

Documentary History for  
**79 and 81 The Causeway, Steventon, Oxfordshire**  
*Site Code: STE-I*

from

The Medieval Peasant House in Midland England

by

Nat Alcock and Dan Miles



Fig. 1. View of the house from the north

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***Oxbow Books***

STE-I: 79 AND 81 THE CAUSEWAY, STEVENTON, OXFORDSHIRE

No. 81 was formerly known as The Firs.

Grid reference: SU 4673 9172

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Documentary history by Nat Alcock and Chris Currie with the assistance of Heather Horner and Catherine Lorigan

*References:* Currie, C. R. J. (1976) 'Smaller domestic architecture in North Berkshire, c 1300 - c 1650', Oxford, D. Phil thesis; Currie, C. R. J. (1992) 'Larger medieval houses in the Vale of the White Horse', *Oxoniensia*, 57, 81-244.

*For court roll and documentary source references, see the bibliography of primary sources.*

*In the admissions tables, Mess = messuage (house); a r p = acres rods perches; v. = virgate/yardland; d. = died. s. = surrendered.*

*Abbreviations:*

BRO Berkshire Record Office, Reading

Reg Parish registers at BRO; transcript published on CD by Oxfordshire Family History Society.

TNA The National Archives

WAM Westminster Abbey Muniments

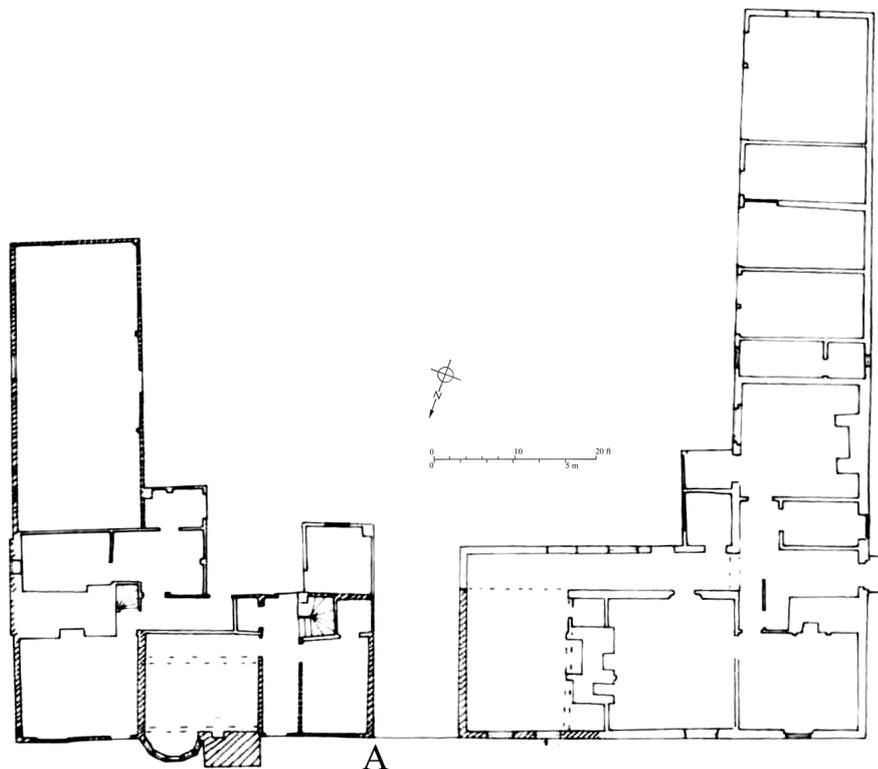


Fig. 2. Plan, showing truss and bay numbering (based on Currie (1992)).

## SUMMARY ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

These two houses form a single structure, comprising a pair of late-medieval, box framed houses, on either side of a gateway, each with an open hall. No. 79 (east) comprises an open hall, heated with a substantial and possibly original fireplace, and accompanied by a two-bay domestic wing, containing a central fireplace, apparently of the same date. The wing continues with three further bays with a queen-strut and clasped-purlin roof, which may have been agricultural in use. Although the wing has not been fully surveyed, it appears that the front and rear ranges are part of the same structure having, for example a wall post with pegs for mid-rails on both sides. The front gable has a crown strut flanked by upward braces, which is identical in form to the gables at Wisteria House & The Stores, East Hendred (X-EHA), which also have queen-strut trusses behind them; that house is dated to 1472/3. A date of around 1500 has also been suggested for the house.

