**Long Liversedge: The Green and the Liversedge Stocks**

**What we know**

1. A hand drawn map of Liversedge called “ A Survey of Liversedge Manner” in West Yorkshire Archive with a date around 1700 shows three hamlets, one of which is Long Liversedge. This is depicted as stretching alongside a central road called Heigh Street (now Halifax Road) between what is now Knowler Hill and Quaker Lane (which was originally Townend Lane) (for obvious reason). The centre for Long Liversedge is around Middle Hall.

Around 27 properties are shown, of which there is depicted larger buildings which appear to correlate with Lower Hall, Haigh Hall and Middle Hall. It is not possible to see any more detail, for instance whether there are stocks at the visible entry to Lower Hall. Whether the other properties shown are the actual dwellings or, very possibly, illustrative, is not known.

1. Moving on to Jim Summerscales’ map of 1803 we see that the area in the vicinity of where the stocks now stand has numerous buildings, standing back away from the road, including an access to Lower Hall. The stocks are not shown. Around the stocks is entirely open.

Of particular interest on the 1803 map is the quadrant on the east side of the main road junction with the entry to Lower Hall which has no buildings on it. This is believed to be and is depicted as a green. Along the frontage with what is now Halifax Road, there is a ditch in which a water flow is apparent. Immediately adjacent to the east is shown a large and rather angular pond. There are no buildings on the west quadrant to the junction either, shown as Croft, and it is not depicted by Jim as part of the village green. This area is currently grassed.

1. Taking his information from deeds in 1803, Jim identified each building and enclosure and who owned it at that time. Thus Lower Hall and the group of buildings around it including a malt kiln and shop are all listed as owned by Joseph Radcliffe. Neither the green nor the pond have an identified owner. Presumably Jim identified both areas from information garnered from adjacent deeds.

It can be seen that Radcliffe was a great landowner in the area. Almost certainly this is the same Sir Joseph Radcliffe, resident of Rudding Hall near Harrogate, who gave land for a pub in Roberttown called the Radcliffe Arms (the building of which still stands). In the vicinity of Lower Hall Radcliffe also owned a field called Pond Close.

1. Turning now to Jim Summerscales’ 1834 map . We see some changes. What was previously shown as the green remains but the field known as Pond Close now includes the area of the former pond, now gone. On the area shown as the green a linear building appears. This is one and the same as now numbered 196-200 Halifax Road. Initially this was a house with a cattle barn and weaving rooms above. Again, no stocks are shown. The remaining land of this

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part of the green (i.e. behind current 206-202) remained open and is still referred to as Croft. There is no change on the 1851\* map.

1. In the latter part of the 19th century a terrace was built west of Lower Lane on the roadside plus a short terrace of back to backs east of Lower Lane. Behind this terrace the former green remained an open space. A terrace of back to backs was built behind what is now 212-214, where there is currently a grassed open space maintained after a fashion by the council. These buildings all appear on the 1894 map. There is no change on the 1922 map.
2. We know from Frank Peel’s book “Spen Valley Past and Present” (Page 186) he reports that **a**fter 1690 the village carpenters John Farrer of Liversedge and John Sympson of Heckmondwike, were often engaged in “*mendyng ye stocks*”, or in “*makynge new stocks*” . Peel remarks at the time of his writing that in spite of complaints and protestations, the authorities seem loth to touch these relics of antiquity. Continuing he says;

“These dreaded instruments for the punishment of vagrants and drunkards were generally placed near the church, or on the village green, but in the case of Liversedge there being no church they were placed in front of Lower Hall, the residence of Squire Green, who would doubtless at that time be considered the most important person in the township. As new property has been built all round them they look at present in a very incongruous position, but at the time they were set up there the surroundings would be altogether different. The Lower Hall would then stand back a little from the main road, with nothing in front but its garden, and the stocks would thus be outside the hall gates and close to the highway, so that all passers by could see the occupants”.

1. The source of some of Peel’s information are the Town’s Books. That is, books kept by the parish constables and overseers in which receipts and expenditure of the township are duly chronicled. For Liversedge, the oldest such book is dated from 1682, but there is a detached leaf, he says, belonging to a previous book with a 1670 date and indicative of earlier books.
2. Peel says that in 1690 Thomas Beevor of Little Liversedge (Littletown) was chosen as chief constable, a largely honorary post held for one year with certain fiscal responsibilities. It was his entry that refers to the repair of the stocks. A further entry by Beevor refers to a bill for “repayring and for erecting and keeping in repayre the parish stocks”. There is also a reference to a “whipping post”. Peel then theorises that one of the stock posts doubled as a whipping post and was furnished with an iron clamp to which the offender was chained. There is no direct evidence of this on the stocks.

