

Dastardly deeds at Binegar Fair

Dastardly deeds at Binegar Fair were common. Here is an example from 1543 in the reign of Henry VIII. It concerns one Thomas Foxe, brewer of "Bristowe" who petitioned the *Court of the Star Chamber*.

He begins, "Most humble-wise and complaining. . ." He tells of selling his ale, wine, beer and victuals at Beneger Fair. As well as bringing "great pleasure and commodity" to people attending the Fair, it brought "great advantage to your poor subject towards the maintenance of his living, his poor wife and great number of children".

On 22 May, Foxe packed up his unsold beer, wine, ale and victuals. He hired a man, his horse and wain (wagon) to carry the goods the 13 miles home to Bristol. Others shared the space in the wagon.



At Emborrow, Foxe alleges that Robert Duddleley, Robert Hyppesley, Thomas Blandon, Robert Evans and "divers, lewd and misruled persons of their affinity" attacked. "Arrayed like men of war", they were armed with clubs, swords and staves, putting Thomas Foxe in fear of his life.

The gang exacted a ransom of two shillings and four pence (12 pence = £600 today) but then destroyed Foxe's goods. This was, Foxe says, "to the great loss and utter undoing of your poor subject for ever". He was "brought to extreme poverty and is likely to perish" unless the Honourable Council is moved with pity to order some recompense.

Foxe asked that the King put the offenders on "safeguard and surety" (a Tudor ASBO?) so that honest folk might

travel without fear. He requested they answer for their crimes before the Star Chamber.

The *Star Chamber* records are lost, so truth is for you to decide. It does seem strange that a brewer reduced to penury had the money to petition the King. Equally, could a Hyppesley really be a gangster? The answer to this last question might surprise you. Some of the younger members of rising gentry families were not yet pillars of society. In 1532, the same Robert Evans, this time with Edward and Nicholas Hyppesley, were found to have wantonly vandalised Emborough Pond. As if such a thing could happen in Mendip today!