

King Henry VII sign – Longwater Lane – History by Trevor Ottlewski May 2020

In 1501 Katherine of Aragon, after a dangerous sea voyage, arrived at Plymouth at the beginning of October with her entourage in readiness for her journey to London and marriage to Prince Arthur. After some time spent recovering from the voyage, the party set out for London stopping at numerous places en route. Just after 1 month (about the 6th November) she arrived at the Bishop's Palace in Dogmersfield, Hampshire, where she was due to stay the night, before continuing to her next stop at Chertsey. King Henry V11 had news of her planned and imminent arrival at Dogmersfield, and depending on which version you believe, either set out from London to join Prince Arthur who was hunting at Easthampstead or travelled with Prince Arthur from London and stayed at Easthampstead Hunting Lodge, from where they travelled on to Dogmersfield to meet Arthur's future bride. Either way it was Easthampstead they set out from to go to Dogmersfield. They arrived at Dogmersfield to be informed that a personal meeting was not considered correct, however, Henry would not accept this and insisted on a meeting. It went well and the evening was spent feasting and merrymaking, with a respectable distance being kept between the soon to be married couple. The next day Katherine of Aragon and her entourage continued on their journey to Chertsey.

It should be born in mind that roads were unmade, it was late autumn, and the River Blackwater would have to be crossed, probably by ford, and it is likely that land on either side of the river would have been marshy in many places. Not an environment that would be willingly crossed by a large group of people if it was not necessary. Katherine and what must have been a sizeable entourage would not have diverted across a river if it wasn't necessary, neither would she have left a direct route for no good reason, and a look at a map shows Dogmersfield to Chertsey does not follow a route through Finchampstead. The meeting often quoted as being on The Ridges has its own controversy as a place name; the earliest useful map dated 1607 shows the area we now know as The Ridges was called Beche Hills (Beech Hills), undoubtably descriptive of the landscape then and surviving now as the last few Beeches at Edge of Hill, (perhaps Finchampstead's most historic piece of surviving woodland).

The only potential link between the above story and Finchampstead is the possibility that King Henry V11 and Prince Arthur travelled via Finchampstead on their way to Dogmersfield for the meeting with Katherine of Aragon. At a stretch Prince Arthur may have been out hunting in Finchampstead when King Henry arrived, however he could have been anywhere within several miles of Easthampstead (bearing in mind this was then Windsor Forest a Royal Hunting ground), and it would be unlikley he would have joined the king immediately and headed straight for Dogmersfield, without changing into more formal attire, to meet his future bride whom he had never met, was destined to be Queen of England, and was bringing a large dowry with her.