

The Grievances of a Wilts Farmer, 1640.

In the Calendar of the House of Lords MSS. is recorded, under date 1640, the Petition of Osmund Gibbs, yeoman, for relief against John Farwell and others, by whose unjust practices he had been deprived of a copyhold at Westwood, in the county of Wilts, held by him under the Dean and Chapter of Winchester.

In his Articles of grievances, Osmund Gibbs relates that John Farwell, a councillor-at-law and justice of the peace in the county of Somerset, having cast a greedy eye upon petitioner's copyhold, endeavoured to become owner thereof by most unconscionable practices. Pretending that he had a horse hanged, he caused petitioner to be arrested, and although there was no evidence against him and he was discharged, yet he again prosecuted him for it. He then presented him to the Dean and Chapter for committing waste and cutting down trees, and afterwards indicted him at the Assizes upon a false charge of stealing a tame buck, and he procured witnesses to swear that petitioner confessed having stolen it. He was found guilty and put to read for his life.

Petitioner desired to read the Psalm of Mercy, but Farwell so incensed the judge against him, that there was not only a clear bar made to prevent promptings, but the judge turned him into one of the hardest verses to read, which by God's grace he was enabled to do, and so escaped hanging, but was burnt in the hand. Farwell has since taken forcible possession of his copyhold, thrust out his children, and locked his wife in a room without food in order to starve her, and otherwise oppressed him.

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