

Fresh Light on the History of Wokingham in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

By ARTHUR T. HEELAS.

Editorial Note.

There have recently come to light two important documents, long considered lost, which throw much light on the town and parish of Wokingham during the second half of the XVII and first half of the XVIII centuries. One of these is a Minute Book of the Common Council of Wokingham for the years 1630 to 1748, the other a Parish Book kept by the Clerk of 1629, and in the following paper Mr. Heelas gives a summary of the material contained in these documents, and in addition has compiled a list of Aldermen from 1612 to 1885.

In order that the extracts from the old Minute Book may be properly understood, it is necessary to give an outline of the town's ancient Municipal Constitution.

Undoubtedly Wokingham was a Saxon settlement, and evidence appears to favour the existence of some form of Saxon local government, it is probable that it originated by the formation of a Saxon "gild" or guild. These guilds were the predecessors of our present Municipal bodies.

The name of the town is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words, Uuoccing or Woccing and ham. The Woocings or Woccingas were a powerful tribe whose territory extended from Woking, in Surrey, to Wokingham. The Saxon tribes, like their predecessors the Celts, when the tribe became too large for the settlement in which they resided, sub-divided and sought fresh ground. This particular tribe appears to have divided for some such reason, they left their old settlement around Woking and came into the neighbourhood of Wokingham; in doing so they retained the family name with the addition of the word "ham," showing that it was the home of the Woccinga.

From time immorial until 1885, the town was governed by an Alderman or Elderman, who was the chief magistrate.

Of the many Charters that must have been granted to the town there are only three of them in existence, viz. Queen Elizabeth's granted in 1583, King James I's in 1612, and Queen Victoria's in 1885; the previous ones have been carelessly lost or destroyed.

The cause of the trouble was through past officials being allowed to keep on their own premises the town's documents and books: after they had resigned or died no one troubled to collect or store them in the Town Hall, consequently they were frequently lost to the town; it is only within recent years that a strong room has been built to house the town's regalia, books, documents, &c.

THE ELIZABETHAN CHARTER, 1583.

This Charter states that "by all the time whereof no memory of man is to the contrary there have been enjoyed certain liberties, privileges, customs, as WE are creditibly informed." This quotation proves that the town enjoyed ancient privileges granted by some Royal Charters previous to the document in question.

The Alderman was to a considerable degree autocratic; there was no Council associated with him; "He hath had the government ordering and direction of the Town." There were two constables, two bailiffs, and two ale-tasters, and these "have always been under the correction only of the Alderman."

But on the other hand he was in some matters subservient to the Steward of the Manor of Sonning. Wokingham was "parcell of the Manor or Lordship of Sonning," held by the Crown. The Steward was an officer of the Crown within the Manor, and he exercised considerable authority in the town.

The Charter confirmed the privilege of holding the Court Leet, an old Saxon Court held annually about the feast of Easter; at this Court the Alderman was chosen by the Steward of Sonning, "with the devise and assent of the Alderman out of certain persons to them named by the Jury."

A Court Baron, the Norman Manorial Court, was held every three weeks by the Steward, "in the presence of the Alderman." This Court dealt with various cases in the town and district, such as trespass, debt, personal actions, &c.

THE CHARTER OF KING JAMES I, 1612.

This Charter states that Wokingham "is an antient Town and the Alderman, Burgesses and Inhabitants of the Town have had divers liberties, franchisements and privileges, and have enjoyed them as well, by the Charter of the Lady late Queen Elizabeth as by the Charter of diverse other our progenitors and predecessors formerly Kings of England."

The town is still "Parcell of our Manor or Lordship of Sonning," but all dependence on the Steward of Sonning is removed and the fines and profits of the Courts go to the town instead of the Crown. No longer is there a one man rule, as there is a Common Council, consisting of the Alderman, seven Capital Burgesses, and twelve Secondary Burgesses. The Alderman is elected annually from the Capital Burgesses, by the Common Council, on the Wednesday in Easter week, and a provision is made that they are not to leave the meeting until they had chosen an Alderman. The Burgesses held office for life, unless they were deposed for "ill government or carrying themselves amiss." There was no public election and the Common Council was in no real sense a representative body.

