

PREFACE

This is a re-issue of the second edition of a pamphlet on the history of the common land of Coppett Hill, first published by the Coppett Hill Common Trust Ltd in 1990 and revised and updated in 1998.

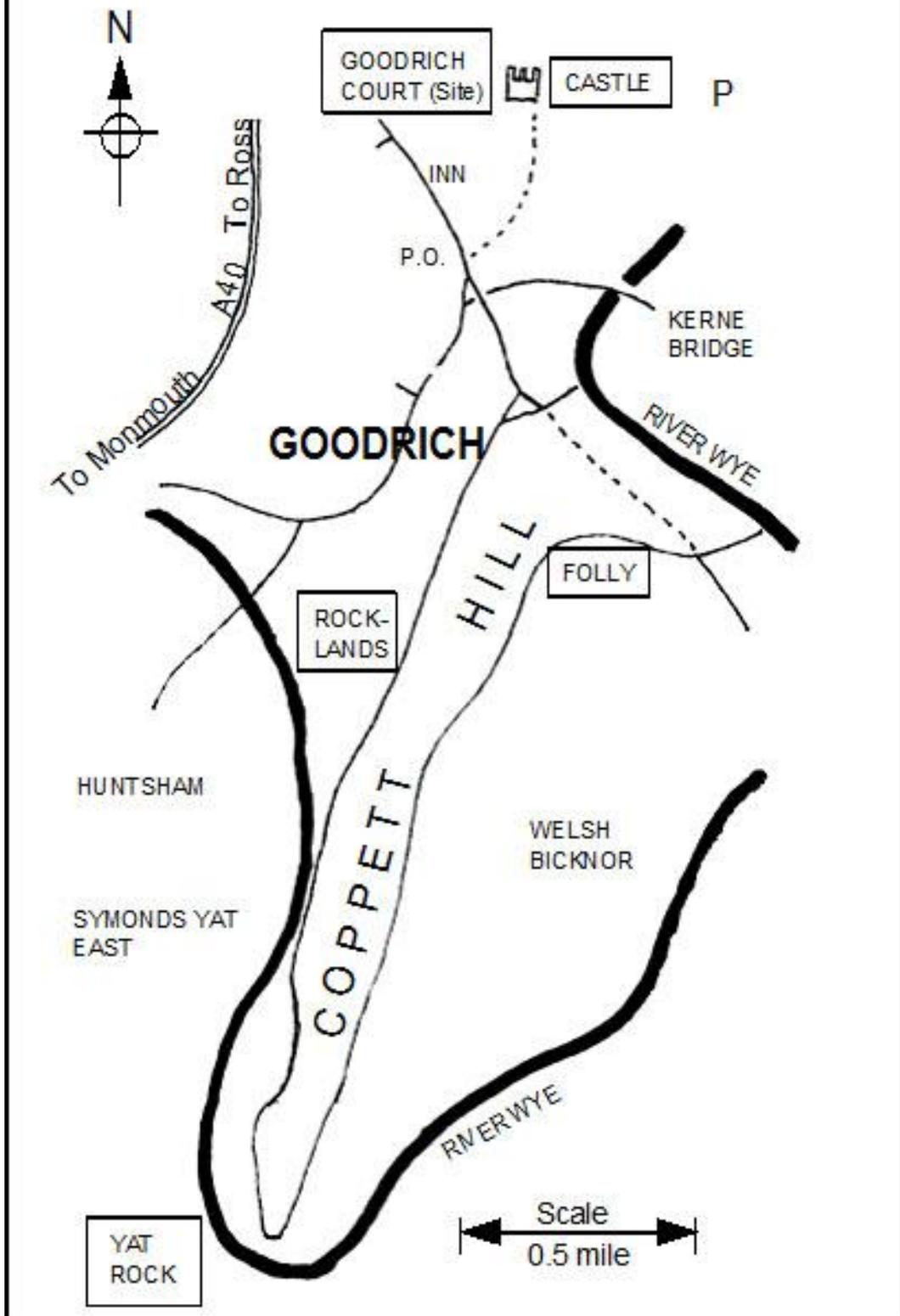
The 1998 review introduced new material that was evidence of settlement in the 17th century, much earlier than was suggested in the first edition, and for this my thanks are due to Roz Lowe for contributing her research into Manorial Records. It is not possible to locate all these settlement sites accurately, but the evidence does indicate that some cottages are older in origin than was originally supposed.

The extent of the settlement in early Victorian times is fully described, and the ownership by successive Lords of the Manor from 1740 to 1919 when many tenanted cottages were sold. The common remained in private hands until it was bought and secured for the public benefit by a local initiative in 1986.

I am also grateful to Roz Lowe for her help in preparing this new edition and to the Friends of Coppett Hill for providing the opportunity to publish it. The profit from it will support their work.

