, baulkes and weeds; from Cowbridge and the bridge into Old Hall Mead, (i.e. at the Old Waterworks) which is divided from Great Hartham by the River Lea. At about this time, and a little later, viz. 1602, Sir Michael Stanhope had a lease of the King's Meads, and the Corporation had a dispute with him respecting the mowing. In 1634 it is recorded in the Corporation papers, "cuttinge of Weeds in Ryvers against ye Old Hall Mead and ye Hoppitts—5s. About this time, viz. 1636—(the New River having been completed in 1613) there was a map prepared by one Benjamin Hare, which shews us that the stream which has been since used for pumping at the Old Water Works, ran across Great Hartham in a N.W. direction nearly in a direct line to the place in the River Beane, where the youths of the Town have for many years bathed; it shews with dotted lines the course it formerly took, with trees growing upon the banks or on the sides thereof, and a small bridge over it, and is there called "the old streame." The course of this can even now be traced nearly throughout, as being at the foot of a general small rise in Great Hartham, which in time of floods is not submerged. On the south end of this stream was situate a Malt mill, (whatever this might be, perhaps a paper mill), and there is no indication that the Paper Mill Ditch was then in existence, this must have been a new cut afterwards. There is then no further record until 1646, when it was determined by the Corporation that some improvement should be made in the Navigation, as the River Lea was not open to boats between Hertford and Ware, to the great detriment and damage of the trade of the Towne, and so Captain Olyver Butler was spoken to about making a Turnpike or lock in the old River Lea in Great Hartham; the present stream as used by barges between the Folly and Dickermill, (called Lickermill Stream in 1621), was but a ditch to supply the mill, and with the further part from the Dicker Mill to Ware Park Mill was not formed until the 12th year of George II. to carry the barges. In July of 1646 complaint was made by the inhabitants that a "ditch running between the King's Mead and the Stant, which had been opened by the Myller of the Dicker Mill this last year, gulls and wears away the ground and drowns the grass," but, as it was without the borough and jurisdiction of the Corporation, the Judges of Assize were ordered to treat with Henry Gardener, to see that the Stant ditch should be stopped up forthwith, and also to see what (they) would contribute to the fillinge up of the Dyche, and y^t if (they) did refuse, then to see y^t (they) would give more, that it might be filled up at the Town charge: and on September 22nd, 1648, an item in the accounts says—"Pd. to Labourers for makinge up the dam in the Stant Dyche—9/6."

On March 8th, 1646, there was a dispute respecting the navigation

through the King's Meads, and a trial was held, when several old men were examined before the Mayor and Mr. Barker, one of whom, aged 72 years said, that "within 60 years (1586) there was a turnpike at the head of the Black Ditch, being the River of Lee running between Hertford and Ware adjoining unto a mead at the upper end of Lock Mead called Turnpike Mead, and that before the turnpike was blown up Robert Leonard was the owner of the Ware Mills, and that Mr. Thomas Fanshaw, (Sir Thomas Fanshaw's grandfather), bought Ware Mills of the said Thomas Leonard—that afterwards the said Mr. Thomas Fanshaw took up the turnpike and dammed up the place where the turnpike stood, and this examinant doth well remember the same, being a labourer at the time in the same work, and brought bushes and fern from Ware Park in his father's cart to fill it up." Another man, aged 75 or thereabouts, said, "that near 60 years ago (1586) he was herd boy unto old Edward Wren, who was herdsman for the commons of Hertford, that to his remembrance there was a weir or turnpike in old Mr. Thomas Fanshawe's time standing at the head of black ditch at the upper end of Lock Mead upon the navigable stream called the River of Lea, and that Thomas Grympell of Hertford, Edward Smith of the same and Thomas Jurie and Henry Jurie their men, and John Clifford a flescher passed with their barges through the turnpike into the River of Lee carrying therein 60 or 80 quarters of wheat and malt from Hertford to Ware and so to London and so home again loaded with Iron and Coal through the turnpike," and he further saith that "about two or three and fifty years ago (1594) there came a sudden flood between St. James' tide and Bartholomew tide and blew up the turnpike, and that old Mr. Thomas Fanshaw caused the turnpike to be removed away and the place where it stood to be dammed up by John Leonard son of Robert Leonard, who had been owner of Ware mills, Christopher Robinson, Robert Ballard and John Leonard son of Robert Leonard at the command of old Mr. Thomas Fanshaw, who had bought the said mill of the said Robert Leonard, and that the aforesaid workmen brought bushes and boughs and haycocks and old boats and chalk from Shypman's Hill being hard by and stopped up the head of Black ditch, which is the River of Lea, and that lately by reason of the dam Hertford cattle going over into Ware ground were often impounded to their great damage." Other witnesses said the same. (The turnpike was between 16 and 18 foot wide and the key was kept by Henry Jurie at the command and by the appointment of the bailiff of Hertford).— Christopher Dickson of Hertford said that "being about 70 years of age he doth remember that about 50 years since (1588), there did come by to Hertford two barges belonging to one Mr. Camage, which were loaden with corn from Hertford to Ware, and so to London, and that then these barges did then use to pass through a turnpike which stood upon Black ditch and that the said Black ditch was the usual and common way for barges and boats to pass."

