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**The Road through Horfield: a reinterpretation of Samuel Seyer's
notebook on the parish**

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The Road through Horfield: a reinterpretation of Samuel Seyer's notebook on the parish

By DENIS WRIGHT

There are several accounts of an ancient trackway from Bristol through Horfield to Aust ferry. One of them¹ describes in detail the route of an old lane through the parish, another² includes a photograph of a wayside inn called the Ship, and a third³ provides photographs of part of the trackway and of the inn. The trackway is also mentioned in a short history of the parish church compiled in 1992. The source of those accounts is *Horfield Miscellanea*, published in 1906 by Fanshawe Bingham, rector of the parish 1879–99. This is his description of the ancient trackway from the point where it enters the medieval parish.

... so far as I can ascertain, the highway started at the foot of the present Zetland Road, ascending up by the present pathway, which crosses Egerton Road and passes by the Bishop's Road Board School, and along the back of the gaol towards Quab Farm, and thence by the piece of Common at the back of the 'Poplars', now called 'Ardagh', to the gateway by Hughenden Road, and skirting the boundary wall of Horfield Lodge, continues along the fence of the Rectory field, past the ruins of the cottage spoken of by Mr Seyer, and so on to the North Common, past the Church and 'Ship' Ale House and Manor Farm to Charlton, Compton, Pilning and Aust.⁴

The story of the road was important to Bingham. It was part of his attempt to prove that Horfield church was founded by St. Augustine as he travelled from Bristol to Aust to meet the British bishops in 603. There are two main problems with his account. The first is that there is no recorded evidence for the existence of such a road or trackway, and Bingham does not offer any, though he appears to think that the road was in constant use until the mid 18th century. The second problem lies in Bingham's interpretation of his main source, a notebook⁵ kept by Samuel Seyer, perpetual curate of Horfield 1813–28. Though Bingham was aware of Seyer's reputation as a Bristol historian, reading *Memoirs of Bristol and its Neighbourhood*⁶ and claiming in his introduction to *Horfield Miscellanea* that the notebook 'first gave me the idea of making researches into the past history of the parish', he fell short of Seyer's example of 'painstaking and learned'⁷ work based on the 'collection and accurate transcription of original material'.⁸ Notebooks, by their nature, are usually open to interpretation. Seyer's notes about the road are brief and sometimes ambiguous. Bingham clearly had to make choices in his reading of them, but he offers no explanation for the conclusions he reaches. His treatment of Seyer's notes is inconsistent and his transcription of them is inaccurate. He also misrepresents the copy he made of Seyer's sketch map of Horfield. Some of those lapses may have been genuine oversights, but not all of them were. Bingham seems to have felt that a little reorganization of the evidence was legitimate in the interests of a good story. It seems to be part of his meaning when he declares in his introduction

If I have erred, at least my errors can do no harm, whilst the possibility of the suggestions being true will give pleasure to those who prefer to accept the traditional history of persons and places

