

History of Hole in the Wall and Court Farm

The small hamlet of Hole-in-the-Wall lies in the parish of Foy on the eastern bank of the river Wye a few miles upstream from Ross in the county of Herefordshire. It is an ancient site where Court Farm, the Gatehouse and several cottages have evolved over the centuries from a fortified manor known as Eaton Tregoz Castle. The name Hole-in-the-Wall is possibly derived from Turlestane 'a hole stone' or from 'holywel' and Eaton Tregoz is named after 'river settlement' and the family of Tregoz.

Eaton Tregoz

In 1280 John de Tregoz endowed a chapel at Eaton Tregoz and in 1309 a licence was granted to William de Grandison to crenellate (build fortifications) 'his dwelling house at Eton'. In 1420 the manor house or castle contained 'One hall, one great chamber, at the end of the hall, and under it a buttery and pantry; a parlour with a chamber adjoining, a chapel with a chamber adjoining, a chamber called John ap Harry's Chamber, a kitchen, a bakehouse, a brewery, a great stable, a great barn, a chamber over the lower gate, a chamber over the outer gate, a great oxhouse, with divers other tiled houses built on the site'.

In the early 15th century the manor devolved to the Abrahall family who held Ingestone together with Eaton Tregoz, but after 1487 the manor was divided between two brothers and the focus of the manor switched from Eaton Tregoz to Ingestone on the west bank of the Wye in Foy. In 1610 'all that manor, capital messuage called Eaton Treygosse' with its park, woods two water corn mills and fishing in the Wye was in the tenure of William Abrahall. His descendant John Abrahall provided three almshouses - one room up and one room down for three poor pious persons in 1640. Sometime after this date the mansion became ruinous before the last male heir of Eaton died in 1715 when the property passed from the Abrahalls and through the female line to Percival Lloyd.

Court Farm and the Gatehouse

Court Farm of two stories and a basement dates from the early 17th century and almost certainly occupies the site of the former castle or fortified manor of Eaton Tregoz. Other buildings stood in the fold and yard together with a range of three tenements later converted into one cottage and a house on the riverbank known as the Gatehouse. The settlement at Hole-in-the-Wall began to expand with cottages and an inn probably built from the remaining stones of Eaton Tregoz. By 1747 the Court was in the ownership of Herbert Lloyd and in 1754 was still marked with a castle legend on Taylor's map.

From the late 18th century William Clifford acquired the Perrystone estate and his family later purchased the Court which in 1799 was rented to Samuel Steele. In 1805 the land around the Anchor and Can Inn was investigated to discover 'the remains of some ancient buildings, consisting of the foundations of some well-built walls, with huge stones lying about:What is now shown as Hole-in-the-Wall, is an excavation formed in the rocky bank of a neighbouring garden; but the spot is so overgrown with brambles, as to be difficult of access. When complete, it consisted of a flight of steps leading downwards to a cavity, sufficiently capacious to contain about twenty persons'.

The Gatehouse was another alehouse called the Boatman's Rest, which 'catered not only for the bargees passing between Hereford and Monmouth, but also to those crossing the ford below it to West Foy' it also served as 'stabling for the barge horses and a wharf'. From the end of the 18th century barges freighted timber and hurdles from the wharf to Chepstow, and limecole was delivered to the Hole to be measured and used at the local lime kilns. On the opposite bank a variety of goods including apples, bottles, lime, cases of wine, casks, bottles, hampers and hurdles were loaded and unloaded.

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In the 1840s the Court House and Garden, the Buildings and Fold, and an Island on the Wye were tenanted to Joseph Cadle from Henry Clifford. Other cottages at Hole-in-the-Wall were rented from Henry Clifford including the Gatehouse housing the Boatman's Rest occupied by George Tommy. Three widows lived in the Almshouses, and the former row of tenements had been converted into a Smith Shop owned by John Powell and tenanted to George Tommy. Joseph Hardwick kept the Anchor and Can and operated the ferry.

During a storm on a dark night in 1844 a passer-by hurried past 'the pot house called the Hole in the Wall and passed the ferry where the horse-boat was moored to the shore, and had almost reached the wood when the storm came. The only sound he heard was the awful imprecations of a blaspheming bargeman from a barge with a red light sailing down the broad stream at Foy. The place was lonely on the road between the river and the wood, where on most nights he would have seen or heard some of the labourers of the surrounding farms coming from their toil, or an errand-woman returning from a neighbouring market, or a farmer on horseback jogging from a friend's home'.

Due to a rapid decline of the river after the opening of the Hereford, Ross and Gloucester Railway in 1855, the Boatman's Rest at the gatehouse closed as a pub. After Henry Clifford sold the Perrystone estate to George Clive in 1865, James Saunders was at Court Farm, the Anchor and Can was run by Sarah Hardwick, and at the Gatehouse 'a fair-sized room at the east end housed the school until shortly after 1870'. A new National School was built in 1872 a few years before the first suspension bridge was built to replace the ferry. A legend exists that a tunnel once led from the Rick Yard of Court Farm under the Wye to the cellar of Ingestone on west side, but when investigated 'the appearance was of a filled-up well to within about three feet of the surface'.

Twentieth Century

During the 20th century many changes took place at Hole-in-the-Wall. The bridge was washed away by floods in 1919 and rebuilt in 1921, the shop closed, and George Fry at the Gatehouse 'supplied most of the inhabitants of Hole-in-the-Wall with milk'. During the 1950s Douglas Williams was farming 150 acres at Court Farm, dilapidated cottages were demolished, the school closed and many properties became holiday homes. In 1960 the Almshouses were rebuilt and incorporated into one dwelling, and in 1965 Court Farms and its buildings were sold to PGL to provide an activity holiday centre. In 1973 PGL acquired the Gatehouse which was unfortunately burnt down in 1975, and at a later date the company purchased the former Smith Shop known as Wayside and the former almshouses known as Abrahall Cottage.

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