



The Gates and Abenues of Dorchester,

WHEN AND BY WHOM PLANTED.

By ALFRED POPE, F.S.A.

(Read December 12th, 1916.)

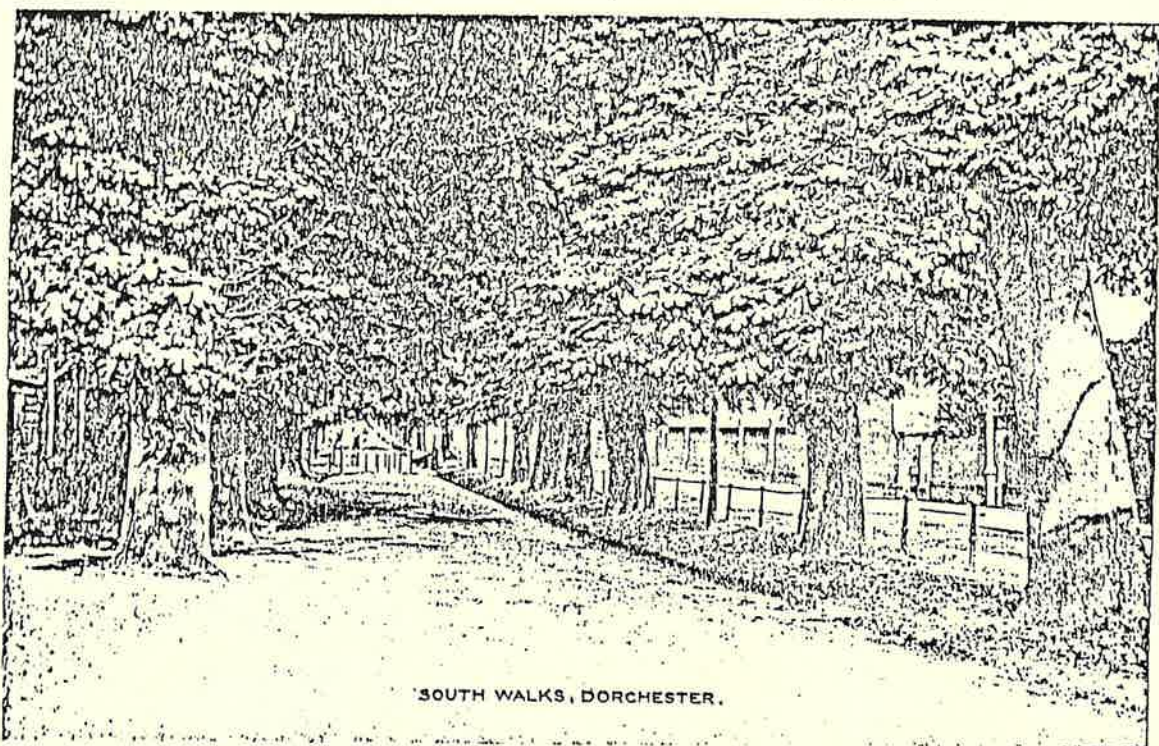


DORCHESTER, the *Durnovaria* of the Romans, was during the 16th and 17th centuries surrounded on the South, East and West sides, and partly on the North side, by the remains of her old Roman wall, flanked by deep ditches and valla after the manner of many Romano-British towns. The walls at that time formed part of the borough of Dorchester, and were claimed by the Mayor and Corporation for her inhabitants. The ditches, being outside the borough, formed part of the Manor of Fordington, and were claimed by the Duchy of Cornwall as part of the possessions of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, Lord of the Manor of Fordington. Many conflicts arose as to the respective rights of the townspeople of Dorchester and the tenants of the Manor over the "ditches"

and with regard to the boundaries of the Manor, as evidenced by the town records and the Court rolls of the Manor. The walls, being of no further use for defensive purposes, were allowed to go into decay, and were eventually, by degrees, demolished, the stone being absorbed into other buildings; and the ditches, or some of them, were, with the consent of the Duchy of Cornwall, levelled down and used as "Walks" and recreation grounds by the town's folk, and at length, by some happy inspiration, they were planted with trees. Hence arose those beautiful walks and avenues of Dorchester as we now see them, which are the pride of the inhabitants and the admiration of the many visitors to the town.