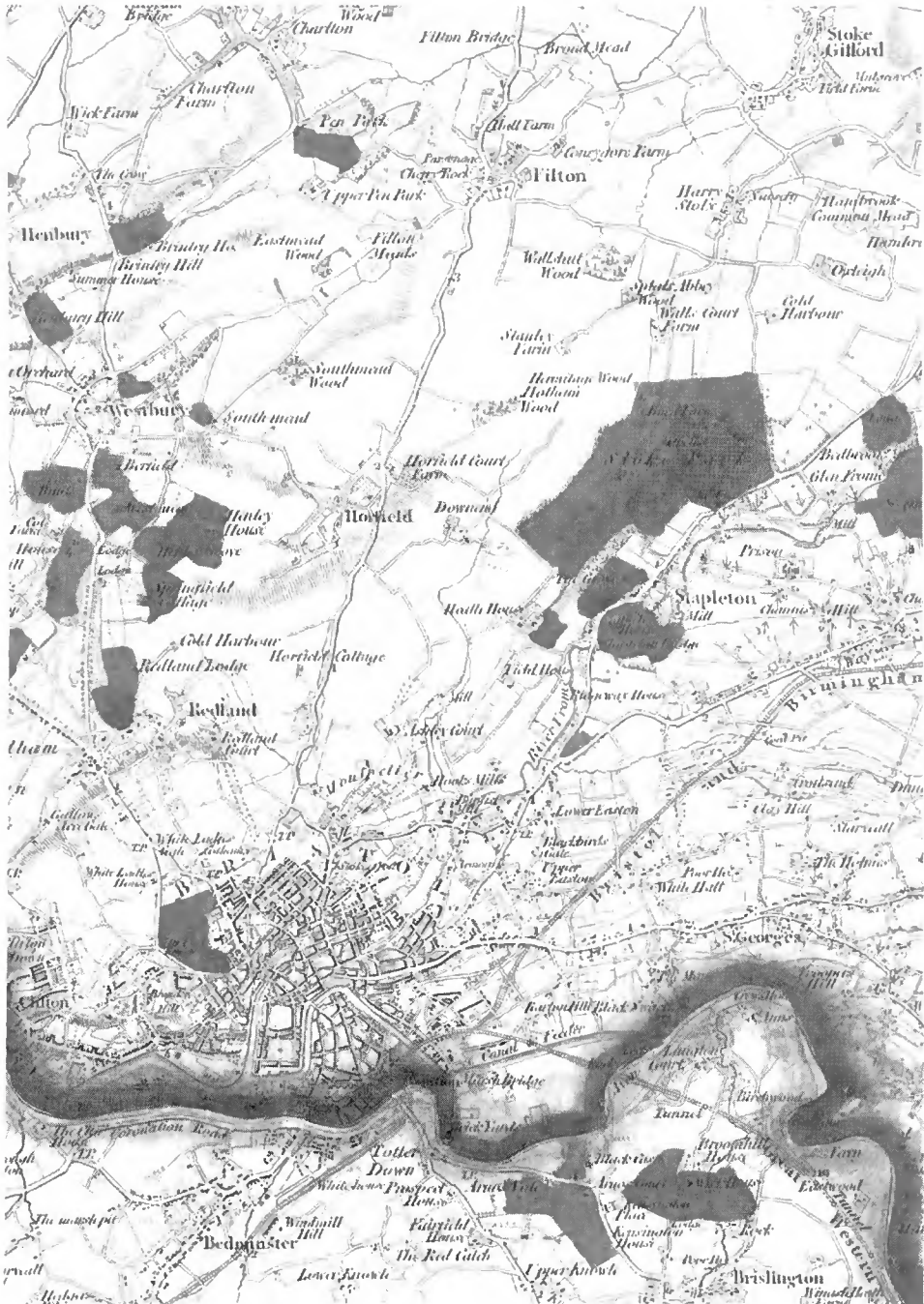


Fig. 1. Detail from the first one-inch Ordnance Survey map of Bristol and south Gloucestershire, surveyed 1824–9 and published 1830; information on railways was added in 1854. North is at the top of the page.

connected with Bristol and the locality thus expanded, rather than the newer opinions of others, which are decidedly at variance with them.

Bingham's story is intriguing and persistent. That may be partly because much of the route he describes has been preserved in the pattern of streets and connecting alleyways of suburban Horfield, a pattern incorporating ancient rights of way which once crossed the parish's medieval fields. An early example of the preservation of a footpath is found in a surveyor's report of 1840 noting that the 'public footpaths' across 'East Conyger' (part of a field formerly known as 'Ludbridges') interfered 'to some extent with a regular plan for building'.⁹ The footpath which ran 'diagonally from corner to corner' of the field was eventually preserved as Tyne Path (Bingham's 'present pathway'). 'Ludbridges' was leased in 1532 by Thomas Walter,¹⁰ indicating that Bingham's 'highway' had been no more than a footpath since at least that date. The suggested derivation of 'Ludbridges' (possibly a stream-name from O.E. hlud-loud'¹¹) is confirmed by a description of Cutlers Mills Brook 'which until a few years ago flowed at the bottom of a ravine'¹² below the steeply rising field. Both the history and topography of 'Ludbridges' make it a most unlikely starting point for a 'highway'. Seyer's notes, when read alongside roughly contemporary sources, also suggest quite different conclusions from the ones Bingham reaches. The notes, in fact, provide unique evidence for an event which was significant in determining the shape of 20th-century Horfield.

A survey of maps of the area gives no evidence for Bingham's 'highway'. Perhaps the best evidence of roads and tracks in Horfield in the early 19th century is provided by the parish tithe map¹³ of 1843. The principal road from Bristol to Gloucester, a turnpike since 1727,¹⁴ crosses the parish from south to north along the course followed by the Gloucester road in the late 20th century. Two other roads cross the parish boundary and both are local roads running from the turnpike. One is the Westbury road (Wellington Hill) and the other the Ashley road (Ashley Down Road). All the other routes shown on the map are tracks providing access to fields or buildings within the parish. Some of those tracks became suburban streets (like Downend Road); one or two, surprisingly for such a developed area, survived in the late 20th century in something like their mid 19th-century form. In 1843 there was no trace of the highway described by Bingham. If there had been such a road, one would expect to find some evidence in a map depicting a landscape that had remained essentially unchanged since the Middle Ages.

Earlier maps also offer no trace. The first Ordnance Survey map for Bristol and south Gloucestershire (Fig. 1), published in 1830, records the same roads in the parish as the tithe map but gives some different detail as to the tracks. For example, a track crossing from Horfield to Stapleton is not recorded on the Horfield tithe map perhaps because it had little more status than a footpath. A meeting of Horfield parish council in July 1863 describes it as a 'Bridle road'.¹⁵ The Ordnance Survey map gives no indication of Bingham's 'highway', either within the parish or between Horfield and Charlton. According to J.B. Harley, a final revision of the map was undertaken between 1825 and 1829,¹⁶ but the process may have begun slightly earlier close to Bristol, because the map does not show John MacAdam's new section of the turnpike between Stokes Croft and the southern boundary of Horfield parish, completed in 1824. It does show the straightening of the road (between Wellington Hill and Muller Road) completed by MacAdam in 1821. The map is of particular interest because it is contemporary with Seyer's incumbency.

