

Extracts from John Fowles Lyme Regis Museum Curator's Report of 1985 on the acquisition of the John Drayton Survey of 1824

RESEARCH, ACQUISITIONS, ETC.

1. By far the most valuable gift in historical terms came this year from Mr H. J. Sowerby, of Roper and Roper's, Broad Street. It consists of a bound volume of sixteen 9" x 16" maps drawn on linen in 1824 by John Drayton, a prominent Regency and early Victorian merchant of Lyme. The maps are of all the ancient Borough freehold property in the town, and are accompanied by very detailed and complex valuations. They are also far more accurate than any other survived plans of the period, and I make no excuse for devoting most of my space here to discussing them.

We shall never be able to walk round the Lyme of 1824; but the large scale, accuracy and detail of Mr Sowerby's gift offer the nearest approach to that impossible experience. In 1824 most of the Borough property here was leased by a method already old-fashioned: that of copyhold or lifehold, whereby a property was held for the duration of three lives (which could be renewed) against often absurdly uneconomic annual rents. The freeholder (or Borough) had to depend on the fines (lump sums) and other old manorial taxes that could be charged the life-holders when they entered possession.' True values fluctuated hugely according to the age and circumstances of the lifeholders. The ancient Borough was hopelessly inefficient, in other words; an accountant's night-mare. Why did Drayton carry out what I propose to call his Survey? It seems clear it was to try to establish a freehold value for the whole, quite simply because that was also a mortgage value- in plain English, his job was to estimate what the Borough could borrow on the town. We know that it desperately needed to do this at the time, because of the damage caused by the Great Storm in November 1824. The Borough had to raise £3,000 towards repairs. Lyme was of course already in the pocket of the Fane family, and had been long in rotten financial state. There also began in 1825 a long law-suit with Henry Hoste Henley of Colway over whether the Council or himself, as private land-owner in the Gun Cliff area, was responsible for upkeep of the sea-walls. A Henley ancestor had largely helped the Fanes get into Lyme in the first place, but by this point the Fanes were diehard Tories, while Henry Hoste Henley was a firm Whig and their sworn enemy. This fatal - and futile - action was in fact to drag on until 1834 and to cost the Borough (who finally lost) another £3,000. One of the ironies of 1832 is that although political and municipal administrative reform swept the country nationally and drove the Fanes out, it left the Borough in financial ruin. The Fanes' final blow when they left Lyme was to bankrupt it. However, this was still to come when Drayton undertook his Survey. It resulted in George Smith, the Town Clerk, managing to raise in 1826 a mortgage of £4,000 from Arthur Mills Raymond, long a major Fanite figure at Lyme. Fortunately all the papers to do with this transaction were bought by the Museum a few years ago, so we now are not short of material concerning it. But the labyrinthine spider's web of Borough affairs in the 1820s needs a good deal more study. For now I should like to concentrate on the maps themselves and what they reveal.

Map 1. A double-page map of all Corporation property in Lyme, detailed below.

Map 2. The Cobb. The map reveals three main changes from today. Of the three warehouses then on the landing quay, the central one is marked as the Customs House Office and Watch-house. The eastern-most is marked as 'washed down' - i.e. in the Great Storm of 1824. It had

been a dwellinghouse and work-shop rented by William Kerridge (but names of Corporation tenants, all through these maps, do not mean they were necessarily also occupiers, since they often in turn let to subtenants). The second change is that the landing-quay then ended only some 50 feet beyond this easternmost house. The present extension (the Victoria Pier) was built in 1841-2 and 1850. The old 'short' end of this quay had a picturesque name, the Crab Head, now fallen totally out of use. The third change is in the position of the North Wall. In 1824 it lay a good deal to the west of the present one, on a curved line running from opposite the central warehouse in a direction only just east of the Royal Standard (then England's Hotel). Bussell's shipyard is shown on all the land west of the modern Cobb Arms Square. Between the present Cobb Arms site and the Royal Standard were a culm-yard and a coal-yard, owned respectively by Fowler and Walker. On the corner at the foot of Cobb Road (not then yet in existence), where the Shell Shop (before that a later Customs Watchhouse) now stands, was Drayton's own timber-yard, which extended over the space he later used to build his bonded warehouse (for newly found details of this, see the next item). The Royal Standard (then England's Hotel) and all the houses east of it were surrounded by a semi-circular wall, breached in the 1824 storm.