The Report of the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations, published 1833, contains some interesting items regarding the government of the town about the end of the XVIII century. It states that great difficulty had been experienced for many years past in keeping up the membership of the Council, it had sometimes been reduced to four or five members only. The revenue was very small, as the only property consisted of the Town Hall and some small quit-rents and tolls and the fees from the freemen.

The Quarter Sessions were held twice a year before the High Steward, Alderman, Recorder and a Justice of the Peace, but owing to the want of funds for the cost of prosecutions and witnesses only seven cases of misdemeanour and one of felony were tried at the Sessions within the previous six years of the Report.

There were no Police at the disposal of the Corporation, but one night watchman was employed, who was paid by a subscription raised among the inhabitants. There was no Gaol in the town only two small lock-up houses, provided by the Corporation, that were used as places of temporary confinement. In 1675, a lock-up house was built at the cost of £4-9-10, which was contributed in small proportions by individual members of the Council, as the financial position of the town was unable to bear the strain of such a heavy charge. The town nearly lost its Corporate body through this Report.

With regard to the recent recovery of lost records one of them is the Minute Book of the Common Council from 1630 to 1748. Unfortunately the book has been rather seriously damaged through being kept in a damp place, the edges of the leaves are badly stained and rotted away, so that it is a difficult task to transcribe the ancient hand-writing with its curious characters.

The book is a valuable find for the records of Wokingham, as it carries us back 145 years earlier than the existing records in the care of the Corporation. It is of historical interest because it shows how the towns-people managed their first Council after centuries of autocratic government. It is evident that they were proud of James' Charter because for the first hundred years they tenaciously did their utmost to uphold the privileges granted to them.

Before this book was recovered it was impossible to make a correct list of the Aldermen or Chief Magistrates of the town from the granting of James' Charter, as the oldest Minute book in the town records only dates from 1775, leaving a gap of 162 years unrecorded. With the help of Canon B. Long, who took a great interest in the matter and searched the Church Registers very carefully, we were able to discover 56 of the lost gentlemen. With the aid of these recovered books I have been able to reduce the number of missing ones to 37.



Old Guildhall, Wokingham, built between 1612 and 1625, and pulled down 1858.

landlord of the Rose. His daughter, Molly, was known throughout the land because some of the celebrated wits of the day, who used to meet in this old hostelry, composed the famous ballad "Molly Mogg of the Rose." They were Alexander Pope, Dean Swift, Gay the poet, and John Arbuthnot, Queen Anne's physician.

1691, Dan Bell was discharged from the Council for refusing to attend the Alderman; he was one of the members who refused to take the Oath of the Solemn League and Covenant.

1697, Richard Grape, the Common Clerk, who was also a Capital Burgess, was elected Alderman for the year; he was re-elected in 1705 and 1714.

1688, The Recorder, Thomas Staples, was discharged for "living remote from the said Corporation and by reason of his several offices and employment in other places hath not given his attendance on the Corporation so often as occasion required."

In 1698, two ex Aldermen who were summoned to appear before the Alderman refused, and refused to aid and assist in maintaining the rights and privileges of the Charter, they were removed from the Council.

1699, The Recorder, Abell Bradley, was fined for non-attendance, also two members of the Council were turned out for a similar offence.

1700. A new resident of the town was refused his freedom to trade, and ordered, with his family, to leave the town within two months. Several others with their wives were refused freedoms and ordered to leave the town.

1704. The Market House, owing to a great and violent storm of wind was so badly damaged that it cost £30 to repair. Funds could not meet this great expense so the money had to be borrowed from members of the Corporation, and each Alderman during his year of office had to pay out of the tolls, £5, to the said members until the debt was settled.

1711. George, Duke of Northumberland, K.G. was made High Steward.

It was decided that two of the "hors faires," held on "All Sould's Day" and the Thursday before Shrovetide in each year, shall be kept in Roth street also Row street and not at the place called Shoot end, and that the "hey faire" on June 11th, shall be kept at Shootend as before.