Benjamin Donn's 1769 *Map of the Country 11 miles round the City of Bristol* shows the route of the Horfield section of the turnpike before MacAdam straightened it. The differences between Donn's map and the first Ordnance Survey map are only partly explained by realignments of the Bristol turnpike roads carried out by MacAdam. There were other developments in the

immediate area of the city. For example, the road to Ashley shown on the tithe and Ordnance Survey maps was apparently improved after 1769. A mid 18th-century plan book of Stapleton parish¹⁷ shows that the road had been a track with gates at the field boundaries leading from Horfield to Glass Mill and Ashley House. Otherwise, the network of roads in south Gloucestershire recorded by Donn is the same as that in place 50 or 60 years later.

Although Donn's map is the earliest to show Horfield's roads in detail, it is possible to trace the history of the main roads of the area back to the 14th century through other documents. John Ogilby's ribbon maps of 1675, especially those of the routes from Bristol to Worcester and Chester, also indicate the minor roads in south Gloucestershire that were recorded by Donn. It seems very likely that Donn depicted a pattern of roads that had remained unchanged for at least a century and was probably much older. In particular, it is clear that the road from Bristol to Aust did not run through Horfield but through Westbury. The main road through Horfield was, instead, an important trade route through the vale of Gloucester. William Schellinks,¹⁸ a Dutch painter, records a journey he made on horseback from Gloucester to Bristol on 12 and 13 July 1662. There was 'continuous heavy rain', which made an overnight stop necessary at Newport. He completed the journey 'with a young merchant from Bristol called Sanders', travelling by way of Thornbury. Beyond Almondsbury the road to Bristol 'became stony and difficult'. An Act of 1554 'for the repairing of a Cawseie betwext Bristowe and Gloucestre'¹⁹ may refer to a highway through Tytherington or Acton which had 'been heretofore well repayed by the devocon of dyvers good people', but the will of Thomas atte Hay,²⁰ a burgess of Bristol who died in 1393, contained a bequest of £20 for 'mending roads between the towns of Bristol and Gloucester, and between Bristol and Almondsbury', indicating the importance of both roads for medieval trade. The road through Horfield is also mentioned in the charter of Edward III in 1373 granting Bristol the status of county. The perambulation to establish 'certain metes and bounds' included 'a stone fixed in the King's highroad which leads from Bristol to Thornbury' and another 'fixed in the same way opposite a certain path called Apesherd',²¹ marking the route through Stokes Croft. The reason for granting the charter was the difficulty and the injury to trade experienced by Bristol merchants in constantly travelling to county courts in Gloucester and Ilchester 'distant thirty miles of road deep in winter-time particularly and dangerous to passengers'.²²

While the earlier history of these roads remains a matter of conjecture, there is no indication from the available evidence that Bingham's 'highway' existed. The case depends, therefore, on the evidence of Seyer's notebook.

Bingham was handed the notebook in 1879, shortly after he joined the parish, fulfilling Seyer's request, written on the inside cover.

This book is to be given to my successor in the Perpetual Curacy of Horfield, & so on to his successor etc. S.S. 1814.

There are other indications that Seyer intended to keep a systematic account of his curacy, most obviously a note 'Get this book copied on a better Plan' written beneath the request. However, in spite of starting afresh from the other end of the notebook, the entries remain fragmentary, a series of isolated statements and phrases, usually with gaps between them, as though Seyer were leaving spaces for further comment. If the headings (Register, Name, Churchyard, Patron, Fabric) written on the back cover refer to an intended 'better Plan', it is not evident in the arrangement of the notes. A recurring topic, suggesting a possible motive for beginning the notebook, relates to the building of a parsonage in Horfield. Seyer had published a pamphlet in 1804²³ listing a number of reasons for non-residence which he felt an Act passed in the previous year had failed to consider properly, and he may have decided to record his first-hand experience

of the problem. Though Seyer was a strong advocate of residence, it took 11 years of negotiations amongst bishops, Horfield lessees and the governors of Queen Anne's Bounty to achieve the transfer of land and the necessary funding to build a parsonage. He notes his personal expenses dispassionately.

1817 An opinion of Mr Courtney, relative to the power of the Bishops to make a title to an acre of Common £4.0.0.

The final achievement is precisely dated and his contribution recorded in the third person.

21 Feb. 1825. The Bishop of Bristol transferred £350 from Bishop Newtons Fund to which The Curate Incumbent (Saml Seyer) added £50; & then the Governors met the £400 with £600 Benefaction.

