

Westfield Common Dispute

Extracts from Fred Blessley's notes:

It was in January 1930, I found myself jammed close against a bulky seafaring man and the parson sitting on a very low infants-school form at the back of the old army hut, Hamble Memorial Hall. The room was packed, our knees were up to our chins, thick plug-tobacco smoke made visibility bad, I could hardly breathe, and those forms were terribly hard. Nevertheless, it was significant so I think, that the Padre was not on the platform that night. We knew, afterwards, that he knew what was coming.

The gathering was a Special Parish Meeting convened to hear an important statement. It was announced from the platform that the Chairman of the Parish Council was unavoidably absent. The chief speaker on the platform, a complete stranger, explained "that he had come with the friendliest intention towards the people of Hamble." The speaker was a South African businessman, Major Charles Goldman, who had bought Sydney Lodge and its estate.

He said the Lord of the Manor, Winchester College, had sold to him Westfield Common (tith No.185) eight acres, for £1,500, and he wasn't such a mug as to spend all that money until he had satisfied himself that he had a good title. Lord Muir, one of the greatest authorities on law, and Lord Selbourne had been consulted and both had given favourable opinions.

At this time a gentleman rose from his front seat and expressed his own and the meeting's pleasure that the speaker was coming to live permanently in our midst.

"E's got plenty o' dough!" murmured a voice.

Addressing the Chair, he thought that the new owner of that Common had paid a big price for a big bag of trouble. In his opinion, the gentleman had not bought and could not buy the right to turn the parishioners off that land.

After an unfavourable decision by South Stoneham RDC, the local "responsible authority", Westfield Common was fenced in and a gate went up across Coach Road at the entrance to the Common. Permission to go on the Common was obtainable from the big house where the new owner had taken up residence with his family. It was to the credit of Hamble that no parishioners went to big house for permission to go on it. Parishioners resentment was shown when the gate was removed several times. The climax arrived when a new gate appeared, chained and padlocked.

One dark and rainy night a gang, women & all, again visited the spot. Joe Lockyer's hacksaw blade went through that chain as though it was butter. The gate a heavy one, was placed in the ditch. After that, when the gate was replaced a custodian stood by, with frequently a policeman in attendance.

The Hamble Parish Council was disunited, and the Hampshire County Council was dumb. At this time everyone expected that the case would have to be settled in a court of law. The Parish Council was not inclined to start spending money that way.

I decided to stage a police court case on my own, and find out just what my status as a parishioner was worth. I went down and was stopped at the re-erected gate by the custodian who took my name and address, while the policeman looked on. The parish copper was a friendly sort of chap, and a neighbour. After carefully taking his number I asked him if he was on duty there for the purpose of obstructing me on the highway, or if he was there as a witness to the custodian obstructing me. He said he was there to prevent any breach of the peace. The custodian opened the gate, and as I went through I told them I was going to park the car* on the common within fifteen feet from the road.

I never received a summons. Henceforth the gate was left un-attended and apparently the custodian found another job. It was now obvious that nobody had an inclination to go to court.

** Part of the dispute was regarding if 'Green Lane', which ran from Coach Road to the Westfield Common Foreshore, was a path or a cart track, hence his use of a car.*

Fred Blessley lived in Satchell Lane and was a piano tuner and pensioner. He became a Parish Councillor in 1931 and was Chairman in 1937.

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