John Tisdall

Environs of Goodrich



THE SETTLEMENT OF COPPETT HILL

*No fences parted fields, nor marks nor bounds
Divided acres of litigious grounds,
But all was common.
Virgil, Georgics I*

The Early History

Coppett Hill (earlier Copped Wood) has been a possession of the Manor of Goodrich since Goodrich Castle and the manorial lands came into the hands of the Lords of Monmouth after the Norman conquest, and then to William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke in 1204. Goodrich was part of Archenfield, an area of the Marches with Welsh customs and land holding traditions. Any early squatters on the Hill would have spoken Welsh in their temporary shelters.

An early mention of 'Coppyngehode' in 1372, shortly after the Black Death, says that is 'worth nothing but for big timber', unlike the Doward where charcoal was made. Goodrich has many traces of iron-making, and the demands for charcoal may have led to extensive coppicing, and the open character the Hill has today.

From the 17th Century complaints of 'incroachments on Copped Wood' start appearing in the manorial court rolls. The incroachers, some of whom had built cottages on the incroached land, were fined a regular amount. This was a way of the absentee lords of the manor increasing their income, and was a rent in all but name. The earliest map of the manor in 1717 shows the incroachments, some with houses, and names the incroachers. By 1735 the manor officials were trying to convert the 'fines' to regular leases or freeholds, but not all took up the offer.

When the Earl of Kent died in 1740 without a male heir, his estates at Goodrich were sold off. The ruined castle and the wasteland of Coppett Hill were bought by Thomas Griffin, a naval officer who lived farther down the Wye at Hadnock, Monmouth. He thus became Lord of the Manor of Goodrich.

A few years later, Griffin faced a court martial, accused of twice failing to engage the French fleet in war at sea, but he went on to become an Admiral and a Knight. When he died, the property passed to his brother and it was to remain with the Griffin family for several generations. During this time, the remnants of the feudal Manorial system were swept away in an agricultural revolution. Little was left but the laws governing wasteland like Coppett Hill.

Traditionally and legally, the Lord of the Manor owned the wasteland, but manorial tenants had the right to use it for grazing, gathering fuel and for recreation, and the land could not be enclosed without Parliamentary approval. These rights were known as 'rights of common' or commoner's rights' In the 18th and 19th centuries, Parliament sanctioned the enclosure of thousands of commons and the loss of the people's rights.

Parliament was not asked to enclose Coppett Hill; on the contrary, the owner appears to have encouraged its use. The evidence for this is an account of a river journey made in 1778 by a Fellow of Queen's College, Cambridge, the Rev. S. Shaw, one of the first to make the Wye Tour. By boat from Ross-on-Wye, he visited Goodrich Castle, ' a most romantic relick of moss-grown towers', and observed 'the vast hill called copper wood'.

Continuing by boat, approaching the Bishopswood furnace on his left, he observed the east side of Coppett Hill on his right 'covered with lime kilns'

'We saw a small hut by the waterside carelessly heaped together, which, according to established custom, the indigent natives raise in the night; this, if they can accomplish it so as to cover in, and boil a pot within the space of twelve hours unmolested, becomes their own, and they are allowed to inclose a sufficient quantity of land, and to rebuild a more suitable cottage; thus in a few years by this laudable custom and indulgence, the whole face of the country wears a general aspect of cultivation, and the most barren spots become adorned with woods, gardens and orchards.'

While the settlement of the Hill, and the income derived from it, was acceptable to the Griffin family, other incursions by people living in the adjoining Manor of Welsh Bicknor, owned by the Vaughan family, were less welcome. In 1792, a George Griffin instructed 13 'lawful and honest' men among his tenants to make a sworn statement setting out 'what parts of the wasteland called Copped Wood are in the Manor of Goodrich.' The tenants' perambulation began 'at the Wood Cott and from thence along the Bank of the River Wye to Thomas Wood and from thence to Courtfield Gate taking in the cottage and garden, and from thence along the Road from the said Gate by the Lime Kiln of William Vaughan Esq. to Baysham's Cott, and from thence taking in the whole of the said common called Copped Wood and the inclosures lately said to have been made thereon by William Vaughan Esq. or his tenants to Binnalls Gate and from thence by the side of the Weire Wall there to the Gate of the Meadow of Thomas Weare Gent. called White Croft by the Witch Tree and from thence along the [side] of the Meadow to the Weire in the River Wye called the County Weire.'

Goodrich in the 1800's

In 1841, the parish of Goodrich consisted of a number of separate townships, as they were called. One was Glewstone, which is no longer part of the parish, another Huntsham, which included Symonds Yat East. Goodrich township, including Coppett Hill, had a population of 500 men, women and children living in a hundred houses and cottages. Most of them worked where they lived and the township was largely self-sufficient. It had to be, since most people could not afford to travel further than their feet could carry them.