Again in 1647 several of the inhabitants came and asked to have passage by boats laid open between the town and Ware. (The Ware road as now was not then in existence, but only the lower road). It appeared that the engineer had not yet attended to what was required.

In 1653 Ralph Consett (or Constans, from whom is derived the name of Constan's Weir), of Ware was allowed to have the ozier beds at the lower end of Hartham for 2/- per year. On September 1st 1655, the jury presented to the Commisioners of Sewers that the river was not navigable from Hertford to Ware, and the Commisioners therefore ordered the river to be cleansed and made navigable by

the landholders on each side, and a rate was made and confirmed for the purpose; and so at the month's court the Mayor and Corporation were to take care to set men to work to make it navigable, and pay them out of the rate, and that Mr. Clerke is to pay them according to order from time to time, and give an account of the same to the Corporation, and that any two of the Corporation should receive voluntary subscriptions towards the same from any, being out of the Borough, and account for it.

In this year (1655) the turnpike near Old Water Works was made, as there is a note which says, "that the work from the turnpike to Barber's close called the Mill orchard is referred to Thomas Haire and Thomas Ebbs what William Green shall pay for it, and in case they cannot agree to it, Mr. Phineas Andrews is to put a full end to it between both parties,"—the work that Mr. Green was to do on the side next the river next the Priory orchard was judged to be worth 30/-, but only 26/- was demanded, which he paid.

A survey was had all along the river by the Hoppitts, and Mr. Phineas Andrews was judged to pay for his part £5, besides bushes which he is to provide, and the towne to see the work done effectually, and to find stakes, and William Burgess of Hertford affirmed, that the navigation for boats and barges did pass on the Hartham side, (i.e. down the side of Hartham), and between the Island (i.e. the ozier bed), and Hartham, and that the side next unto the Hoppitts was but a ditch which he had often stepped over, and Mr. Lawrence also said there was no passage for boats between the Hoppitts and the Island. (By this it is understood that the navigation passed on precisely what is the now borough boundary between Hartham and Ware mill.)

Then on June 20th of this same year (1655) £20 was borrowed to make a turnpike, (this was near the Priory orchard and the Dicker Mill, and called the Middle Turnpike), towards which, John King and George Seeley gave £1, and Henry Browne gave 5/-, and so the amount was borrowed from the burgesses. Towards the end of the year 1656 William Green, the miller at the Dicker Mill, was evidently looking after himself, as altho' he had leave formerly to turn water to his mill, yet by taking more he had stopped the barges passing, and was ordered to alter same before January 1st, he also had a sluice in the King's mead, and this was ordered to be stopped because it drowneth the mead.