1712. John Mogg was duly elected and sworn in as a Secondary Burgess.

1713. A Special Council meeting was called to deal with the traders' protest against "foreigners" (not freemen) settling in the town and trading. It was decided to fine them £5, to be levied by distress and that a Warrant be issued forthwith to the Sergeant-at-Mace to sell up their goods and pay the fines.

1716. Charles, Duke of St. Alban's, K.G., elected High Steward. He was at this period living at Luckley House.

1719. Donnington Bradley, son of the Recorder, Abell Bradley, was elected Town Clerk and Clerk of the Peace in place of Richard Grape, deceased. Bradley was the first Town Clerk to use a seal in the Minute book, this seal had the acorn upright and his own initials "D.B." on each side of the acorn; whether this was considered the official seal of the Council is not at all clear, but it was evidently his idea of what it should be. During his period of office more meetings were held in the year and he appears to have been a far more active clerk than his predecessor. — Bracey, distiller, refused a freedom for trading in the town.

1720. Some of the newly elected Secondary Burgesses did not respond to the call of the Sergeant-at-Mace, to attend a meeting and be sworn in, they were threatened with fines if they did not attend the next meeting. John Coleman at the next meeting refused to be sworn in and was fined £2. There were also several others in trouble for non attendance.

1724. The Duke of St. Albans, the High Steward, strongly recommended to the Council, James Hayes, as Recorder in place of the late Mr. Bradley, he was duly elected.

In the same year it was decided that a 2/6 Dinner be held for all the Corporation to attend, at some convenient house in the town, at every Quarter Sessions, at the sole expense of the members. Each member summoned to the Dinner must pay his 2/6, whether he attends or not.

It was also ordered that the "Remains of the Dinner shall be had to the Officers for ye keeping of ye peace attending and that they be allowed out of the said half crown contribution the sum of 2/6 for drink and no more." John Houlton was Sergeant-at-Mace; he died in 1726. In 1725, all members of the Council without gowns and cloaks are ordered to procure same before next Whitsun, or be under penalty of the Bye-laws made for that purpose.

1726. Mr. John Simonds resigned on account of great losses and misfortune, and not being able to contribute and attend the Alderman. Edward Lawrence elected and sworn Sergeant-at-Mace in place of J. Houlton deceased. In the same year, Thomas Golding was appointed Deputy Postmaster of Wokingham, he was recommended by the keeper of the Post Office at Bagshot. He was duly sworn in by the Alderman. The Duke of St. Albans died and Henry Neville Grey, M.P. for Reading, was made High Steward. After acceptance it was decided to celebrate the swearing in day with a Handsome Dinner at Mr. John Mogg's house, the "Rose." Each Capital Burgess to pay 25/- and each Secondary Burgess 20/- and 5/- for their friends.

1729. At this period there is a noticeable falling off in the attendances of the Secondary Burgesses which caused a lot of trouble later.

1730. Francis Whitworth, Esq., Chief Forester of Bigshot and Sandhurst Walks in Windsor Forest, was elected an Honorary Freeman and sworn in.

1731. Several members fined for non attendance at Council meetings.

1727. John Mogg of the Rose Inn was elected Alderman ; after his year of office he apparently left the Council as his name is missing from the lists of those who attended. His son became a Secondary Burgess in 1731 and was fined for not attending his first meeting to be sworn in ; after that he attended regularly for some years ; he did not become an Alderman as his father did before him.

1733. John Angell, the elder was duly elected an Honorary Freeman.

1734. It was agreed to pay the Alderman out of the tolls and fines £5-5 towards the expense of his outgoing dinner for the entertaining of the Justices, Recorder, Town Clerk and poor officers at Quarter Sessions dinners. The Common Clerk, D. Bradley, appointed his nephew, Edward Wise, to act as his Deputy in his absence, this was confirmed by the Council. William Houlton, junr., was collector of tolls.

1738. Evidently a lot of trouble was being experienced in filling up the vacancies in the Council, so that traders applying for a freedom to trade were pressed into the Council when the application was granted. Henry Winter, the wheelright, was a case in point, he had to become a Secondary Burgess when granted a freedom, then soon after was made a Capital Burgess, and in three months time was elected Alderman. During this period the Secondary Burgesses, if there were any left, were conspicuous by their absence at the meetings.

