

## THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ALRESFORD AND THE VILLAGE OF WIELD.

*by*

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One day during the First War a farmer sent his son to Alresford to fetch a sack of maize - "Where have you come from?" he was asked - "Wield" came the reply. "Wield! That place. What an adventure for you to come down here". For that boy it was an adventure - the journey down the narrow, winding lanes took an hour and a half with a horse and cart. Seventy five years on, coming by car ? it only takes fifteen minutes but Wield is still considered remote. "Where is Wield?" is a frequent question in the town even today.

The twin communities of Upper and Lower Wield lie six miles north east of Alresford on the uplands above Armsworth. Originally part of the ancient Liberty of Alresford, the parish is now in the District of East Hampshire but the Constituency of Winchester; it was in Alresford Deanery but is now in Alton; with an Alresford postal address and an Alton telephone exchange - no wonder it is hard to find!

A small, isolated community in the past had to be largely self-sufficient but it depended on a local centre for trade, for communications with the outside world as well as for the social contacts provided by markets and fairs. Although Wield is half way between Alton and Alresford its traditional links with the latter are strong and go back over a thousand years to the time when they were both parts of the Bishop of Winchester's estate. Part of Wield was probably included in the grants made by Cynewald, King of the West Saxons to the Church at Winchester in the middle of the 7th century - certainly there is mention of a game reserve at Wield in the confirmation of the grant: of about 825. Winchester was the capital of the West Saxons and Alresford developed as an agricultural area feeding the city. There were almost certainly two settlements at Wield in Saxon times - this is borne out by the Domesday survey when it was recorded that East (or as we know it, Lower Wield) was held by Durand of the Bishop (Durand also held land in Alresford) :

while West (or Upper Wield) as part of the Bishop's Chase was held by the Bishop himself. It was included under Old Alresford and sent a tithing man to Old Alresford Court Leet. Although the Bishop's manors were grouped together in districts or baliwicks (Wield and Alresford were in the baliwick of Button, together with Cheriton and Sutton itself) they were worked independently. The Bishop was supplied direct at Sutton from each manor and Alresford sold the surplus of all.

Alresford was the centre for all the surrounding villages but Wield, geographically isolated, was rather out on a limb. Even the Bishop's Steward was content to leave the affairs there in the hands of the local reeve - providing the tenants produced their share of the Bishop's needs and sued to the Court when required. An early Customal in the Court Rolls records that Philip of Wield who held two yardlands for 5s and all manner of services "shall sue to the Court of Wield and to the Court of Alresford twice in the year, that is at Hock Tyde and at the Hundred held at St. Martins Tyde".

The Courts were held by the Steward or his Deputy. The roll of Steward was an influential one - they were the eyes and ears of the Lord of the Manor, their power and influence over the lives of villagers could be extensive. Not only did they carry out the functions of the Court: collecting fines, sorting out disputes, recording property transactions - they often became personally involved, granting mortgages to tenants on occasions. Over the centuries a number of prominent Alresford men acted as steward for Wield - most notably J. Ridley Shield who held the post for many years. The last Court was held in East Street Alresford in 1901, although entries by Mr. Shield in the Rolls continued for another thirty years.