Sir Frederick Treves, in his "Highways and Byways in Dorset," writes:—"One of the most beautiful features of Dorchester is its ceinture of green; for on three sides it is surrounded by avenues of trees—of sycamores, limes, and chestnuts. On the fourth side runs the river Frome through reedy meadows."

Mr. Thomas Hardy, O.M., makes one of his Wessex heroines say of the town:—"What an old-fashioned place it seems to be. It is huddled all together; and it is shut in by a square wall of trees, like a plot of garden-ground by a box-edging." And other writers, visitors to Dorchester, have been no less lavish in their praise of our beautiful avenues. The archaeological features of the "walls" and "ditches" have been ably treated on by other members of the Dorset Field Club, namely, by the late Rev. W. M. Barnes, in his paper on "Roman Fortification, with special reference to the Roman Defences of Dorchester" (Vol. XII., page 135, of the "Proceedings"), by the late Mr. H. J. Moule in "Notes on the Walls and Gates of Durnovaria" (Vol. XIV., page 44), and by Captain J. E. Acland, F.S.A., in "Notes on Excavations at Dorchester on the site of the Roman Defences" (Vol. XXXVI., page 1); but the much-revved question of—when and by whom the Dorchester "Walks," and the other fine avenues leading to and from the town, were planted seems still to rest in doubt; and I hope to be able, as the



result of a lengthy research among the town records of Dorchester, the Court rolls of the Manor of Fordington, old maps and plans, and other documents bearing on the subject, to clear this question up to the satisfaction of the members of the club and others.

Taking the "Walks" in the order in which they were planted, we come first to the "Bowling Alley" Walk, which, together with the West and the North or Collision Walk, was planted between the years 1702 and 1723.

At a Court Baron of the Manor of Fordington holden in June, 1723, the following presentment was made by the Homage:—"We present that the Corporation of Dorchester have made several encroachments on the lands belonging to this Manor, particularly by planting on and inclosing two several pieces of land on the North side of the Town of Dorchester and on the West side of the said town opposite to a close of pasture called Miller's Close, containing three acres (be the same more or less), and also by making another encroachment on the lands of this Manor by inclosing a parcel of land on the West side of the trees in "Bowling Alley" containing half an acre more or less, and also by making another encroachment by inclosing and planting on half an acre of land belonging to the tenement of Mary Winsow, Widow, lying at the South side of the said town and lying on the North side of the lands of Thomas Cooper, and also for another encroachment of a piece of land parcell of a copyhold tenement of this Manor in the possession of Mr. Edward Churchill which lies at the West end of the town of Dorchester called, of late, Alders Sawpitt—Ordered that the several persons to be proceeded against as the law directs."

From this presentment it may be gathered that the laying out and planting the Bowling Alley Walk and the West and North Walks was completed previous to June, 1723. Hutchins, the Dorset Historian, in the first edition of his work published in 1774, says these walks were made between the years 1700 and 1712 and planted with rows of limes and sycamore trees, as are the avenues on the South,

West, and East. This is confirmed by the Bishop of Durham, who puts the date of completion as 1712, doubtless on the authority of Hutchins. By 1730 the trees must have attained a considerable size, as visitors to the town remarked upon their beauty. These "Walks" extend Westward from the old South Gate of the town 187 yards, thence Northward to the North-West corner of Collision, 767 yards, thence Eastward to Glyde-path Hill, 167 yards, giving a total of 1,121 yards.

The trees forming these avenues are sycamores, except where they have been replaced, in more modern times, by elms and limes, several of the sycamores measuring over 9 feet in girth, 5 feet from the ground, and 90 to 100 feet in height. The following are the measurements of 6 of these trees taken by Mr. Malby and myself on 14th November, 1916, namely, 9ft. 9in., 9ft., 9ft., 8ft. 9ins., and 8ft. 9ins. respectively.

