

Nash references in Great Horwood Court Rolls 1400 - 1454

1. **Date:** Wed 5 Oct 1401 (Wed after feast of S Michael Archangel 3Hen IV) **Ref:** 3916/ 6v

Woodwards' attachments:

1. John Cook of Nassche attached in the lord's wood, gave a saw as security.
2. John Adam of Nassche attached in the lord's wood, gave an axe as security.
3. Richard Neel attached in the lord's wood.
4. Hugh [?K-----] of Nassche attached in the lord's wood. Pledged by William Coupere.
5. Richard ?Jonus attached in the lord's wood. Pledged by William Coupere.

2. **Date:** Wed 18 May 1407 (Wed in Pentecost week 8 Hen IV) **Ref:** 3916/ 15v

Woodward's attachments: *Wadeward* presents that:

William Brynkelowe <2d>, John Sloo <1d>, John Cookes <nothing> of Nasshe, Richard Candel <2d>, Geoffrey ?Tocell/Totell <2d> were attached for trespass in the lord's wood, pledged by /e *wodeward*.

3. **Date:** Tue 1 May 1436 (Tue in feast of apostles Philip, James 14 Hen VI) **Ref:** 3917/ 27 r

Breach of the peace: constables present that:

1. Thomas Parterich <1d> unjustly assaulted Robert servant of Robert Taylo'r
2. same Thomas <1d> made rescue (*fecit resc's*) on the constable
3. John Cok of Nasshe <2d> unjustly assaulted Thomas Upton with a stave (*bac'lo*) worth $\frac{1}{2}$ d, forfeit
4. John Giffard <2d> unjustly assaulted William Bron one of the king's constables with a baselard worth 6d, forfeit.

4. **Date:** Wed 22 Oct 1449 (Wed after feast of S Hillary 18 Hen VI) **Ref:** 3917/ 48 r

Property transactions etc:

It was reported that Joan Knyght had surrendered, outside court into the hands of the reeve John Hoyges, a messuage and half virgate of land with appurtenances to the use of (*ad opus*) Richard Baylly of Naysshe. Heriot is 1 ewe worth 6d, for which the reeve answers to the lord. Afterwards in the same court the lord by his special grace re-granted the messuage and land with their appurtenances to the same Joan, Holding to herself, for her life only, by the rod according to the custom of the manor, and the reversion therein to Agnes the wife of William Pernell and her heirs and assigns. Joan paid an entry fine of 2s, and did fealty. [*I don't understand this - if the surrender had been ad opus Richard Baylly, then the property should have been granted to him.*]

5. **Date:** Tue 28 Jul 1450 (Tue after feast of s Anne mother of BV Mary 28 Hen VI) **Ref:** 3917/ 48 r

Property transactions etc:

William Pernell and Agnes his wife, examined alone by the steward [*to make sure that she consented to her husband's actions*], surrendered and released all their interest and reversion in a messuage and half virgate of land which will descend to them after the death of Agnes' mother Joan Knygth (*no heriot due because Joan is the tenant for life*) to the use of (*ad opus*) Richard Brookes alias Baylly of Naysshe, Having and Holding to him and his heirs and assigns by the rod according to the custom of the manor for the rents, works and customs therefrom due and customary etc. He paid a fine for enrolling the reversion of 10s, and did fealty. [*Well, this seems partly to correct the earlier illogicality, but I still don't understand why it was done this way*]

Notes on Nash men arrested for woodcutting in Great Horwood's College Woods 1401, 1407.

The present day parish of Nash does not include any ancient woodland within its boundary (though there are a few modern plantations in the west of the parish). In the past it does not seem to have had any, either. However its people needed wood, not just for firewood, a daily necessity for cooking and heating in pre-gas and electricity times, but also for building, fencing, furniture, farm equipment and a myriad of other items essential for day-to-day life. Though Nash was adjacent to Whaddon Chase, which in the past was very much more extensive than it is today (it lay not only in the parish of Whaddon, but also those of Great and Little Horwood), and although Nash was a hamlet in the parish of Whaddon until 1854, it does not seem that the hamlet's territory included any part of the Chase.

