

Extract from: *Millennial Halstead: A Kentish Villager History*. By Geoffrey Kitchener, M.A.

The early nineteenth: Semper Vir (Always a Man).

The 1830's and 1840's were a contentious time in the village, largely due to one person, Harry Stoe Man of Halstead Hall. Man fell into feud with the squire, Alderman Atkins, as indeed he seemed to do with a range of authorities. Being of a barrack-room lawyer disposition, if he was wrong in any matter, he would use every technicality to prove himself right, and if he was right, he would alienate his allies in the course of his claim. Family tradition credits him with a violent temper, as when he chased with a broom a beggar who was posing as an old seaman but who was unable to answer correctly a nautical question from Man. [Halstead Hall]



Man contracted in 1831 to buy the Hall, through his wife's marriage settlement, and arrived as a gentleman of independent means, but with an embittered past. He claimed honourable naval service, having seen action against the French 1802. A pistol ball was supposed to have passed through his cheeks during the engagement, leaving holes through which he would whistle when angry. But in 1825, while purser on H.M.S. Perseus, he was court-martialled and dismissed from the service, on the grounds of having charged 26 seamen for blankets which they never received. Deprived of his half-pay pension, and convinced of injustice, he fought the decision for the rest of his life.

In 1825 he took the members of the court-martial to court, unsuccessfully, on the basis that they had been improperly constituted; and in 1829 followed with similar proceedings. By 1841 he had made 84 applications to the Admiralty to reconsider his case, he was accusing the Board of Admiralty of perjury, forgery and fraud, and was trying to enlist the help of his County MPs. He took further proceedings before the Queens Bench in 1841 and 1842, but the court was not prepared to consider matters at that distance in time. His attempt to petition Her Majesty in Council was refused. [Below Halstead Place]



On his arrival at Halstead, it was supposed that he would be a useful member of the community, and he was appointed an overseer, to apply parish funds to the use of the poor. At first, he was all diligence, attending vestry meetings even when no other members did so. It was not long before he was minded to assert independence from the squire, feeling, as he said, that had Atkins

"made his great dog one of our church wardens instead of his under-gardener, who now officiates, no one would have dared to contradict it". So instead of consulting Atkins (the largest ratepayer) before taking steps to make a rate to cover funds for the poor, he asked the rector to have it announced in church in the usual way. Upon the Rev. John Sampson's refusal, he announced it himself; then tried, and failed, to collect from both Atkins and the rector, and summoned the rector before the Sevenoaks magistrates for non-payment. The magistrates included Atkins on the bench, so it was not surprising that they exonerated the rector, and purported to quash the rate.

The result was a temporary stalemate, as Man could collect no rates as overseer, and so made no payments to the parish poor. The vestry made various attempts to compel him to produce accounts, and Man was eventually indicted before quarter sessions at Maidstone for irregularities of which he was acquitted. His satisfaction at the decision was somewhat tempered by having been arrested beforehand by a constable accompanied by three of Atkins' men. He was confined, pending bail, at the Black Boy at Sevenoaks under constant watch, while Atkins sought to have him committed to gaol. There is a family belief that Man dug up the churchyard gate to enable his carriage to pass, which may well have triggered another dispute at this time. The old church was approached by a way through the grounds of Halstead Place, and in May 1834 there was much concern about a lock which had been placed on the churchyard gate. It is entirely possible that Atkins was trying to prevent Man's access; but for the villagers it was an issue of public



rights. The oldest inhabitants all spoke as to their recollections of use of the way. Some could remember the hearses for the funerals of Robert Eyles in 1795 and Elizabeth Bagshaw in 1802. Others remembered Mrs. Brooks of Broke, "a very ailing woman", attending church by cart some 45 years previously. Edward Brooks had made the present gate in 1816 from an oak tree of disputed ownership at Hunts field, the rest of which had been used for the parish fund. On the whole,

the tenor of the evidence was that the squire had interfered with public rights.

The dispute moved next to the village pond by Halstead Hall, adjoining the site of the present parish room. According to Man, he had erected a few hurdles three years before, in front of a laurel hedge, to prevent cattle and horses from destroying it. The Atkins-sponsored case was that this was an infringement of public rights: that he had ruined the pond by moving the clay in 1835, and had then fenced across it with large hurdles, endeavouring to purloin the land, "giving only brutal Answers to the remonstrations made by Mr. Atkins and others; the Nuisance being meanwhile cruelly felt by the people". Atkins chose his ground carefully, being appointed surveyor of highways so as to claim grounds to complain, and then causing Man to be indicted at the Maidstone assizes. There Man entered into a dispute over payment of court fees, and seems have confused matters by having replaced the fence with a wall of flint and brick, while the

proceedings still referred to the fence. A consent order for arbitration by a barrister yielded no result, Atkins claiming that Man subsequently denied his consent, so that the barrister could not act. [Below 'The Cock' pub in the village].

Back in court for the Lent assizes in 1837, Man was ordered to take down the wall within a month, or forfeit £100. He had not done so by the Summer assizes but, according to Atkins, he, although “well known as a blustering bullying person, and horrid in his



language, effectually imposed on the kindness of Mr. Justice Littledale, by crying and weeping bitterly, pretending great penitence”. Man, on the other hand, treated the occasion as a straightforward recognition by the judge that the proceedings referred to removal of a fence, and he

had no jurisdiction over the wall. Judgement was stood over until March 1838 when Man did not attend, providing a medical certificate. His enemies said that this was obtained only after being refused a certificate by another practitioner who considered him in good health. But Man claimed that the refusal was merely a referral to his usual doctor. His certificate was not brought to the court's attention, however, and the £100 was forfeited. He applied to the court for relief but spoilt his success by objecting to paying the court fees. So before he had extricated himself the forfeiture was enforced and he was taken to prison for nine weeks. "To use the Officers own words who took him to Gaol his expressions were horrible."