The next in order of planting were the South and East Walks, which were planted shortly previous to 10th October, 1743, as evidenced by the following "Presentment" made at a Court Baron of the Manor of Fordington holden on that date, namely:—"We present that by a voluntary subscription of several inhabitants of the town of Dorchester and Fordington there has since the last Court been made a walk and planted with trees from the corner of Grope Lane near the East Gate of the said town of Dorchester to a place called Gallowshill and from thence by the South Walls of the said town of Dorchester to the South Gate of the said town, and that the ground where such walk is made part thereof is the waste belonging to the said town of Dorchester and other part thereof the waste ground belonging to the said Manor of Fordington, and the residue thereof is one acre of arable land belonging to John Hayne, one of the customary tenants of this Manor, and parcell of the whole place tenement there, and extending East and West in the ditches there, from the said place called Gallowshill to the South Gate of the said town of Dorchester. We further present

that in order to make the said walk complete and to the intent that the same may from henceforth be enjoyed as such, William Churchill Esquire and William Templeman Gentleman, two of the customary tenants of this Manor, have agreed each of them to give half an acre of land belonging to their respective tenements in Forthington in lieu and by way of exchange for the said John Hayne his said acre of land thus converted into a walk and in order thereto to surrender up by way of exchange two half acres of arable land, the one belonging to the said Mr. Churchill's half place tenement called Britton, lying in the West Ditches of the town of Dorchester, and the other half acre belonging to the said Mr. Templeman his whole place tenement called Cadrows and lying in the South Ditches of the said town of Dorchester, and for that end and purpose the said John Hayne hath agreed to surrender up his said acre of land belonging to his said whole place tenement unto the said William Churchill and William Templeman by way of exchange for the consideration aforesaid and to be held and enjoyed by the said William Churchill and William Templeman's as parcel of the said William Churchill's whole place tenement in moieties—but nevertheless from henceforth to be used and continued as a walk for the benefit of the inhabitants of the said town of Dorchester and Forthington."

By an extract from the Dorchester Town Records, dated 30th March, 1744, it was ordered "that Mr. Cooper, the present Town Steward, do pay unto John Pitman ten guineas towards the railing out and completing the new walks." By another extract, dated June 30th, 1783, it was ordered "that the walks belonging to the town be repaired under the direction of Mr. Churchill the Town Steward, and Mr. William Bower."

In 1829, £26 16s. was ordered to be laid out in gravel and labour for the East Walk.

This, then, fixes the date of the planting of the South and East or Salisbury Walks. These walks extend from the South end of the South Street eastwards to Gallows' Hill,

thence northward to the Gas Works, and are 740 yards in extent.

The avenues consist of two rows of fine horse chestnut trees (a single row only is shown in Simpson's map of the Manor 1779, on the North side of the South Walks Road, the other row not being within the Manor), some being over 12 feet in girth, 5 feet from the ground, and at least 100 feet in height. I recently, with the assistance of Mr. F. T. Maltby, surveyor, took the measurements of six of the largest of these trees, and they measured in girth, 5 feet from the ground, 12ft. 9ins., 12ft. 6ins., 11ft., 10ft. 6ins., 10ft. 6ins., and 10ft. 2ins., respectively. A tree which stood opposite South Lodge, the residence of Dr. Kerr, taken down last winter, measured 9ft. 6ins. in circumference, and was over 90 feet in height. The trees are planted in rows 24 feet apart from row to row, with 20 feet from tree to tree.

This disposes of the trees known as the "Walks" planted on the site of the Walls and Ditches of old Dorchester, and of the tradition commonly accepted that they were planted by French prisoners of the Napoleonic wars, and of the French penitents said to have been dug up from time to time beneath the roots of the old trees now and then removed to make room for new ones. It is just possible, however, that prisoners of war taken during the Duke of Marlborough's campaigns might have had a hand in planting the West Walks, which, as we have seen, were planted early in the 18th century.

