

Sydling History Society

The Reddle Woman of Sydling

There follows a transcript from the Dorset Evening Echo of 4th January 1985 - so add 40 years to any timelines.

Note that the Poor Lots referred to where the Reddle woman camped are no longer common land but were likely brought under private ownership by one of the many Enclosures Acts.

Mr Dubben, the author was the son of the village baker - the bakery was the building , now called Greystones, next to the Old Vicarage.

I expect he was related to the Dubbens who owned one of the village shops.

Bushes Bottom is mentioned - this was the subject of Will Best's talk , hosted by the History Society, here in the hall a couple of months ago - if you missed it you can listen to it. it's very good - just search Bushes Barn Sydling on You Tube.

I can see no headstone in the Churchyard belonging to the Reddle Woman - maybe she lies in an unmarked / pauper's grave.

Finally, Reddle is red ochre, dug from pits and had various uses, but here was sold to farmers as a ready mixed dye to apply to rams.

Reddle Woman's Camp

Stories that have appeared over the last few months have reminded reader Mr Arthur Dubben of Damers Rd, Dorchester, of how he got to know the Reddle woman Mary Ann Bull.

He writes :

"On a hill between Sydling and Cerne Abbas is a field known as Poor Lots. This field belongs to the villagers of Sydling, and anyone from there could graze cattle, catch rabbits, cut furze, or camp there.

The Reddle Woman camped there and considered herself a villager. Incidentally she is buried in the churchyard at Sydling. She put the shafts of her cart on the ground , fastened two poles on the sides and covered it over with a tarpaulin, creating a box-like tent, and would have an open fire in front from furze which she cut.

By the way, the red dye she would use was only put on the ram who would transfer it to the sheep.

My father was the baker at Sydling. We delivered bread to the Giffords at Langford Farm, and so many loaves for the two families who lived at Bushes Bottom, the valley between Sydling and Godmanstone.

Sometimes they did not leave the money for their bread, so father decided I should ride horse-back with a basket of bread on my arm to them to collect what was owed and to pay for what I took. That was where I got to know the Reddle Woman. She called me over one day and asked me to call with bread for her each time I rode by which was quite a few times.

I enjoyed the gallop and so did our mare, Bess. I got to know Mary Ann Bull very well. She would tell me how she got on with her farmer customers. Some were mean but I gather that she usually got off best. It tickled her that one farmer always gave her more than she asked for. She led a lonely life and was pleased to get someone to talk and to listen to her.

Although over 80 years ago, I still remember some of her quaint ways. She was a little person and her face was more brown than white. Some of the villagers said she was a witch, and the lads treated her badly. I often heard her swear at them, but I always found her pleasant and got on well with her, although I was only a boy.”