Map 3. The Walk and lower Broad Street. This map begins to the west along 'The Walk', by showing the 'Fort Wall' (what we now call Lucy's Jetty, opposite the Bay Hotel) and the 'Original Fort' (the West Fort, built in 1627, destroyed by 1863). The Cobb Gate Jetty was longer, ended by wooden piles. The Alcove freehold belonged to the Corporation, and of course that of the Assembly Rooms at Cobb Gate. The actual gate (once a very literal thing, see later) lay at this period where the entrance to the modern car-park is. The Corporation also owned the three houses of Middle Row, and the Shambles market up the street. Its clock-tower was at its north end. It was walled behind, but had an open colonnade to the street. Drayton gives it as just 100' long, but narrow in breadth, about 15'. Unusually the Corporation did not lease this, but rented it out annually at £52.10 p.a. (its freehold value is given at £1,000). The Shambles went in the 1844 fire. The present Dorset House Tea-rooms (No 9) was also Corporation property then. Drayton gives an interior plan of the Assembly Rooms and even more importantly, of the other loss of 1844, the Customs House opposite. On the map the colonnade at its front is named the Fish Market. Behind the arches lay another Customs Watch House, and the main Customs cellar. But the back of this building, once one of the most important in Lyme - and about which we had previously known next to nothing - is shown as rented in 1824 by Thomas Manning, the landlord of the old Three Cups Inn next door, at the foot of Broad Street. The still existent car-park there (Van Allen's) is here marked as the 'Three Cups Yard'. The Pilot Boat, incidentally, is shown on the east of the Customs House.

Map 4. Gun Cliff to Monmouth Street. This has proved one of the most exciting maps. The Corporation had the freehold of two houses in Monmouth Street, and also of the Golden Hart Inn opposite (present Old Monmouth Hotel), then leased by the brewer Richard Sellers. 'Butter Market Street' is marked north from the Guildhall to Monmouth Street; from the Guildhall westward to the mouth of Coombe Street is called Cockmoile Street, not Bridge Street, which only begins beyond that. Cockmoil is old west-country dialect for 'prison'; in 1824 Lyme's cockmoil had two floors (women upstairs, men down) and jutted out into the square at about the site of the present Guildhall steps. Coombe Street itself also ends at Monmouth Street, and becomes Horse Street from then on north. Two houses by the existent steps to the river were also Corporation-owned. I was delighted to see they were leased to the London publisher (of very old Lyme family) George Bagster. This solves an old enigma of our geography, the site of Bagster's Steps: they are clearly those still down to the river. The cellar beneath the old Guildhall was let to James Blackmore, whose school was in a house then on Gun Cliff due south.