On June 18th it was ordered, that John Holton shall prepare timbers in readiness for a Turnpike, and notice was given to the inhabitants to raise the money for it; in the week following it was agreed on good and mature deliberation, and being found necessary, a turnpike should be made on the River Lee for the better bringing up of barges for the use of the inhabitants, and Mr. Clerke, (town clerk) is to receive the money and account for it, and set J. Holland and Jeremiah Downes to work in timber, &c.

I think also that the lower turnpike or lock at the head of Black ditch had been effectually stopped at this time, as I find the record "It is ordered that the Mayor have carts for carriage of Sir Thomas Fanshawe's timber from Brickendon to Ware for the building of the locks at Ware Mills, and pay for the carriage to the intent that barges may pass and repass as was agreed between Sir Thomas and the Companie."

In the next year, 1657, on July 22nd, a further sum of £30 was borrowed by the Corporation from Richard Goodman to make the Turnpikes, and in November, £20 was repaid: and it was ordered

“that workmen are to be employed about the turnpikes to make them fit for carrying water to the Dicker Mill, according to an agreement made between Mr. Andrews and the towne, which being done, they shall derive their money out of the rents of Dicker Mill, according to agreement.” Afterwards 40/- was paid to W. Green the miller, to make up bank at the Middle turnpike and to maintain it afterwards. The two turnpikes are shewn upon the map before mentioned, one immediately at the Old Waterworks, and the other half-way down Hartham towards the Dicker Mill. There had been two boxes made for the sluices at the turnpikes, but they were found to be of no use and were taken up and sold for 7/3. This proceeding did not pay, as it cost 11/5 to take them up and to make good the damage: two of the gates out of the boxes had been lost or carried away, the rest of the stuff was delivered to John Holland to make sluices and wharfing with. Altogether £12.7.4 was paid to John Holland for work at the upper turnpike at the Old Waterworks, which had been done according to order; 2/6 was also paid to Ebbs to make a way, to turn the barges: (whatever this might mean), a lock and three keys were provided for the middle turnpike at a cost of 2/4.

On September 1st, 1658 the Mayor went to London by water to see Mr. Steward (the Steward of the Borough) to prepare an address to the Lord Protector.

In this Winter, 1658-9, there were some extraordinary floods, which nearly blew up the middle turnpike and the Dicker Mill river bank, and the Corporation borrowed money to use towards the lowering of the turnpikes.

In 1660 the burgesses complained that such great pains and expenses were obliged to be taken about the turnpikes, and so it was ordered that foreign barges should pay 1/- each, and those of the town 6d. each barge, when passing the turnpike. Thomas Prior was ordered to receive the amounts and 10/- a year from the Dicker Mill, for repair of the turnpikes and the river from the upper end of Little Hartham to the lower end of Great Hartham for three years, and to leave them in good repair, but Sir Thomas Fanshawe was not to pay anything. John King and Abraham Rutt, (Sergeants at Mace)? or any careful persons they shall appoint, were to have power to oversee the said work, and that the money be used for defraying the charges.

In 1663 a Lease was executed between the Mayor and Edward Harvey for three years for £3 per year, letting him the two turnpikes as they now are sett up for the benefit of the navigation, to let barges up and down the river from Ware to Hertford. He was appointed keeper in the place of Thomas Pryor, and he resigned in 1666, and Thomas Sibley who now held Dicker Mill paid £1 towards the repair of them.

Ralph Consitt or Consett or Constans of Ware was paid the sum of tenne shillings for takinge off the shelve below the warehouse (weir-house) bridge, and for the said consideration he is to keep the said shelve down till June, 1665. This man in 1649 was allowed to sell baskets in the market at 4d. per quarter; he entered his son as a freeman of the borough in 1661, and some of his descendants holding the ozier islands at the end of Hartham gave the name to Constan's Weir, as known to this day, as before described.

In July of 1663 the Steward of the Borough was asked for his advice respecting the turnpikes, and the Mayor ordered the lower one to be set up again for the supply of the navigation, (this is believed to be the one at the head of the Black Ditch).