There were three village shops, offering hardware, clothing and fancy goods, as well as basic provisions; and several blacksmiths to shoe horses and to make or repair tools used on the land. There were dressmakers, shoemakers, stonemasons. There was also much unemployment and poverty, high infant mortality, and a dread of being reduced to the workhouse. Already the village as a self-contained, self-ruled entity was breaking up: the Vestry was losing control to larger authorities, young people were moving to the cities, machinery was replacing manual labour on the farms, the barge trade on the Wye giving way to faster roads and soon to railways.

The life of Goodrich was dominated now by a wealthy newcomer, Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick who built Goodrich Court, and a few well-to-do men, William Henry Ross at Rocklands, the Vicar, the Rev. Charles Morgan among them, all employers of labourers and servants, all men of greater influence than the Lord of the Manor, the distant Charles Marriott who died in 1848. It was not until much later that the Lord of the Manor was to figure largely once again in the Coppett Hill story. When Marriott's grand-niece, Louisa, became the owner of the castle and the hill by descent and gift, she also acquired 19 of the cottages on the hill.

In 1919, as Mrs Louisa Bosanquet, she put them up for sale, together with the castle and the common, and other property. In a sales brochure, her agents noted that the rents from the cottages (none more than £7 p.a., most much less and all inclusive of rates) were 'totally inadequate', not having been raised for some years. They suggested that the rents 'might be considerably increased, and that the cottages could by 'judicious expenditure be made into charming week-end and residential cottages and homes.' Most of the cottages were sold for less than £200. The topmost cottage, then called Cook's Folly, which was let to a Mrs Barnes for 5s. a year and had four walls but no roof, went for £70. Tenants who could not afford to buy their homes now risked losing them. Among the new owners one sees the vanguard of a new type of settler, the commuter, the weekender and the retiree from the town, all mobilised by the railway at Kerne Bridge, the motor car and the autobus.

Four houses were built after the sale: HILLBROW in the grounds of The Thatch; WYE MOUNT in an orchard; CLEVELAND REACH in the grounds of Cliff Cottage; and THE ORCHARD on land which was particularly recommended as a housing site in the 1919 brochure. Mrs Bosanquet retained the title of Lord of the Manor but placed the castle in the guardianship of the Commissioner for Works, later subsumed by English Heritage. The title is presently held by a descendant, Mrs Sally Wait, who lives on Vancouver Island.

The Common in Modern Times

In 1971 a national review led to the formal registration of Coppett Hill as a common and rights to graze animals and cut small wood were confirmed at a number of cottages whose owners had asked for them to be retained. But the hill remained in private ownership and when Captain W. C. Ashby put it up for sale in 1985, it was realised in the village that these rights of common were scarcely used and that there were no definitive public rights of access to tracks and paths over the hill. Elsewhere in Britain private owners were succeeding in deregistering common land, or enclosing it, or restricting access or developing it beyond its original purpose. An initiative was taken to buy the hill and to establish rights of public access in perpetuity, conservation policies and local control. The Coppett Hill Common Trust Ltd, a non profit making company, was formed among some 80 village shareholders and the Hill was purchased for little more than £30,000 with grants from the parish

council, local authorities in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Countryside Commission. The principal shares in the company are restricted to residents and property owners in the parish to keep control in local hands.

The Trust company's voluntary work is supported by the Friends of Coppett Hill, a charitable fund-raising and educational body, open to all who value access to one of the least spoiled areas in the lower Wye valley. Coppett Hill now has Friends in many parts of Britain and also overseas.

Coppett Hill became a registered Local Nature Reserve in 2000 and in that year the Countryside and Rights of Way Act was passed that made all commons open access land, allowing free access to the public across the whole common

The Houses of Coppett Hill and their Occupants in 1841

The list which follows identifies by their present names the cottages built by 1841 and the sites of later settlement. The sums of money are the rates levied by the church at a time when a labourer earned perhaps 5s.(25p) a week. The accuracy of every entry cannot be guaranteed.

“#” against a cottage name indicates that it was not shown on the 1838 map and may be presumed to have been built later. “*” against the occupier's name indicates that he was qualified by the size of his property to have a vote in 1841.

