

NOTES ON SALE OF NAVY TIMBER, SITUATED ON THE  
WHITEHOUSE ESTATE IN THE YEARS 1812-13.

By ARTHUR S. WOOD.

(Read 20th August, 1936.)

William Wood, who was born in 1758 at Hereford, does not appear to have lived at Whitehouse until a few years previous to 1812.

The estate was his wife's (Frances Haselden) inheritance, she being the granddaughter of Magdalen Howorth, who married Robert Haselden in 1729.

It may be of interest to remark that the estate has descended—going backwards—through four generations of Woods, two of Haseldens, and four of Howorths, the first of that name, Epiphan who died in 1643, being preceded by Rowland Vaughan of Whitehouse and Newcourt.

For a considerable period before 1812 the timber seems to have been conserved and, in fact, the estate is said to have been "in chancery" and except possibly for home use, very little had been felled.

On William Wood's decision to live permanently at Whitehouse, a valuation of the timber was made during the spring of 1812 by Jacob Holland of Leominster, the original book is preserved, with the result that 3,299 oak trees were marked for sale, and about an equal number, mostly the smaller trees, marked to stand.

Of the oak trees offered, approximately 2,230 appear to have been sold by private treaty during the following months of 1812. The remainder, divided into seven lots, were advertised for sale by auction. One of the original posters has been preserved and the sale is thus described:—

NAVY TIMBER

Of prime Quality, very great Lengths, and extraordinary large Dimensions.

To be sold by auction by William James

At the CITY ARMS HOTEL

in the City of Hereford

On the FIFTH DAY OF MARCH, 1813,

1,063 Capital Oak Timber Trees, growing on the Whitehouse Estate, in the Parishes of St. Margaret's, Turnaston

and Vowchurch, Twelve miles from the City of Hereford and Six miles from Canon Bridge, from whence, down the navigable River Wye, the Timber may be readily conveyed to any of the Ports or Yards in the Kingdom

Lot VII contained some of the largest trees, varying from 40 to 230 cubic feet with an average content of 100 cubic feet, and an average value of over £18, or nearly 4s. per cubic foot. The total footage of the seven lots is stated to be 53,300 cubic feet.

There is no record of the purchasers of the timber, or of its ultimate destination, except for one tree—an exceptionally long and straight oak, standing in the meadow below Whitehouse, and containing nearly 250 cubic feet. This tree was transported by road to the South Wales coast, near Tenby, on a wagon drawn by twelve horses. Its weight at full length in the round would probably have been ten tons. It was erected upright and a lanthorn for the guidance of mariners fixed at the top.<sup>1</sup>

The tree still standing behind the house, known as "The Great Oak," can be identified in the valuation book made 124 years ago as one of the trees numbered to stand, by the paint mark number 289 being still clearly visible. The number would originally have been in red paint, and so at some subsequent date must have been overpainted white. But my father used to say that not within his memory, which would extend back some 80 years from now, had he known it other than white.<sup>2</sup>

The value placed against this tree was £18, so possibly, even at that date, it may have been 250 years old, and was past its best and not considered sound.

The cubical contents now, making no allowance for defects, is about 500 cubic feet.

You will note that it has lost several large limbs, but that it still retains its full height.

It should be added that the whole of the numbered timber, marked for sale, and marked to stand, was growing on an area of some 200 acres, and that this also included a few hundred ash, wych, &c.

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<sup>1</sup> A member, Mr. W. King of Hereford, present at the meeting, mentioned that his grandfather had assisted to fall the Navy Timber, and that on arrival at Canon Bridge it was unloaded into the River Wye, four or five trees being lashed together to form a raft, which was then ready to be floated down the river. Mr. King's grandfather also supervised the first stage of the journey by water as far as Hoarwithy.

<sup>2</sup> Red lead can become white by reduction to a lower oxide, *i.e.*, if mixed with a little sugar and water it soon becomes white. Some similar change may have occurred on the tree.—*Ed. H.E.D.*