



Vachell, of Coley, Reading.

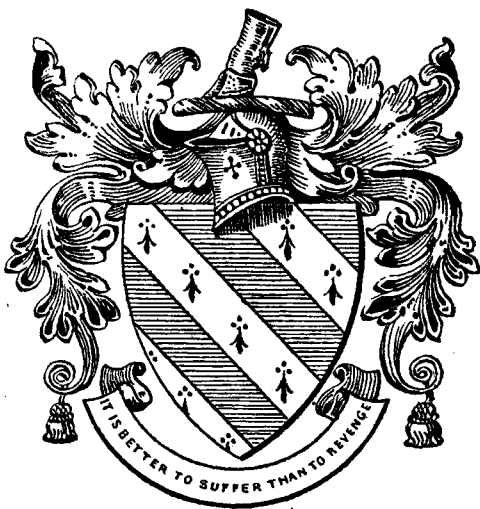
*By Rev. G. P. Crawford, Curate of St. Mary's,
Reading.*



ENEALOGY, it may be urged, assumes something even of moral worth when it serves to rescue from the obliterating effect of time those families whose names are now well-nigh forgotten, but who, in their day and generation, have lived and laboured for the common weal. Such a family is that of Vachell, of Coley, who for the extraordinary term of four centuries held their mansion and estate at Coley, near Southcote, in the parish of St. Mary, Reading, and whose property, after a temporary sojourn in the families of Thompson and Chamberlayne, passed in 1810 into the hands of the Monck family, its present possessors.

The name is probably a variation of Vacher or Vatcher in which the frequent substitution of "l" for "r" has taken place and as therefore derived from the French "Vache," a cow, seems to indicate a family of Norman origin. Assuming this derivation to be correct, the intermediate forms of the name would then differ according as it was used with the prefix "Le" or "De la"; Le Vacher signifying the cowkeeper; whilst "De la Vache" might refer to a dairy or the sign of an inn or to one of the numerous places called La Vacherie. In documents the name is spelt variously Vachell, Vachel, Vatchell and occasionally Fachel; but the first is the normal form and the one used at the present day.

The arms of Vachell are: a bendy of six ermine and azure; the crest, a bull's gamb in pale coupé argent, hoof in base or: and the motto "It is better to suffer than to revenge." The latter is said to refer to an early incident in the history of the family when the Abbot of Reading claimed the privilege of carrying hay through Vachell's yard and was denied it. After sending several times to Vachell and having received no answer, he sent at last a monk whom Vachell killed in a fit of passion and was consequently compelled to make his escape. From this incident the family is said to have henceforth adopted the pertinent maxim as its motto "It is better to suffer than to revenge."



The Arms of Vachell of Goley, Berks.

Some few relics of the family exist in modern Reading. A road adjacent to Greyfriars house, which was the property of the Vachells, has of late years received the name of "Vachell Road." In the parish church of St. Mary a northern transept, easily distinguishable in its position and extent by the barrel roof still remaining, was known commonly until the extensive restoration of the church made in 1863 as the "Vachell aisle," to which we shall have occasion to refer at a later point in our memoir; and on one side of the octagonal font upon a small escutcheon of stone, in company with three others respectively, plain, another bearing a chevron between three garbes and a third the cognizance of Knollys, are discernible to the present day the arms of Vachell. The stables, once those of the Coley mansion and now used with the Coley Home Farm, contain two other traces of the family; one a wooden pillar bearing the initials T, A, on either side of the date 1679 and under the common initial V; the other, a stone upon the face of the building incised T 1619 V. Some old almshouses stood until 1872-3 on the south side of Castle Street which bore a stone on their front recording that

Sir Thomas Vachell, Knt.

Erected these Alms-houses

Anno Dom. 1634 and endowed

them with Forty Pounds per Annum

forever, for the Maintenance of Six Poor Men.

The same stone may now be seen built into the wall of a modern house, 69, Castle Street, erected on the site of these ancient buildings; and the present comfortable retreat provided for old age in the present alms-houses in Castle Street is in part the effect of the old Vachell benefaction. A house also in Hosier Street, once a handsome building and now divided into several cottage tenements, with its back to Hosier Street and containing many blocks of stone probably derived from the Abbey, was generally known in the early part of this century as "Lady Vachell's" and is so described in a map of 1802. "Lady Vachell" was the widow successively of Sir Thomas Vachell and John Hampden, and this is no doubt the house to which she retired in her second widow-hood, previous to her death in 1666. A much older and probably the oldest existing relic of the family is a circular pigeon house, which stood at one corner of the quadrangle behind the old Vachell mansion and with a stone over its door-way marked T.V 1553 is now to be seen at the back of some of the farm buildings at the Coley Home Farm. It contains lodgings for nearly 1,000 birds, with a curious arrange-

ment for a revolving ladder by which the nests could be reached ; and remains a very interesting curiosity, apparently untouched, except with external plaster, since the day of its erection.

