

TENANTRY CUSTOMS IN SUSSEX—
THE DRINKER ACRES.

BY MR. WILLIAM FIGG.

(READ AT ALFRISTON, OCTOBER 16, 1850.)

IN connection with the subject of "MANORIAL CUSTOMS," in the Third Volume of the *Sussex Archæological Collections*, p. 249, it may be interesting to know, that there have existed other customs of a local character, which may be deemed somewhat curious, and among them that of the tenants of several parishes meeting on certain days of the year, in order to tread or set out the Brooks or Marshland, used in tenantry, for the purpose of their being afterwards mown, and at the same time of "making a drinking by spending the rent arising from particular pieces of land locally called 'Drinkers,' or 'Drinker Acres.'"

Many of the parishes on the South Downs, in the neighbourhood of Lewes particularly, have a considerable quantity of brooks (locally so called) or marshes, within their limits, and generally, where the Down land was fed in common, and the arable was in tenantry, some portions of the brooks were in tenantry also. In the parishes of Kingston near Lewes, and Southease, it was so until they were inclosed, the former in 1830, the latter in 1842. In both these parishes were particular brooks called Wishes, and in each also there was a small piece of brookland called *the Drinker*; it has been for years past a matter of curiosity to know the origin of the name, and the purpose for which these drinkers were originally set out. By the following remarks I hope to be enabled to throw some light on the matter.

In Kingston the custom connected with the Drinker appears to have been discontinued for many years, but at Southease it was kept up until the inclosure took place.

The arable in these parishes was divided into yardlands, and according to the number of yardlands held by each proprietor, the rights of depasturing the Down, and mowing and feeding the tenantry brook, were regulated.

Having lately, through the kindness of a member of our Society, had an opportunity of copying, from a manuscript of the time of Elizabeth, the following "true and certain note" of the custom in Kingston, at that period, I have thought it right to embody it in this paper, with an account of the custom as continued in Southease up to the year 1842.

It appears that up to a certain day in the spring, the brooks called Wishes were fed in common, by the stock belonging to the tenants, in proportion to their rights; they were then laid off for mowing, and were, on a subsequent day, trodden out, that is, divided into pieces, to be mown for hay, each tenant taking such quantity as he might be entitled to, according to the number of yardlands he held. The Drinker in Kingston appears to have been used by the tenants of certain yardland, in a regular rotation of ten years, as described in

"A true & certeine note how y^e Drinker dooth faule to everymans lande or yard wishe in the parishe of Kingston, nigh Lewis, at y^e time of trading of y^e wishe. At which time, whosoever receiveth y^e same to his parte, doothe pay xvij^d to y^e residue y^t trade out y^e Wyshe to make them a drinking.

1. Firste. Mr. Mychells lande had y^e same wholly for iij yard wishes. Anno Regni Dne Eliz. Regine XVIth
2. It. xvijth Elizabethhe.—Mychells lande received the Drinker for ij yards & a halfe wishe, Richard Howells for a yard wishe, and Mr. Ersfylds for half a yard wishe.
3. It. xvijth Elizabethhe.—Newtons land for ij yard wishe, & y^e meane landes for one yard wishe, & Jone, a Bowers, for one yarde lande.
4. It. xixth Elizabethhe.—Mr. Ersfyld receiveth y^e same for ij yarde wisshes, & Averdslande & Hardmans land for ij yard wishes.
5. It. xx^o Eliz.—Ersfylds lande wholly for iij yard wysshes of Peks.
6. It. xxi^o Elizabethhe.—Cranes land receiveth y^e same for iij yard wishes, & Robte Howell for one yarde wishe.
7. It. xxij^o Elizabethhe.—Ihon Barndens lande rec y^e same for iij yard wisshes, & Thomas Howell for one yarde wishe.
8. It. xxij^o Eliz.—Gregory Ade for iij yard wishes, & Ihon Adams for one yarde wishe.
9. It. xxiiij^o Elizabethhe.—Shusmiths lande for ij yard wisshes, & Peter Towners for ij yard wishes.
10. It. xxv^o Eliz.—Ersfylds for iij yard lande of Awfords.

So y^t every iij yard wishes receive y^e Drinker yearly, according to y^e order above written."

The above "note" I think fully explains this custom in Kingston, and it would thus appear that the person or persons, to whose lot the Drinker fell by succession, had the right to mow and depasture the same during the whole year, or until the next "trading of y^e wish" took place, he or they paying eighteen pence "to make them a drinking," that is, the other or "resydue" of the tenants who were present at the treading out of the Wish.

In the parish of Southease, the custom appears to have been somewhat different. The rights with which the Drinker was connected were confined to a portion of the "North Wish," which was divided into fourteen parts called hides, and thirteen called clouts; this land was cleared of stock, or as it is usually called laid off for mowing, on the 6th of April (old Lady Day) in every year. On the 10th of July, those tenants, who possessed rights, met on the ground, and drew lots for the hides, commencing at the south end. The mode of drawing lots was as follows—Fourteen pieces of stick five or six inches in length were severally notched or marked with a knife with certain characters, named as follows :

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| 1. One Score. | 8. The "Doter." |
| 2. Two Score. | 9. Dung hook. |
| 3. Three Score. | 10. Cross. |
| 4. Four Score. | 11. C. |
| 5. Five Score. | 12. C. |
| 6. Six Score. | 13. D. |
| 7. Seven Score. | 14. The Drinker. |

These hides were not each mown wholly by one tenant, but in various proportions; for instance, No. 8 was in six parts, No. 9 in six also, No. 10 in three, 11 went to a tenant in Heighton,¹ 12 to two tenants in Heighton, 13 the same, while the whole of the seven scores were held by the tenants of the adjoining parish of Telscombe² in various proportions.

The tenants having met, the following was the mode of proceeding: these marked pieces of stick were put into the

¹ See the "Customary Services by the Homagers of Hayton," vol. iii, p. 252, *Suss. Arch. Collections*.

² The parish of Telscombe is situate wholly on the Downs, having no marsh or meadow land, the tenants had therefore by some means obtained the right of a "cut and away" upon certain portions of the brooks in Southease, that is, to mow the grass and carry off the hay.

pocket of one of the party, and drawn at random by those who had rights.

As soon as the first stick was drawn it was stuck into the ground, on the south side of the first hide, and the turf was cut with a mark similar to that on the stick, in order that no mistake might be made as to whom the hide belonged at mowing time, and so on till all the sticks were drawn and the several pieces marked.

Another portion of the North Wish, eastward of and lying between the hides and the river Ouse, was divided into thirteen pieces called clouts, which were mown and divided in the same manner and proportions as the hides, beginning at the north end, each hide taking a clout, except the Doter, which had no clout.

If the hay was not cleared off by the 12th of August (old Lammas Day), the tenants of Southease could carry away all that might be remaining.

The right of mowing and feeding half the Drinker Hide was, at the time of drawing lots, let yearly by auction to the highest bidder and the proceeds spent. The tenants dined together, spending one half the amount, and the other half was given to the labourers of Southease "to make them a drinking," in order that they also might enjoy themselves.

The man who acted as auctioneer was called the crier, and received one shilling for his trouble, and was always afterwards employed in setting or treading out the hides and clouts at mowing time.

Some portions of the North Wish (lately called stumped pieces) were formerly called "Garlands."
