The Enclosure of Ludgershall Part 2 – The costs and physical effects

The previous article on the enclosure of Ludgershall dealt with the reasons why it happened. This article is concerned solely with the physical effects, the changes in the structure and geography of the village which created the village in the form which we see today. There is no doubt that a visitor, perhaps travelling down the hill from Brill, to the village he or she had known before enclosure would have been surprised at the considerable change that had taken place.

In order to better understand post-enclosure changes to the landscape of Ludgershall some knowledge of the pre-enclosure landscape is beneficial. Unfortunately very little documentary evidence exists to illustrate the pre-enclosure landscape. Only one map is known to exist showing Ludgershall pre-enclosure it was drawn circa 1568 and used as part of a legal dispute concerning the village of Wotton Underwood. The map shows the village surrounded by large areas of ‘ridge and furrow’ and also appears to show two or three small enclosures; more enclosures are known to have existed in Tetchwick. The three fields which made up the pre-enclosure parish are not clearly shown but we know from documentary evidence that they existed. The village does not appear to have had vast tracts of woodland although the map does show some woodland adjacent to the southern boundary of the village. The village lay in the purlieus of Bernwood Forest and it would therefore be reasonable to assume that at some stage it had all been forested. However growing populations probably meant that over a period of time parts of the forest were cleared of trees and turned into cultivated areas. Pre-enclosure there would have been few hedges although there is reference to a hedge in the 12th Century which formed a boundary between Ludgershall and Piddington.

In pre-enclosure Ludgershall most of the land was ‘open’ meaning that cultivation was by the strip system which created the ‘ridge and furrow’. There was no need for hedges in this type of agricultural system especially as it would have taken up large amounts of land which could have been used more productively for growing the much needed food, and have taken up a great deal of the farmers time in keeping it under control. No doubt too there would have been a great many disputes about which part of which hedge was required to be maintained by which farmer. There would not have been any need for hedges as a means of livestock control as all the livestock of the village was herded together and was under constant supervision by shepherds or cowmen. Thus pre-enclosure Ludgershall would have looked quite flat, have very few hedges, a limited number of trees and have just a few tracks going around the village and then out to other nearby villages. Enclosure was to radically change all this over a matter of three or four years.

One of the most striking changes to the landscape of Ludgershall post-enclosure was the miles and miles of hedges which delineated the new fields. The new fields which formed the ‘patchwork’ landscape which we instantly recognise today. The Enclosure Act stipulated the plants to be used to create the field boundaries stating that they should be made; ‘with quickset hedges well and sufficiently planted and guarded on one side by a ditch and by post and rail or stake hedges on both sides.’ ‘Quickset’ was the term used at the time to describe live slips or cuttings of what we would know today as hawthorn, which were pushed into the ground along the new boundary. These new boundaries did not take into account the existing ‘ridge and furrow’ and even today we are able to see areas where the new boundary was placed across ridges. The cost of all this hedging naturally fell to the new owner of the field and for larger landowners this would have been very expensive. However, as in common with many other Enclosure Awards across the country the Reverend
Martyn, the then Rector of Ludgershall and thus freeholder of the Church property was not required to pay for the hedging of his lands. All the other recipients of land had to pay his costs proportionally to the area of land which they received. They were probably not best pleased to have had to pay a share of the £622 6s 6d bill!

Today most of the hedges planted at the time of enclosure still remain. Ludgershall has not suffered the fate of some areas where hedges have been grubbed up to accommodate new farming practices and larger machinery. Many of the hedges still contain a great deal of hawthorn but all now have other species growing within them such as elm, ash, oak, dog rose and bramble. Many of the new hedges were planted in straight lines and this can easily be seen on any Ordnance Survey map of the area. Where the field lines are less straight it usually indicates an existing watercourse or one that has since dried up or one of the very old enclosures where straight lines were not as common.

The Commissioners having created the fields by survey then allocated them to a specific farmer, they did this in such a way as to try and create as little argument as possible. The following extract from the Enclosure Act shows just how detailed their descriptions of who was to own which filed was.