In the large quantity of material collected for Major-General Henry Tanfield Vachell, R.A., of 7, Adelaide Crescent, Brighton, and kindly entrusted by this gentleman to the writer, the first mention of this ancient Berkshire family is among the "Feet of Fines" of 1287¹ when John Fachell enters into *final* agreement with Thomas Burnel and Agnes, his wife, to take of them for 40 marks of silver, 4 messuages (houses), 140 acres of land, 42 acres of meadow, 40 acres of pasture, 5 acres of wood and 10 mercates of rent (rent-charges), with the appurtenances, in Radinges, Tyelhurst, Burghefeld and Hurtleley. The conjunction of Reading, Tilehurst and Burghfield seem to indicate lands situated to the south of the present Bath Road where these parishes meet each other, and such as are comprised at the present day in the Coley estate ; and as all the old MS. pedigrees of the family and Heralds Visitations agree in recording John Vachell, legis peritus (skilled in the law), at the head of the family in Berkshire, we have possibly in the record of this Fine mention of the founder of the family in this county ; and that his name occurs as witness in several deeds of this period which are preserved among the Records of the Reading Corporation is a probable confirmation of the note made in the pedigrees of his being connected with "the law." In one such deed of 1325 he obtains by purchase possession of a house in the High Street, Reading, from William and Edith, son and daughter of the late Thomas, the Vintner, of Reading. The accompanying table will show the early descent of the family.

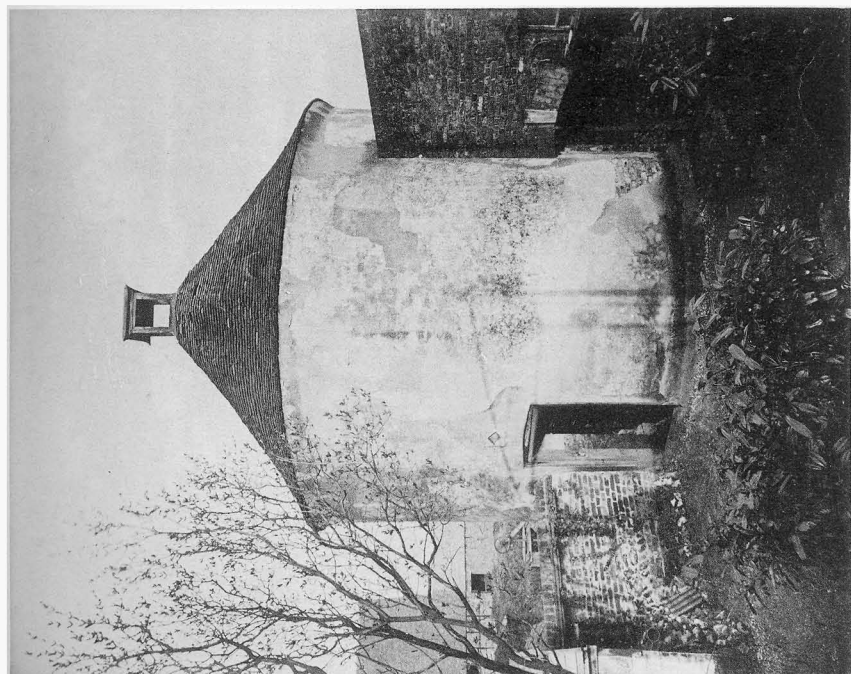
A later Fine, made on the Octave of St. Martin, 1309,² mentions probably the same man agreeing to take of Thomas Syward and Alice, his wife, for £20 sterling, 60 acres of land, 20 acres of meadow, 6 acres of pasture, 7 acres of more (moor) and 7d. of rent, with the appurtenances, in Colle, near Southcote ; and is interesting as definitely connecting the family with Coley. It seems as if the founder of the family in Berkshire was, by gradual purchase as opportunity offered, forming the Coley estate.

A Fine, a little later, made in 1318,³ gives another and probably a last mention of this John Vachell, when, for 100 marks of silver, he agrees to take of William Bordel and

1. Easter, 16, Edward I.

2. 3, Edward II.

