

MANORIAL HERITAGE REGISTRY HISTORICAL RECORD EXTRACT

MHR-M-0003120 • MANOR
Weston-super-Mare

Evidence status: Unverified
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Location: Somerset
Associated places: Somerset

LORDSHIP / TITLE ASSOCIATIONS

ABOUT THE MANOR

The historic seaside resort

Towns and villages have prospered through history for many different reasons. Some find themselves in an advantageous place to trade, others have rich mineral wealth or are places where trade routes converge. A few however can be said to have expanded thanks to sudden need for leisure and pleasure.

Weston-super-Mare is one such place that has earned fame beyond Britain by finding itself suddenly desired for its bracing air and bathing.

People have lived at Weston since at least the Iron age. For almost 2000 years it remained a quiet

fishing village nestled beneath the Mendips on the Bristol Channel. Unlike many towns which grew in

the 19th century and for whom the Lord of the Manor was a distant memory the Lords of the Weston-superMare played a central role in its meteoric rise.

Weston lies at the western end of a large out crop of rock known as Worlebury Hill. This was the

site of an Iron Age fort known as Worlebury Camp which was excavated in the 19th century. The

surrounding land is a largely flat and marks the limits of the Somerset Levels.

The Manor appears to have had just four familial owners in its 950 year history. At the time of

Domesday Weston received the following entry,

William holds of the Bishop of Coutances, Westone

Algar held it in the time of King Edward and geld three hides and one virgate of land.

The arable is three carucates.

In demesne are two carucates and two servants and four villains and four cottagers.

There are seventeen acres of meadow and twelve acres of coppice wood

Pasture twelve furlongs long and two furlongs broad and six furlongs of moor

It was and is worth sixty shillings.

Weston was a wealthy and productive Manor with an ideal balance of arable, pasture, woods and

meadows. William was a local tenant of the Bishop of Coustance. The Bishops lordship appears to have been fleeting since by the early 11th century Weston had come into the possession of the Clapton family of Clapton-in-Gordano, a few miles to the north (and now famed as a service station on the M5). The first of the family was Wido who held his land, including Weston, as part of the honour of Gloucester. It is likely that Wido was a Saxon who managed to either retain his family lands after 1066 or had rendered some service to the Normans. His son, Arthur, is the first noted Lord of Weston, possibly as early as 1125. He was succeeded by his son Nigel Fitz-Arthur. There is some evidence that Nigel married Adeva, daughter of Robert Fitz-Harding, grandson of Sueno, 3rd King of Denmark, by Eva, niece of William the Conqueror and through which union he was granted another manor, that of Kingscote, in Gloucestershire. Weston passed to Nigel's unnamed younger son who took the surname of Arthur. The descent of the family is uncertain until the reign of Henry III (1216-1272) when William Arthur is recorded as Lord of Weston. He was followed by his son Sir Richard Arthur, then Sir William Arthur, who was deputy Constable of Bristol Castle. In 1404 the Manor was held by Sir Thomas Arthur who was an intimate of the Lords Berkeley of Berkeley Castle. Although their estate was not a great one the family were certainly influential in Somerset and Gloucestershire and held various official posts. The family had established themselves at Clapton, and Weston, known at this period as Weston-juxta-Mare, formed a core part their estate. At this period it was a small fishing village and the Lord of the Manor assumed control of the sale of catch by the granting of fishing stalls. This was not always appreciated by the fishermen and in 1492 there was a protracted legal dispute between John Arthur, Lord of Weston and several locals over fishing at Birnbeck, site today of the famous pier. On 30th November Arthur and ten armed men raided the Birnbeck fisheries and are reported to have taken; a hundred horse-loads of Barons (sprats) four young tubbelyns (cod) three hundred haddock and two hundred whiting. The fisheries consisted of nets strung across the shore and presumably Arthur considered these to be his by manorial right. Later records show that the Lords of Weston continued to grant leases