1740. Charles, Duke of St. Albans elected High Steward. He was sworn in on October 1st, when a Handsome Dinner was prepared at the house of the Alderman, all expenses being paid by the members of the Council. At the same function, John Oliviere, Esq., Deputy Governor of Windsor Castle, and James Hayes of Holyport, were sworn in as Honorary Freemen. The latter gentleman was then Recorder.

1741. John Simonds was made Sergeant-at-Mace. James Hayes, Recorder, resigned after seventeen years in office, owing to pressure of legal work in the Courts. He expressed a wish that his son might succeed him. The Alderman applied to the Duke of St. Albans for permission to accept the resignation with great regret and to nominate his son as successor. The Duke willingly agreed.

James Hayes junr., his son, offered himself as a candidate ; being recommended by the High Steward, the Duke of St. Albans, and in grateful recognition of his father's many valuable services to the Council, he was elected and sworn in as Recorder or Under-steward.

1742. William Cowderery fined £5 for refusing to accept office of Alderman, after being chosen. Should he refuse to pay the fine after such neglect the Council would vote him an "Un-worthy Member, and vote him out as such from being a member of the Corporation." He evidently paid as in two years time he became Alderman.

1745 and 1746. Great efforts were made to fill the vacancies in the Council, several residents were summoned to appear before the Alderman and be sworn in, but many refused and were fined 40/-. At one of the meetings there was a scene when some of them lost their tempers and walked out ; the trouble was over an objection to two residents being admitted, however at the next meeting they were elected.

The Parish book that has been found was written by William Ball, who was evidently a clerk of the parish ; it contains lists of persons assessed for Ship money in the parish ; lists of the number and value of the lands and houses in the town and parish ; of the rents of the freeholders due to the Lord of the Manor of Sonning, gathered by the bailiffs there, A.D.1629 ; a copy of the Charter of the town ; a list of the gifts and legacies given to the poor, copies of wills and deeds in connection with charitable gifts, lists of freemen, quit rents and fines.

The most interesting item is a copy of a Royal Patent granted by Charles I, in 1625, to Wokingham and other parishes in the Forest of Windsor. Being a somewhat lengthy deed full of legal phrases, with much repetition, only a brief outline is therefore given below.

" Anno primo Caroli, R^s
20^a pars m^a II^a

A copy of the Patent whereby
Wokingham and other Parishes
in Windsor Forest are exempted
from Purveyance, Composition
&c., for the King's Household.

Charles I, instructs James, Lord Ley, the High Treasurer of England ; George, Duke of Buckingham, High Admiral of England, Chief Justice in Eyre of all Our Forests, Parks and Chases on this side of the river of Trent ; and Master of Horse ; to the Treasurer of the Household and Comptroller of the same. Also the Cofferer Clerk of the Green Cloth, &c. . . . Whereas it appeareth that both Our late deere Father, King James, of happy memory deceased, and before him Queen Elizabeth, in consideration that the Inhabitants and dwellers in the Baylywicks of Battles, Finchampstead and

Fynes, within the Forest of Windsor should be more careful to preserve, maintain and encourage the game of deer there; did free and exempt from all manner of Purveyances, or taking of Victualls, wheate or any other provision whatsoever for the use of Our house or stable or otherwise. And from all manner of composition or payment in money for the same or any of them.

And likewise of or from all manner of carriages for Our removes, or for any use or service of Our house or stable. Excepting only the carriages for the necessary of building or repairing Our Castle of Windsor or other Our houses of access within the said Forest of Windsor, and Our lodges and parks within the Forest.

LIST OF ALDERMEN OF WOKINGHAM FROM THE TIME OF KING JAMES I CHARTER.

