

# NEWSLETTER

## JANUARY 2014

**Colwall Village Society**

Revealing Our Heritage

The following article is the culmination of two years research by David and provides a really fascinating account.

### The Village Tannery by David Hodgson

The Tannery was situated on the Tan House Estate which was lands where Brook House is situated. This was an ideal situation as requirements for a Tannery is a constant supply of water. On the Tan House Estate water would have been available from the Brook which runs through the property now called Brook House. The property is situated the southern end of the village more or less opposite the Thai Restaurant, which was formerly the Horse and Jockey / Groom Public House.

TANNERY, AND LANDS, AT  
COLWALL, HEREFORDSHIRE.

PARTICULARS

OF A

VALUABLE ESTATE,

SITUATE AT COLWALL,  
IN THE COUNTY OF HEREFORD;

COMPRISING ABOUT

EIGHTY ACRES OF ARABLE, MEADOW,  
Pasture, Hop-Yard, Orcharding, and a  
Thriving Coppice:

*Part Freehold, other part Copyhold of Inheritance*

HELD UNDER THE BISHOP OF HEREFORD,

*And a small part Leasehold, for a long Term of Years; in the occupation of*

MR RICHARD ALLEN,

A Yearly Tenant; who will have Notice to quit on the 2nd of February, 1808.

*Formerly the ESTATE of PHILIP PRICE, Deceased;*

Which will be SOLD  
BY AUCTION, BY  
JOHN AGG,

At the FEATHERS-INN, in the Town of LEDBURY;

*Between the hours of 10 and 2, on Tuesday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Day of October, 1806;*

In the following Lots, and Subject to Conditions then to be Produced.

The first indications of the Colwall Tannery came to light when I noticed the details of the sale of Tan House Estate amongst documents being offered for sale. The sale of the Tannery was in 1806.

Around 1770 the Tannery had passed to Ann Hartland. Under the terms of the will of Ann Hartland dated October 1779 the Tannery passed to her nephew Phillip Price. Phillip Price passed away 1793. Under the terms of his will he bequeathed the estate to his brother William Price and his sisters Mrs Evans of Wichenford and Mrs Pardoe of Cleve. Complications arose after the death of Phillip Price, William, Phillip's brother had pre-deceased him, William had a young son who was unable to sign any documents, and there was also the question of an annuity of £10 a year to be paid to be paid to John Hartland. As a result of these problems questions were being asked by would-be purchasers and resulted in the case being dealt with by the Court of Chancery. Eventually matters were settled and the property came on to the market in 1806 and was eventually part of the estates of Lowbridge Bright of Bristol and his Cousin Richard Bright of Portishead in Somerset both of whom already owned several pieces of land surrounding the Tannery. Lowbridge and Richard did not reside in Colwall although many of their ancestors did reside in

Worcester, Colwall, Coddington and Mathon from the 1500's. Richard and Lowbridge were descendants of Henry Bright, Prebendary of Worcester who was baptised on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1562.

### How did animal skins begin to be used for leather?

Primitive man hunted wild animals for food and removed the skins of the animals using the skin for crude tents, footwear and clothing. However the skin decayed quite rapidly and a method of preserving them was needed. The skins were rubbed with fat while they dried, this was found to have a short period of preservation, it was also found that the smoke from wood fires had a similar effect. Skins were sometimes left lying on the ground amongst leaves, barks and twigs. The bark and twigs produced a chemical reaction that had the effect of preserving the skin, from this it was found that tannin, produced from the bark, was an excellent method of preserving the skin.

From here-on a method was devised to obtain tannin which became the method of turning the skin into leather. The main requirements for tanning at this time would be oak bark; this was probably obtained from the Forest of Dean or somewhere within the local area. Oak trees were usually cut in the spring as the rising sap made it easier for the bark to be stripped. Bark was ringed at the top and the bottom of the tree trunk. The bark would have been transported to the Tannery where it would have been put in a barn and left to dry for around a year. When the bark was sufficiently dry it would have been broken down and at this time the Mill would be similar to an old fashioned Cider Mill, the mill wheel being pulled around by a horse. The bark was crushed until it was a fine powder. The powder would then be placed in pits containing water which were around ten feet by four feet and six to eight feet deep, varying amounts would be put in each pit; it took around six to eight weeks before the tannin was eventually leached out of the bark. The Bark Peelers often lived in the wood during this period and remnants of their dwellings can be seen in certain woodlands today.