 9 When Charles II died the proclamation ceremony for the ascent of James II to the throne

 was announced on Liversedge Greene according to Peel. Taking his information from the Town

 Books he tells us the event cost 4 shillings.

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1. In 1690 or shortly afterwards Peel reports that an inquest took place into the death of John Watson who was “accidentally slayne at a sledge throwing on ye green “. This centuries old game was a competition as to who could throw the sledge furthest. As in sledgehammer. 40-50 yards would be a very good throw. It would appear that Watson was struck by a hammer. The Lower Hall green is just about big enough for sledging.
2. Lower Hall was built in 1660 by William Green (Greene), nephew of Lieutenant Green of Liversedge Hall. The Green family made their money from trading in cloth. Frank Peel again tells us that the building is something in the gothic style, having three gables in front and a large projecting porch with stone seats within it. A sundial on the porch was dated 1660. It is not known who after William Green was the owner/resident there but in 1803 it was still in the portfolio of landed gentry (Sir John Radcliffe). In its later years the hall became tenemented and out of repair and was condemned and demolished in 1939. It is said some of the stone went to the U.S. but certainly the internal woodwork of the Oak Room was stripped out by the contractor and auctioned off by Robersons of Knightsbridge. Now somewhere in the Home Counties?
3. The terrace built to the west of Lower Lane, behind the frontages terrace, was demolished and the area grassed by Spenborough Council in the 1960s when many other out of repair houses were declared unfit for habitation in the locality. The land then passed to Kirklees Council in 1974. As for the open space on the east side of Lower Lane, behind the frontage properties, this remained open apart from the frontage properties until around 20 years ago when a single stone bungalow and garage was built. The council insisted this was built in coursed stone. The remainder comprises of the rear garden of nos 196-198 Halifax Road. The owner there asserts with justification that the rear wall to the garden is the same wall as is seen to the front of Lower Hall itself, in an old photograph.

**Discussion**

The critical source of information for the period preceding 1803 is Frank Peel and the information he collected, primarily from the Liversedge Town Books, insofar as Liversedge Green and the stocks are concerned. Although it can be trendy to criticise Peel (for his pro-establishment stance) he more usually turns out to be correct when corroboration emerges. Thus there is little or no reason for doubt when he cites extracts from the 1690 Town Book, particularly as he uses actual quotations.

But Peel also refers to a maypole and to faction fights with people from Gomersal. In these cases it is more likely that the green he is referring to is actually the green at Little Liversedge, now Littletown, which he also calls Liversedge Green, and says it is next to the River Spen. On which green the sledge slaying took place is anyone’s guess. Indeed the James II ceremony could also have been at Littletown.

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We know that the cucking stool was definitely there as it is well detailed and was sited on the green, next to the Beck, for obvious reasons.

Littletown at that time- judging by the number of buildings- was as populous as Long Liversedge and Jim Summerscales’ map shows a large green next to the Spen Beck and an orchard opposite. It is not hard to see this being an attractive location, at least until industry polluted the Beck. Littletown lacked the prestige of Long Liversedge as it had no great halls and was located in a subordinate place with respect to local highways. Indeed there wasn’t even a through road to Cleckheaton until well after 1800.

So there must be a question over whether *any* of the references to Liversedge Green by Frank Peel relate to the green at Lower Hall. Indeed, when he describes the location of the stocks his text rather reads as though the location is an alternative to them being on the green. Possibly, at the time of writing, he was unaware there had been a green at Lower Hall. This does not weaken what he has to say about the stocks, since as mentioned earlier, he quotes directly from the town book of 1690. So clearly some clarification would be helpful about the nature of the supposed green at Lower Hall. But of the location of the stocks there is no room for doubt.

There is a local belief, quite widespread, that the stocks were once in a different position from where they now stand. But there is not one scintilla of evidence they have ever been moved.

So is there a relationship between the Green (or Greene) family, Lower Hall, the green and the stocks? Here we get into further debate.

Lower Hall was built in 1660. At that time the entire frontage to Heigh Street was open. Why did the Greens not avail themselves of the opportunity to have a roadside position? There could be many reasons. One might be that it was indeed a village green and they didn’t own it. But a house and cattle byre was built there between 1803 and 1834 (according to map evidence) suggesting someone or some body owned the green at that time and was able to sell off a part of it and maybe even fill in the village pond. But Jim Summerscales does not show an owner.