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| 1612. Anthony Bartlett. | 1661. John Sampson. |
| 1613-14. ? | 1662. Thomas Miller. |
| 1615. Capt. William Irish (circa). | 1663. Edward Bradley. |
| 1616. " " " | 1664. John Bradley. |
| 1617-27. ? | 1665. William Anderson. |
| 1618. | 1666. Thomas Gooding. |
| 1628. John Whitlock. | 1667. Edward Monke. |
| 1629. ? | 1668. Abell Bradley. |
| 1630. Thomas Miller. | 1669. Thomas Miller. |
| 1631-32. ? | 1670. John Bradley. |
| 1633. John Whitlock. | 1671. Caesar Batten. |
| 1634. John Planner. | 1672. Simon Leach. |
| 1635. Henry Bradley. | 1673. Thomas Gooding. |
| 1636. Thomas Planner. | 1674. Edward Monke. |
| 1637. Allen Weaver. | 1675. Abell Bradley. |
| 1638. Thomas Mills. | 1676. Thomas Miller. |
| 1639. Thomas Huse. | 1677. Nicholas Ayliffe. |
| 1640. John Whitlock. | 1678. Thomas Hudson. |
| 1641. John Gooding. | 1679. Thomas May. |
| 1642. Henry Bradley. | 1680. Edward Elkins. |
| 1643. Thomas Huse. | 1681. Thomas Barker. |
| 1644. Thomas Mills. | 1682. Daniel Bell. |
| 1645. Thomas Grape (Town Clerk) | 1683. Simon Leach, who died. |
| 1645. Angell Bell. | Thomas Gooding, junr. |
| 1647. John Sampson. | 1684. Thomas Gooding, junr. |
| 1648. Thomas Miller. | 1685. Henry Butler. |
| 1649. John Gooding. | 1686. Simon Leach (11). |
| 1650. Robert Batten. | 1687. Thomas Hudson. |
| 1651. Thomas Grape. | 1688. Thomas Barker. |
| 1652. Angell Bell. | 1689. Richard Grape. |
| 1653. Thomas Derney. | 1690. John Simonds. |
| 1654. Thomas Miller. | 1691. William Fernell. |
| 1655. John Gooding. | 1692. Richard Leach. |
| 1656. Edmund Derney. | 1693. William Sampson. |
| 1657. Robert Batten. | 1694. Simon Leach. |
| 1658. Thomas Gooding. | 1695. Thomas Hudson. |
| 1659. Thomas Grape. | 1696. Thomas Barker. |
| 1660. Angell Bell. | 1697. Richard Grape. |

1698. John Lawrence.
1699. Pearce Planner.
1700. John Simonds.
1701. William Fernell.
1702. William Sampson.
1703. Simon Leach.
1704. Thomas Barker.
1705. Richard Grape.
1706. John Lawrence.
1707. Pearce Planner.
1708. John Clements.
1709. John Simonds.
1710. William Fernell.
1711. Soloman Blackman.
1712. Robert Hunt.
1713. William Sampson.
1714. Richard Grape.
1715. John Lawrence.
1716. John Norwood.
1717. Pearce Planner.
1718. William Fernell.
1719. John Lawrence, junr.
1720. Robert Hunt.
1721. Soloman Blackman, senr.
1722. William Sampson.
1723. John Lawrence, senr.
1724. Thomas Webb.
1725. Soloman Blackman, junr.
1726. Richard Vernell.
1727. John Mogg.
1728. John Lawrence, junr.
1729. John Coleman.
1730. Thomas Golding.
1731. William Cowderoy.
1732. Thomas Webb.
1733. Nath'l. Griffin.
1734. John Lawrence, junr.
1735. William Cowderoy.
1736. Nath'l. Griffin.
1737. Richard Vernell.
1738. Thomas Webb.
1739. Henry Winter.
1740. George Barrell.
1741. John Lawrence, senr.
1742. Nath'l. Griffin.
1743. Richard Vernell.
1744. William Cowderoy.
1745. William Jack.
1746. Thomas Brooks.
1747. William Trash.
1748. William Triggy (?Trickey).
- 1749-57. ?
1758. Thomas Brooks.
- 1759-64. ?
1765. Thomas Round.
1766. Thomas Brooks.
1767. William Trash.
1768. John Wheeler.
- 1769-74. ?
1775. James Webb.
1776. Edmund Togwell.
1777. John Bunce.
1778. John Feltham.
1779. William Newbolt.
1780. William Trash.
1781. James Webb.
1782. Edmund Togwell.
1783. Ephraim Houlton.
1784. John Bennett.
1785. John Fennemore.
1786. Thos. Chas. Cruttwell.
1787. Rev. Clement Cruttwell.
1788. John Bennett.
1789. John Fennemore.
1790. T. C. Cruttwell.
1791. John Roberts.
1792. Paul Holton.
1793. George Chase.
1794. James Webb.
1795. John Roberts.
1796. Rev. Clement Cruttwell.
1797. James Webb.
1798. John Bennett.
1799. Paul Holton.
1800. John Bennett.
1801. James Webb.
1802. Thos. Bunce.
1803. John Herring.
1804. Dr. John Thos. Newbolt.
1805. Paul Holton.
1806. John Roberts.
1807. James Webb.
1808. Thos. Bunce.
1809. John Herring.
1810. Paul Holton.
1811. Dr. J. T. Newbolt.
1812. John Roberts.
1813. James Webb.
1814. John Herring.
1815. Richard Crabtree.
1816. Paul Holton.
1817. John Roberts.
1818. James Webb.
1819. Bartholomew Brown.
1820. James Bushell.
1821. Edward Horne.
1822. Thos. Creaker.
1823. Jas. Hayward.
1824. Richard Crabtree.
1825. John Rogers Wheeler.
1826. John Rogers Wheeler.
1827. Bart. Brown.
1828. Edward Horne.
1829. Thos. Creaker.
1830. Jas. Hayward.
1831. Rich. Crabtree.
1832. William Heelas.
1833. William Roberts.