THE WEYMOUTH ROAD AVENUE, comprising two fine rows of English elm trees planted 36 feet apart and at a distance of 36 feet from tree to tree (from the Station Gate to Maumbury, these distances are 30 feet only), formerly extended along the Weymouth Road, from the South gate of the town to the confines of the Manor of Forthington on the South—as shown on Taylor's map, 1795; but when the cutting was made by the Turnpike Trustees in 1803 in order to level up and widen the road at this point, it was found necessary to remove some of the trees. The avenue was

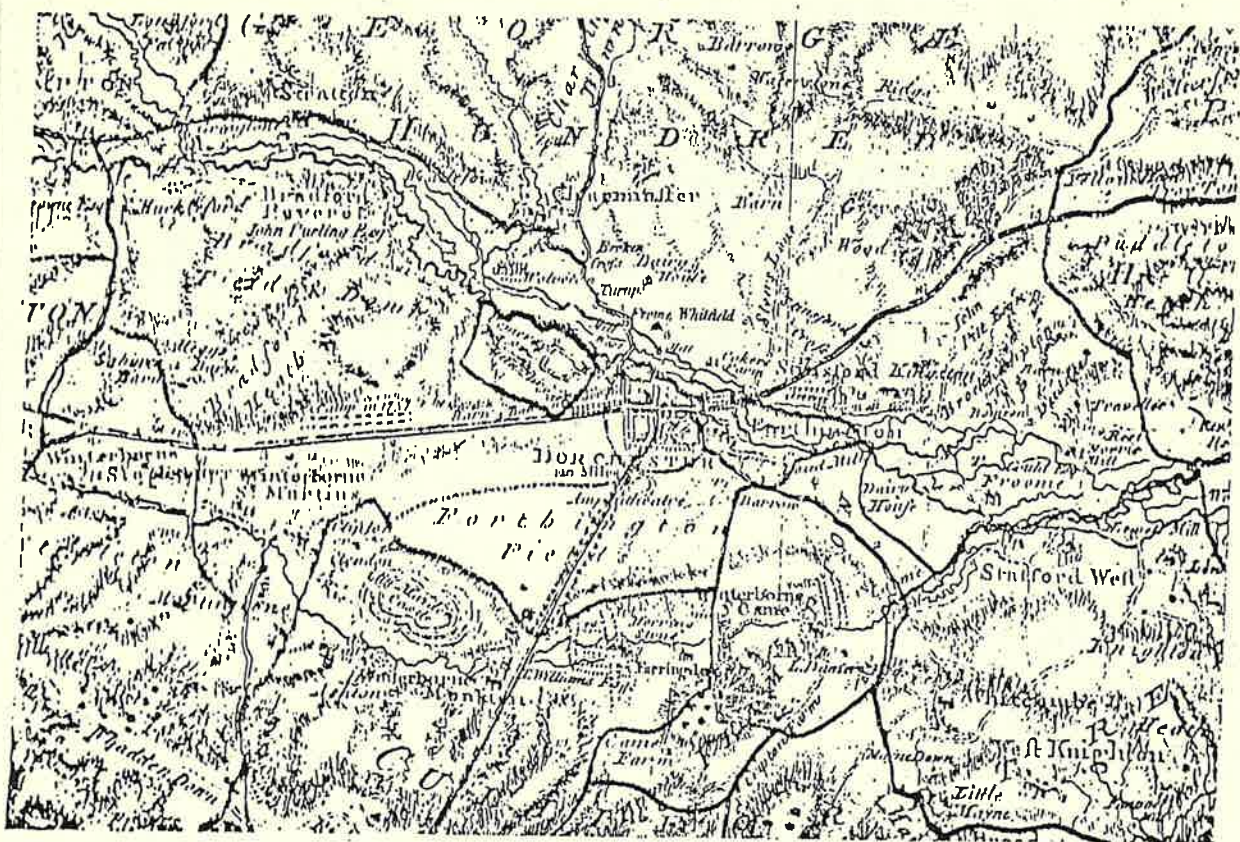
thus shortened at the South end by about 150 yards. A further curtailment on the North End from the South Gate to the entrance to the L. and S.W. Railway station took place in 1876, when the fine old elm trees then standing were replaced by limes, as seen at present.

