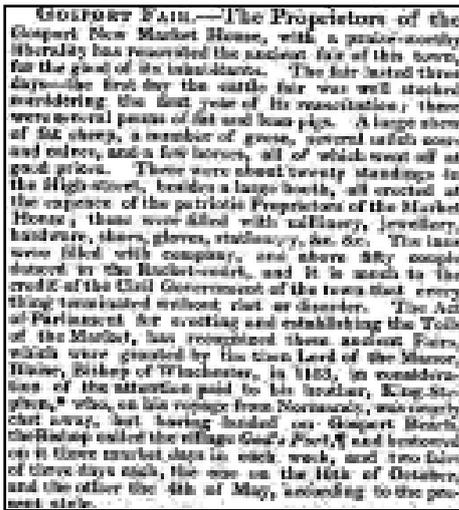


God's Port, Gorse Port or Goose Port. Which?

This has been debated for many years and still causes disagreement. Years ago children were taught in local schools that Bishop Godfrey de Lucy founded Gosport at the beginning of the thirteen century. But does the origin of the name stem from the legend of King Stephen, who on a voyage from Normandy was cast onto the beach at Gosport resulting in Henry de Blois, the Bishop of Winchester, referring to it as God's Port?



The very first written reference to this story seems to be an article in Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle etc (Portsmouth, England), Monday, October 14, 1811. The inhabitants of Gosport were looking for assistance with obtaining an Act of Parliament for their new market house in 1811. A local Portsmouth historian, (Henry Slight?) found a document in the papers of the Bishop of Winchester which claimed to be the original grant of markets and fairs to Gosport by Henry de Blois, resulting in the Hampshire Telegraph article above.

Henry Slight writing in 'A History of Portsmouth' in 1838 says:

There are two fairs at Gosport, of trifling extent, viz. on May 4, and October 10. The act of parliament passed for erecting the new market, in 1811, recognized the ancient fairs, which were granted by the then lord of the manor, Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester, in 1158, in consideration of kindness shown to his brother, King Stephen, who, in a voyage from Normandy, landed here after a storm : The Bishop called the village God's Port, bestowed on it the fairs above mentioned, and three market-days in each week.

White, writing in 'The Story of Gosport', states that in 1682 a fire hearth receipt was discovered in the beam of an old house in Gosport High street when it was pulled

down in 1833. It said ' Received of Edward King, the sum of four shillings in full for one half year's duty for four fire-hearths in this house in godsport due and ended at Michlemas last past. I say received by Edward Nevey, Collector.' However spelling in documents such as this can be arbitrary and suspect. An error in the spelling?

The idea of God's Port was revived when Gosport was granted its charter and the Gosport crest was designed by local artist Martin Snape in 1922. The words 'God's Port Our Haven' were added in 1946. This is now the basis of our Borough logo. Details here: Gosport Seals

The second suggested origin of the name, Gorse Port, is dependent upon the idea that the yellow bushes gorse or 'goss' growing on the Gosport coast line are the origin of the name, 'Gossport'. This is problematical as there is no written evidence to support the idea. Yes, Gorse, or Goss, does grow locally but one argument to counter this idea is that the term for the bush locally was not Gorse, but Furze, so we should be 'Furzeport'. Also Gosport appears to have more ferns than Gorse.

The third suggestion stems from the known fact that Gosport was a port that held Goose Fairs, going back to the thirteen century.

Philip Eley writing in The Place Names of Gosport:

The name apparently derives from gosa, Old English for goose, and port, Latin portus or harbour, 'borrowed' from Portchester, Portsea and Portsmouth. The suggested derivation from gorse is clearly nonsense as gorse is a northern name for what is traditionally called furze in this area. Similarly, 'God's Port' is a nineteenth century romantic invention, but one which has 'official' backing in the form of the town crest with its motto of 'God's Port our Haven'.

God's Ports, Gorse Port or Goose Port? make your choice.

The only provable fact from written sources was that a place called 'Goseport' existed by 1241. A town was planned and laid out on the site before 1243 but no earlier than 1170, which was the year before Henry de Blois died.

For a more detailed description read God's Port The Origins of Gosport, written by local historian Philip Eley