

Have we lost Pinner Fair for good?

The answer is a resounding 'No!'

Every so often PLHS gets asked whether the right to hold Pinner Fair will lapse if for one year it is not held, because the enquirer has heard long ago that something in the charter provided that it should. This year of pandemic has brought more worried enquiries, even from Harrow Council.

The authority for the fair is, as is well known, a charter granted by King Edward III in 1336 to the Archbishop of Canterbury, John de Stratford (on Avon), who was Lord of the Manor of Harrow. It granted him the right to hold a weekly market and two annual fairs in Pinner 'in perpetuity' that is, forever. It still holds.

The fairs were to take place at the two major festivals of St. John the Baptist, patron saint of our parish church, which were his Nativity and Decollation, the birth and beheading. The first was for three days, the eve or vigil, the natal day itself, and the morrow thereof; that is from 23rd to 25th June. The second was for 28th and 29th August, the vigil and the day of the beheading.

The only clause threatening the holding of the fair was "unless that market and that fair are to the detriment of neighbouring markets and neighbouring fairs". Now there was already a fair held at Harrow on 8th to 9th September, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, its patron saint, so there must have been a clash of interest in this case with Pinner's second fair, which would surely have been decided in favour of the existing fair. (The lord's interest was in receiving the rents of stall holders.)

We don't know whether St. John's fair has been held every year, because the earliest reference to it so far found is a mention of it in the account book of William Bodimeade, brickmaker, for 18th May 1769. Already the day had been moved from the originally granted day, presumably by agreement.

About the market, which was to be held on Wednesdays, there is no further record. Whether it was ever held is quite unknown. Maybe Pinner was too close to Harrow for it to be viable.

What about the effect of that great medieval epidemic, the Black Death? Did the fair carry on in 1349, when it was at its height in England, and the fair was only 13 years old? Of course, as made

plain above, there is no information at all, but I think it would have been very unlikely indeed.

Back to today - I should think the fair might be abolished if everyone agreed upon it, and there have been many failed attempts to abolish it. Whether it would require legislation I do not know. As it is, the original wording of the grant still holds. Covid 19 does not change that.

The wording of the charter:

The King to the same greeting Know ye etc. as above that in perpetuity they may have one market each week on Wednesday at his manor of Pynnore in the county of Middlesex and two fairs there each year for five days duration one that is on the vigil and the day and the morrow of St. John the Baptist and the other on the day and the morrow of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist Unless etc. as above as far as the end The witnesses being as above Given as above

By the King himself and by writ of privy seal.
Charter Roll (Chancery) 10 Edward the Third. m14. No.31

Note: Jim Golland's book "Fair Enough" gives you all the later detail about Pinner fair and many others. I think there are still a few available from PLHS.

Pat Clark May 2020