No. 81 comprises the present gateway and a hall or kitchen bay with a smoke bay later inserted in the adjoining bay, extending into a brick range probably replacing two original bays and later extended to the rear.

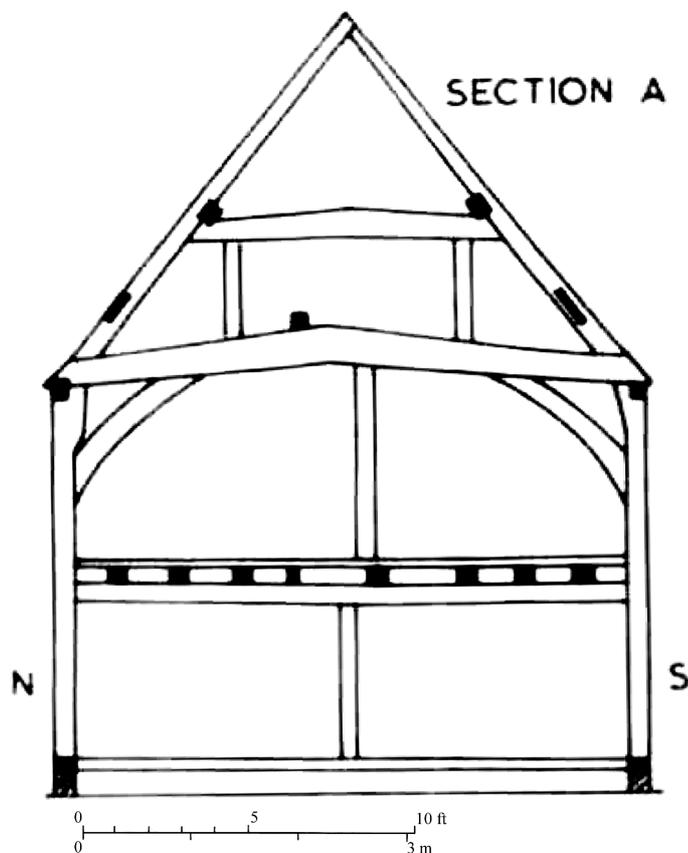


Fig. 3. Section of truss A (from Currie (1992)).

### *Location and summary history*

On the 1842 Tithe Map, these two houses are plots 17 and 18, owned by William Stevens, occupied by William. Looker. They can be traced back to 1679 in the court books, when they formed a single copyhold property, although they were then regarded as two holdings (numbered 9 and 14 in the c. 1800 holdings list). Their ownership can be traced from about 1400, being acquired as part of the substantial estate of Richard Doo (acquired in two halves in 1430 and 1463). They were settled on his son Thomas, but after 1501 passed through a number of hands, finally being acquired by John Wells in 1593. and can be traced in the hands of the Wells family until they passed to Thomas Doe, probably in 1641. They were acquired by the Stevens family in 1761, the copyholders of both houses until they were enfranchised.

