

AVON 1958

Visitors to the straggling village of Avon can be certain of hearing one legendary story, guaranteed to send a cold chill down their spine!



The New Queen, popular roadside inn at Avon

You will hear it talked about over a pint at the "local", the New Queen, and if you chat with any of the villagers they are bound to mention the story before the conversation has gone very far.

It was at an old forge at Avon where Sir Walter Tyrell is reputed to have had the shoes of his horse turned round when escaping from the New Forest after shooting William Rufus. It is also said that after the blacksmith had turned the shoes, Sir Walter killed him and then fled across the river, known as Tyrell's Ford.

Some villagers claim that the old forge near the New Queen is the one in the story, but others say the building in which the "deed

was done" is no longer to be seen and was about half a mile further along the road towards Bisterne.

Whether the blacksmith was killed by Sir Walter is not exactly known, but time does, sometimes, add extra detail to these old stories.

It is recorded that at Tyrell's Ford a smithy long existed which had always been said to pay a yearly fine to the Crown because the blacksmith assisted Sir Walter in his flight.

But when the Fane family, owners of the property, redeemed their Forest dues great pains were taken to trace the supposed fine and its commutation, but in vain. Nothing could be found about either one or the other in the Fane papers or in the Land Record Office.

THE RUFUS STONE.

The "Rufus Stone" can be seen in the New Forest and the inscription says:

"Here stood the oak tree on which an arrow, shot by Sir Walter Tyrell at a stag, glanced and struck King William II, surnamed Rufus, on the breast; of which stroke he instantly died, on the 2nd of August, 1100."

"King William II, surnamed Rufus, being slain as before related, was laid in a cart belonging to one Purkess, and drawn from hence to Winchester, and buried in the Cathedral Church of that city."

"That the spot where an event so memorable had happened might not hereafter be unknown, this stone was set up by John Lord Delaware, who had seen the tree growing in this place, anno 1745. This stone having been much mutilated and the inscription on each of its three sides defaced, this more durable memorial (a triangular cast iron case) with the original inscription was erected in the year 1841 by William Sturges Bourne, Warden."

The assertions of the inscription would seem to admit no doubt as to the place or manner of the King's death.

"MONSTER OF CRUELTY"

It is said that there would have been many who would have gladly assisted providence to get rid of a man whom they could only regard as a monster of cruelty and oppression. It sounded natural to say that it happened in the excitement of the chase, and it was not a bad idea to say that the hand that sped the arrow was Tyrell's as there was no known cause of enmity between him and the King, so that if he shot him it must have been accidental.

His flight gave colour to the accusation and made it look as if he had more to do with it than he admitted. Tyrell himself always denied it, and probably with truth, for it was hardly to be doubted that the hand that drew the bowstring was under orders from a distance, and there were always plenty of men who could be hired to do the church's bidding, and they would feel that those who gave them the task were quite able to protect them from any inconvenient consequences.

Tyrell's flight might well have been prompted by unwillingness to run any risk of having to play the part of scapegoat. He also knew, of course, that the news of the King's death would be eagerly looked for abroad, and in those days the only way for news to travel was by special messenger, so he fled towards Ringwood. Whatever the truth behind the story, there is no doubt that it lends itself to those eager to "spin a yarn" about the dim and distant past.

Coach parties stare with wonder as the story is related when passing the old forge near the New Queen. Whether this was the actual building or whether extra details have been embroidered into the story does not really matter, it all adds to the picturesque traditions which shroud the small villages of the Avon Valley. Other historical records state that at the time of the Domesday Survey, Avon belonged to Hugh de Port and on the death of his descendant, Edmund de St. John, in 1349, the reversion of the two knight's fees in the New Forest, Avon and other places, after the death of his widow, Elizabeth, passed to his elder sister,



Mr. "Bill" Peckham, aged 87, is one of Avon's oldest personalities.

Margaret, and her husband. In the 14th century the Manor of Avon Tyrell was held by the Tyrell family. The present Lord Manners' family bought the estate in 1815. His father built Avon Tyrell, now a youth hostel, about 1900, after occupying the house known as Tyrells Ford. Lord Manners followed his father at Avon Tyrell but returned to Tyrells Ford at the beginning of the last war. Lord Manners' father was a great horseman and it was in 1882 that he won the Grand National on his own horse, "Seaman", which was bred and trained in Ireland.

Of the many farm labourers' in the Avon district, Mr. Wesley Fry, of Pink Cottage, claims the longest service on any one farm.

He moved to Avon from Christchurch in 1913 to work for Lord Manners on the London Farm and he is still working there, although now only two days a week, for he officially retired about 12 months ago.

The farm is now worked by T. L. Dampney, who has been there for about 33 years.

PRESENTATION.

Mr. Fry was last year presented with the Royal Agricultural Society of England's certificate, signed by the Duke of Edinburgh, president, and medal for 43 years' service as a farm labourer. They were presented to him by Sir George Meyrick at the annual dinner of the South Avon and Stour Agricultural Society. He also holds the South Avon and Stour Agricultural Society's certificate for long service which he received in 1956.

Although I was unable to trace any stories of smuggling at Avon, Mr. Fry pointed out what was thought to have been a smugglers' cave in a local field. This, he said, was discovered some years ago when some of the local men decided to unearth the cave "just out of curiosity".

FAVOURITE MEETING PLACE.

The New Queen is a favourite meeting place of many villagers around the district. When the building first became a public house or when it was actually built is not known but it is believed there was an inn called the Old Queen further along the road.

There is no trace of the Old Queen and on the site where it is reputed to have been there are now two cottages.

Popular manager of the New Queen is Mr. E. M. Worsley, who has been there for the past three years. A well-known "regular" at the New Queen is 87-year-old Mr. Walter William Peckham, known to his friends as "Bill".

Mr. Peckham moved to Avon from Bagnum at the age of five. He attended school at Sopley, walking the two miles there and back each day, and started work at the age of 13 at a Bisterne farm. He left there after just over four years and then worked for Mr. Edward Bramble at a Ripley farm for 50 years.

DARTS TEAM.

Doing quite well in the Christchurch and District Darts League is the New Queen team, captained by Mr. William Foster. The team's hard working treasurer is 75-year-old Mr. Walter Foote, chairman is Mr. Clifford Lawence and Mr. Arthur Bines is secretary.

Catching the eye of visitors to the inn is a replica of the Schneider trophy. Mr. Worsley's brother Flt. Lieut. O. E. Worsley, was a member of the team and came second in 1927.

Avon is regarded as very good farming land. The flat, light soil brings the best out of crops and it is said that local farmers can be seen working on the land within an hour of a heavy shower of rain whereas in other parts of the country they have to wait sometimes two days.

One of the biggest farms in the area is Avon Tyrell, tenanted for the past 20 years by Mr. J. S. Whittle. Some of the most up-to date equipment is used on this farm which covers about 420 acres.

The remains of an old mill have been discovered on a site near the farmhouse and during dredging last year an old grinding stone was recovered from the river bed.

Avon has a special attraction for river anglers and during the season many visitors from all parts of the country travel to the area to enjoy their sport in beautiful surroundings.