As to the planting of this avenue, the following facts will approximately fix the date. From an old drawing in Grosse's Dorsetshire showing the Roman Amphitheatre and the Roman road which runs thence to Weymouth, drawn in 1755, the trees in this avenue are not shown, and it may be presumed were not at that date planted. In W. Simpson's map of the Manor of Fordington among the records of the Duchy of Cornwall, made from an actual survey of the Manor in 1779, a double avenue of trees extending 76 chains (say 1,672 yards) from the South Gate is shown. In Taylor's map of Dorset, published in 1795, this double avenue of trees is carried on to the confines of the Manor on the South about another half mile, and it is a curious fact that the trees, which for the first distance are planted 36 feet apart only in the rows, are for the second distance planted 60 feet apart.

I think, therefore, it may be presumed that the whole of the Weymouth avenue was planted prior to 1795, but subsequently to 1755; and that the Northern portion was planted before 1779, and according to Hutchins before 1774; the Southern part from about the first mile stone being planted subsequently, but prior to 1795.

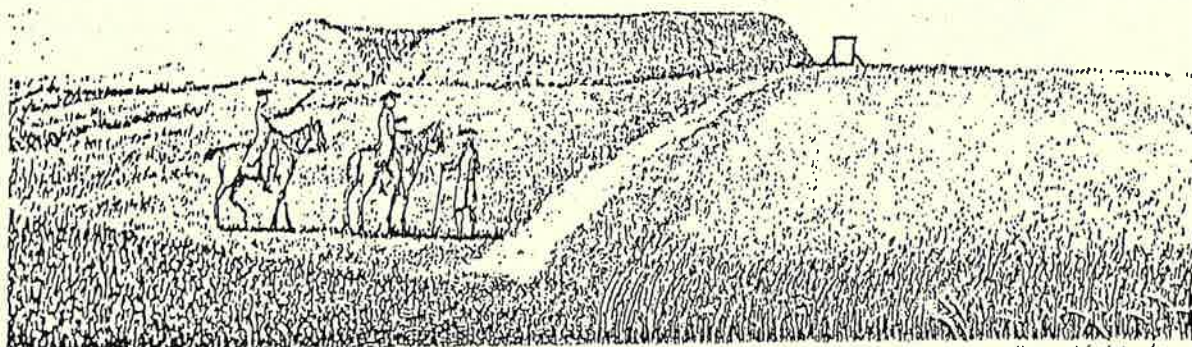
It has been generally accepted that this avenue was planted by Colonel William Bower, of Fordington, who took a prominent part in the defence of the town and county during the threatened invasion by Napoleon.

William Bower, brewer, was a copy-holder of the Manor, between the years 1789 (at which date he is stated to have been 40 years of age) and 1798, when he was admitted tenant to the Court House Malt House, and other premises—formerly of William Spering—"subject to the privilege of the Steward of the Manor or his deputy keeping the courts