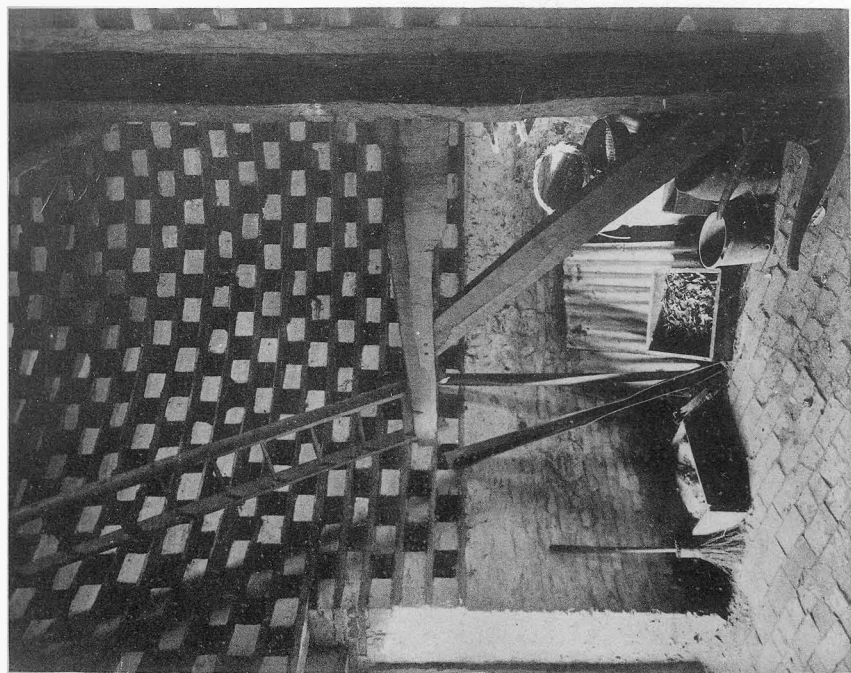
3. (12, Edward II.)



Heliotype.

(EXTERIOR.)

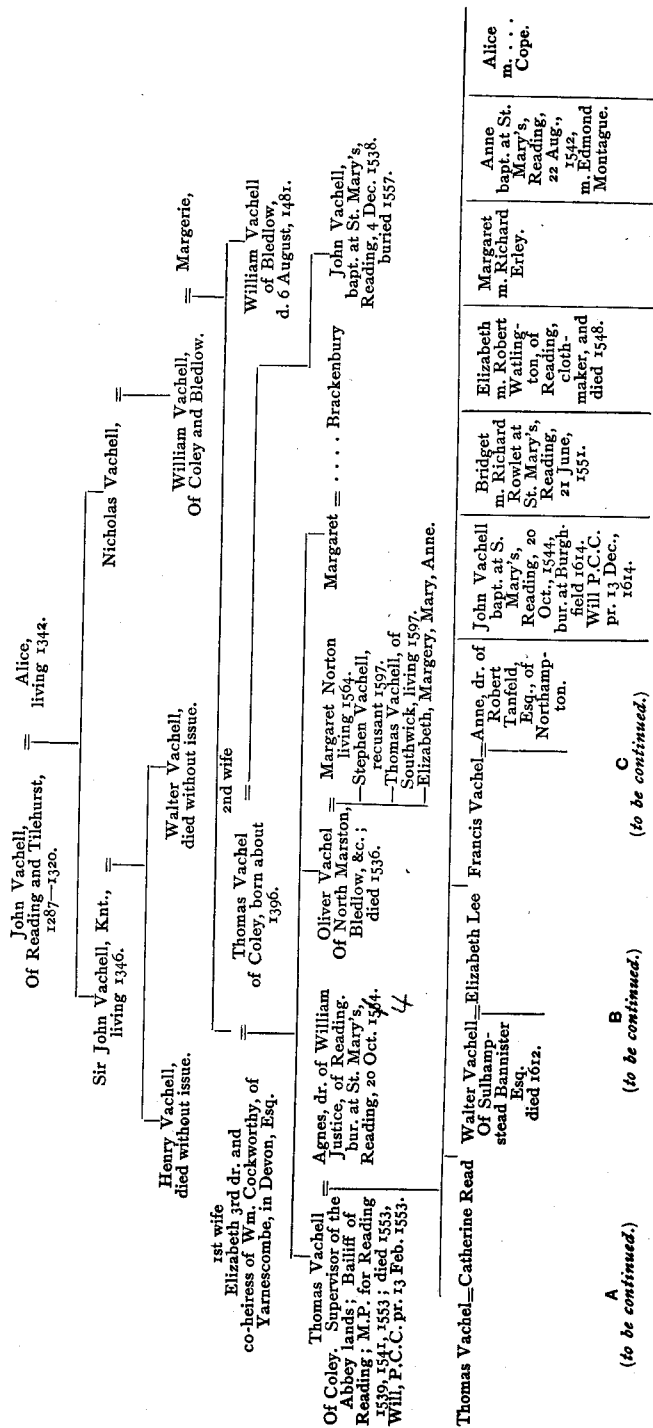
THE PIGEON HOUSE,
COLEY, READING.