From Man's own viewpoint, this was all a conspiracy of oppression. "I ask who can contend against power and riches -against a man worth £300,000, if that man is determined to sacrifice you? ...is anyone safe against riches, power, judges, attornies, under-sheriff: sheriff's officers, and clerk of the arraigns, counsellors, barristers-at-law, and clerks and officers *combined* against me ... I am ready to die a martyr."

Matters did not stop there. In 1839 he was summoned for non-payment of rates which he defended unsuccessfully on the basis that the parish owed him money, but successfully on the grounds of a deficiency in the date of the rating form. That spurred him to intervene in the rating process, and when in next February a list of the poor was presented to the magistrates for exemption from rates, he objected to the entire list. The parish vestry was then able to trumpet how they were the warmest friends of the poor cottagers, albeit “thwarted by a certain Parishioner”. At this time, the entire parish was being surveyed for the purpose of converting the clergy’s right to receive annual produce by way of tithe, into a fixed money payment ("tithe rent charge") for the different properties. Inevitably, Man complained at his share and then sought to embroil appeal proceedings by claiming that the Assistant Tithe Commissioner had arrived two hours late. The

evidence was that Man had brought a letter of objection and left immediately, and the Commissioner had arrived a few minutes before his appointed time.

From the writings of Man's fifth son, William Lionel Man, it might be supposed that Man had other troubles than those which were self-inflicted. The son left what appears at first sight to be an account of his early life, with all the Victorian era's fascination and sentiment in respect of too-frequent child deaths-

"...my little Sister Ellen died just after Christmas and I remember when the undertaker came, and they carried her away to the Churchyard. My father asked one of the men who bore her on his Shoulder whether there would be a pathway through the snow. The man (placing the pall upon the coffin) answered that Whitehead and Wigzell had dug a passage to the grave and that Mr. Heywood the clergyman had gone down to the church better than twenty minutes ago.



How well I remember that cold winters morning -the chestnut trees in front of the House, and the Walnut tree in the meadow opposite, covered in the cold white drapery of snow. My Father, -looking, as he always seemed to look to every one but me, cold and stern, his hand holding mine, and pressing it lovingly, and then a voice -my mother's - He is too young to go, let him stop here, at home. [Above the old graveyard (now abandoned) where Harry Stoe Man was buried]

I press my father's hand and ask him to take me with him, he whispers something to my mother, and then kissing me she wraps a scarf around my neck and kisses me again.

I can see her face now, she looks so white and marble like. She is standing with one foot on the last step of the doorway and the other on the gravel walk, I can see (Baby as I am) that her heart is nearly breaking with a heavy sorrow. I long to put my arms around her neck, and say "dear Mama please let me go, and don't cry", but I can't do it, because the clash of the tolling bell sounds clear and ringing -oh~ such a dreadful sound to me -the old Dog -my Sister's pet, we called him Spot -comes rushing round the Lawn and jumps upon me and licks my hand, then crouches down and growls as the Death Bell of Halstead Church tolls out that the grave is ready for my little sister's burial.

I remember how cold I was, and that the men had to cut a path for us to the grave, I remember my Father -when I took my hat off at the grave kissing me, and tying his pocket handkerchief round my neck. Harry and my Brother Morrice were close to the grave and I remember that Harry was sobbing and when they lowered the coffin into the little grave he took out of his green bag (in which he always kept his marbles) a bunch of Snow drops, and threw it on the coffin. His head was covered with the drifting snow and he looked an old man -to me -he was only ten or twelve I can't remember to a year or two but I know I loved him for the pretty

brothers' offering he had made, and so did our old dog Spot for he wagged his tail and kissed his hand.

..... This was my first sorrow."

Curiously, however, there is no record of the birth or burial of Ellen at Halstead, although William had an older sister, Eleanor, who survived until 1894. So the account, despite its circumstantiality, seems to be fiction. Dramatisation of his childhood perhaps came naturally to William who, although articled to a solicitor, ran away and married Rosa Cooper, a Shakespearean actress, becoming known as an actor under the name of Lionel Harding.

Harry Stoe Man died in 1848, and his presence at the Hall did not cease then, so every member of the household firmly believed. He outlived his protagonist, Alderman Atkins, who was succeeded at Halstead Place on his death in 1838 by his son, John Pelly Atkins.

SOURCE NOTES:

Purchase of the Hall: title deeds KAO U746.TI4.

Man correspondence as to Court Martial: KAO UI515.CI3.

Court proceedings reported in Barn. & Cres. vol.9, p.595;

The Times 4 June 1841, 31 May 1842.

Kent Assizes agenda books 1836-38, PRO ASSI.31.28.

Civil minute books, PRO ASSI.32.8.

Vestry book KAO U969/Q2.

Vestry book 1835-1970 (held with church papers when examined) .

Case to Counsel KAO U969.03.

Scrapbook of cuttings and articles by or about W. Lionel Man, privately held. Major-General Patrick Man, in litt.

Colonel Andrew M. Man, in litt.

H.S. Man, *An unprecedented case of oppression with a narrative of facts* (1838); copy at KAO.

Halstead tithe file PRO IR 18/3623.

Halstead burial registers KAO P166. 1.



Halstead Church