From Taylor's Map of Dorsetshire

A.D. 1795

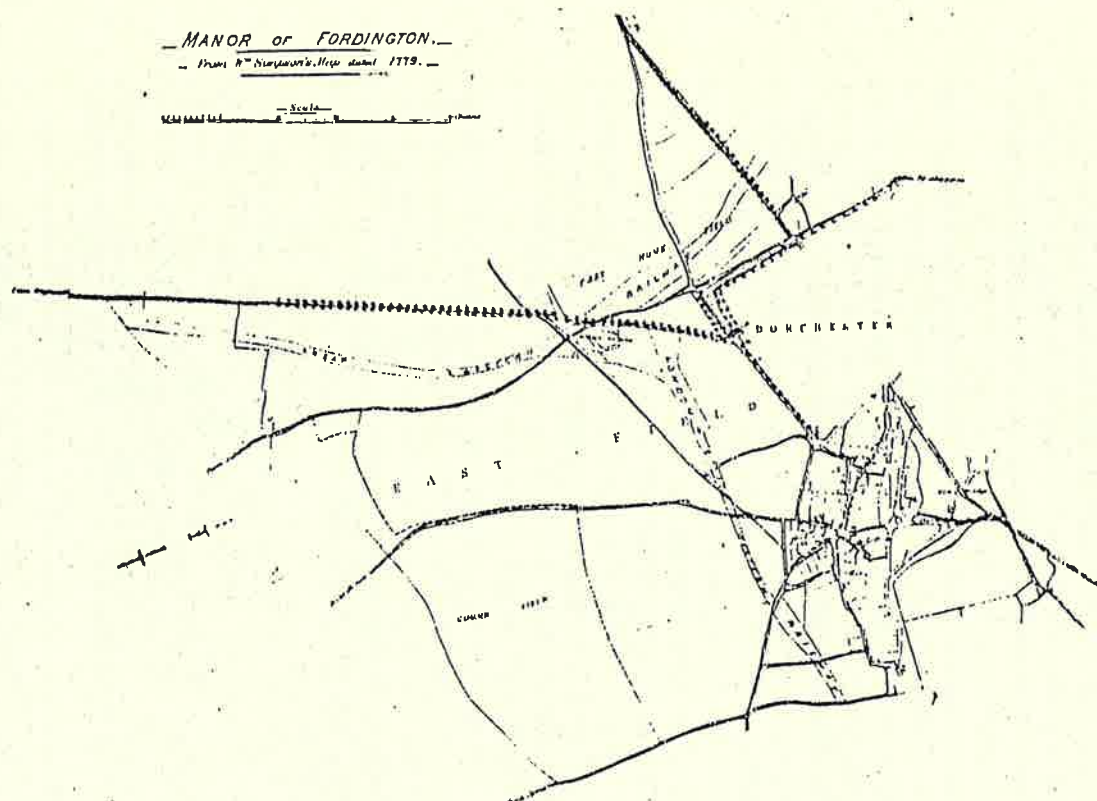


Collected July 10. 1786 by St. Martin

Engraved by J. Norton

Roman Amphitheatre Dorchester

From Grosses, Dorsetshire
Drawn A.D. 1755. Published A.D. 1786



From Simpson's Map of the Manor of Fordington
A.D. 1779

of the said Manor in the said Court House and providing proper and necessary conveniences for holding the same;—and it seems not improbable that the second portion of this avenue above referred to was planted by him, the first portion being of an older date.

BRIDPORT AVENUE ROAD.—There can be little doubt that the Eastern end next the town of this avenue to the top of the hill, so far as sycamore trees extend, was planted at the same time with the Bowling Alley and West Walk avenues, the trees being of the same age and species. In Simpson's survey of the Manor, 1779, the double avenue is made to extend thus far. In Taylor's map, published in 1795, the avenue is carried on to Damer's Barn; and it will be noticed that the trees forming the extension, from a point about opposite the town water works, where the sycamores cease, are English elms of the same kind as those on the Weymouth Road, and it is reasonable to suppose that this extension was made about the same time (*i.e.*, between the years 1779 and 1795) as that on the Weymouth Road.

The extension of the avenue from Damer's Barn to the road leading to Winterborne St. Martin was made in 1890 by the Dorchester Avenues Society, to which the late Mr. Henry Symonds was hon. secretary. The trees are Gloucester elms, and are doing well considering their very exposed position.

It will be noticed that several of the sycamore trees first planted on the North side of the avenue opposite Sydney Terrace, above the Railway Bridge, have been removed. This was done in 1895, by order of Mr. W. Tilley, with the sanction of the Duchy, on the ground that they were dangerous to, and obstructed the light from, the houses in the terrace.*

* Since the above was written the Town Council has, with the assistance of German prisoners, ruthlessly pollarded the fine old sycamore trees from the Barrack Keep to the railway bridge on the South side; those on the North side, being Government property, could not be touched.