Seyer treats his involvement with historical detachment as though he were indeed noting events for an audience of future incumbents. A few items date other events such as the collection in 1815 for 'the wounded & families of the slain at Waterloo' which was taken not only 'at the church door' but also 'from house to house'. Seyer's enthusiasm for the collection is consistent with his views on the French Revolution ('democratic madness') and the Empire ('military tyranny') as expressed in the preface to *Latium Redivivum*,²⁴ but it also echoes the watchfulness he had advocated as an aspect of residence and which he tried to emulate as a non-resident clergyman.

I expect that no person in the parish be sick whom he does not visit, or endeavour to visit, whether invited or not; and by visiting is meant praying with him: and that a slight sickness be sufficient for this purpose, lest men be terrified at the visit of a priest.²⁵

However, most of the items appear to be the habitual jottings of a scholar collecting material on the locality for his own reference.

There is no mention of Horfield in *Memoirs of Bristol and its Neighbourhood*, but it is clear from *Fragments of a Topographical History of Bristol*²⁶ that information from the notebook would have appeared in chapter LXVII and may have influenced chapter LXXVII on turnpike roads. As he prepared for publication Seyer wrote

Memoirs of Bristol. The Book is to consist of two Divisions 1. Historical & 2. Topographical. But the 2nd I will not take the trouble to finish, unless I gain sufficiently by the first.²⁷

The projected topographical volumes relied heavily on illustration, and since the cost of plates even on a moderate scale accounted for over half the total production cost of *Memoirs of Bristol*, Seyer probably considered that the financial risk was too great for his limited means.

An early item in the notebook is Seyer's rough sketch map of Horfield village. His depiction of roads and buildings is similar to Donn's map of 1769. Apart from the heading, 'Horfield', the only things Seyer wrote on the map were 'Church Common', 'North Common', and 'turnpike Road from Bristol'. One cannot be sure that Seyer drew all the other features, because Bingham superimposed a key to the buildings in ink and added direction signs and dotted lines.

Bingham probably regretted the impulse to write on the map. He was perhaps encouraged initially by Seyer's remark about wishing the notebook to be handed on to his successors, with the implication that they might add to it. Later, Bingham seems to have been keen to deflect possible charges of more drastic tinkering by pointing out where three consecutive pages had been removed before he received it, though two further pages are also missing, one cut and one torn out. Crucially, Bingham changed his mind about the key. As his thesis about the trackway developed, he must have wanted the annotation of the map to reflect his ideas. The only option was to redraw it. The map that appears prominently in *Horfield Miscellanea* is the copy that

Bingham made of Seyer's map. There is a new key, and the map differs in several other details from the one in the notebook. This would hardly matter if Bingham had not gone to some lengths to disguise the fact. He does that by directly stating (twice) that this is the map drawn by Seyer; but he also fakes its appearance by pretending to distinguish carefully between Seyer's detail and his own and by taking a photograph of the result, as though it were unique. Bingham appears to have decided that his 'error' could be turned into a virtue. The effect, as far as *Horfield Miscellanea* is concerned, is of clergymen linked across the generations earnestly seeking continuity with ancient Christianity. Seyer's original map, so far as one can tell, is not, by itself, material to the case for the trackway.

The text of the notebook includes a passage in more or less continuous prose and spread across three pages in which Seyer writes about things he has been told about Horfield, presumably by parishioners. Dated events are generally presented in chronological order and they may have been recorded as they occurred; most of the passage, though undated, may therefore have been written in 1814, in any case, early in Seyer's incumbency. Since the passage supplies Bingham with clues about the road, it is useful to provide a transcript indicating Seyer's alterations. Words inserted by Seyer are given in italics and words scored out by him in round brackets; . . . denotes an illegible passage. Editorial interpolations are in square brackets and italics. The page numbers are those added by Bingham.

p. 8

I am informed that the two roads which go across the Church-common were made about 1760 or 1770, that which goes from the church westward to Mr. Lambert's was made by Mr. Davies, Mr. Lambert's predecessor, that which goes from the Turnpike road towards Southmead was made by the Parish. Before this time every one cut across the common as well as he could, by which the land was so torn to pieces that the pasture was little worth.

a little lane *now* almost impassable, which leads from the turnpike road about a mile & a half from Bristol up to Horfield South common is repeatedly & almost every year mentioned in the old records of the Manor-court as

[Then follows a Latin phrase heavily scored out. It appears to read 'via alta conduit ab Bristollia ad Gloucestriana' though the precise Latin construction of 'conduit' and 'Gloucestriana' is obscured. This is followed by a phrase squeezed in below the scoring.]

& presented as in bad repair. I have heard

[At the very foot of the page in lighter ink, using a different pen and clearly added later, are the words]

Venella vocat' Beate lane ducens ab Horfield ad civitatem Bristoll, existens communis alta via.