‘To the said Ralph Griffin owner of one half of one yardland divers odd lands and common right thereto belonging in and over the said field by the said Act directed to be divided and inclosed and in lieu thereof and of all other his rights and properties in and over the said field. One plot of ground being parcel of the said open and common field and commonable land by the said Act directed to be divided and inclosed containing seventeen acres one rood and twenty-eight perches including all roads passing through and over the same as now admeasured staked and set out Bounded on the north or north east by the said Turnpike Road and the east or south east and north by the said old inclosed grounds in Ludgershall aforesaid called Tetchwick inclosures on the south by an allotment herein awarded to the said John Harris and on the west or north west by an allotment herein awarded to the said Richard Griffin on the north or north east next the said Turnpike Road and on the south next an allotment herein awarded to the said John Harris. They the said Commissioners parties to the presents do award order and direct shall be made at all times thereafter maintained and kept in repair by and at the expense of the said Ralph Griffin and the owners of this allotment for the time being.’

With each allotment set out in such precise terms there would seem to have been little room for argument as to who owned what.

Having defined the fields and the allotments which each person was to receive, the Commissioners then had to make provision for everyone to move freely throughout the village without causing problems with lack of access or trespass. This they did by setting out and defining public and private roads and footways. The Award for Ludgershall defines some twenty-five public and private roads and footways. In some cases existing routes were used and in other instances new routes were created. Each route however was carefully described in the Award document as can be seen from the following extract;
'One public carriage and drift road leading from the north east corner of and old enclosure called Little Close belonging to Elizabeth Burrows and herein exchanged with Thomas Lambourne through and over part of the west side of the allotment herein awarded to the said Roland Platt by the east side of lands allotted to and taken in exchange by Thomas Lambourne through and over part of the east and north east side of an allotment herein awarded to the said James Burrows through and over part of the east or north east side of an allotment to the said Richard Drope Gough for his land out of settlement and over part of the north west of the same allotment to the said Rowland Platt into the said Turnpike Road being part of the road from Ludgershall to Bicester and Aylesbury aforesaid.'

The road so described we would know today as the Bicester Road and it still follows the route set out in the Award. The Commissioners ordered that the public roads should be sixty feet in width and the Bicester Road to this day remains so. The metalled surface is only fifteen feet wide but the wide verges make up the sixty feet. This may appear wasteful to the modern day observer but would have been very important at the time of Enclosure when the roadways, no more than tracks as we recognise them today would have become badly rutted in poor weather conditions. Having a route sixty feet wide enabled those who moved along them to choose the best route. The Turnpike Road mentioned in the Award was of course the A41, this too was sixty feet wide and the Commissioners stated that they had made no change to this road.

As well as routes for the horse or oxen drawn traffic of the time the Commissioners also set out the route of footways. The following describes the footway from Ludgershall towards Piddington and thence to Arncott;

‘Also one other public foot road branching out of the second described part of the footway from Ludgershall to Piddington at the entrance of the second allotment to the Trustees of Pembroke College in Oxford aforesaid and through and over the same through and over the second allotment to the said John Collins and also through and over the allotment to the said Thomas Martyn and his successors rector as aforesaid in lieu of tithes of the said open and common fields to a certain stile called Dead Queens Stile in Ludgershall aforesaid being part of the foot road leading from Ludgershall towards Arncote in the said County of Oxford.’

The Commissioners as they did with the public and private roads prescribed the width of these footways, they also indicated that several of the footways were in existence before Enclosure.

‘All of which said several public foot roads they the said Commissioners parties to these presents do award order shall be and remain of the breadth of four feet as now set out and shall severally be and remain public foot roads for the use of all persons whatsoever and are meant and intended to go on using the same tracks on which the present footways respectively go.’

There is no doubt that the Enclosure Act when enacted in the parish of Ludgershall caused great change to the landscape. Instead of a series of open vistas those living then would have seen a gradual change to the present day patchwork landscape we recognise today. Views would have been gradually occluded by ever taller trees and thicker hedges, new routes would have become accepted as the norm, some farmhouses would have been built nearer the land of the new occupant thus further reducing the need to travel. In short, leaving aside the personal and social implications of enclosure, as far as the physical change to the landscape was concerned it was far reaching and as can be seen today in an almost unchanged pattern, as permanent as any previous changes made.
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