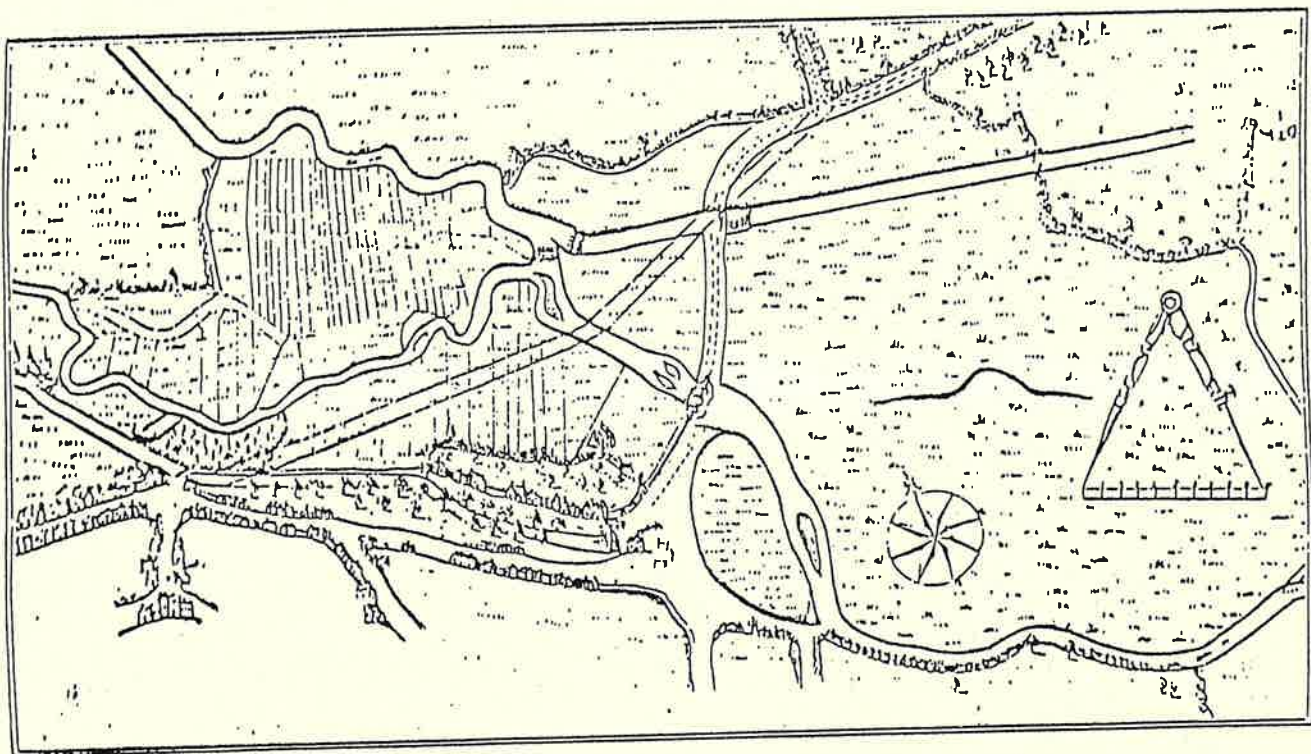
LONDON ROAD AVENUE.—A very fine avenue of magnificent elm trees formerly overshadowed this road, but in 1887 they were, by order of the then Duchy Steward, Mr. George Heriot, removed as dangerous, with the exception of seven trees on the north side, which were pollarded and may now be seen as evidence of what the former avenue was like; the present trees were planted by the Duchy a year later.

Prior to 1746, the road from Dorchester to Blandford and London went through Fordington. Passing along Holloway, leaving St. George's church on the south, it ran through the Ford below the East or Abbey Mill, thence over the "Old Bridge," which stood about 120 yards southward from the present "Grey's" Bridge, as indicated by the grass-grown mounds of débris on the east side of the river there, and joined what is now the new London Road, near where the road from Waterson intersects the same.

"Grey's" Bridge, as the date upon it shows, was built in 1747-8, when a new road was made by Mrs. Lora Pitt from the bottom of High East Street to "Stowham" Bridge, thus enabling travellers to Blandford and London to avoid the dangerous and circuitous route through Fordington over the "Old Bridge."