So where did the people of Nash get their wood and timber? They were entitled to share in the pasture of Great Horwood's Great Common, which until Great Horwood's enclosure in 1842 extended over most of the northern half of its parish, from the brook just on the northern side of Great Horwood village right up to the boundary with Nash. It may be that the Great Common provided Nash with some of the firewood it needed - in the medieval period the common was probably lightly wooded - but a much more reliable source of wood in all its necessary forms would have been Whaddon Chase. They definitely had the right to pasture their animals in Whaddon Chase (see the 1694 Survey), and so may also have had rights to take wood from it, though probably only from that part which fell within the parish of Whaddon.

However the Whaddon part of the Chase lay some distance from Nash, whereas the part which fell within the parish of Great Horwood was much closer. The villagers of Great Horwood had the right to take wood from this part of the Chase, but it is uncertain whether Nash people had a similar right. What is certain, however, is that whether or not they had the right they did occasionally take wood there. The Great Horwood woods were owned by the lord of the manor of Great Horwood, and the records of that manor tell us that in the early 15th century its lord was in dispute with the men of Nash concerning their activities in his woods. The Great Horwood part of the Chase was then called Prior's Wood, as the manor belonged to the Priory of St Faith in Longueville in Normandy (whose local base was at Newton Longville), and covered an area of at least 240 acres. A large part was cleared in the 19th century and converted into farmland, but some 120 acres still remain, now called College Woods.

There follow the records of two manorial courts held in Great Horwood in 1401 and 1407, at which a number of men were prosecuted for unlawful activities in Prior's Woods (called 'the lord's woods' in the court records). Three of the men, John Cook, John Adam and Hugh K----, were stated to have been from Nash, though the others may also have been from there. The details can be found near the end of each court, in the sections headed 'Woodward's attachments'. Both entries are rather terse, and an explanation of their meaning will be found after the end of the second court.

Explanations of other parts of the records have been interpolated [*in italics*].

The Great Horwood woodwards.

Great Horwood, like many manors which contained woodland, had a number of local officials called woodwards, whose job was to protect the woods from unlawful taking of timber and underwood and from unlawful pasturing of animals there during the years when the woods were closed to livestock (so that the underwood could regenerate). They were not full-time salaried officials, but local farmers who did the job part-time. They are not often mentioned in the court rolls, but we do know a bit about them from a dispute about their remuneration which was recorded in the rolls in the early 14th century - it seems that at that time there were six of them, and they were usually chosen from among the customary tenants holding a half yardland (an average-sized farm of about 17 acres). They were elected by the village, not appointed by the lord of the manor, but such remuneration as they got was paid by the lord (in that he remitted half the rent for their

farm and allowed them the grass and hay from a meadow called Wardens' Mead) so they seem to have been at least partly manorial officials as well as representatives of the villagers.

The woods belonged to the lord of the manor, but both the lord and the tenants would have had an interest in protecting them - the tenants had rights to collect firewood and other underwood, and to pasture their stock there at certain times. These rights would have been very important to them economically, especially to the poorer inhabitants. The Horwood men would have been as keen as the lord to keep the residents of neighbouring manors, such as Nash, out of their woods!

The attachment of the Nash men

Attachment was a means by which men were forced to come to court. It could mean their physical arrest, but also meant taking valuable property as security for their appearance at the court (and for payment of any fines or damages which might be imposed), or the acceptance of a 'pledge', i.e. a guarantee that they would appear, given by someone of standing. In the present case it seems to be the two latter meanings which apply - two of the Nash men persuaded a Horwood man (William Coupere) to stand as pledge for them, but two others had to give up the axe and saw they had with them. These were valuable items. In 1401 the value of an axe used in a wounding was recorded in the court rolls: it was 3d - this may seem a small sum today, but just 30 years earlier the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 had been triggered by the imposition of a new tax which required every adult to pay just 4d every two years. A saw, which contained even more precious iron than an axe, would have been still more valuable, and was an unusually expensive item to be taken as security.