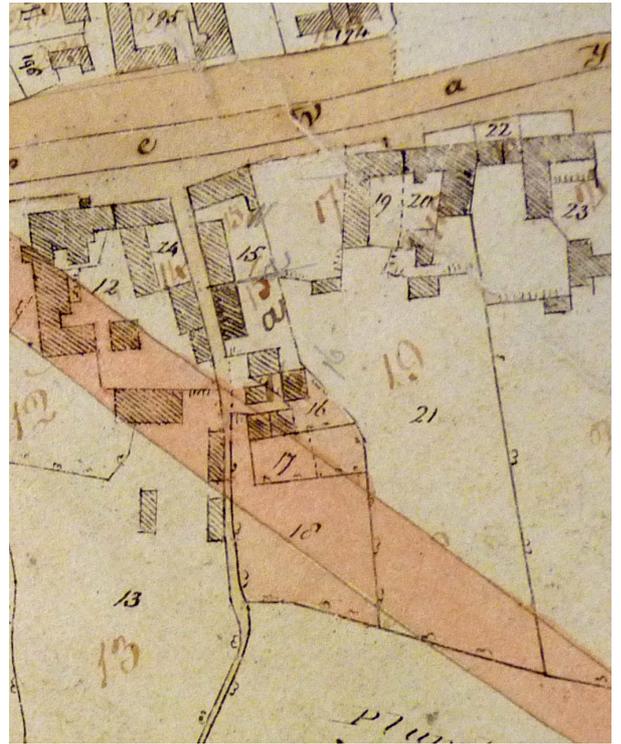
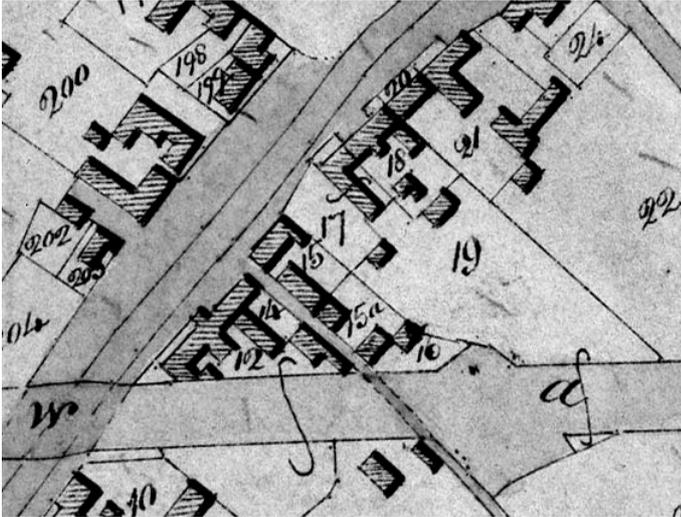


Fig. 4. Excerpts from the 1842 and 1839 maps of Steventon: (a, left) the 1842 Tithe Map;  
(b, right) the 1839 map

79-81 The Causeway is plots 17-18 (TM; 19-20 in 1839) and its orchard is plot 19 (21 in 1839). This was cut through by the railway. (1839 map reproduced courtesy of Steventon Parish Council).

#### *History after 1664 (Table 1)*

In 1679, Walter Doe inherited  $2\frac{1}{4}$  yardlands on the death of his father, Thomas. Although no house is mentioned in this admission, it appears that it included both 79 and 81 The Causeway. They were surrendered separately in 1720 by Walter Doe, senior, to his sons Walter and Thomas, but the latter died before he was admitted, so the second property also passed to Walter. The western property was then described as a 'messuage called Wells'. Since an orchard, formerly of Robert, then of Joseph Wells lay within or adjoining the curtilage, this house can be presumed to have belonged to the Wells family. The two houses passed to John Stevens in 1761 (with separate copyhold admissions) and on his death were separately bequeathed in 1797. 'Wells' passed to Sarah Stevens, but with only the house and garden, the rest being included with the other house. In 1821, they were recombined, and then remained with the Stevens family. They were enfranchised in 1873.<sup>1</sup>

*Table 1. Admissions to holdings 9 and 14, 1676 onwards*

The column *Hld* indicates which holding is concerned.

<i>Hld</i>	<i>Adm</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Descr</i>	<i>Rent</i>
9/14	93	1676	Walter Doe	d. Thomas Doe, father	$2\frac{1}{4}$ v (messuage not named)	£1 4s 10d
9	364	1720	Walter Doe	s. Walter Doe, senior on 23 Mar 1716[17]	Mess where Walter, uncle (avus) lived, mess late Eliz Weston (E); mess called Wells of Walter Doe (W), backside, gdn, free ingress via the court of Wells; 10 ac land, 2 cows common	7s 10d

<sup>1</sup> At some date, the name Wells was transposed from 81 to 79 The Causeway. Later deeds and the holding sequences identify it as 79, the eastern of the two properties, whereas Adm 364 and earlier show that Wells lay on the west (or south) side. The error was probably made by an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century solicitor's clerk, misinterpreting the earlier copies.