An interesting presentment relative to the making of this road was made at a Court Baron of the manor holden the 26th day of February, 1746, when, after reciting that by an Act of Parliament made the nineteenth year of his present Majesty, King George the 2nd, intitled an Act to enable Lora Pitt, widow, to erect a bridge or bridges over the river Frome and to make a causeway over Fordington Moor in the county of Dorset, it was among other things enacted that it should be lawful for the said Lora Pitt, at her own expense, to make a new road or causeway to branch out of the common highway between Stowham bridge and London* bridge within the Manor, over and through part of the meadow ground and other the common cow pasture, belonging to the manor,

* Lounds Mill and Lounds Estate are in this locality.



From the Court Rolls of the Manor of Fordington
26th February, A.D. 1746

to the town of Dorchester. It was presented and agreed that she, the said Lora Pitt, should pay into the hands of the tenants of the manor the sum of £100 to enable them to bear and pay the charges and expenses of erecting proper wyres and digging trenches and drains, rendered necessary by the erecting of such causeway, and of maintaining and keeping such wyres, drains, &c., in repair.

The new road was made and the bridge built and opened in 1748, but the avenue of trees was not planted until many years later, certainly not until after 1779, as Simpson's map of the Manor does not show them; but in Taylor's map of Dorset, 1795, the trees are shown. This avenue, therefore, now replaced by younger trees planted at a much greater distance apart, was doubtless planted between the years 1780 and 1795.

A single row of sycamore trees, shown in Simpson's map 1779, formerly extended from the South gate to the old Britannia Inn, now the Great Western Hotel. These, with the clump of trees on Beggars' Knap, where now stands "Mentone Lodge," the residence of Mr. Edwin Pope, were removed in 1876, when the frontage to the Fair Field was let off by the Dorchester Corporation for building purposes, much against the wishes of the townspeople, who memorialised the Corporation that they might be allowed to stand. The facts and the memorial are fully set out in a brochure entitled "A mare's nest discovered in the trees on Beggars' Knap," written by the late Mr. G. J. Andrews, of Dorchester, in 1876.

THE WAREHAM ROAD AVENUE.—This avenue is of alternate pink and white horse-chestnut trees, and extends from the bridge over the L. and S.W. Railway to, somewhat beyond "Max Gate," the residence of Thomas Hardy, O.M., the Dorset novelist. They were planted in the year 1868, and both the trees and the cost of planting were the gift of the first Lord Alington.

THE PRINCE OF WALES' ROAD AND CULFORD ROAD were planted in 1876 by Messrs. A. and E. Pope, the joint owners of the Prince of Wales' estate.

THE MANOR ROAD, SOUTH COURT, AND HERRINGSTON ROAD AVENUE were planted at the expense of the owner of the South Court Estate (Mr. Alfred Pope) in 1890, and QUEEN'S AVENUE, VICTORIA PARK, was planted in 1891 by the Victoria Park syndicate. The trees in Cornwall Road and Maumbury Way were planted in 1888.

This, then, is the true history of the far-famed "Walks" and avenues of Dorchester, as evidenced by the Court rolls of the Manor of Fordington, part of the possessions of the Duchy of Cornwall, the official records and accounts of the town of Dorchester, and the various maps of the town and the locality which have from time to time been published, and I hope it may set at rest the many doubts and surmises as to when and by whom our beautiful avenues were planted. I need hardly add that these walks and avenues are much prized and appreciated by the townspeople of Dorchester. They are justly proud of them, and take great interest in them. Of late years they have been added to and improved, both by private enterprise and the Dorchester Avenue Society; and it is to be hoped that the mania for cutting down and over-pruning the trees, which some few years ago obtained with the governing body of the borough, will not again be renewed.

I have to acknowledge the courtesy received, in my researches at the Duchy of Cornwall office, from Mr. Walter Peacock, M.V.O., the secretary, who placed the Court rolls of the Manor of Fordington and ancient maps and plans relating to the Manor at my disposal, and also the assistance given by the Rev. R. G. Bartelot, the Vicar of Fordington, who has supplied me with many useful facts and figures.

The research has been a real pleasure, though somewhat wearisome and difficult, and has taken up more time than I originally contemplated; but it has proved most interesting work, and well repaid the time and labour expended. I think I may claim to say with the poet Herrick—

"Attempt the end, and never stand to doubt,
"Nothing's so hard but search will find it out."