[The word 'via' spills over onto the adjacent page and has a bracket at the end of it.]

p. 9

[Running on from 'I have heard']

also that the narrow strip of ground below the church yard, where Matthew's cottage now stands, is a continuation of this high-way, & that thence it passed by the church to the North-common,

[Then, written in the same lighter ink and pen as the Latin footnote on the previous page, and after converting the original full stop of the previous sentence into a comma in the same lighter ink,]

on which common about 100 yards distant from . . . it's [*sic*] entrance was the original Ship-ale-house, now a farm-house.

a little further information I picked up concerning the *humble history* of this retired village in former times. (Under) *Close to* the long hedge which bounds the Church-common on the South about 50 yards from the churchyard, are two tumps of Earth about 50 yards asunder between which (about) used to be a skittle-alley, which my informant remembered about the year 1750. The place was then called Horfield-Butts, which shews at once that these two tumps of earth (were) had been in the days of Archery the place, where the youth of this & the neighboring [sic] parishes exercised themselves in that manly art.

p. 10

All my informers agree in representing this Parish to have been a most lawless place, & Filton not much better . . . A little beyond the Common in going towards Filton, Horfield Wood, which now is only on the Eastern side of the road, then was on both sides; & it was not very safe to pass that way in the evening; people used to wait for each other in order to make a party. The making of the Turnpike road contributed much toward letting in the light upon them: nevertheless hodie manent vestigia ruris.

Bingham's argument for the ancient road rests on Seyer's description of the 'little lane' up to the south common, the continuation past 'Matthew's cottage', and the location of the Ship alehouse. Instead of attempting to evaluate those features, Bingham simply adds bits of information. For example, he carries out some fieldwork, locating the ruins of 'Matthew's cottage' and walking the route he claims Seyer describes.

I am inclined to think that the strip of Common to the south of Ardagh and also to the east of the Churchyard were the width of the ancient road to Aust Ferry.²⁸

He provides some observations on circular graveyards, a brief discussion of the idea of a 'sacred' lane, and two photographs of the exterior of Weston's Farm which he identified as the original Ship alehouse and which was pulled down in the early 20th century. He also refers to Vespasian's Roman army and the English civil war.

Bingham's treatment of the notes is inconsistent, particularly over the question of where the 'little lane' started. He is happy to take Seyer literally when the latter describes the site of the Ship 'about a hundred yards' from the entrance to the north common but not so when Seyer, just as precisely, describes the little lane starting 'about a mile & a half from Bristol'. The distance to Horfield village was traditionally measured from the turnpike gate at the top of Stokes Croft, the city boundary as established in 1373. It was a journey familiar to Seyer who was living near the turnpike gate at Catherine Place in the parish of St. James when he voted in the 1812 parliamentary election. In 1814 Seyer wrote to Jane Smyth, a Horfield lessee, on the subject of a parsonage from the same address,²⁹ and remained there until 1822. Both Atkyns and Rudder, in their standard 18th-century works on the history of Gloucestershire, begin their brief accounts of Horfield by mentioning that it was two miles from Bristol.³⁰ Seyer quotes from Atkyns in his notebook. He also refers to fields in the parish 'at one mile hill'. Bingham himself quotes Rudder's phrase 'two miles from Bristol'. It is difficult to see how Bingham could have overlooked that information when suggesting that the lane started at Zetland Road at the southern tip of the parish and a mere half mile from Stokes Croft. He hints at scholarly deliberations ('so far as I can ascertain'), but does not explain what they were, perhaps calculating that because Seyer is sometimes ambiguous he is free to skate over the point. Whatever the reason, he ignores Seyer when the information does not appear to support the story of an ancient trackway.

Seyer's notes on the little lane need closer attention. He is not recording matters of fact nor even noting down exactly what people said, but is writing his own version of what he has heard. In the passage transcribed above, Seyer makes it clear by his comments on them that those are

stories he has been told. He takes them seriously, as when he comments on the story of 'Horfield-Butts'. Sometimes, he shows detachment by adding Latin tags, a device familiar enough amongst scholars and gentlemen of the period. One good example comes later in the notebook.

The church was fitted up with new pews in 1764, John Edwards being Churchwarden. Before this time there were only seats with backs in the old fashion. Utinam remansissent.

The Latin means 'Would that they had remained'. The phrase carries more than a personal note of regret. It appeals to an accepted standard of taste, apparently broken by the parishioners of Horfield.

A similar detachment is noticeable in the story about 'Horfield Wood'. Whatever the truth of the matter, the story had become a part of local folklore. As he says, 'All my informers agree'. The final sentence, a mixture of the commonplace and the quasi-religious, already conveys irony. The additional phrase, 'nevertheless hodie manent vestigia ruris' ('today, traces of the countryside remain'), extends the irony. Though much of the wood has been cleared, there is still some left: though there has been some enlightenment, there are still traces of the old, rough, country manners.