<i>Hld</i>	<i>Adm</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Descr</i>	<i>Rent</i>
14	366	1720	To use Thomas, son but died, so brother Walter Doe adm.	s. Walter Doe, father on 16 Feb 1716[/17]. Reserves to Walter, backside & barn lying on E of messuage	Mess called le Wells in his occupation, all barns, [orch late Robert Wells, now Joseph Wells lying in pt of same]; land.	16s
14	590	1761	Stevens, John	s. Walter Doe	M; pt 366	3s
9 & 14	590 3/20	1761	Stevens, John & s. to will	s. Walter Doe	M called Wells's i.t. John Hill; Mess pigeon ho, barns. Pt 364, pt 366	10s 4d [7s 10d & 2s 6d]
9		1791	Jn Stevens	d. John, father	Formerly i.t. Wm Barnes.	7s 10d 2s 6¼d
14	3/363	1797	Sarah Stevens, wife of John	d. & will John Stevens, father-in-law	M & gdn called Wells, formerly i.t. John Hill	2s 6d
9	3/396 -8	1800	Mary Stevens	d. John, husband	Mess & pigeon house, Hill Croft, lands	7s 10d
14	4/50	1806	Wm Stevens of Didcot, son of John, younger	d. John Stevens, younger, son of John & Sarah	Will of John, elder: Sarah for life, mess where he lived, then to son, John. She adm 1797; d. 1803.	2s 6d
9	4/177	1821	Stevens, Wm	d. Mary Stevens	[Mary for life, then Wm]	
9	C101	1836	Sam Cowdery	Stevens, Wm of Wolverton, farmer	Conditional surrender Mess. formerly i.t. Wm. Barnes, now Wm Looker and John Lyford; pidgeon house, barns stables, etc	7s 10d 2s 6¼d
9	5/168	1859	Wm Stevens,	d. William Stevens	Inherited from father	
9		1873			Enfranchised (exc part orch held by GWR)	

#### *Ownership 1559 to 1664 and 1501 to 1559 (Tables 2-3)*

It appears that the two holdings which were jointly held by Thomas Doe had previously been a single holding belonging to the Wells family, divided in the earlier seventeenth century. John Wells (II) had bought it in 1593, although they already held part as tenants.<sup>2</sup> The acquisition of the first part of the property by Thomas Doe is inferred to have taken place between 1646 and 1661, the date when he obtained the remainder from John and Thomas Wells (C259) (Table 2)

The Wells family relationships in this period are shown in Table 6. The main branch of the family runs from John (I) the elder (d 1575), his son John (II) (d 1601), John's son Robert (I) (b. 1551, died after 1609), Robert's son, John (III) (d. 1644) and the latter's sons, John (IV) (b 1611) (who had only daughters), and brother Thomas (b 1622); that John and Thomas were presumably the vendors in 1661. A younger branch stemmed from Robert (I)'s second son Robert (II) (probably the Robert who died in 1640), and his sons Robert, Joseph, and George, all of who survived the Restoration.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Some of the stages can only be inferred because of the gaps in the surviving court rolls

<sup>3</sup> After 1645-6, this branch of the family acquired a little copyhold property in the East End, which is unconnected to 79-81 The Causeway.

Table 2. Acquisitions by Thomas Doe

Date	Adm	To	From	Premis	WAM
1636	C218	Emma Doe, wife of Thomas Doe, dau & heir of Richard	d. Ric Weeks	Mess, orchard, close of meadow or land cont 1½ a, 1½ a in high mead, croft or close of arable cont. 2 a 1r, 3 a in S field, 2½ a N field, 2 cow commons [subject to lease]. Rent 6s ½d.	7420, rot 1
1638?	C227	Thomas Doe and Emma his w	s. Thomas Doe and Emma his w	Mess, orchard, close of meadow cont 1½a, 1½a meadow in High Mead, arable croft. 2 a 2r, 3 a in S field, 3½ a N field, 2 cow commons [Emma admitted C218]	7420, rot 2
1638?	C226	Thomas Doe	s. Francis Yateman gent	12 June 1637. Meadow called Holmes extending N onto high rd leading to Steventon Hill. Rent 18d	7420, rot 2
1641	C183	Walter Doo (as trustee)	John Wells	Lease. hall and chamber above ground-level ( <i>terrenam</i> ), chamber next garden and chamber above brewhouse, with use and ingress to kitchen ( <i>culini</i> ) 12 a and meadow. John Wells, then Mary his wife, for 59 years (if she lives so long)	7420, rot 3
1661	C259	Thomas Doe	s. John & Thomas Wells	1 mess and appurts in which Thomas Wells lately lived. Mess of Thomas Doe on N. and mess of William Arnold on S.	7421, rot. 2
1661	C277	Richard Trewlocke	s. John Wells and Rob Wells	21 Apr 1652. Close of pasture or meadow called Pleices 2 ½ ac. [added to STE-A]	7421, rot. 4d

