

# The Lordship of the Manor of Sayesbury – Sawbridgeworth

Most of us will have heard the term Lord of the Manor without realizing what it exactly means or involves. On the basis of television series such as “to the Manor Born” you might even think that all it takes to become Lord of the Manor is to buy a really big house! The concept of manorial rights however is well established under British Law. Locally the names de Mandeville and de Say are well known; bearers of those names were once Lords of the Manor here.

The Land Registry describes manorial rights as rights which were retained by lords of the manor when land became freehold. They can include rights to mines and some minerals, sporting rights such as hunting, shooting and fishing, and rights to hold fairs and markets. This description by the way dates from January 2015. The term Lord meanwhile is described as an appellation for a person who has authority, control, or power over others acting like a master, a chief, or a ruler. The appellation can also denote certain persons who hold a title of the peerage in the United Kingdom, or are entitled to courtesy titles.

This article concerns itself with the history of the Lordship of Sayesbury – Sawbridgeworth Manor, which continues until today. The amount of control that comes with manorial rights today is not the same neither does it extend over the same geographical area or holds sway over the same rights, duties and liberties as it did in the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Another point that should be made early on is that strictly speaking there is no such thing as Sawbridgeworth Manor. There is Sayesbury Manor and a Pishiobury Manor. Because Sawbridgeworth was the largest village-town within those two manors and the manors were often owned by one and the same person it then became customary to refer to the two together as Sawbridgeworth Manor.

In 1295 for instance the second William de Say claimed for himself the “liberties of gallows, assize of bread and ale, pillory, tumbrel and prison”. Right of gallows, so we learn, was an ancient right whereby the Lord could execute malefactors in his Manor. However, by the time he made that claim it was already being discouraged by the crown which saw mercy and punishment as the prerogative of the king. Lesser crimes could be punished by the Lord of the Manor hence the reference to pillory, tumbrel and prison.

Another interesting possibility with regards to manorial rights is that of “severed mineral rights”. An interesting detail of land ownership under English Law is that the top soil and the sub soil can have different owners. So for instance when Sayes Farm was sold the mineral rights did pass to the new owner. This was however not always the case.

Evidence of ancient rights can in some circumstances provide an interest in land via the Land Registry. Some rights continue until the present day such as for instance the right to hold markets and fairs.

Meanwhile, before embarking on a historical survey of the various Lords of Sayesbury – Sawbridgeworth Manor, let me give you their names in chronological order.

1. Asgar the Staller
2. Geoffrey de Mandeville,
3. William de Mandeville
4. Eudo Dapifer
5. Henry I
6. Stephen / Matilda
7. Geoffrey de Mandeville, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Essex
8. Geoffrey de Mandeville, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex
9. William de Mandeville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Essex
10. Beatrice de Say
11. Geoffrey de Say
12. Geoffrey (II), de Say
13. William de Say
14. William (II), de Say
15. Geoffrey (III), Lord Say
16. William (III), Lord Say
17. John, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Say
18. Elisabeth de Say ne Heron
19. Sir John Heron
20. Sir John (II), Heron
21. Sir John Say
22. Sir William Say
23. Henry Bouchier Earl of Essex

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| 24. William Parr, Marquess of Northampton      | 37. William Freeman   |
| 25. Queen Mary,                                | 38. Dr. Ralph Freeman   |
| 26. Lady Ann Parr                              | 39. Philip Yorke, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Earl of Hardwicke             |
| 27. William Lord Burghley                      | 40. Rowland Alston  |
| 28. Robert, Earl of Salisbury                  | 41. John Hodgson  |
| 29. William, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Earl of Salisbury | 42. William Hodgson   |
| 30. Lionel Cranfield, Earl of Middlesex        | 43. Edward Salvin Bowlby  |
| 31. Charles I                                  | 44. Arthur Salvin Bowlby  |
| 32. Arthur Brett and Nicholas Harman           | 45. Patrick Thomas Salvin Bowlby                                |
| 33. Sir Thomas Hewett                          | 46. Henry Neumueller  |
| 34. Sir George Hewett, Viscount Gowran         | 47. Derek Partrick Gulliver Crane & Jean Phyllis Gulliver Crane |
| 35. Mary Hewett ne Read                        | 48. Sawbridgeworth Town Council                                 |
| 36. Ralph Freeman                              |   |