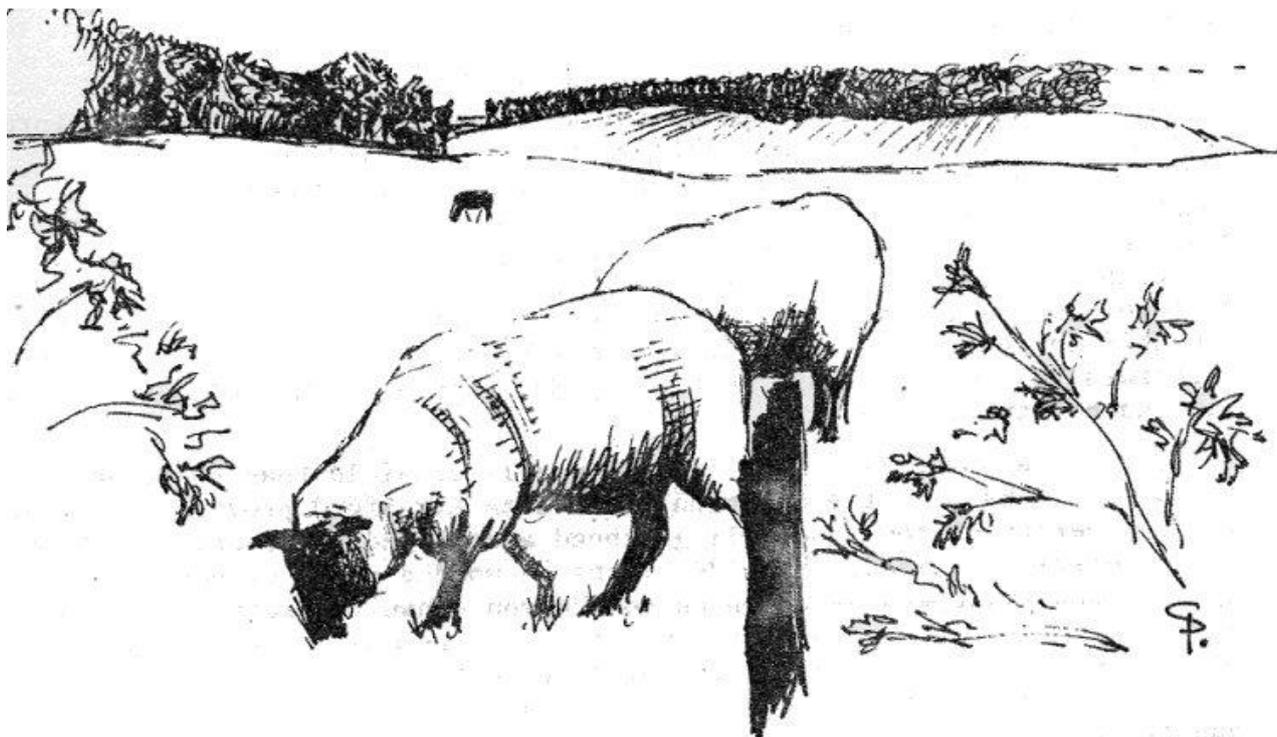
But perhaps more important to the people of Wield than these administrative links were the opportunities which Alresford provided for trade. The prosperity of town and village ebbed and flowed together. The name Wield, originally Walda or Welde, means "a wooded area" or possibly open upland country (depending on which source you consult!) Both the woods and downs of Wield have been the mainstay of its economy and so played part in that of Alresford. Alresford's rise to importance following Bishop de Lucy's remodelling of the town at the end of the 12th century and the holding of sheep fairs and markets was reflected at Wield. Already a settled community it was a time of expansion - fresh clearings were made and the sheep population rose steadily.

The old name of Walda lives on in the village - the downland of Wield is grazed by Olivia Mills' renowned flock of dairy ewes, producing a cheese bearing the name Walda - similar to that produced in medieval times, The medieval cheeses weighing about eight and a half pounds each, were made in Spring and Summer for sale at the numerous local cheese fairs in the autumn.

These fairs, as well as being popular entertainments, supplied clothes and household goods, and shopping would be done for a year. For the villagers of a remote community they were an event. Even in medieval times there would have been traffic problems in the town on Fair Day. Parking was difficult; the streets were full of riders, horse drawn carts and solid bullock carts - all moving at different speeds. There were speed restrictions on waggons and regulations for unloading straw and hay in most towns and Alresford would have been no exception.

Following the removal of the staple to Calais and the period of the Black Death, the whole area was at a low ebb, but again under the Bishop's encouragement sheep farming revived and the Elizabethan period was one of great prosperity. Tenants at Wield were granted permission at the Court to exchange and enclose their fields; the cloth trade flourished in the village and gentry settling in the area further encouraged trade. It was a time of much re-building in town and village and both depended on each other for building materials. The woods at Wield which had provided hunting for the Bishop (and sometimes the King) provided timber for building the mill at Alresford. On the other hand, reeds from Alresford Pond were needed for thatching the yeomen's smart new farmhouses at Wield. The town mills were important to the village; the 16th century weavers of Lower Wield depended on the fulling mill and after the village no longer had its own

grinding mill in the last century, corn had to be taken down to Alresford - a journey still remembered by older members of the village.