The history in relation to the Wells family begins in 1559 [C391], when John Moulton bought a large holding from Robert Sharpe, part of which was in the tenure of John Wells (I).<sup>4</sup> On John Moulton's death in 1564 this passed to his son William, and by 1593 to Thomas Moulton, who sold almost all his copyhold land to John Wells (II) (C644).<sup>5</sup> In 1601, at the latter's death, his son Robert succeeded to what was described as two messuages and two virgates. In 1609, Robert settled one yardland and half a messuage on his heir, John (III), probably keeping the other half house and the rest of the land himself (C203); presumably the two houses were Nos. 77 and 81. In 1641 John (III) leased part of a house to Walter Doe (father of Thomas) as a trustee for his wife in a dower lease. In 1645-6 (after John (III)'s death), Walter Doe was almost certainly living in No. 77 next door to John (IV), but paying a copyhold rent of only 9d, which would cover at most a house and ½ acre.<sup>6</sup> Whether Doe had bought the house in the court-roll gap before 1636, or was holding it as the trustee in the 1641 lease, is not clear (though the latter seems the more likely). John (IV) Wells, in no 81, was still paying over 10s rent in 1645-6, suggesting that he had retained about 20 acres land, but clearly most of the Wells farm had been dissipated. John and his brother Robert (III) sold 2 ½a in 1652 (C277), and the 1661 sale included no farm land.

It is not clear where Thomas Doe obtained the 2¼ virgates of farmland he held in 1676, since he clearly did not have it in 1645-6, when was only paying 1s 6d rent. He acquired a house and about six

<sup>4</sup> In his will of 1575, John bequeathed the lease from 'Mr Moulton' to his eldest son, John (II) (BRO D/A1/132).

<sup>5</sup> Apart from 1½ yardland arable and some meadow, which he had already sold.

<sup>6</sup> Walter follows John in order in this rental, which is arranged topographically.

acres in 1636 (C218, Table 3), inherited by his wife from her father Richard Weeks, but this seems later to have returned to the Weeks/Wickes family.<sup>7</sup>

The property held by John Wells in 1559 is can be followed back straightforwardly to 1501. It formed part of an estate that had formerly been John Doo's which, on his death in 1487-8, had passed to his daughter Agnes and her husband Robert Sharpe. In 1501, this part was settled on their son Robert Sharpe the younger (C1276), while they retained the remainder, including the Priory (see STE-F). Robert Sharpe sold it in 1559 to John Moulton (C391), with John Wells (I) already a tenant (C391). The house was probably built in the years around 1500, plausibly by Robert Sharpe the elder, so that this part of the family property could be leased out as a separate entity; he died in 1502-3, when the younger Robert was only five years old or so (C816; C883). However, the possibility cannot be excluded without tree-ring dating that it was the work of John Doo or his brother, Thomas, who owned the house after 1477, or even of Richard Doo between 1463 and 1477.