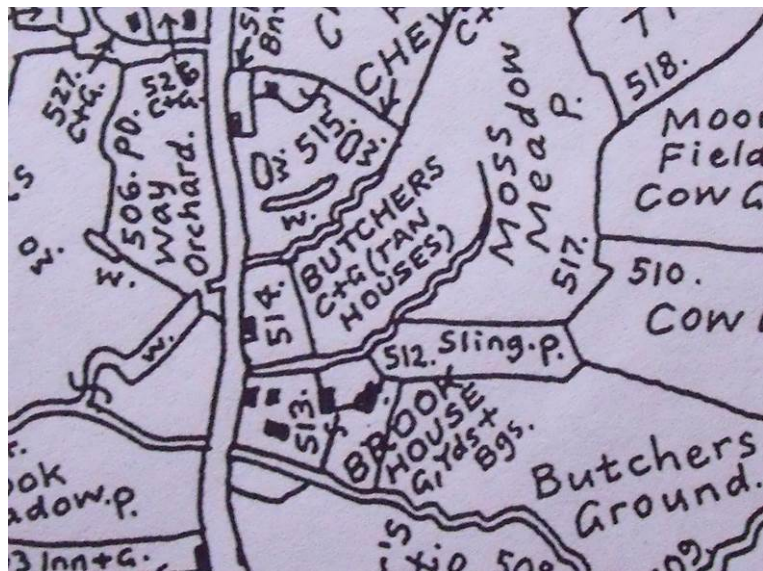
If we look into the Parish Records of Colwall during the reign of Charles II we find a Samuel Turner the son of Robert Turner and Ann was baptised in 1660. In Robert Turner's will (1657) he is described as a Tanner. He bequeaths his property to his son Samuel and makes Ann his wife sole executor. It is probable that Roberts's father was also a Tanner. Other owners of the Tanhouse Estate from 1650 to 1800 were Richard Allen, John and Bridget Pytt and John Hartland,

Phillip Price and probably several others. We often find intermarriages within these families and a system of ownership within the Tanneries to keep the business within the families.

Richard Hartland married Anne Dangerfield in 1723, John Hartland was baptised in 1724, his father was John Hartland and his mother Grace, nee Bright from Coddington. Richard Hartland was born in 1750 to Richard Hartland and Elizabeth, nee Lowe of Sly House now called Mapleton. Henry Dangerfield was an executor of Phillip Price's will.