But it is the last Corporation property on this map 4 that has provided the real discovery. It consists of two houses on the site of the present Museum. The smaller 'house in Cockmoile Square' occupied the front half of our present ground-floor gallery; and the larger, the rear half of it and the area now covered by the arcaded East Gallery. It was this latter house's description that gave the clue: 'A House, Fossil Shop and another Tenement'. No previous historian has been able to establish where Mary Anning was born, and lived before she moved to Broad Street in 1827. The only reliable contemporary hint is in Roberts, who said she (and her parents) lived 'near the Cockmoil'. Though several other professional collectors emerged in the later 19th century, I know of none other at this early time save the Annings - Richard until he died in 1810, then his wife, Mrs Mary Anning, and her two surviving children, Joseph and the famous Mary. We also know from a letter of Mary's in 1824 that the family property had suffered in the Great Storm and was therefore very near the sea. These and other circumstantial factors suggest this Museum site is extremely likely for Mary Anning's birthplace. Drayton's map shows it had three windows, or perhaps steps mounting to windows, facing Cockmoil Square (or modern Bridge Street). I have passed on this discovery to the two great experts on our geological past, Miss Muriel Arber and Dr Hugh Torrens, and they both agree with me that the identification is highly probable. Alas, there is one minor drawback. Drayton records that this house was leased from the Corporation to John Hutchings, not the Annings. But John and Richard Hutchings (two brothers?) owned a good deal for property between them in Lyme. One of them was an early bookseller in Lyme (Richard in 1824 also owned the central Middle Row house and shop, and John had a dwelling-house in Sherbome Lane, next to No 34, the old Methodist Chapel); and it would be quite normal in the merchant Lyme of the period if they had sublet to the Annings. None the less we do strictly lack clinching evidence at the moment. It is possible that the Museum cellars are in part relics of the original building. One other disappointment has been that neither John Oldfield nor I can find a single photograph of the site from the Bridge Street side before the Museum was built soon after the turn of this century. There are one or two shots of the sea-ward side, but the original inland facing front of the building, alas, seems to have escaped the camera.

Map 5. Church Street. The Borough owned freehold of three houses here. One held by Samuel Norman, just above Poole's Court on the west side, and the two houses presently Nos 37 and 38, close beyond the London Inn.

Map 6. Upper Coombe Street (then Horse Street) and the Lynch. Another revealing map. The Town Mill (more or less as it is now, al-though without the currently dilapidated south-west building) is leased by Richard Sellers, who also owned the Golden Hart. Across the river east of it (now the SWEB store) is a 'Malt-house', owned by another Lyme brewer of the time, John Symes Davie. His main house, and malt and brew houses, were on Borough property higher up Coombe Street, at the present No 16, and running behind north-east to the river. The chapel opposite (here called 'The Lower Meeting House') was also Corporation freehold, rented at £10 a year to The Trustees of the Meeting. Its vestry to the north was then much smaller. The bridge and path up to Broad Street from the Lynch is marked south of its present point; it crossed the river at the north-east corner of the Mill garden, where remnants of piers may still be seen in the wall. The wretchedly misnamed Leper's Well bears on the 1824 map its proper old name of the Fountain Garden; and the spring and its shute across the river are marked. Just across Gosling Bridge, No 1 at the foot of Hill Road (then a footpath) is a house marked with a picket or iron fence in front and the name 'J. Warren Esq.'. It may not look very conspicuous now, but this house was once the heart of Fanite Lyme; the Warrens were chief local managers, and this

house is probably where the Earl of Westmorland stayed on his occasional visits, when Borough and Parliamentary elections had to be 'arranged'.

Map 7. Mill Green. The Borough owned the freehold of virtually all of this. The map is especially valuable for giving the early names of the three factories. First was the 'Old Factory', just south of the still existent 'Hatches' (or sluice-gate) on the river. North-east of that was the 'Cloth Manufactory' (later to become Lawton's silk-threadstery), beginning at the present Silk-Mill Cottage, but running down to the river. Further north, on the other side of the Lym (now Jordan Flats) was the 'Higher Factory'. All three were owned by Stanton and Co. William Stanton seems also to have owned all the property in Coombe Street north of the chapel on that side. He must have been a successful clothier, at least at this time. Also interesting was a large open space running south of the Cloth Manufactory called the 'Factory Garden', now built over. It may perhaps suggest how the original name Mill Green came into being. All the present houses both east and west of 'Mill Green Street' were Borough owned but leased to Thomas Walker, Samuel Norman and Robert Clarke, all well known property-owners of early 19th century Lyme. Behind, on the west side, lay Pickles Orchard.

Map 8. The Lym (ancient King's Highway) and Jericho. Most houses here also belonged to the Borough, although the farmland up the hill to the west was all in Henry Hoste Henley's and the Rev. Andrew Tucker's hands. Robert Clarke again and James Edwards are down as leaseholders; but in their cases we know both lived elsewhere in Lyme. Well-to-do 'businessmen' of the time evidently commonly invested in such leases (and property generally), and sub-let. The row of cottages on the river bend just before the Woodmead Road Bridge (now Lymbrook Cottages) are down in 1824 as 'Jericho Houses'.

