

The Goodrich Ferry Oak

By Rosalind Lowe

The Woolhope Club visited Goodrich in August 1901, when the party of more than 60 crossed from Walford via the ancient ferry below the castle. This took some time as there were only two small ferry boats, later augmented to three by Mr Moffatt of Goodrich Court. Before climbing up to the Court, the group assembled under a 'beautifully grown and regularly spreading oak tree on the bank of the river.' A photograph was taken of the tree and appeared in the Club's Transactions for that year. Presumed to be ancient, it now stands perilously close to the river bank. The question is - just how ancient is it?

The Oak in 1901 and 1997



Figure 1. The oak in 1901. (H. C. Moore)¹



Figure 2. The oak in 1997. (R. Lowe)

Accidental Portraits

We are fortunate that since the late eighteenth century artists have been taking the Wye Tour. Many travelled from Ross to Goodrich overland and crossed by the ferry from Walford rather than by river. The castle upon its wooded eminence and the ferry beneath formed an irresistible subject and the artists portrayed the scene with variable degrees of accuracy.

The owner of the ferry rights received the crossing fees but the ferryman no doubt only received a small percentage for what was sometimes a dangerous job. It's clear from the paintings and sketches that it was a 'chain' ferry, similar to that which still exists at Symond's Yat. A chain was stretched between poles on either bank and the ferryman or a passenger pulled the ferryboat across, with a loop sliding along the chain. This is clearly shown in the earliest known depiction of the ferry, Samuel and Nathaniel Buck's engraving of 1731 of Goodrich castle (Fig. 3). There is no sign of a windlass being used to pull the boat across, unlike the ferry crossing at Huntsham where a field was already called Windlass Meadow in 1718, the windlass being clearly shown in David Cox's picture (Fig. 4). The Buck engraving also shows that the large building shown in later views, the Boat Inn, was already there in some form in 1731.



Figure 3. The ferry in the 1731 Buck view



Figure 4. David Cox's view of Huntsham Ferry

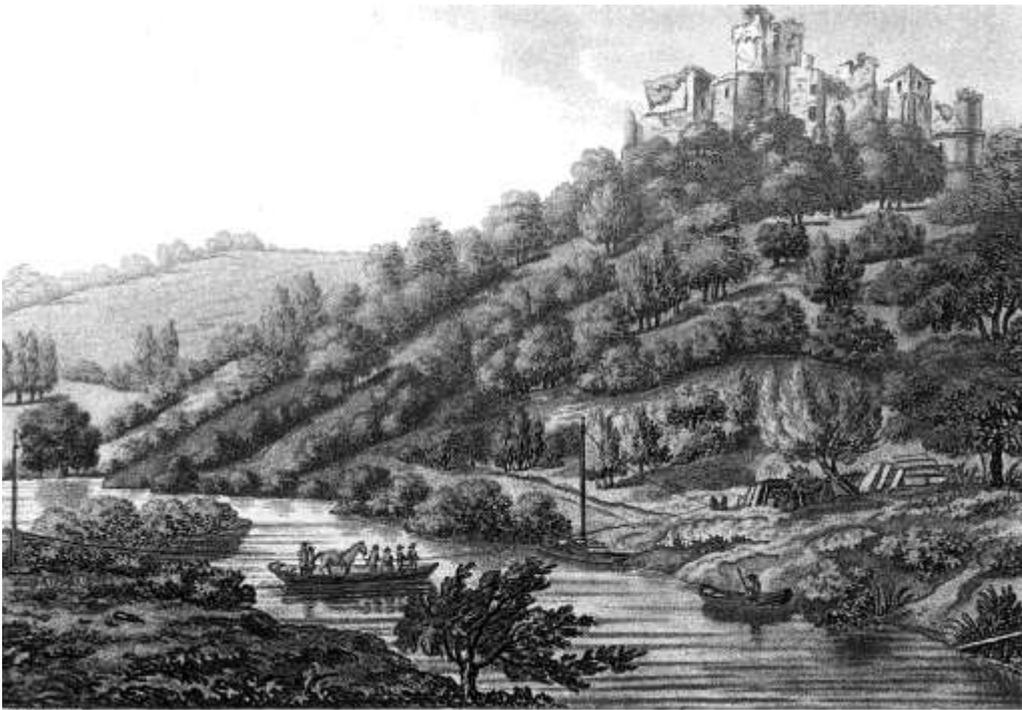


Figure 5. Samuel Ireland's view of the ferry.

Samuel Ireland's 1797 engraving (Fig. 5) shows that the ferry could take animals. The trees below the castle are a bit odd but he does show a large one, perhaps an elm, near the way to the boat. In 1833 John Varley painted a view towards the castle from the river path (Fig. 6) which gives us the best view of the trees near the ferry. His nearer view of the castle (Fig. 7), although the Wye looks like an estuary, does show an apron of land projecting into the river.



Figure 6. John Varley – approaching Goodrich castle (1833)



Figure 7. Varley's nearer view of the castle and ferry (1834)

Perhaps Edward Dayes's sketch of 1792, later engraved, gives a better idea of a possible candidate's trunk. (Fig. 8).