An estate map of 1806 shows the position of the Tannery



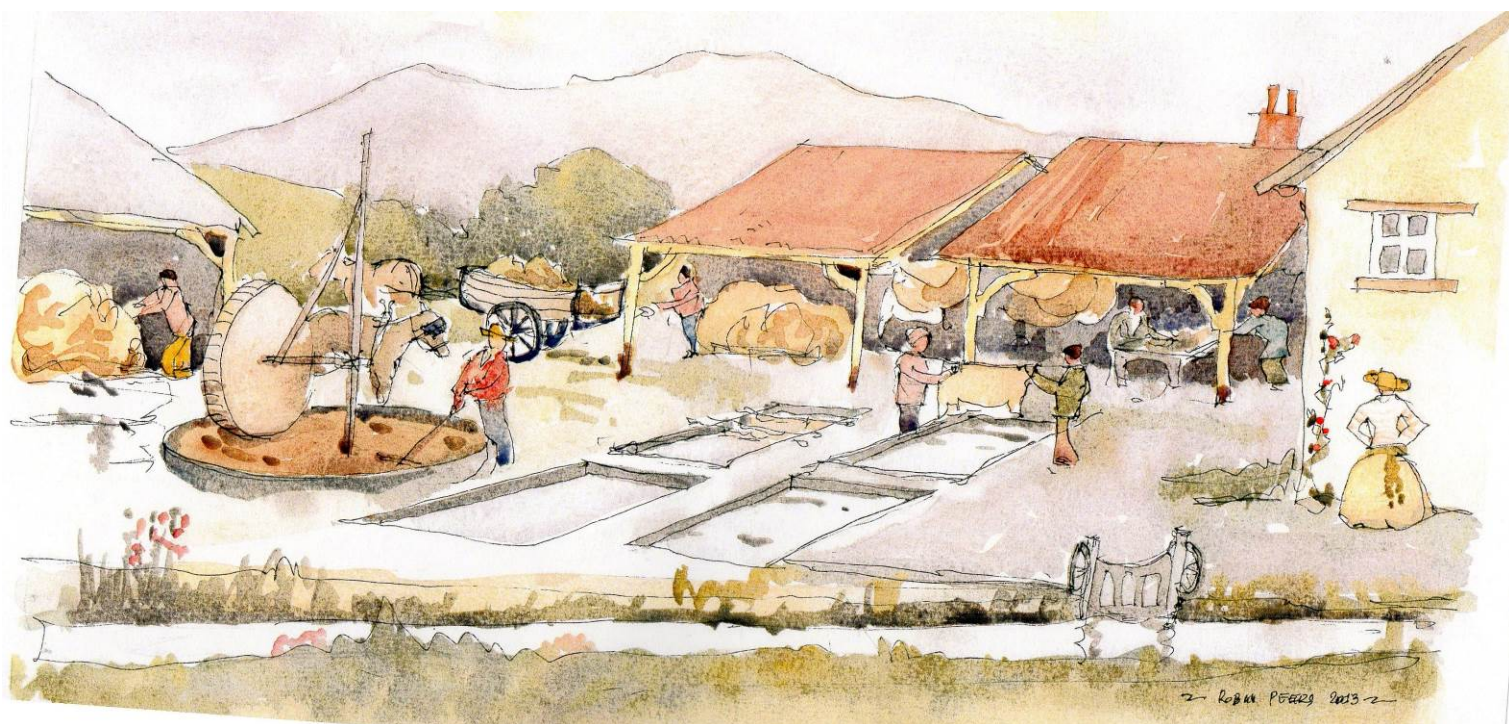
1838 Tithe Map showing Tannery site [513]

The Estate map shows the areas:

- V** as Brook Tanhouse
- X** Guildings or Horse and Groom. (Thai Restaurant)
- U** Chevenham
- r** Chevenham Brook

The Estate comprised of various fields, orchards, cottages, appurtenances and outbuildings i.e. Channamin Field, Galley Acre, Little Cockmoor, Brookfield orchard, Great Cockmoor, the Forty, Ancel Orchard, the Tanhouse and Tanyard, Fords Croft, The Sling, Comball Piece, Moorcroft Orchard and Hopyard. It also contained an acre of excellent Coppicing fit to cut.

If we look at the map we see a couple of Sluices on the Brook. The first one would be closed to allow the water to build up and would be directed to the Tanning pits nearby, the water may have been channelled to the pits by means of clay pipes or, once the water level had risen sufficiently, the pits filled by buckets. It is also possible that drains from the pits went back into the brook after the contents of the pits were no longer fit for purpose. The second sluice would have been closed during the summer months to retain a supply of water when rainfall would be lower.



An artist's impression of what the Tannery may have looked like in the 1800's

The process of tanning hides for leather has been carried out over thousands of years. One of the earliest that we are aware of is that during the Roman occupation of the area when we know that the Romans wore several items that were made of leather. It is probable that tanning was carried out during the Roman occupation of British Camp.

Primitive implements made from flint flake have been found around the Malvern Hills, these were objects that fitted in the hand with one edge that had a formed cutting edge, and was probably used to remove the skin from the animal (flaying) also a similar object used to scrape the skin / hide to remove the hair and subcutaneous tissue. Before the hides were placed in the tan pits they were placed in pit which contained a solution of lime (prior to the use of lime, animal urine and faeces were used) this has the effect of loosening the hair. The hides would remain in the lime pit for around two weeks. The hides would be removed from the lime pits and placed on a fleshing beam (bench) here the hair would be removed by using a fleshing knife similar to a draw knife with a blunt edge, it would be used with a downward action by the flesher. After the hair and fat had been removed the hides would be placed on poles into the pits, containing tannin, these pits were known as layer pits.