Such matters of interpretation are relevant to Bingham's treatment of the Latin statement 'Venella vocat' Beate lane ducens ab Horfield ad civitatem Bristoll, existens communis alta via'. As elsewhere in his commentary on Seyer's notes, Bingham does not offer a translation, merely adding later,

Some of the old inhabitants told me that the part near the ruins spoken of as Matthew's cottage, used to be known as 'St. Paul's Walk'. S Seyer seems to say this 'Venella' was called 'Beate Lane'; I must leave others to decide whether he meant the 'sacred' or 'blessed' lane, and if so, why?³¹

Bingham's transcription of Seyer's notes is inaccurate at this point. It is possible that he did not notice the change of ink. Inks fade at different rates over the years. However, there are several obvious indications that Seyer added the statement later, such as the size and slope of the hand, the position on the page, and the way the statement spills onto the bottom of the adjoining page. Seyer wrote, 'I have heard also that the narrow strip of ground' and not 'I have heard Venella vocat'. Bingham's version makes no difference to the literal meaning of the Latin, but it alters the possible significance. His reorganization of the sequence allows Bingham to suggest that Seyer's notes support the idea of an ancient trackway without making the point explicit. Bingham appears to think that Seyer may have chosen to express in Latin significant information about the supposed 'sacred' history of the lane. If Seyer was indeed responsible for composing the statement then the Latin might be expected to match his description of the lane in English at least with regard to its location. In that case, 'Venella' (the lane) 'ducens ab Horfield ad civitatem Bristoll' (leading from Horfield to the city of Bristol) might be described as 'existens communis alta via' where 'existens' means 'emerging onto' rather than the more usual 'being'. It is equally possible, since the word 'Beate' does not agree with its English noun, that Seyer intended it to mean neither 'sacred' nor 'blessed' but the adverb 'happily', producing the phrase 'the venel happily called a lane', and thus evoking, especially in view of the ruinous state of the lane, the tone of ironic detachment present in his other Latin phrases.

A simpler explanation, given the context and the use of the medieval Latin word 'venella',³² is that Seyer transcribed the statement from 'the old records of the Manor-court'. According to Thomas Holt, secretary to James Monk, bishop of Gloucester and Bristol 1836-56, and writing in 1841 about properties in Horfield leased from the diocese, 'all documents of the see (were) destroyed in the Bristol riots in 1831'.³³ There seemed little hope of verifying the source of Seyer's statement until the recovery in the late 20th century of books and papers relating to

Horfield manor court,³⁴ revealing that Seyer copied an extract from the court roll of 23 October 1702. It is part of an order requiring Elizabeth Thomas widow or John Adlam, her tenant ('*tenen ejus*'), to cut the hedges ('*sepem sua attonden*') and repair the banks ('*et ripa amovet*') of their fields on both sides of the '*venell vocat Beate lane*' by the end of the following month.

The name 'Beate lane' appears once only in the court records during the 17th and 18th centuries. At first the lane is called 'Bate lane' (four references) and a nearby field is called 'le Bate Shord' (three references). In 1679 and 1680, it is called 'Back lane' and in 1681 'Bak lane'. By the late 18th century after an interval of some 50 years when it remains nameless it is called 'Quab lane' (five references). There can be no doubt that the name given to the lane in 1702 is 'Beate' since the same scribe referring to Candlemas on an adjoining page writes '*purificacon Beate Marie Virginis*'. It is possible, since all court business was conducted in English and since during the period 1660–1732 draft court rolls were written in English before being translated into Latin for the official record (as confirmed by examples from 1693 and 1694), that the script for 'Bate', 'Back', or 'Bak' was on that one occasion confused with 'Beate'. Whatever the case, Seyer is unlikely to have chosen the extract for the name 'Beate' alone. His purpose in reading the court records was to test the accuracy of stories about the history of 'the little lane'. He might have chosen the 1681 entry which refers to Bak lane as '*communis via Regia*' (the king's highway). That description is significant because during the late 17th century the record is particularly precise when differentiating types of public way, the way to Stapleton (1684) being '*antiqua via equestrem*' (an ancient bridle way), one route to Filton (1686) being '*communis via pedestris*' (a public footpath), and a track leading from the common (1692) being '*viculum*' (a narrow lane). In fact, Seyer identified the single item which most strongly suggests that the little lane had been the main highway '*ab Horfield ad civitatem Bristol*'.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence that Bingham found in Seyer for the route of his highway was the location of the original Ship alehouse. Weston's farm seems to fit his reading of Seyer's description exactly and, if, as Bingham assumed, the alehouse stood by a main road, then the case for a highway in the direction of Aust was persuasive. It is obvious from the notebook, but not from Bingham's transcript, that Seyer returned to the note about the Ship later. His attempt to continue an earlier sentence produced a misleading phrase and a deletion, perhaps as he concentrated on trying to modify the meaning. The apostrophe in the phrase 'it's entrance' might appear to be a further error, if the same usage did not occur throughout Seyer's published writing. The Ship alehouse was not, in fact, on the common, though it was 'about 100 yards distant from it's entrance'.

The evidence comes from contemporary sources. When Court farm was auctioned at the Commercial Rooms on 30 August 1827, lot 4 was described as follows.

