

A note regarding the history of the piece of land known by us as "The Petwyn".

The name 'Petwyn' will seem somewhat obscure to most. Why '*The Petwyn*' for the strip of grassed land as you enter the main shopping area from the south? To understand, a little history is required.

Go back several centuries to a time pre-Henry VIII and the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Most land was in the ownership of the State (effectively the Crown), the Church (the 'Church of Rome' - then the 'established' church), or 'Noble Families' in the favour of either of these authorities. The land was farmed through a series of tenant / yeomen farmers, who held their lands from, and paid their rent to, one of the aforesaid freehold owners.

During the reign of Henry VIII, and equally his son, Edward VI, the 'Roman church' was side-lined as a major property owner following Henry's schism with Rome over his need for a divorce and re-marriage. The Dissolution of the Monasteries followed, which meant a huge re-distribution of estates to the Crown and directly or indirectly to 'favourites' of the Tudor Court.

One of these who found favour in the eyes of Elizabeth I was Sir Henry Weston, Lord of the Manor of West Parley (which includes West Moors). These landowners controlled vast amounts of 'real estate', and from time-to-time they sold off parcels of land for various reasons - often because they had need of short-term income - they had to pay their dues to the Royal Treasury too!

In 1575 Sir Henry sold land to John Lockyer, Richard Lockyer and Hugh Corbin (names with a long Dorset or 'Wessex' heritage), yeomen farmers, all the lands that make up the 'wastes' of "West Perley and Moores", "with all messuages leases pastures feedings commons wastes heaths furzes waters fishings profits commodities easements ways paths advantages and hereditaments to the premises belonging" - in the wording of the Deed of Transfer.

The three mentioned were acting for *all* the tenants (as they were at the time) listed below - each paid a sum in proportion to the value of his holding - the freehold of which he received in due course.

Within the West Moors allocation, there were 7 farmers involved: James Dewye, Thomas Dugdell, John Lockyer, Richard Barns, James Corbin, **John Petwyn** and William Lockyer.

Each farmed along the watercourses that today we know as Mannington Brook (to the west) and Uddens Water (to the south). The parcels of 'waste' land they now owned abutted onto the land that they farmed (in the main - there were exceptions). The parcels extended right across St. Leonard's, or West Moors, or Woolsbridge Common (various names used), in some cases up to the Moors River (the then county boundary).

Although designated 'wastes', part of the vast Dorset heathland, which at one point stretched from the neighbourhood of Dorchester east towards the New Forest and south across the Purbeck Hills, the land did have uses: a source of fuel from furze, turves etc; grazing for cattle, pigs and sheep; mud & course straw for Cobb cottages, reeds for thatch & floors ... and the like. It was therefore of benefit to be able to have sole access to the land.

John Petwyn's 'strip' ran from the area of Pennington's Copse (including the modern-day Queen's Close estate) north-eastward across the area covered by Glenwood Road.

The allotments were still extant during the first-half of the 17th century - there was a dispute which was settled in 1633 by which the 'wastes' were divided up among the freeholders (or successor families) - but over time, the lands passed into other ownership - most under housing by the 1990s.

The narrow remnant of John Petwyn's 16th & 17th century lands remained as an open space, though not managed, right up until early 21st century.

Plans for building on this fragment of land led to a large public response to prevent its development. Through the efforts of the whole community the land was purchased on behalf of West Moors (in the ownership of the Parish [now Town] Council), and was further safeguarded when it was granted Village Green status in 2006.

The Petwyn retains the name of the family who once lived and farmed in this corner of Dorset. It now hosts the village War Memorial at one end of the plot (nearest the shops), a secular memorial to honour all who have served the community in whatever capacity at the opposite end: a central seating & memorial area (with flagpole), and Memorial benches alongside the War Memorial. It is a pleasant place for sitting and watching life go by - and which hosts the annual Christmas Fair / Carols on the Petwyn and of course the Remembrance Sunday commemoration in November.

[Reference: The Division of the Commons of West Parley & West Moors, Drew, Charles D. (Lt.Col. C.D. Drew, D.S.O., F.S.A) (1929), available in Ferndown Library, or order through Dorset Library Service.]

Note written November 2020.