Map 9. Lower Silver Street. The house (No1) at the bottom corner with 'St Michael's alias Pound Street' was Borough property; so also were some 'houses now building' at about today's No 7, just before the public library, and a long strip of land that ran back. This was leased in 1824 by the rich solicitor at the Grove in Pound Street, Edward Hillman. It had earlier belonged to A. S. Lillington, an early geologist in Lyme.

Map 10. Upper Silver Street. Many of the houses on the east side between Hill and Woodmead Roads (both then paths) were Borough-owned. The house Woodville on the north side of the junction with Woodmead Road was leased by W. H. Aveline, De La Beche's step-father. Because of changes, it is difficult now to recognize exactly where some of the houses in this map were, but they covered the stretch between Rose Cottage and Whitsbury. The Nag's Head is seemingly built on what was a slaughter-house in 1824. Behind these Silver Street houses was a field running back to Woodmead Road, called Whitmore Close alias Morley's Plot. It covered the ground now occupied by Brigadoon and Holme. The corner on the road, where Springfield and the Mariner's Hotel now stand, was owned in 1824 by 'Benjamin Follett Esq'. 'Blue Devil' Follett was some time dead in 1824, but presumably the property was still in his family. Among his tenants would have been the famous three Philpot sisters, who came to live here about 1805.

Map 11. Pound Street. The index of the maps gives an interesting old name for the area covered: 'the Island'. Its boundary began in the west with Belmont, then came down seawards along the line of the present Buena Vista garden, curved round the ancient Town bowling-green (now Farnham Flats), then joined Stile Lane and ran out into Pound Street. I can only suppose it was called the Island because it was all Borough freehold. The garden of Belmont (like the house itself) was then much smaller; its back wall only 10' from the rear of the house. Its coach-house on the street was already in existence in 1824, so too its neighbours Nos 14 and 15. The Buena

Vista Hotel plot was very different, showing only two small cottages on the street; all the rest was garden. The Lawn, on the other hand, was very much as it is now; the Bowling Green not yet built on (Henry Waring was to do that in the 1840s). The last house, today the Wedge, was leased by John Govis. It significantly has a pond marked, I suspect a result of the spring in the grounds of the Grove across the Street. This spring was to be the source of the endless slips lower down the cliff below Stile House earlier this century.

Map 12. Clappentail and Roman Road (here Colway Lane'). Borough properties are two: a cottage on the road on the north-west side of Clappentail Lane, long disappeared. Its very bizarre narrow garden ran 700', nearly two-thirds of the lane's length. John Phepoe's house is marked opposite, seemingly near Portland Lodge. The other Borough property begins on the left about 150' down Roman Road, below the Victoria. It is 'Garden Plot, called the Nursery'. The most valuable thing in this map is the marking of the 'Spring that supplies the Town'. It appears to have sprung about 100' due north of the entrance to Roman Road beside the Victoria on the Uplyme Road. It has hitherto never been quite clear where this old town water supply, used since Elizabethan times (it ran down Broad Street), exactly originated. I had believed its source to be in the garden of St Andrew's; but it evidently began on the old railway station (now the industrial estate) plot. Here it ran eastwards through the grounds of St Andrews, and down to a collecting tank at the top of Broad Street.

Map 13. Morgan's Grave area. This shows two lots of land owned by the Borough. One is a small sliver of land joined to West Close, opposite Morgan's Grave. The other Borough land was a halfshare of Square Mead, which now holds the houses to the west along Greenway, at the beginning of Somers Road. In 1824 Somers Road was merely a cart-track, with a gate across it. 'New Houses' are marked at Ware Corner; while a footpath there cuts across the fields to about where Blue Waters Drive now joins the Sidmouth Road - clearly a footfarer's short cut past the curve in the road.