Table 3. Court entries for holding acquired by John Wells in 1593

Date	Adm	To	From	Premis	WAM
1501	C1276	Rob Sharpe son & h in custody of his father Rob Sharpe	d. Agnes Sharpe late w of Rob Sharpe and dau & h of John Doo	1 mess and 4 v called Longes, another mess called Playces and 2 mess called Brytilton [Eastend] and Menlondes	7411, rot 22
1501	C1277	Rob Sharpe for life, then Rob their son & heir	s. before death Agnes Sharpe late w of Rob Sharpe	1 mess and 4 v once in tenure of Ric Doo. To pay to Alice Sharpe [sic] mother of said Agnes 40s a year during her life ( <i>see STE-I</i> ).	7411, rot 22d
1514	C816	Rob Sharp son & h aged 18	d. Agnes Sharp w of Rob Sharpe dau of John Doo	[death 14 years earlier] Divers tenements	7412, rot 7
1559	C391	John Moulton	s. Rob Sharpe out of court 21 Oct 1558	All mess lands tens cotts gdns virgates of land meadow leasow & pasture woods & underwoods of cust lands in Stev late in ten John Wells & Ric Holmes once of lord (domine) Doo de Steventon	7418, rot 1; 7523
1564	C444	Wm Moulton s & h aged 11 by Eliz his mother now wife of John Crocker Esq	d. John Moulton	Mess lands tens cotts gardens virgates of land meadow leasow pasture by copy [as C391]	7418, rot 7d
1593	C644	John Wells	s. Thos Moulton gent out of ct	All his customary land except what surrendered to John Smalbone and Wm Simpson	7419, rot 8
1601	C690	Rob Wells son & h aged 50	d. John Welles	2 mess & 2v, rent 46s 5¼d.	7419, rot 16
1609	C203	John Wells	s. Rob Wells his father	Moiety of mess, felidnement[?] and one yardland	41308

<sup>7</sup> This house may be the same as that sold by John Wells (II) to Richard Wickes in 1593 (WAM 7419, rot 8), which he had bought in 1570/1 from John Stamp (WAM 7524, ff 8-9).

*Ownership before 1501 (Tables 4-5)*

The earlier history of the site is confusing, since earlier court roll references to a messuage called Longes can be shown to relate to a different property (Table 4). In 1437, Richard Doo bought two messuages and 1½ v called Longes (C2002), and in 1445 he disposed of Longes house, together with another house known as Princes, to William Wattes (C1679).<sup>8</sup> However, he kept the Longes farmland, which must have retained its identity, so that when it was settled on Robert Sharpe the younger in 1501, the property was re-described and the messuage (or messuage site) accompanying the land was called Longes, even though it originated as a different property.

Immediately before this, in 1499, the Sharpe holdings included the capital messuage (The Priory), and messuages described as late William Shepard, late Brikeltons and Gorings (C1264-5, see STE-F). All the other messuages acquired by Richard Doo had either been sold, or disappeared after being subsumed within The Priory itself, while Brikeltons was a derelict messuage in the East End. Thus, Shepard's and Gorings are indicated as the precursors of the 1501 Longes (rather than the house bought in 1437). These properties can be followed from the early fifteenth century, well before the date of the surviving houses.

Thomas Goryng (born in about 1370)<sup>9</sup> held a house and yardland in about 1400, and he and Richard Goryng (probably his brother) sold a house obtained by exchange from John Smith atte Yate (C2276), with half a yardland, to Robert atte Mille in 1409 (C2318);<sup>10</sup> the latter died in 1430, after surrendering the house and half-virgate to Richard Doo (C1914). Thomas Goryng seems to have retained the other half of Goryng's (a house and half-yardland), until he made a pre-death surrender to William Baker, shepherd, and his wife Isabel in 1446 (C1691); they sold the half-yardland in 1456 (C1800), but retained the house until 1463, when the messuage 'lately William Shepherd's' was bought by Richard Doo (C1388); it was then described as a messuage called Goryng. It is significant also that these were distinct from Doo's capital messuage (the Priory), since he settled them on his son, Thomas, in 1477 (C1538, C1546). Thomas seems to have died without heirs, leaving his brother John (or perhaps the latter's daughter Agnes) to inherit this property as well as the main family holding.<sup>11</sup>

*Table 4. Messuage called Longs, before 1501*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Adm</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Premis</i>	<i>WAM</i>
1437	C2002	Ric Doo	s. Ric Long	2 mess 1½ v	7264, rot 27
1445	C1679	Wm Wattes	s. Ric Doo	2 mess of wch 1 called Princes, other Longes	7409, rot 7

*Table 5. Descent of Goryng family holdings.*

<i>Date</i>	<i>Adm</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Premis</i>	<i>WAM</i>
1406	C2266	Thos Goryng	s. John Smith atte Yate	1 mess to be held henceforth with Goryng's virgate [ <i>Smith receiving a messuage from Goryng in C2267</i> ]	7262, rot 27d
1409	C2318	Rob atte Mulle	s. Thos Goryng & Ric Goryng	1 mess ½ v	7262, rot 37

<sup>8</sup> Princes and Longes can be followed as two messuages (without any land) at least to 1524 (C898), and they eventually became part of the Old Farm site (STE-N).