The earliest record of local lords is of course the Domesday Book, compiled around 1086 by order of William the Conqueror in order to facilitate the raising of taxes from his newly conquered English lands. Prior to the arrival of the Norman invaders it seems that Asgar the Staller was Lord in our neck of the woods. From the Dictionary of National Biography we learn that Asgar was the second-richest thegn (some sort of aristocrat) in pre-conquest England below the rank of earl. The historian Ann Williams writes that "his estate of over 300 hides of land was scattered over nine shires, the greatest concentration (some 160 hides) lying in Middlesex, Essex, and Hertfordshire. For these shires and their neighbours Domesday gives details of dependent relationships, showing how Asgar's wealth had attracted the commendation of many lesser thegns and free men. Even in Cambridgeshire, where he had no land of his own, such men had sought Asgar as lord. Indeed his two most interesting dependants are found there: the pre-conquest sheriff Ordgar, who sought Asgar's protection after 1066 and Asgar's steward, Sigar who retained some of his land in 1086 as a tenant under Asgar's successor, the first Geoffrey de Mandeville.

The arrival of the Norman invaders brought great changes. In our part of the country these were indeed mainly brought about by the de Mandevilles. There were in fact 5 of them: three of them called Geoffrey and two called William. Their place of origin may have been Colmesnil-Manneville (*arrondissement* Dieppe, *canton* Offranville) but that is far from certain. The first Geoffrey came over with William the Conqueror and apparently rendered great aid at the battle of Hastings. As a result he became one of William I's wealthier tenants-in-chief with lands concentrated in Essex, Middlesex, and Hertfordshire, and extending into seven other counties. Geoffrey died around 1100 and was succeeded by his son William who like his father became constable of the Tower and sheriff of Essex, London and Middlesex, and Hertfordshire. As such William must have blotted his copybook as during his tenure the rebellious Ranulf Flambard, the first political prisoner did escape. As a punishment for his neglect William was ordered to pay a fine of £ 2200, an incredible sum at that time, he had to give up Sawbridgeworth and until the fine was paid his estate was granted to Eudo Ryes, otherwise Dapifer, Geoffrey's father in law.

What happened afterwards is unclear. Eudo lost control of the estate and died in 1120 leaving only a daughter who happened to be married to William. That same year Sawbridgeworth reverted to the crown where it remained until 1141 when the second Geoffrey de Mandeville came on the scene,

Now this Geoffrey de Mandeville, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Essex is/was not very popular with many historians. He came to prominence after a period of chaos and uncertainty known as “the Anarchy” and initially supported King Stephen. The King had been compelled to delegate much of his powers to newly created earls of which Geoffrey was one. Between 1138 and 1141 Geoffrey added no less than 18 earldoms to the 8 that he already held at the close of Henry I’s reign. Historians disagree about how trustworthy an ally Geoffrey was. From one of those, J.H. Round, we learn that “each successive change of side brought this unscrupulous magnate more advantage”. We may never know if he was indeed as bad as that. Whatever was the case, at the time of his death Geoffrey was excommunicated, although that was undone posthumously.



Left to right: Geoffrey de Mandeville, King Stephen and Sir John Say

Sawbridgeworth was conferred to Geoffrey’s son, another Geoffrey in 1156 who died ten years later and was succeeded by his brother William who became the third Earl. He, a courtier of Henry II was the last of the Mandeville and Sawbridgeworth was then left to his widowed aunt Beatrice de Say and subsequently to her son Geoffrey. By that time the Manor had been much reduced. Henceforth the estate became known as Sayesbury to differentiate it from other Manors in the area. Geoffrey was succeeded by his son, another Geoffrey and it was to him that a market charter was granted in 1222. Originally the market was granted for a Saturday but later on that was changed to a Friday.

The name of de Say became inextricably linked to Sawbridgeworth and a succession of people bearing that name became Lord of the Manor. In 1245 William de Say received a grant of Free Warren, a hunting licence one could say, indicating that a great part of the Manor was given over to Park Land. The right of free warren by the way carries on as a manorial right but as it can only be exercised on land actually owned by the Lord it is of little practical value today.

To be continued.

The above is primarily based on a report from 2010 by Stephen Johnson MA, a history researcher specialising in manorial rights. Other sources were Henry Neumueller, the Dictionary of National Biography, the Manorial Society of Great Britain, Page’s Victorian County History of Hertfordshire and Wikipedia,