S. Victor White, Photo., Reading.

(INTERIOR.)

PEDIGREE of the VACHELL FAMILY, of the Counties of Berks, Bucks, Cambridge, Essex, Devon, and Sussex.



A
(to be continued.)

B
(to be continued.)

C
(to be continued.)

Susanna, his wife, of William Maysent, of Richard Thedrich, of Mapel Durham, and Maud, his wife, a messuage, 60 acres of land, 6 acres of meadow, 8 acres of pasture, 1 acre of wood and 4 denarates (pennyworths) of rent, with the appurtenances, in Tyghelhurst (Tilehurst). He died about the year 1342, when a writ of Inquisition⁴ (*Inquisitio ad quod damnum*) was issued to Robert Fitz Ellis, Escheator of Berks and Oxon to know whether, without injury to the crown or others, John, son of John Vachell, might alienate to the Abbey of Reading upon the death of his mother, Alice, a messuage and 15 acres of land in Reading and Whitley, which she holds for her life and which would revert to him, for finding two wax candles to burn at the Altar of the Blessed Mary in the Conventual Church of Reading when mass is said for his father's soul and for himself when he shall have departed this life. Answer is returned that he may properly do so; and by a Fine of 1342⁵ the said property is duly made over to the Abbot of Reading.

From the fact that John Vachell, the father, is described in these Fines as "of Tigelhurst" it may be supposed that at present the dwelling-house of the family was in that parish; and this is further confirmed by a mention of his son in the Patent Rolls of 1346⁶ as being permitted to enjoy free warren in all his demesnes within the village of Tyelhurst so that they are not within the *King's Forest; and no one else may disturb or capture anything belonging to the warren on forfeiture of £10. The right of free warren may be described roughly as the grant of sporting rights, and thus early the modern game-laws have their counterpart. And further still, among those to whom licence was granted to have what we should call a private chapel at their house,—the ancient form is "licence of hearing divine things in their house"—such privilege is given in 1347 to John Vachell to be exercised in his house at Tigelhurst; but it is interesting to find also that in the same year a similar licence is granted to John Vachell for his house at Colle, in the parish of St. Mary, Radyng.⁷ It is possible, therefore, that this John Vachell had residences both at Coley and in Tilehurst; but if the adjoining parish of Tilehurst

4 16, Edward III.

5 Michaelmas, 16, Edward III.

6 20, Edward III.

*The King's Forest was the modern Windsor Forest and extended through the country around Reading.

7 Clarke, MS. 5, Bodl. Libr., "Old Berks."

was the earliest home of the family in this neighbourhood, it was not long before Coley, in the parish of St. Mary, Reading, gave its members a designation and therefore had probably become the place of their settled abode. John, son of John and Alice Vachell, recorded in the pedigrees with the title of Knight, having two sons who died without issue was succeeded by his brother Nicholas and this man's son William is the first to be described in the records of the family as "of Coley." He is so styled in a Fine of 1405. In this Fine⁸ concluded on the Octave of the Feast of the Purification, William Vachell, "of Coley," is found to be making further addition to the estate by agreeing to take of John Collee, of Padworth, for 100 marks of silver, 9 messuages, 2 carneates of land, 40 acres of meadow, 40 acres of pasture and 20 acres of wood, with the appurtenances in the neighbourhood of the former acquisitions of the family, viz., "in Colle, Thillehurst and Burghfeld." To him and his wife, Margerie, is granted in 1439, as to their predecessor at Coley, the right of enjoying the ministrations of religion in their private chapel. This William Vachell had an elder son who would naturally succeed to the Coley estate and probably also a younger named after himself, William, and living at Bledlow, who died on 6th August, 1481, and at whose death the usual enquiry instituted by the Crown⁹ attested that amongst his real property were one tenement, 121 acres of land and 12 of pasture, situated in Bledlow, which he held of "the College of Eyton" (Eton), 40 years previously founded by Henry VI. The elder son, Thomas, born about 1396, succeeded his father in the Coley estate. He was married to Elizabeth, 3rd daughter and co-heiress of William Cockworthy, of Yarnescombe in Devonshire, Esquire. This marriage, as one which perhaps brought some wealth into the Vachell family, was for many later generations recalled by the constant quartering of the Cockworthy arms—or, a chevron sa. between three Cocks or—with those of Vachell. As late as April 10th, 1746, a window in the Vachell aisle of St. Mary's Church, Reading, was seen to contain such a coat, and is thus described¹⁰:

The Arms of Vachell as I saw them in a window of St. Marie's Church, in Reading, in Berks, April 10th, 1746, are quarterly 1 and 4 bendy of 6, ermine and blue for Vachell; 2 and 3 or, a chevron sable between 3 Cocks or [for Cockworthy]. Crest a Goats foot couped az, or Calves foot. Motto: it is better to suffer than to revenge. These 4 Quarters impale 4 others, viz., 1 and 4 B. crusule

8 1-7, Henry IV., Berks 2.

9 Inquisitio post mortem, 21, Edward IV., No. 3.

10 Harleian MS., 5812, fol. 156 b.

and a Cross sarcelè voided Or. for Knolles; 2 and 3 G. on a Chevron Az. 3 Roses G; Crest over these, an Elephant passant proper; and the same writer adds (Harleian MS., 5811, fol. 50, b) that "under them was a motto and a date; but now broken."

And even the tomb stone of a member of the family buried in another part of England and so late as 1703 bore the Cockworthy arms quartered with those of Vachell, and thus recorded¹¹:

"In the church of Gravesend in Kent; on a black marble stone, are these Arms, in the Nave, viz., 2 Coats quarterly, 1. Bandy of 6 Ermine and . . . , 2. *a chevron between 3 Cocks*; Crest on Ox's leg coupé, and this inscription as in Dr. Thorpe's *Registrum Roffinse*, p. 750. Here lieth interred the Body of David Vachell, of this parish, who departed this life the 19th day of October, 1703, aged 36 years and 9 months.

The Lord did give Time to make a Godly end;

The Church hath lost a Blossome, the Poor a Friend."

Thomas Vachell, according to the Visitations of Bucks made in 1575 and 1634¹² married a second time and as will be seen in the pedigree had a son named John of this second marriage; but by Elizabeth Cockworthy he had Thomas who succeeded him at Coley, Oliver and a daughter Margaret. Of the two latter some further details are given in the accompanying pedigree; in the elder son, Thomas, the line of the family at Coley was continued upon the death of his father. This Thomas, second of the name, married in Agnes Justice one of a family of some importance in the borough of which mention occurs frequently in the municipal and parochial records, and which, like so many other families in Reading at that time and for long after, had prospered in the cloth trade. She outlived her husband one year and was buried at St. Mary's Church.

It is of greatest interest when facts are ascertainable to detach the objects of genealogy from the bare details of a pedigree and present them in some kind of moral individuality before the reader. In the case of Thomas Vachell there are one or two facts to suggest the outline of such a presentment. He lived through the time of what must have been nothing less than a revolution in Reading when its magnificent abbey, the centre of its ecclesiastical, social and even civil life was dissolved under the order of Henry VIII.; and at this time we find him clearly allied with that party which had thought good to suppress the religious houses and was perhaps unconsciously moving forward in the direction of religious reform. Indeed he was a member of the Parliament of 1539 which sanctioned the dissolution

¹¹ Harleian MS., 5812, fol. 156 b.