to fishing stalls which usually included a small building and a parcel of land. The leases were for three lives or 99 years depending on which was the shorter. The Arthur family remained as Lords of Weston-super-Mare (or merely Weston as it was known between the 16th and 17th centuries) until the death of Edward in 1595. He had two daughters and the Manor then eventually passed to his son-in-law William Winter of Dyrham in Gloucestershire who had married the eldest daughter, Mary. The Winter family had something of a troubled existence at Weston during the 17th century. The family, who were based mainly at Lydney in Gloucestershire were ardent Royalists and during the early part of the Civil War, William Winter was arrested by Parliamentary forces despite his pleas that, unlike his kinsmen, he had not taken part in any action against Parliament. He was imprisoned and remained so for the the duration of the war, dying whilst still incarcerated in 1649. His two children, Henry and Grace were minors and their estate was left seemingly to the ravages of their guardians. On attaining his majority Henry Winter set about losing what he had left on the gaming tables of London. On his death in 1685 he had so little left that his memorial in the parish church went uncompleted. Henry s son and heir, also Henry, was faced with such large debt that he was forced to sell his estate and Weston-super-Mare was duly sold in 1696 to a local gentleman, John Piggot. At the beginning of the 19th century Weston was still a small fishing village. The Smyth-Piggot family (as they had become) had a small cottage in the village which was used as a summer retreat from their main residence at Brockley Court. In the early years of the 19th century there was a vogue amongst the middle and upper classes for holidays to the coast for bathing and the Smyth-Piggots realised there was potential for development at Weston. In 1810 they secured a private Act of Enclosure of common land and it was divided into freehold lots. At the same time they built and opened a hotel. Although it was a slow start, in the 1820s Weston connected to Bristol by coach and since it could be reached in a couple of hours from the city it began to attract more visitors. John Hugh Smyth-Piggot planted trees on Worlebury Hill and its slopes were laid out with walks and private, speculative villas built below. The greatest boost to the fortunes of the town came

in 1841

when the town was connected by rail. This led to a huge rise in the number of day-trippers, especially after a larger station was added in 1866. The growth of Weston was prodigious. In 1821 it

had a population of just 738 yet twenty years later this had reached over 4000, by the 1880s it had

reached nearer to 40,000.

In 1883 Cecil Hugh Smyth-Piggot sold land and the beach front to Weston-super-Mare Local District

Board for the use of public recreation. Interestingly, the indenture, which is available online,

reserved out the manorial rights including that of treasure trove. The family also sold land within

the manor to the local council for the development of parks and amenities for holidaymakers.

By this

time Weston-super-Mare was the largest seaside resort in the West of England and it was popular with

workers from Bristol and South Wales whilst retaining some of its earlier genteel charm. In

1904 the

Grand Pier was opened adding a further attraction and in the 20th century the town became the most

popular destination in the South West of England. The Smyth-Piggot family retains its connections to

the town as Lords of the Manor.

Some famous names hail from Weston-super-Mare, including; John Cleese, Jeffrey Archer, Jill Dando

and Roald Dahl.

There are a number of original documents associated with the Manor which form part of the conveyance.

We will accept offers for Weston-super-Mare until 30 June, 2021. Offers starting at £20,000

Rights, customs and incidents At this period it was a small fishing village and the Lord of the Manor

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Catalogue source Lot #1 of Manorial Services Auction - Winter 2021 - Stephen Johnson

Associated manorial documents / archive references
1482-1482: rental, with other manors
Bristol
Archives
1555-1559: court roll, with other manors Hampshire Archives
1690-1690: survey
Somerset
Heritage Centre
1694-1694: particular
1852-1852: ownership of land in manor

OWNERSHIP / HOLDER ACCOUNT

Historical holder / succession information
his son-in-law William Winter of Dyrham in
Gloucestershire

[source claim requiring identity review]
passed_to • historical_holder_or_transferee
Source wording:

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CONVEYANCE / DESCENT

- 1696 | John Piggot | sale | Manor Property |

RECORDED RIGHTS

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