A close of excellent pasture (1 acre 2 roods 27 perches) with extensive frontage against the Turnpike and extending from thence to the Old Road passing by the house late the Ship in the occupation of the said Richard Evans.³⁵

The Ship (situated on the north-west side of the later Wellington Crescent) had been a landmark and also played a wider role in the community than Seyer's term 'alehouse' might suggest. It was, for example, a venue for the manor court of Horfield as revealed by late 18th-century letters to the Smith family at Heath House.³⁶ The date of its closure can be narrowed to a period of five or six years. The schedule for the 1819 Act proposing various alterations to the turnpikes includes an intended new road 'Opposite the Ship at Horfield'.³⁷ The Ship appears to have been in business at that date. MacAdam carried out the work in 1821.³⁸ At about the same time he widened and remade the road to Westbury but that evidently did not compensate for the loss of trade. The new section of turnpike road left the Ship on a deep lay-by, relying on

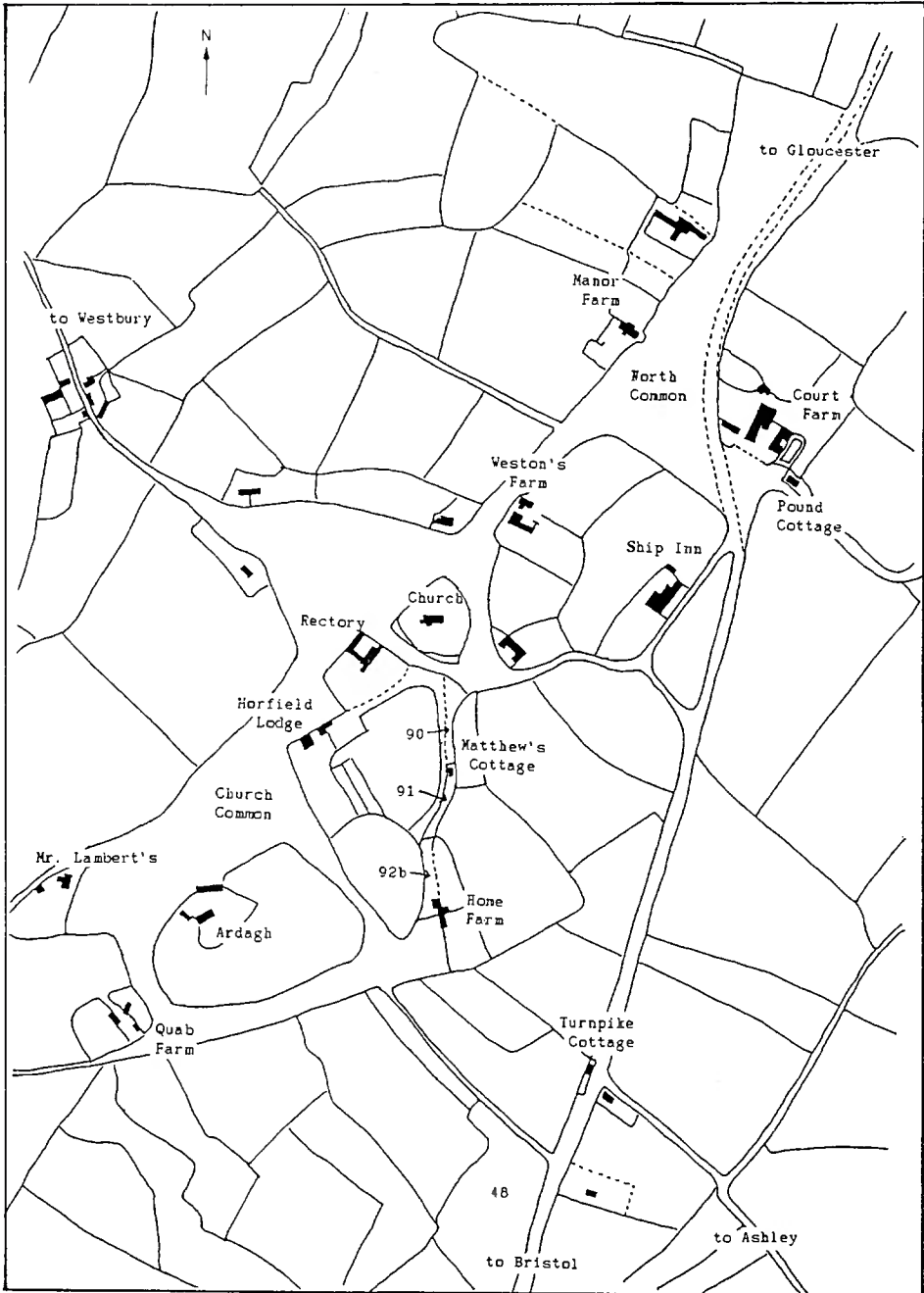


Fig. 2. Map, based on the Horfield tithe map of 1843, indicating the former line of the main highway. The plot numbers given are taken from the tithe map and apportionment: 48 = 'Rowlays' or 'Row lease', 92b = 'Part of Old Lane and Garden', 91 = 'Cottage and Garden', and 90 = 'Plantation'. The names of buildings are those given in the text and are not all contemporary with the tithe map.

local custom. Some time between 1821 and 1827 it closed. Seyer's phrase 'the original Ship-alehouse' suggests that he knew it had reopened elsewhere. The 1841 Census locates it at Pound Cottage, next to Court Farm. Those were smaller premises but presumably they were the only ones available, if the Ship was to remain near the village and also by the turnpike.