Above all Wield depended on Alresford for that most precious commodity to a farming community on high ground - water. When ponds and wells ran dry at times of drought the carts would go down to Alresford Pond or to the pump at Old Alresford.

Wield and Alresford have shared national troubles. At the time of the Civil War when the King's army-occupied Alresford before the Battle of Cheriton, the Roundheads were scattered in the surrounding villages. In this century Wield was used for manoeuvres by troops stationed in Alresford.

During the 18th and 19th centuries men from Alresford invested in property in the village; Mr. Godwin, a pork butcher in Broad Street, and Henry Broad, a carpenter, both bought cottages in Upper Wield. Soon after Admiral Rodney rebuilt Alresford House he acquired the manor of Wield and for the next hundred years the Rodney family's influence on the village was considerable. William Faithfull, their patient and diligent Steward, who also looked after Pinglestone and Lanham Farms, journeyed frequently to Wield in connection with the considerable land transactions which so altered the village. But he held meetings of the Court at The Swan. As these were followed by a good dinner at which much brandy was consumed (at Lord Rodney's expense) the tenants were no doubt quite happy to make the journey to Alresford,

Alresford was Wield's contact with the wider world - a journey anywhere started there. In 1792 Collyers Coach from Southampton left The Swan at breakfast time, arriving in Ludgate Hill at 6 pm. The journey to London cost 15/-. But until the coming of the railway people rarely went further than Alresford. The railway gave a huge boost to Wield's hurdle making industry from 1865, and enabled them to be exported as far away as Jersey. They fetched 7 or 8/- a dozen at the turn of the century and a man could make a dozen a day.



The railway also brought new landowners - successful Victorian business men who purchased properties in the country for the shooting. In 1890 the Manor Estate, then consisting of most of Upper Wield, part of Lower Wield and a small part of Old Alresford, was bought by Mr. Barnes Wimbush. Travelling down from London, where he ran a horse and carriage business, he was met at Alresford Station and driven up to Wield.

This contact with the wider world was important to the Village but at the beginning of this century it was a very self contained place and communication tended to be inwards more than outwards. Most people worked within the parish; the village had its own shop and there were regular visits from local tradesmen - Eddolls horse drawn wagon came from Alresford among others. The doctor came (if paid in advance). The most regular visitor was the postman who walked up from Alresford every day, including Sundays. On arrival at the Green he blew a trumpet and villagers collected their mail. Walking on to Lower Wield he purchased bread and cheese for 2d, a pint of beer for 4d and a packet of Woodbines for 2d at the Inn. He rested in a hut at Bradley before making the return journey in the afternoon. The postman is still an important link with the outside world, a daily visitor known to everyone,

Most of the children attended the Village School but Mrs. Williams a widow who farmed in Wield during the First War, drove her three children down to Perin's where they boarded at Miss Nicoll's Hostel. Wield children still go to Perin's, but they go by bus and do not board.

Sometimes there were social reasons for visiting the town; the Fireman's Dance was an annual event not to be missed by the girls of Wield during the 1930s - one defied her father and slipped off in his car while he was out on the farm. The football team enjoyed their "away" matches at Alresford - returning late at night, the pony finding his own way home while the footballers slept!

Alresford has always played a special part in the lives of the people of Wield; as the village has changed so its dependency on the town has changed. The village no longer needs the mill or water from the pond but does rely on the many services of the town for everyday needs. Whether *it* has been through trade or property, for communications, for administrative or social reasons, the links between Alresford and Wield have been continuous for a thousand years. To end on a note of that continuity; when the Alresford sheep fair was restarted two years ago the first lot sold were three grazing ewes from Wield.

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Sources : Wield Parish History - Olivia Mills  
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