

Richard Hodgkinson's diary entry, August 24th 1795

Mr Green, being so kind as to lend me his Horse, I set out at ab^t 11 o'Clock & went to Langston to spend the day among the Reapers. I found Mr Evans very forward with his Harvest, having housed about one half of both his Wheat and Barley. His reaping is done by Welchmen who annually come for that purpose. He finds them Victuals & Drink and gives them 14s per Cover for Reaping, 3 of which Covers make two Statute Acres.

Mr Evans informs me that the greatest part of his Purchase-money is already paid into the Hands of his Solicitor, Mr Phillips, & that he has desired him to lose no time in completing the Purchase as soon as Miss Atherton is ready. I went all thro' the House and found it very much out of repair. The Hall is entirely uninhabited, old Mr Cope who lived in it being dead since I was last there.

Mr Cope's Executors had made a Sale of his Household Furniture a few weeks before. And the House was stripped of every thing, except here & there a piece of old lumber not worth carrying away & particularly a pair of Bedsteads with Head & Tester (but no hangings) which bore the marks of ancient Grandure & State, but now were covered with Cobwebs & Dust. This Bed, I was informed, was for the sole purpose of laying out the Corpses of such of the family as died, when Langstone was the residence of the Gwilym Family. This idea, I confess, gave a gloomy cast to my reflections, & I c^d not help thinking that if Miss Atherton was with me, it w^d furnish her with a good moral Lesson.

A few years ago this gloomy deserted place was the residence of gaiety and splendor. The ornaments upon the dusty walls & tops of the Rooms, with the heavy Cornishes, shew that taste and fashion once resided here. The spacious Hall & Parlour tell us that many a joyous Feast has here been held. That many a Bottle, & many a Cask of native Cyder, has here have been quaffed, while, doubtless, Wit & Humour passed around. The jolly Farmer, here, no doubt, has many a time well drench'd his skin, & pleased that his Esq^r has deigned to make him drunk, gone reeling home, & envied not the Courtier of his Prince's smile.

The stately Palisades & lofty Iron Gates are now grown over with rust, & the Garden Wall is moldering to the Ground. Here, dismal as it now appears, was the residence of a worthy Family, honoured & respected by all who knew them, the boast of their Friends, and the pride of Langstone. Miss Atherton might reflect that from this Family she descended by no distant line, this house having been the Seat of her Grandfather even after he was married, she might see to what herself must come, that she like her Ancestor must ere long sink into the Grave & by degrees into Oblivion too. And that her House, which now seems to bid defiance to time, will like this become deserted and only be admired for its massy ruins, & gloomy appearance.

The Clock, upon the top of the Dove-house, here, struck five. Its sound thro' the empty Hall seemed like the knell of some departing Spirit. I stopt, and tho't it bid to remember that time, not to be recalled, is continually passing on, & not to forget, in reflecting for Miss Atherton, to reflect for myself.

I returned to Wilton about 7 o'Clock after having spent a day as agreeable as any I ever passed in Herefordshire. The day was warm & pleasant, but not much sunshine.ⁱ

Happily, Langstone still stands in good repair, but Atherton Hall in Lancashire, built between 1723 and 1742, was demolished in 1824 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atherton_Hall,_Leigh.

My uncle Colin talked of an old four-poster bed that used to be at Langstone but now belonged to the Victoria & Albert Museum. He tried unsuccessfully to get it back. I assume it must have been the Gwilyms' bed described here.

One may also observe that the import of "foreign" labour to get the harvest in is no new phenomenon.

i Hodgkinson, *A Lancashire Gentleman* pages 86-87