¹² Harleian MS., 1533, fol. 6.

of the greater abbeys; and it is not therefore surprising that on his return to Coley he should have been appointed to act as supervisor or steward of the possessions of the dissolved abbey. In the Public Record Office¹³ there is a deed appointing him in 1540 to this office for life, and committing to his management the extensive estates of the late Abbey of Reading and its daughter house of Leominster, in the county of Hereford. A few years later, as was very natural, some of the Abbey Lands began to find their way into the hands of their supervisor at easy rent and purchase. In 1544, according to the Patent Roll,¹⁴ he is granted by the King on a lease of 21 years, "all our ferme and pasture Cowyk, with a close of pasture called the Busshye lease and honye lease, and our parcell of Demesne lands in the parish of Tyle Hurste between Hurlock's lane and a parcell of demesne landes of oures late in the holding of Christofer Butler comen called Calcot, Southcot and Anguey meade, closes of land agenst Bulle Crosse, All which of late belonging to the late Monasterie of Reding, now in our hands by the atteyndre of Hugh late Abbot of the said Monasterie of high treason atteynted. For Cowyk £5 16s. 8d., for the demesne lands 4 marks, for the tythe in land meade 2s., for the tythe heye of Calcot, Southcott, Shudwyk, and Colley 40s., for the 4 closes and 5 acres 26s. 8d., and 40d. of encrease by the yere at Lady day and Michaelmas by evyn poscions." At the same time¹⁵ he is allowed to purchase for £126 a house and curtilage near Colley lane and lands in Cowikmeade, Whitley, Colley, Brewers' meadows, Rotherbeast, Mylfeld, Westfelde, Pydelles, Castlestrete." This attitude towards the Abbey and its lands might not of itself mark Thomas Vachell as a "Protestant" in the modern sense of the term. Politics with him, as with so many others at this crisis, and possibly also greed of gain, rather than faith may have brought them at first to sanction the dissolution of the Roman strongholds in England; but of course it is not improbable that in the last years of his life, after the accession of Edward VI., when he made his will without particular mention of the Blessed Virgin and desiring simplicity at his funeral, or whilst he was a member of the Reforming Parliament of 1553 he was moving along in the course of the newer Faith. It is interesting, however, to note in his will the mention of the "monthly mind," or remembrance of him made at Mass a month after death

¹³ Patent Roll, 31, Henry VIII., pt. 7.

¹⁴ 36, Henry VIII., pt. 21.

¹⁵ Patent Roll, 35, Henry VIII., pt. 15.

as a mark of the gradual transition from the older practice of the Church. He died in 1553, and in London, according to a pencil note made recently on the official copy of his will; and was possibly buried there also. His will¹⁶ is thus recorded:—

In the Name of God, Amen. This twentie day of Auguste in the yere of our Lorde God a Thowsande fyve hundred fiftie and one. I, Thomas Vachell, of Colley, the elder, doo ordeyn and make here this my laste Will and Testament. Firste, I bequeth my soule to . . . God, my body to be buried in the parishe church of saint Maries in Reading without anny great pompe to be don at it. I will there be given in almes to the pore tenne poundes, that is to wete about the tyme of my burying fyve poundes. And about the tyme of my monulthes mynde other fyve poundes. The Residue of all my goodes, cattals, mony, plate and jewells, I doo freely give theym unto Thomas Vachell myne eldist sonne to be good to his brethern and sisters, to releve theym and helpe theym as to hym shalbe thoughte most mete and convenient, putting no doubte but that he will shewe hym selfe a verry naturall brother unto theym, and they will be ordered by hym as I will theym all in any wise so to be. And of this my present testament and last will, written with myne owen Hands . . . my saide sonne and heire Thomas Vachell to be my sole Executor . . . *Thomas Vachell.* [Proved by Thomas Vachell 13 Feb. 1553.]

The brothers and sisters for whom the duties of primogeniture were thus hopefully invoked by their father, or at least the elder of them, had no doubt received their provision from him in his lifetime and were thus commended to their eldest brother only if unforeseen circumstances should render his help necessary. But some were still children at the time of their father's death; an elder daughter, Elizabeth, had married Robert Watlington, a wealthy cloth-maker of Reading¹⁷; Walter seems to have been provided with the part of the family estate situated in Tilehurst, and in turn to have handed it on to his second son when his eldest, by a fortunate chance, succeeded to the chief holding of the family at Coley: Francis found a wife in Anne Tanfield, of a good family in Gayton, Northamptonshire, whose name after they also had given in their eldest son an owner to Coley, was long retained as a Christian name and is so used in the family at the present day; and John who in his Will [proved P.C.C. 13 Dec., 1614] describes himself as of Burghfild, gent., was no doubt provided with the family lands situated in that parish. The present account is, however, chiefly concerned with the possessors of Coley; and it will be convenient to break the memoir of their descent at this point before treating of the Thomas Vachell, third of these names, whom his father's Will, given above, has named as his son and heir.

(To be continued.)

¹⁶ P.C.C. Tashe 25.

¹⁷ (Berry's Berks Gen.)