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Report as to the Manor of Doccombe

The Manor of Doccombe is leased by the Dean & Chapter of Canterbury to George Gregory for 21 years from 1815. It is a Copyhold manor. All the lands therein being grantable by the copy of Court Roll for 3 lives successively of which 2 may be granted in reversion (that is without surrender of the life in possession) and the widow of each tenant dying in possession is entitled to hold for her widowhood – an heriot of the tenants best beast is due on the death of each life in possession – the rents reserved on the Copyholds amount to £16 16s 9½d the same Rent as is reserved to the Dean & Chapter.

Particular		
Tenement	Acres	Yearly Value £
by Mr Gregory's Acc[oun]t in 1823		
North Kingwell & Harcourt	76	75
South Kingwell	50	20
Cossick	100	45
South Doccombe etc	100	45
Mills & part Broomhill	8	18
other part of Broomhill	14	20
Knaphole	30	20
North Doccombe	22	23
Coombe	22	14
Stacombe	40	32
Black Marshes	10	7
Duck Moor Cot	0	
Smalridges	104	55
<i>{Totals}</i>	576	434

The above value is considered by Mr Gregory to be the present rent, he admits that the farms were let in the highest war time for double the above but that there are peculiarly – the lands which are affected by the low price of corn suppose the war rents to be £800 and the same to be subject to a deduction of near one third, it would leave the present value about £550 – the lands are situate in the neighbourhood of the granite hills of Dartmoor

and are interspersed of Granet [*sic*] rocks above the surface. Mr Gregory has at a great expense removed rocks and cultivated and improved the ground.

There are 2 Commons belonging to the Manor Hingston Common which belongs to South Kingwell and Harcourt Estates and two thirds of Mardon Common belonging to the other tenements. Mr Gregory makes the total acres including the Commons and woods to be near 800. There are 2 Oak Coppice Woods of about 40 acres each called Colridge Wood and Saint Thomas Cleave Wood one of them in an exposed situation and the growth very slow, and the other in a sheltered situation, and well adapted for growing Cops or Timber. In these 2 woods the Copyhold tenants of the Manor claim and exercise the right to cut and take wood for stakes that is for making their fences of their estates at their free will and pleasure without limitation. The tenant of Leane {Leign} a demesne estate in the Parish leased to the Dean & Chapter has also a similar wood right – and the natural consequence of such right is the destruction of the woods.

If these Copyhold Wood rights could be gotten rid off the Woods might be worth to be let for 25 years perhaps from £40 to £50 a year or would produce the Lord that amount on an average of years if kept in hand –

The tenants have no right to insist upon Renewal of the Copyhold estates – Copyholds of this kind are common in the West of England and no Idea was ever suggested of a right to insist on renewal. In fact Mr Gregory grants no Copies and nearly half the Manor is by lapse of the lives fallen into his hand and the lives on the other Estates are so old that in the course of a few years he will have the beneficial Interest in possession of the whole. Mr Gregory having laid out a large sum of money in improving the property is desirous of renewing the lease, but he would sell his interest to the Dean & Chapter. He says he was once offered £20,000 for his lease. He would sell it for £8000.

If this Manor was held under lease from the Dean & Chapter of Exeter and they were to set a fine for renewing 7 years in 21 they would ask 33/ 80th parts of the value or supposing the yearly value to be £550 about £220. Mr Gregory has offered £150 for the renewal.

If the Dean & Chapter wish to get rid of leasing the Manor in this way they can do nothing but let the lease run out and then the lessee would immediately before the expiration fill up all the Copies with 3 lives and the Chapter would then have to renew lives as they happen to drop. Perhaps in the case of a Manor at this distance from the church and of such inferior quality the Chapter would not think such a course necessary. If the lessee chose to pay a fair equivalent for the renewal the rate of fine charged by the Chapter of Exeter was settled by Mr Morgan's Calculation and it may be just equal to the value by calculation, but where a lessee has in fact obtained a more beneficial mode of managing the property

by letting Copies fall in it may be fair to charge him for a renewal at a higher rate say half a year's value.

But there is one arrangement which is obviously for the benefit of the property to the Church and which with Mr Gregory's assistance might be effected without much difficulty that is the putting an end to the Wood rights and either reserving and keeping the woods in the hands of the Chapter, or leasing them, Mr Gregory under such stipulations as may ensure their best improvement for Coppice and Timber. For this purpose, it will be necessary to inspect them and point out the proper regulations, but it is quite obvious at once that such an arrangement would be highly beneficial, and it meets the concurrence and approbation of Mr Gregory who really seems to take an interest in the Property unusual for a Lessee. Having so much of the Manor in hand, he thinks he can easily purchase at moderate sums and surrender of the remaining copyhold wood right, or if any were unreasonable on their demands, their rights might remain outstanding, but it would be better to get all surrendered.

If the Chapter intend to renew the Lease I should advise them to state to Mr Gregory in the first Instance that it must be upon the Condition of a Surrender of all the Wood rights and in that case the Woods to be granted by lease to Mr Gregory for 21 years to be held by him exempt from all Copyhold Rights and with proper conditions for encouraging the growth of Coppice and Timber. The Coppice to be cut only in regular average quantities according to the rule to be pointed out by the Chapter's surveyor and for this purpose I should beg to recommend for integrity intelligence and moderation of charges Mr Coldridge the Surveyor employed by the Chapter of Exeter and who has the management of a large wood for Kings College in the neighbourhood of Doccombe.

Exeter November 29th 1823

{*Signed*} Ralph Barnes