

## 9. Romsey's Market

*Writ 'ad quod dampnum' ('to whose disadvantage')*

The known history of Romsey Market dates from the reign of Henry I (1100-1135). He granted the Abbess of Romsey Abbey the right to hold a weekly market on a Sunday.

At some point, perhaps at the instigation of the 17th-century Puritans, the day changed to a Saturday. Then, by the early 19th century, this day was also under review for more practical reasons. The improvement in transport after the development of the turnpike roads had brought Romsey's market into more direct competition with those of Andover, Lymington and Winchester, which were also held on a Saturday. By the 1820s Romsey market was struggling. In seeking an alternative day for Romsey, it was noted that Southampton held its market on Fridays and Salisbury on Tuesdays. So Thursday was considered to be the best choice for Romsey.

A deputation of 'the inhabitants and neighbourhood of Romsey' went to Lord Palmerston, as lord of the manor, and asked him to present their case to the King's Attorney-General. It seemed a straightforward matter, until Stockbridge raised an objection, claiming that their own Thursday market would be adversely affected. Stockbridge made an unexpected move by applying for a medieval writ that had been little used in recent years and use of which caused a flutter of interest in many circles beyond those immediately involved. The writ in question was a writ 'ad quod dampnum' (a writ to what damage). The case was heard at the White Hart, Winchester, and was reported in the Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle on 9th January 1826. Mr Henry Holmes represented Romsey.

Mr Holmes countered the claims of the young Stockbridge lawyer with devastating effect. He traced the history of Stockbridge's market, which had only operated in fits and starts since it was first established in the Elizabethan period. The most recent revival had been in 1794, when it had only lasted about a twelvemonth; it had long been 'the shadow of a shade'. Any further attempts to revive that market would have the same effect as 'galvanism on a dead rat'. Furthermore, the recognised distance required between markets was seven miles, and Stockbridge was ten miles from Romsey. A change

of day for Romsey need not, therefore, affect any revival of the Stockbridge market, but it would be of enormous benefit to the growing population of Romsey and its vicinity. Stockbridge, Mr Holmes declared, was playing 'dog in the manger'.

Eventually, the jury withdrew but reached a decision after only a few minutes deliberation. The verdict was in Romsey's favour, and although there was some reference to other steps that could be taken, nothing seems to have come of it. Romsey Market continued to be held on a Thursday until it finally closed in the 1960s. In 1826 the Abbey bells were rung when the news of the verdict reached the town, and it was said that they shook the tower, such was the enthusiasm of all who celebrated the change of Romsey's market day.

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*Ref: 19th-century British Library Newspapers*