It seems likely that the earliest road through Horfield passed through the village and not round it, linking the church, the Ship and the principal farmstead. If we follow Seyer's description of its line, supported by evidence from the tithe survey, some of the difficulties of that route become clearer (Fig. 2). According to the notebook, the 'little lane leads from the turnpike road about a mile & a half from Bristol up to Horfield South common'. Such a lane is recorded on the tithe map and the first Ordnance Survey map. The lane featured in the late 19th-century estate map for 'Thornleigh Park'³⁹ and was given the name 'Ash Road', so that Ash Road, unlike neighbouring roads, leads directly onto the common. Seyer refers to 'a continuation of this high-way' along 'the narrow strip of ground below the church yard, where Matthew's cottage now stands'. The tithe map shows the 'strip of ground', and the tithe apportionment describes it in three sections, reading from the south, 'Part of Old Lane & Garden', 'Cottage & Garden', and 'Plantation'.⁴⁰ Though the brief section of lane, across a corner of the common from Ash Road to 'the narrow strip of ground' passing the site of Home Farm, is not recorded on the tithe map, its presence can be inferred, especially since the map records no other access roads to farmsteads on the common. It is clear from the tithe map that the lane managed the relatively steep ascent northwards to the church in a series of curves. The lane then turned east, following the line of the Westbury-Horfield road as it dropped away from the church, before turning northwards again, climbing past the Ship towards Court Farm.

It seems that during the 18th century a decision was taken to avoid most of the bends and hills by cutting a new road less than half a mile in length to the east of the village. The new section ran north from the vicinity of Ash Road on a gentle gradient towards Court Farm, deviating from a direct line in order to join the old road as it turned northwards to pass the Ship. The tithe map shows three formerly continuous field boundaries interrupted by the by-pass. There are no such occurrences elsewhere in the parish. If the by-pass was cut by the Bristol turnpike trust (as seems most likely), then responsibility for maintaining the old lane would have returned to the parish. That event may account for the building of roads on 'the Church-common', which happened 'about 1760 or 1770'. The implication of Seyer's story seems to be that the parish was tidying up the common. The primary concern would have been to keep a good link between the village and the (now more distant) turnpike. A compromise was perhaps achieved, involving the abandonment of the old lane and a concentration of parish funds on a more direct link. Matthew's cottage was built illegally on the former road in the early 19th century. According to the manor court records, it was William Thomas who 'Erected a Cottage in a lane from the Church' in 1804, while William Matthews tried to secure the property in 1809 by enclosing 'part of the Common leading to a lane commonly called Abigail [*sic*] lane'.

If the former route of the highway described by Seyer is accurate, then the alteration to its line had certainly happened before 1766 when the manor court required tenants to attend to hedges and ditches along 'the road called Quabb lane leading from the Turnpike Road to Horfield Common'. The same lane is described in similar terms in 1746 when a tenant is ordered to 'shear his Hedges on both sides of the narrow lane leading from the main road to Horfield Common against Row leaze'. There are very few references in the court records that identify a road in Horfield as a thoroughfare between other cities or towns, so that when they occur they are significant. For example, it appears that the turnpike trust may have done nothing to improve the main highway before 1734. An order of the manor court for that year reads

They present that the Common High Way leading from the City of Bristol through this Mannour towards Almondsbury in the County of Gloucester is very foundeorous and out of repair and order the same to be sufficiently repaired by the first Day of May next by the respective Tenants and Inhabitants of this Mannour on pain of five shillings per Lugg to be forfeited by every one.

The order is uniquely specific about the repair of the entire highway within the manor and by echoing the responsibility of the trust (initially extending to Almondsbury) it may be that the manor court hoped to apply pressure on the trustees to comply with the Act of 1727 through the considerable influence of its copyholders. A further entry in 1741 suggests that work on the highway had been completed with consequences which disturbed traditional practice. The 'Bayliff of this Mannour' is required

to secure the Gates of the Common one of which is now down in the Gloucester Road to make the Common safer either by some means to hoop the gates always shut which frequently lie open a considerable Time together or to make a Fence to inclose the Common from the Gloucester Road.

Security of the gates was perhaps made particularly difficult because the highway, now suddenly referred to as 'the Gloucester Road', no longer passed through the village.

Seyer's notes provide evidence for an 18th-century realignment of Horfield's main road. There is no specific reference to the event in contemporary records, though the evidence of the manor court record seems to indicate a date for the alteration during the late 1730s, beyond the living memory of Seyer's 'informants'. Seyer referred to Horfield *c.* 1814 as 'this retired village', and Macadam's improvement to the turnpike in 1821 completed its detachment from developments that would take place elsewhere in the parish. The notebook helps to account for the eventual decline of Horfield village and the simultaneous growth of the suburb alongside the main road.

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Notes

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