The first pit would contain a weak solution of tannin and subsequent pits containing stronger solutions of Tannin. The hides would be moved into the different pits over a period of around ten months and finally into the pit with a strong solution of Tannin. The tannin strength would be tested by dipping a finger into the solution and tasting it, a barkometer similar to a hydrometer was eventually devised to test the strength of the tannin. Finally the hides would be removed from the Tannin pits and hung up to dry in a drying shed. In the drying shed the hide would be lightly oiled with crude cod liver oil and allowed to dry slowly and evenly. When the hide was dry it would be placed through a

large roller to knit the fibres together and smooth the leather, this was carried out around three times with a period of drying between each rolling. The Tanner would decide to which use each portion of the hide would be used for.

The thicker parts of the hide would go to the Cordwainer (Shoemaker), John Taylor and John Hussey are listed as shoemakers in Colwall around 1720/30. The Saddler would also require the thick part of the hide. The thinner portions would be used for Harness making also the Glove Industry, several females within the village were glove makers notably Hannah Nash, Lydia Watkins, Sarah Eacock and many others.

Hides would be obtained from local butchers or Fellmongers who were men who dealt with animal skins. Hides were sometimes damaged by animals rubbing against broken branches, also at this time Warble fly was a problem, the warble fly would lay its eggs on the hairs of the animals skin, they would hatch out and the larvae would crawl down the hair and penetrate the skin, this would show up in the hide as if the skin had been penetrated with shot gun pellets. This problem has now been eradicated. Hides from different breeds of cattle vary. The hides from Hereford, Aberdeen Angus and Welsh Black cattle would quite dense due to the hardy conditions of the area of their origin, Continental Breeds such as Friesian, Limousin and Charolais would be less dense due to the warmer climes of their origin. The process of Tanning was a very dirty and smelly process which clung to the clothes of anyone working in the tannery.

Today there are about two Tanneries that actually use Oak bark for Tanning in England, most hides being converted to leather by chemical methods which produces a slightly inferior product, a lot of leather is also now imported into the country.

Brook House is now a Private Dwelling; it is probably 16<sup>th</sup> Century but does not appear in Pevsner, little is known much before 1900 as deeds do not exist. In 1890 it was owned by two Spinsters. Around 1900 Major Lake a retired Army officer born in Brighton resided there. In 1926 Sir Guy Dawber added an extension and in 1936 it was the home of James Dewhurst Milne who eventually became Managing Director of Worcester Porcelain. In 1946 James founded the Perrins Museum Trust. A painting of James Milne by Margaret Clarke can be seen at the Worcester Porcelain Museum.

Lowbridge Bright died unmarried and left the bulk of his estate to his Cousin Richard Bright. Richard Bright died in 1840, the bulk of his estate went to his eldest son Henry Bright; the rest went to his eight children and other beneficiaries. The estate at that time was quite extensive, much of which had previously been in the occupation of the Pytt family. Henry Bright was a Barrister at Law, also M.P. for Bristol he died unmarried on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1869 and is buried at Colwall. His brother Richard was M.D to Queen Victoria, his research on kidney disease led to the discovery of Bright's disease. Richard Bright was born in 1789 and died in 1858.

We do have Tan House Farm and Tan House Cottage situated on the outskirts of the village. The present house at Tan House Farm was not built until the 1920's. The Architect was Sir Arnold Thornley, Sir Arnold was the architect for the Stormont building in Belfast. He was awarded the RIBA Bronze medal in 1933 the same year that he was knighted. Tan House Cottage is probably 16/17<sup>th</sup> Century and at one time may have also been the site of a Tannery.

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## Season's Greetings!

The Colwall Village Society Committee wishes all members a Happy New Year and a Peaceful and Healthy 2014.

### Future Talks

**27th January 2014:**

**Gordon Wood:** The Building of the Hereford to Worcester Railway.

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2014: AGM**

followed by a talk from

**Professor Richard (Dick) Bryant:**  
The Ice Age in Colwall

### From the Editor

Any article on Colwall related subjects (however tenuous!) are always welcome.

If you are prepared to receive your newsletters by electronic means, please register with the email address below.

Corrections and additions to the information in newsletters are always welcome, as are **CONTRIBUTIONS!**

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