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| 1834. Bartholomew Browne. | 1860. John L. Roberts. |
| 1835. John Rogers Wheeler. | 1861. Thomas Cooke. |
| 1836. Edward Horne. | 1862. William W. Wheeler. |
| 1837. Thomas Creaker. | 1863. William Heelas. |
| 1838. James Hayward. | 1864. Wm. H. Ferguson. |
| 1839. William Heelas. | 1865. John Heelas, junr. |
| 1840. John Lamplow Roberts. | 1866. James Skerritt. |
| 1841. Thomas Quentery. | 1867. Edward Roberts. |
| 1842. John Roger Wheeler. | 1868. James Weeks. |
| 1843. Edward Horne. | 1869. John Heelas, elder. |
| 1844. Thomas Creaker. | 1870. William Goodchild. |
| 1845. William Towse. | 1871. Wm. W. Wheeler. |
| 1846. William Heelas, the elder. | 1872. John L. Roberts. |
| 1847. John Lamplow Roberts. | 1873. John Heelas, junr. |
| 1848. William Heelas, the younger. | 1874. Edward Roberts. |
| 1849. Francis Soames. | 1875. James Weeks. |
| 1850. Edward Dalley. | 1876. John Heelas, the elder. |
| 1851. James Hayward. | 1877. William Goodchild. |
| 1852. William Heelas, junior. | 1878. John L. Roberts. |
| 1853. John L. Roberts. | 1879. John L. Roberts. |
| 1854. William Wilson Wheeler. | 1880. John Heelas, junr. |
| 1855. William Heelas, junior. | 1881. William W. Wheeler. |
| 1856. William Heelas, junior. | 1882. James Weeks. |
| 1857. Edward Dalley. | 1883. William Goodchild. |
| 1858. James Twycross. | 1884. William Goodchild. |
| 1859. John L. Roberts. | 1885. James Weeks. |

RECORDERS OF THE OLD CORPORATION.

1630. John Knight, Esq.
 16—. John Hercy, Esq.
 1669. Thomas Staples, Esq.
 1688. Giles Hamley, Esq.
 1693. Abel Bradley, Esq.
 1725. James Hayes, Esq. (the elder).
 1742. James Hayes, Esq. (the younger).
 1807. Giffin Wilson, Esq. (Knighted later).
 1822. John Roberts, Esq.
 1834. Henry Jeremy, Esq.
 1849. George Clive, Esq.
 1858. Fredk. Aug. Carrington, Esq.
 18—. Sir George Russell, Bart.