

The Stuchbury Trust

ON the 3rd February, 1708, there was proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, the will of Elizabeth Stuchbury, which she had signed on 26th January the same year.

By her will she bequeathed the residue of her estate to Charles Benson and Thomas Johnson, upon trust for putting out apprentice poor children of the people called Quakers in Southwark, as they should in their discretion see fit. The residuary estate consisted of about four acres of agricultural land with messuage and buildings thereon situated in St. George's Fields, Southwark.

Elizabeth was the widow of Giles Stuchbury, whom she had married, as his third wife on 15th March, 1680 [1681], at the Bull and Mouth Meeting, Aldersgate. At the time of her marriage she was the widow of Jarret Winstanley.¹ Giles's address was at the sign of "A Cooper's Adze," on Bankside, Southwark. A short while before his death Giles had loaned the sum of £400 to one Thomas Jenkins; this loan was secured on land in St. George's Fields.

Giles died on 3rd December, 1706 and left all his property to his widow Elizabeth, and upon her death eighteen months later, this land in St. George's Fields formed part of her residuary estate which she bequeathed to Southwark Quakers.

Giles Stuchbury had been an early convert to Quakerism, and had suffered for his convictions, particularly at the hands of the "Priest of Savories Southwark." By trade he was a Cooper, being a Freeman of the Guild of Coopers of the City of London. In 1671 Horslydown Monthly Meeting minuted:

It is to be remembered that Giles Stuchbury doe give notice to all the rest of Friends that are Coopers that they see that the man that weighs & seals their Casks that he do it exactly and justly: and that they make their Casks tight, that they use no clay, and if the man will not do them justly that then the Wardens of the Coopers Company be invited to weigh and seal them, and if they be false to bear a testimony against them.

Thomas Jenkins was unable to redeem the estate which he had mortgaged to Giles Stuchbury, and in 1713, five years after Elizabeth's death, he signed an Indenture

¹ See *Journal F.H.S.*, xlix, 42n.

releasing the equity of redemption, to the executors of the will.

The following year the trustees granted a lease to Nathaniel Oade of a Messuage, Coachhouse Stable and Barn with four acres of land in St. George's Fields, for a period of 21 years at an annual rent of £20.

By 1718 the two executors had discharged Elizabeth Stuchbury's various legacies and were able to hand over the residue of the estate to seven Quakers who were to administer it as directed by the will.

An advertisement in the *Daily Advertiser* reads:

To be lett on lease for any term of years, a small estate in St. George's fields Southwark, late in the occupation of the Widow Gaskin, deceased, consisting of 2 Tenements a Cowhouse & Stabling & above three acres of land, enquire of Thomas Roake, Distiller, over against the hospital in the Borough, Southwark.¹

There was only one bridge across the River Thames at London until the year 1735, when the government constructed Westminster Bridge. To prevent trade becoming diverted from the City, the Bridge House Estate of the Corporation of London erected Blackfriars Bridge at the western boundary of the City. To link these two new bridges with that of old London Bridge, roads were cut across the Fields, these met at St. George's Circus. The Blackfriars road crossed the Stuchbury property, and in 1751 the trustees sold a portion of their estate to the Commissioners at the price of £400; they also claimed compensation for the inconvenience caused by the division of their property. Tenants too had to be recompensed for disturbance caused by these roadmaking schemes.

During the next few years other portions of the estate were sold to the Commissioners. Leases continued to be granted for the remainder of the property, but the new roads had made access easier and the agricultural uses of the land were no longer attractive. Nearby was Bankside, a noted area for questionable places of entertainment, and the Stuchbury Trustees, feeling the need to guard against possible doubtful activities being practised on their property, inserted the following clause into their leases:

He engages that no part of the Premises shall be employed as a Bear Garden or used for Bull Baiting or Tennis Court or any other disagreeable employ.

¹ St. Thomas' Hospital was at the southern approach to London Bridge.

In 1785 the owner of a nearby inn, known as "The Dog and Duck," made offers to the owners of all lands adjoining the New Roads, including the Stuchbury trustees, to acquire their interests. After negotiations the trustees agreed to sell all their remaining properties for the sum of £1,200.

In 1786 they recorded:

This Trust being now divested of the Estate in George's Fields consisting of houses and land, by the same being sold to James Hedges and the amount being invested in the Bank Annuities 1726, 3% which joined to the £400 of the same stock we had before, makes the Amount thereof now to be £2,200 in said Stock and the Trust solely consists in that.

To ensure regular attendance at the meetings of the trustees they instituted a system of levying a fine of one shilling on any of their number absent for any reason, other than illness; this was known as the forfeit money and it was used to pay for an occasional dinner for themselves. The menu of one of these, held at the Rose and Crown, Kew Green on 15th August, 1770, has been preserved. The cost of the meal, with gifts for servants, the hire of coach and horses with the turnpike charges cost £2 5s. 3d. for five persons. As the forfeit money only came to £1 13s. 1d., each of the five trustees had to contribute 2s. 6d. to make up the difference.

The only original asset to survive is a Navy Bill of the time of William III. These were used to pay sailors, who exchanged them with tradesmen at considerable discount, the tradesmen subsequently cashing them at the Navy Office.

At various times the investments have been changed. For 250 years the trustees have met regularly and distributed the income in conformity with the wishes of Giles and Elizabeth Stuchbury.

GEORGE W. EDWARDS