Unfortunately we know nothing more about the 1401 offences - the roll only records the fact that the men had been caught and would be dealt with later. The rolls of subsequent courts (they were usually held twice a year) do not mention the matter, so we will never know exactly what they did or what their punishments were. However they were probably something similar to the punishments imposed at the 1407 court, when the offenders were amerced a penny or twopence each (except John Cooks, who seems to have got off scot free). These were not insignificant sums, however - at that time a farm labourer could not expect to earn much more than 2d a day, or 4d during the harvest.

Interestingly at least one of them was a repeat offender - John Slow had been amerced one penny for 'trespass in the lord's wood carrying an axe' just two years before, in February 1405.

The entry immediately following the woodwards' attachments in the 1401 roll also gives some idea of how serious the matter was. It is an order that all Horwood inhabitants be alert to prevent further incursions into the lord's woods, on pain of being amerced, or fined, £5. This was an unusually large fine - 6d to 3s 4d was the normal range. A hint as to why it was regarded so seriously lies in the equipment taken as security - the axe could have been used to take either underwood or timber, but the saw could only have been used to take timber. So it seems the Nash men weren't just taking the underwood (the five- or seven-yearly regrowth of poles from pollarded and coppiced trees - used for fences or firewood) but were felling fully grown trees to obtain building timber (a very valuable resource reserved to the lord of the manor).

The right to take timber and other wood from the lord's woods

Some pains imposed by the manorial court in the 16th century throw an interesting light on the tenants' rights to collect wood, and the problem of unauthorised or excessive woodcutting:

In 1542 it was "ordained by the assent of all the tenants that no one should carry axes or other tools for cutting wood or underwood in the lord's woods nor should they cut wood or underwood, on pain of 3s 8d."

In 1515 it was ordered that "no one should carry wood by cart or on the head out of the wood called Priorswode without the licence from the lord's officials, pain 6s 8d " (this reminds me of my childhood in Africa when I would often see African women walking home from the woods with enormous bundles of firewood carried on their heads - usually with their husband strolling along behind unburdened!)

In 1583 the nearby manor of Newton Longville laid a pain that: "no tenant having half a yards land or upward in occupyng shall send his servant to the lords wood to fetch home any upon pain of 3s 4d" and "no towne dweller having under half a yard land shall goe or send to ye lords wood but only Monday Wensday and Friday and then but one in every house upon paine of 3s 4d as often, and three houres in ye stock for every tyme if they cannot paye the forfeiture" (an example of how it was recognised that the poorer inhabitants had the greatest need of free firewood from the woods).

A rental of 1320, which defined what services every customary tenant had to do for the lord, has some interesting references to their right to pasture their animals in the lord's woods, and to take wood and other resources from it:

"the aforesaid John ought to plough for the lord at the winter sowing for one day with what beasts he has in the plough, by reasonable summons three days in advance, for the reason that his plough-beasts are often pastured in the woods where they cannot be found when he wants them..."

"and he ought also to work at enclosing the lord's assart [*a field cleared from the woods*] with one man for one day and in the evening he shall have a bundle of underwood to take him with him..."

and he owes one man for one day to gather nuts for the lord if there shall be nuts in the lord's wood and after that day the said John together with the other customers [*customary tenants - ie villeins*] shall have the nuts which remain in the said wood."

The court rolls have been set out here in full, though the greater part does not relate to Nash, as they are of some interest in their own right. Nash was part of the manor of Whaddon, which would have held similar courts in Whaddon, dealing with similar matters and creating similar rolls, but unfortunately none of them have survived.

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