John Dawson, 1692- 1765.

John Dawson, of Hoxton Market, was a hop excise man, sitting in Tunbridge Wells, from August 1722 and lodging in Penshurst until 1727. In July 1724 he took an oath in pursuance of the Coffee Act. He built up a substantial library which he willed to the church of St Leonard, Shoreditch. This included two volumes of his diaries. This material was included in items “returned’ to the Library Commissioners for the Parish of St Leonard in 1899 by Rev Septimus Buss, rector of Penshurst.

With these pages were two typed lists, one headed ‘ Lists of Inhabitants in the Penshurst Borough AD 1724,’ and the other ‘A list of the Housekeepers in the parish of Penshurst March 25th 1727’, both of which also include occupations.

He kept a diary, possibly daily, and the surviving entries can be seen in the Hackney Archives Department. Copies of thirty-eight pages are in the John Flower Collection of the Penshurst Living Archive. It is possible that Dawson himself may have edited his own diary; whether he himself left a copy in Penshurst is not known.

Each entry date has a sign which denotes the day of the week . On November 25nd, 1722, John Dawson recorded:

*I was ordered to Penshurst, to change divisions with Mr James Allen, and accordingly went there today, where I came at E.T.(?)*

The next day ; *I came to lodge at Widdow (sic) Packhams. Where I boarded myself and Daughter Jane for 8 shillings a week.*

There is no further mention of Jane, although the death of her mother, in London in1726, might explain her presence with her father. She may have attended the school, or spent her time in the village in her father’s absence.

He regularly recorded deaths and illnesses in the village, and perhaps Jane furnished him with the daily gossip on his return back to lodgings.

In 1724 he noted on 10th August that there was *‘a great cricket match played at Penshurst between the Parish of Dartford and the Parishes of Penshurst,Tonbridge and Wadhurst.’*  The harvest was got in early that year, which was just as well as there was a five hour storm on 18th, *‘which did great Prejudice both to hops and apples.’*

On September 28th 1725 he noted ‘*Was the greatest flood at Penshurst that had been known since 1703; the river being above 3 foot above the Causeway.’* An even greater flood was recorded in January of the next year, followed by frost and snow.

His interest in cricket also covered a report that on June 13th 1726 *‘there was a match between Mr. Stead’s Club for Kent and the Men of Surrey; when was the greatest concourse of people ever at Penshurst, being supposed to be between 5 and 6,ooo people’.* This does seem unlikely although there is a note elsewhere of Mr Stead’s team playing in 1718..

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