

PALFREY SILVER

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THE earliest reference in this connection that I have come across is in a mediaeval custumal of the Manor of Weedon Bec (B.M. MS. Ad. 24316, ff. 45, 6) quoted in Dr. M. Chibnall's "Select Documents of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec" (Bec Herlewin in Normandy), which states that at the first coming of the Abbot into England, he is to be granted one *palfrey* as an aid. This custom, however, is not mentioned in the custumals of other manors belonging to this abbey, though it is referred to again in another document relating to Weedon manor which is in the library of King's College, Cambridge (ref. Q.19). This is an Exemplification of Chancery Proceedings concerning *Palfrey Silver* dated 1347, arising from a Plea heard at Northampton at an assize of Novel Disseisin. The Abbot of Bec had complained that he had been unjustly disseised by John Hebbe of Dodeford of a free tenement in Weedon Bec. The latter maintained that the Abbot had unjustly brought the assize, since he held the land of the Abbot by fealty and service, etc. In an outline of the ancient customs of the manor mention is made of a yearly tallage of 100s. or one *palfrey* of price 100s. at the will of the Abbot.

There are additional references in documents relating to other English manors held by this Norman abbey. In Ministers' Accounts of the manor of Ruislip of 1435-6, among "perquisites of the courts" there is the entry: ". . . with 100s. of tallage of bondsmen called *palfrey silver*"; and there are references in a court roll (Tooting Bec Rolls, 248) to the same tallage being exacted from tenants of the manor of Tooting Bec, and also in a custumal of the manor of Harmondsworth which belonged to Holy Trinity Abbey, Rouen. The former is referred to by H. S. Bennett in his *Life on the English Manor* under the title of "joyful accession" (*joyeux avènement*). He states that it was a "custom particularly associated with ecclesiastical manors." The connection with "at the first coming of the Abbot into England" in the Weedon custumal already mentioned, can be observed. That this tallage of *palfrey silver* was capable of being extended into a kind of "forced hospitality" service—the board and lodging of "distinguished visitors" and their grooms and the stabling and

provisioning of their horses—will become apparent from the documents quoted later in these notes, although this service which was common in France, where it was known as the “gîte,” was rare in England.

A slightly different but similar variation of this meaning is the sheriff's aid of “palfridus vicecomitis” which Miss N. Neilson in *Customary Rents* (Vol. II. *Oxford Studies in social and legal history*, ed. Vinogradoff) quotes as being “a rent which is a survival of the old purveyance right of the sheriff to obtain fodder for his horse” (when on toun).

Yet another rather similar palfrey payment was “*saddlesilver*” which occurred at Wimbledon, when at the first coming of the Archbishop, the customary tenants gave a “gifte, called *saddlesilver* accustomed to be five marks.”

It appears that such payments at the first coming of lords or fees were fairly common, and were not confined to particular districts, though the connection with ecclesiastical manors seems conclusive. For instance, at Hexham Priory, a *palfrey* was bought for the new abbot; and at Tynemouth (co. Yorks.), which was a “cell” of St. Albans Abbey, when the new abbot arrived, fifteen tenants whose services are recorded paid 40s. sterling called “*welcom abbatis*.” A further example occurs at Abeshall in Wigborough (co. Essex), when at every change of lordship (of the manor) was payable “a contribution by the name of *palfrey money* amounting to the sum of 60s. leviabie (in this case) upon the copiehold lands only.”

A later document in the King's College muniments dated 1529 (ref. Q.13), which is a lease of the manor of Ruislip from the College (who had been granted the manor by their founder Henry VI, after it had become Crown property following the dissolution of alien priories by Henry V), to the King's “Serjeant Baker,” Roger More, reserved to the College their manorial rights, *inter alia*, “. . . a certain rent called *palfrey silver*.” Earlier Royal Grants of this manor of the fifteenth century also mention this rent, e.g. in a writ from Henry VI to the Exchequer dated 1437.

Though there is probably no direct connection with the mediaeval feudal service or tallage of *palfrey silver*, an interesting lease of 1568 (ref. Q.20) in the same series of Kings' muniments also deals with *palfreys*, which are the subject of a contract between the college and one of its tenants of Ruislip manor, John Smythe. He was released from a covenant in his lease

for twenty years whereby he had to provide stabling for the horses of the Provost of King's and of his "horse-keepers," whenever the Provost or his successors should send them to Ruislip, to a maximum of twelve. He had also to provide hay, oats and straw. The College would allow 4d. weekly per horse towards provision of the above, and 2s. 8d. for every quarter of oats. The tenant also had to "bowert" (board) two "horse-keepers" at his own expense, or provide the college with £4 yearly at Michaelmas. This deed reduced his commitments to one annual payment of £7, for a period of nine years, and discharged him from his covenant. The next document in the series (ref. Q.21) shows this covenant to have been in force again in 1613, for an under-tenant of the Earl of Salisbury was released from the aforesaid covenant on payment of £13 6s. 8d. per annum.

A different interpretation of this rather unusual term is given by a writer in *Notes and Queries* (8th series), Vol. XI, showing that its meaning was puzzling readers in 1897. He considers that it was commutation money paid in lieu of the *palfrey* which in the Middle Ages was due to certain high personages by way of fee or service. Under the Statute of Westminster (13 Ed.I.cap.42, 1285), the Earl Marshal claimed a *palfrey* from peers on the occasion of their doing homage, as well as a second *palfrey* when they were knighted, and sometimes demanded one from others who were not bound to give it.

Camden comments on this in his discourse on "the Antiquity and Office of the Earl Marshal of England." He states elsewhere that Cuckney manor in Nottinghamshire was held in serjeanty by the service of "shewing" [shoeing] the King's *palfrey* whenever he should come to Mansfield.

Yet another version is given by Blount in his *Law Dictionary* (1670) who quotes *palfrey silver* as being a manorial due, mentioned in an Inquisition post mortem or escheat of 26 Ed.III (1352) after the death of William (de) Roos of Hamelak (Helmsley, co. Yorks, N.R.), a custom (i.e. customary service) at Belvoir Castle (co. Leicester) called "*Palfreyselver*" amounting to £4 p.a. "which ought to be levied annually" from vills and hamlets in the vicinity, and was payable to Roger Beler, tenant of the hundred of Framelond, for use of the King, forming part of the said Roger's farm for the said hundred.

It is also mentioned in an earlier Inquisition post mortem (ref. P.R.O. C.134/98(6)) of 19 Ed.II.(1325-6), for the same

county, hundred and property, as: "The hundred and yearly farms within the hundred called *Pallefrey-silver* of Beauver (Belvoir) . . . held by grant of the King to Roger Beler (alias de Belers) at fee farm. . . ."

A *palfrey* is defined as a "saddle-horse for ordinary riding as distinct from a war-horse"; and again, as "one of the better sort of horses used by noblemen or others of state—sometimes of old, taken for a horse fit for a woman to ride."

In conclusion, I should like to acknowledge the assistance I have had from Mr. L. E. Morris of Ruislip in the compilation of these notes.