Map 14. Lower Sidmouth Road. This map shows the old Town pound, and its adjoining cottage and garden. It also shows 'Mrs Tozer's House' (now Coram Towers) at the corner of Pound Road, surrounded by a picket fence. This house was the original Belmont, and had belonged to Mrs Tozer's uncle, Samuel Coade. No picture of it has survived, but the map gives its dimensions as some 30' by 40', and facing Pound Road eastwards. Drayton's scale also shows the pound and its accompanying cottage would have been some 70-75 yards up Sidmouth Road on the opposite side, just above the present opening to Coram Avenue. The pound itself was some 15' by 20'.

Map 15. Pound Close and Many Grounds (Pound Road). This map shows these two small fields downhill of Pound Road. Pound Close is the Hospital site. There is another 'lost' pond marked at about what is now the Physiotherapy Unit, opposite Kersbrook; as is also a spring in the field (Many Lands) on the corner towards the sea and Pound Street. It is the loose map, No 17, that is instructive here.

Map 16. Town Mead. This is the old town meadow, held in 1824 by John Symes Davie, and next to Summer Hill, with a gate on the Charmouth Road; all long built over.

Who was John Drayton? By good fortune documents concerning him appeared in 1985. One set I owed to Mr Terry Trott: the deeds of Pitt House, now a bakery, down the passage between Woolworths and the Great House. Drayton is not a Lyme name. Born about 1776, he first appears here in 1801, to marry Mary Dickinson. They were to have several children, and two of their four daughters married important solicitors of Lyme, Robert Hillman and Frederic Hinton.

Another married a considerable local property-owner, James Loveridge of Eagle (Boswell) House in Sherborne Lane. About the time of Waterloo Drayton acquired the northern half of the Great House, and also its grounds, including what was to become Pitt House. There he started a wine importing business, and a timber one on land he owned at the Cobb. Meanwhile he leased part of Pitt House to Edward Brown, 'iron-monger' - who by the mid-century had become a grate-and-stove manufacturer and the nearest Lyme had to an industrialist. The deeds contain interesting maps of the 'factory' in 1858 and also of Pitt House in 1869, when it was converted by Drayton's Bristol partner and son-in-law, Hinton. These deeds also mention Henry Rowland Brown, Edward's son, who was in the law in London. We remember Brown because he was a minor composer, and also wrote *The Beauties of Lyme Regis* in 1857. He was still alive in 1881, but we know very little else about him.

Mr Mayley of Charmouth also kindly lent me two interesting documents. One is Drayton's printed circular dated 18 June 1831, announcing that he is about to open a bonded warehouse at the Cobb. He had shrewdly noticed that a number of local towns (even as far as Honiton and Taunton) lacked goods when coastal traffic was held up and delayed by bad weather; and proposed to stock them ready in bond. He points out also the great advantage for quicker delivery of 'the new and level line of road to Axminster being made to avoid Uplyme Hill' - that is, the present Hunter's Lodge road. I don't know if Drayton played a part in having that road built, but he was certainly active in having Lyme made an official bonded port. A letter written on the back of this circular makes it clear that he was also agent for a Mr Morse, and was acting against a farmer in the Marshwood Vale (one Daniel Russell of Gumblehay) £350 in arrears. In 1838 he put out another circular to announce he was opening a coal-yard at the Cobb in addition to his other businesses. He says carriers often have to wait all day to be loaded from ships, and he intends to eliminate this - and will also guarantee his coals are kept dry and sold at just weight; not uncommon complaints at the Cobb in the old days, one suspects.

The Pitt House deeds also contain a copy of Drayton's will in 1851. He had property at the Cobb, the Great House, in Silver Street, and appointed Hinton as his business and trading partner. His daughter Mary is sternly warned not to 'intermeddle' with the executrices, her elder sisters, or to demand any accounts. I fancy it was less she than her solicitor husband, Robert Hillman, who provoked this paternal language.

Drayton died on 8 February, 1855, a well-known citizen of the town, perhaps the archetypal businessman and entrepreneur of the new Victorian resort; and certainly, it now proves, its most gifted surveyor.