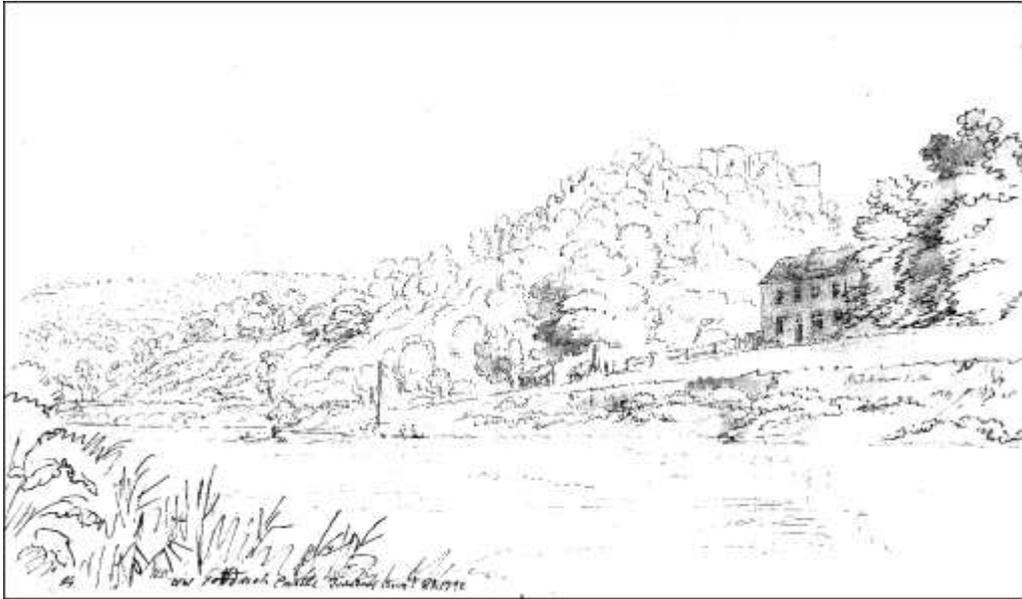


Figure 8. The ferry in 1792

From all these views there appear to be two candidates for the ferry oak: a large elm-shaped tree and a smaller one nearer to the inn best seen in Fig. 7.

Map evidence

The 1839 Goodrich tithe map is the first to show any detail of the site of the ferry and the Boat Inn (Fig. 9). The innkeeper in 1839 was John Evans, but plot 228 (Boat House and Garden) and plot 229 (Wharf, Tow Path and Bowling Green) were owned by Kingsmill Evans Esq. as were plots 230 (Garden meadow), 231 (Boat Lane meadow) and 272 (Castle meadow).

The legend is that the rights to the ferry and the land were granted by Henry of Lancaster, lord of Monmouth and later Henry IV, when he was told while crossing at the ferry of the birth of the later Henry V at Monmouth in 1386/7. The grant goes rather further back to 1314, when another Henry of Lancaster, lord of Monmouth did grant the ferry and land to his servant John Grynye.² Even at that date there was a '*messuage*' or house there.

The erection of Kerne bridge in 1828 meant that the ferry was doomed. Although dues were payable to cross the bridge it was available in all weathers and the approach roads were less difficult. The owner of the ferry still had a statutory duty to provide the service, but it wasn't until 1945 that this was finally extinguished.

The original survey for the 1904 25-inch to the OS map was made in 1887, revised in 1903. This scale of map usually shows individual large trees unless they're in woodland but there seems to be no sign of the ferry oak (Fig. 10).



Figure 9. The 1839 Goodrich tithe map with the Boat Inn shown in pink

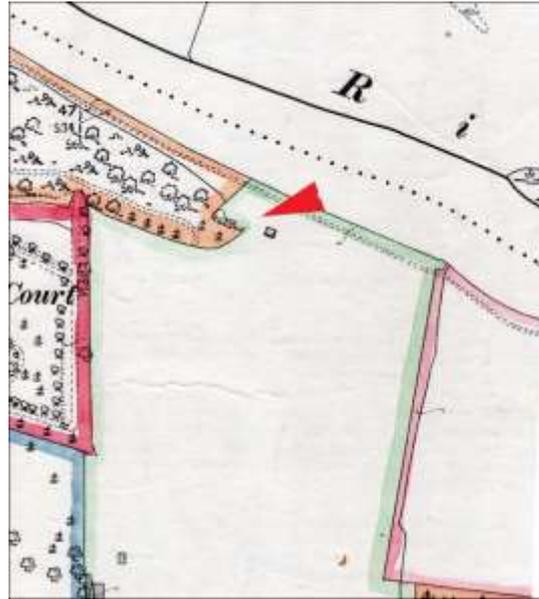


Figure 10. The 1904 26in OS map first surveyed in 1884 with the oak position arrowed



Figure 11. The red arrow points to the ferry oak

An early aerial photo with the ferry oak arrowed is informative (Fig. 11). Between 1839 and 1884, no doubt as part of the boundary alterations after the purchase of the Goodrich Court estate from the Meyricks in 1871 by the Moffatt family, plot 228 on the tithe map has been altered. The tree sits in a notch cut from 228 but there is little sign of the Boat Inn. Remains of a building can be seen in both the 1901 and 1997 photos.

Now the site of the ferry can only be approached by public footpaths along the bank of the Wye, either from Kerne bridge or a footpath leaving the A40 near Glewston Tenders on the Ross side of Penraig. Both directions entail a longish walk.

Conclusion

The two trees shown in Fig. 6 just to the left of the inn building are the likeliest candidates for the current ferry oak. The larger is not shown with a typical oak shape, but artistic licence may be the cause. The trunk indicates a tree probably no more than 150 years old, as the waterside situation would cause rapid growth. Although it would be nice to think of Henry of Lancaster learning of his son's birth under the shade of this ferry oak it seems unlikely.

Location data

Goodrich Ferry Oak: Grid ref; SO 57457 20251; **Lat.** 51.879193, **Long.** -2.6194346.

References

¹ Photograph of the Goodrich Ferry oak in 1901, *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club (TWNFC)*, 1901, opp. p.202, by H. C. Moore.

² Rosalind Lowe, 'Upmouths, cricklesand gillyns: some notes on Wye fisheries between Ross and Monmouth', *TWNFC*, 2008, pp.99-110.