COTTAGES BUILT BEFORE 1841 (The reference number matches the plot on the map on page 8 West side, sometimes known as Lower Coppett Hill:

THE THATCH	Owner-occupied by Ann Hooks, 40, schoolmistress. A cottage and 1 acre. 3s.	[1]
YEW TREES CLOUD NINE	Now a semi-detached pair, this was one cottage, owner-occupied by George Parry, 45, mason, and family. 2s.2d. James Woore* lived there in 1841 aged 60, labourer	[2]
IONA	Owner-occupied by William Dew, 55, labourer, and his wife Mary, 62. 4s.11d. A William Dew also owned 20 acres at Pencraig. £3.7s.11d.	[3]
WYND END	Owner-occupied by Thomas Bevan, who married Elizabeth Dew on December 23, 1837	[4]
HIGH VIEW	James Hoare. 3s.	[5]
CIDER MILL COTTAGE	Tenanted by Mary Abrahams, 50, washerwoman; owned by the Assignees of Louisa Biggs	[6]
CHENSTONE	Thomas Pritchard, 64, labourer , and his wife Ellen, 50. A tenement and orchard	[7]
SHOTLEY #	John Denman, 35, mason, his wife Harriett and four children, tenants of John Counsell.	[8]
ORCHARD END SUNNYSIDE	This semi-detached pair was a row of three tenements. (1) occupied by Richard Preece, owned by Elizabeth Howells of Upper Granton. (2) owner-occupier Sarah Merrick, 70. (3) owner-occupier Margaret Morton, 35.	[9]
ROCKVIEW	Tenant John Southern, 45, labourer, wife & four children; owner George Lawson Whatley Esq.	[10]
OLDFIELDS	Owner-occupied by Richard Roberts, 54, with two children, Mary, 17, and Richard, 14.	[11]
ROCKLANDS	Three cottages owned by William Henry Ross Esq. Cottages of Rocklands House. No.3 tenanted by Thomas James, 4s; No. 1 by Sarah George, 2s.2d.; No.2 was unoccupied in 1838	[12] [13] [14]

East side, sometimes known as Upper Coppett Hill:

WELL COTTAGE	Owner-occupied by *William Herbert, 70, and his, wife Martha, 60.	[15]
OVERKERNE	A single cottage owner-occupied by James Williams.	[16]

WYE NOOK	3s.6d.	
HIGH HAVEN	Owner-occupier Moses Wiles (?)	[17]
POOLE COTTAGE	Owner-occupied by Richard Jackson from Ross-on-Wye who planted orchards. 9s.3d	[18]
POOL HOUSE LODGE	Owned by Jackson; tenant William Hoare	[19]
LEESRIGG	Owned and occupied by William Hoare	[20]
BOZEAT	Tenant Benjamin Lane, 30, labourer, his wife Esther & 3 children. Owner Ann Jeremy.[Jellamy?]	[21]
BRACKEN-BANK	A tenement owner-occupied by *Thomas Morgan, the family name of present owners, 2s.2d	[22]
EASTSIDE	George Powell, 30, tailor, his wife Maria, 40, and three children, shared a tenancy with Nicholas Charles. Owner John Powell. Nil.	[23]
HIGH ACRE	Owner-occupier John Price, 65, his wife Eliza and two children. Tenement & land. 2s.8d.	[24]
CHAPEL COTTAGE #	Owner-occupier John Powell. 2s.8d. [25] [Chapel Cottage owes its name to a Primitive Methodist Chapel built later on the site and demolished in the 1970's].	[25]
BANK VIEW #	Thomas Scott, 40, his wife Ann & 3 children lived here with William Court. 1s.9d.	[26]
HILLSIDE #	Owner-occupied by Edward Woore, labourer, and his wife; daughter Sarah was a servant to Joshua Cristall.	[27]
CLIFF COTTAGE	Owner-occupier Thomas Jellamy, 75, & wife Ann. Then known as Cliff Cottage. 2s.2d	[28]
WOODBINE	Two cottages, owner-occupied by *Samuel Merry, 60, wife & daughters; and by *James Smith, 55 and his wife Eliza, 30.	[29]
WYESIDE	Let to Thomas Bullock, 28, by R.Jackson	[30]
FERRY COTTAGE	Owner-occupier June Stockings. Recently known as Stocking Boat Cottage. 4s.10d	[31]
UNKNOWN	Another cottage nearby, with two acres, which no longer exists, tenanted by James Powell owned by Ann Bellamy of Priory Farm.	[32]

OTHER FAMILIES: By 1841, three other families were living on the hill, addresses unknown : William Counsel, 35 and his wife; Samuel Gundy, 44, carpenter, his wife Sarah and 4 children; John Phelps (?), his wife Ann and six children.

COTTAGES BUILT AFTER 1841: The seven cottages listed below were built after 1841 on sites which were then described as follows:

BANNUT TREE	An orchard belonging to the Dew family who lived beside it at Iona.	[A]
WEST VIEW	On Margaret Morton's land (see Sunnyside)	[B]
ROCK BANK	A garden owned by Samuel Williams	[C]
BEARWOOD	Part of the common	[D]
LITTLE COT	Part of the common.	[E]
WOODCOTT	An orchard owned by William Gisborne who lived at the Croose.	[F]
QUARRY COTTAGE	A garden owned by James Brace, Llangarron	[G]

INDEX OF FAMILY NAMES

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	Woore 2,27

* see Other Families

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