Why were the stocks there? Stocks were usually or commonly placed near a church or at the least a centre of some significance in the area. At Hartshead they were/are at the church. In East Bierley, on the village green . In Clecheaton they were near today’s town hall. In Liversedge there wasn’t a church. Peel speculates that they were placed in front of the residence of Squire Green, the most important person in the township. This is suggestive of a post 1660 construction date. If there was a green there at the time, this could be an added reason.

Importantly, Heigh Street served as the main road from Wakefield to Halifax and was, from the 17th century, the most important road in the entire district. Halifax being the main town. The stagecoach from London was tagged the Halifax Stagecoach and departed from near today’s Euston Station.

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 There was no such stop for the small trading post of Leeds. A painting of the Halifax Stagecoach (aka mail coach} is in Doncaster Art Gallery (attached image). As Frank Peel makes clear, stocks had to be in full view of passers- by, to obtain the deterrence by humiliation effect.

Were the stocks built at the same time as Lower Hall, or shortly after, by the Green family? (See above). This presupposes the stocks were not there already. But even if they weren’t this would seem unlikely. Firstly there is no evidence the Greens owned that bit of land, though they could have. But primarily the Greens were a famous family of Quakers, enured to persecution themselves. It seems most improbable they would sponsor stocks for the rather arbitrary punishment of others. Unless, possibly, the Quakers were teetotal and the stocks were primarily for drunkards! So this all suggests the stocks may already have there in 1660.

Then there is the evidence of the maintenance of the stocks. Peel tells us this was financed by funds held by the chief constable. Where exactly he got his money from is not clear, but the responsibility would appear to be the community, rather than any individual or family. Lastly, the fact that no-one has dug up and removed the stocks, and the land they stand on is unregistered\*\*, would tend to point to a common ownership that has simply been forgotten over time.

England's [Statute of Labourers 1351](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statute_of_Labourers_1351) prescribed the use of the stocks for "unruly artisans" and required that every town and village erect a set of stocks. Did Liversedge comply? As a significant village, likely.

What were the stocks used for? We have no knowledge that the stocks were ever used other than for the local humiliation of troublemakers, for a few hours, such as drunks and the like as described by Peel. If they were used more seriously then there would be more evidence, indeed any evidence. That they provided a useful service is evident from their maintenance and upkeep over a very long period until decline and disuse in the early 19th century.

As for the wear and tear of the stocks we can say with confidence the repair of the stocks shows they were there in 1690 and in need of repair. Peel tells us that. At the very least, the boards would be made of timber, probably hardwood and the fixings would be iron. These would take a few years to deteriorate to the point repairs were needed. If the stocks were stone from the beginning and the fixings were bedded in lead (as evident now) then deterioration would be slower still. The lead allowed for the expansion of iron as it rusted. But this is speculation as an exceptional event might damage the stocks, even if fairly new, warranting a repair. But the stocks could have been ancient, even by 1690. They could even date back to 1351 or shortly after.

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**Conclusions**

A very great deal more could doubtless be found about the history of this local area, as it has so many buildings of rich historic interest. These histories *may also* cast more light on the green, the stocks and other perhaps earlier communal properties, such as the rumoured medieval pinfold (for holding stray cattle).

The thin record to date of the Lower Hall green is presented above. All we can say is that it very likely existed before the middle of the 17th century and could well pre-date that period, even by hundreds of years. But it may well have been subordinate to the green at Little Liversedge.

As for the stocks, they were likely erected at public expense before 1690 and were communally owned, and maintained. The location was central to the locality, in a prestigious location and adjacent to the main road and appropriate for the punishment of minor offenders. They could be as old as 669 years.

**NOTES**

This paper compiled using information and research by Judith and Andrew Gilpin and extracted from

Frank Peel, Spen Valley Past and Present

Gillian Cookson Spen Valley Old Picture Postcards

Alan Godfrey Old Ordnance Survey Maps

The Spen Valley Story (Barbara Lumb)

Maps and deed schedules prepared by Jim Summerscales

Liversedge Town Books (More research needed)

West Yorkshire Archives and the Archaeology Service (Ditto)

Roberson Auctioneers

Meetings with Paul Hargreaves, joint owner of 196-98 Halifax Road.

\*The first ordnance survey map was prepared from surveys starting in 1848 but was not published until 1854

\*\*half of the right hand stone is on land registered to Dee and Patricia Broadfield, owners of 206 Halifax Road. (Land Registry search).

ADDENDUM

The stocks are listed as of historical or architectural interest, but inaccurately dated on the Historic England database as late 18th or 19th century.

Compiled by Max Rathmell Revised July 2020

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