<sup>9</sup> He was under 14 in 1381 (TNA, E 179/73/53) but benefited from a settlement by his father John in 1389, probably at his majority (WAM 7262, rot 14 m 1).

<sup>10</sup> He was presumably so called to distinguish him from another John Smith 'the elder', who in 1381 (TNA, E 179/73/53) lived two doors away, probably at Tudor House (STE-B).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas's death is not recorded in the court rolls and, since Shepherds and Goryngs are not named again until 1499, this could have occurred at any time after 1477.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Adm</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>Premis</i>	<i>WAM</i>
1430	C1914	Ric Doo	s. bef death Rob atte Mylle	1 mess ½ v [of Abingdon. He d at Abingdon immediately]	7264, rot 13
1446	C1691	Wm Baker, shepherd, and Isabel his w	s. befor death Thos Goryng. d in Aug	1 mess ½ v	7409, rot 9d, 10d
1456	C1800	Nich Carpenter	s. Wm Baker & Eliz [ <i>sic</i> ]his w	½ v land with meadow leasow & pasture once Thos Gorynges	7409, rot 29d
1463	C1388	Ric Doo	s. Wm Sheperde and Isabell his w	1 mess called Goryng	7410, rot 4
1477	C1538	Thos Doo	s. bef death Ric Doo	1 mess late Wm Shepard and another mess late Brykeltons and ½ v land [details]	7410, rot 19d
1477	C1546	Thos Doo his son	s. bef death [?Ric Doo?]	1 mess called Gorynges and 23 a 1 r on the hill	7410, rot 19d

#### *Probate records*

The most significant probate records are those of John Wells (1575) and Thomas Doe (1676) (BRO, D/A1/132; D/A1/63/69)

**John Wells**, elder of Steventon, 1 May 1575. Eldest son, John (executor) to keep his son William; bequest of lease (as above). Inventory (18 Oct 1575). Total: £113 7s 8d. Rooms named:

Halle, one Overchamber, another Chamber, Chamber where he laye, Kytchyn

**Thomas Doe**, yeoman: will [5?] Aug 1676. £10 to be paid to his father yearly. All goods in house where his father inhabits to the use of his father and his wife jointly, rest to son Walter. Inventory (7th Sept 1676) Total: £140 5s 6d. Rooms named:

Hall, Parler, Kitchen, Buttery, Dairy, Malthouse, Little Buttery and Mealhouse, Best Chamber, Other Chamber, Closet (his books), Maydes chamber, Mens chamber.

The number of rooms suggests that he used both houses, with his father probably living in the subsidiary dwelling (but with the furniture belonging to Thomas). His was presumably the eastern house, since Walter, the son, was then living in the western one (Adm 364-6).

**John Stevens** the elder, 1777. His will (without inventory), dated 29 July 1777 was proved on 23rd May 1789 (Wilts & Swindon RO, P1/14Reg/189B). In it, he bequeathed his messuage where he lived (holding 14), to his daughter-in-law, Sarah, his son Thomas's wife, for life, for her and her family to live in, free from the control of her husband – and she was not to be liable for any of his debts; then it was to pass to his son, John. The latter immediately received the other property (holding 9), which adjoined the first house, with the copyhold property purchased from Walter Doe. Various household goods were left to his daughter Ann, his son-in-law Thomas Heath, his daughter Margaret, the wife of Edmund Tomkins of Abingdon, and to John Stevens, with the residue divided between these four. The rest of his goods were to be held in trust for Sarah, and then to go to his grandson John, son of Thomas and Sarah.

**John Stevens**, 1800. In his PCC will (proved 30 July 1800) (TNA, PROB 11/1345 and PROB 11/1427), he left all the copyhold estates he had received from his father John to his wife Mary for life, then going to his son, William, subject to paying £50 to each of his other children, John, Richard, James and Joseph.

Table 6. Family of John Wells (I) (d. 1575)  
 Those in bold owned or occupied 79-81 The Causeway.

