

EARLY RECORDS OF THE ARCHDEACONRY OF BUCKINGHAM: THEIR IMPORTANCE TO THE SOCIAL HISTORIAN

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This study of society in Buckinghamshire covers the period 1483 to 1527, the reign of Henry VII and the early years of his son's reign. Henry VIII, though he lived remote from the people described here, was always aware of their feelings and won their fervent loyalty. The court books of the archdeaconry of Buckingham¹ give some details of the lives of the gentry on the one hand and the very poor and unfortunate on the other, but contain a mass of information about farmers, traders and craftsmen, small property owners for the most part. In spite of all the changes of the twentieth century, the world in which they lived can be reconstructed. Many of their houses survive, though sometimes altered and disguised. The lay-out of most of their towns and villages can be traced, interspersed with new dwellings and hemmed in by housing estates. Old roads have become footpaths and old field systems are visible from the air.

The records consist of court proceedings and wills proved in the court and registered in the court books. Before 1500 the judge of the court was the archdeacon or his official, a lawyer of standing. Afterwards, in order to avoid overlapping and disputes, the same man was appointed archdeacon's official and bishop's commissary and acted as deputy for both. The court had much business. It disciplined the clergy and enforced the maintenance of churches, churchyards and parsonages. It dealt with moral offenders, from adulterers to scandalmongers, and backsliders from the church, people who omitted their religious duties or failed to pay their dues. In addition, suits between parties were tried—defamation, perjury and breach of contract, marriage contracts and disputes over wills. Reporting of the actions frequently took the form of rough notes made in court, but improves for courts of later date.

To show the nature of the legal proceedings a summary of the business of three consecutive courts held in 1490² follows. On Tuesday 15 June the archdeacon was at Stowe, where the churchwardens of Steeple Claydon and Stowe sued for money owing to their churches, probably legacies. A complicated marriage suit between Ellen Audewyn and William Lawrens was begun; Ellen alleged that William had made a contract with her and produced witnesses. Notes show that the case dragged on into 1491. On Thursday 17 June the court opened at Stewkley, where a dispute between three inhabitants of Pitstone was referred to arbitrators; a note of its settlement in November was added later. The archdeacon was at Great Missenden the next day. Letters of administration were granted to the son of William Dabney who had died

intestate. The will of William Hill of Ellesborough³ was registered; he wished his farm at Little Hampden to be sold and half of the proceeds devoted to prayers for his soul and the other half divided among his children. The archdeacon was just as busy in the winter, when roads were bad and the churches in which the court sat very cold. Perhaps formal proceedings took place in the church, a room in an inn being used for other business.⁴

To the social historian the wills registered in the court books are of primary importance. The wills of testators who had no goods outside the archdeaconry were brought to the court for probate. The upper classes usually preferred probate in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, even if their estates lay entirely in Buckinghamshire. There are about a dozen wills of gentry, including those of William Hampden of Hartwell, 1521,⁵ and William Hampden of Dunton, 1525.⁶ The poor had little to leave; their wills were proved without payment of fees and were not registered. For the period 1483 to 1527, more than five hundred wills have survived. The testators differed in wealth and status, but the great majority appear to have been farmers who were able to leave landed property to their children, sometimes a few acres, sometimes several farms.

John Hill of Amersham is an example of a prosperous farmer. He made his will on 26 November 1523 and was dead by 6 December, when his wife Florence made hers.⁷ Naturally there was considerable confusion; Florence made bequests to all her children, adding, "I will that; if I had bequeathed more sheep than will be performed, then I will that my executors and overseer shall reform this my will by their discretion". On 18 January 1524, John's will was proved and administrators appointed for Florence's estate. Fees of 6s. 8d. on each were paid in the archdeacon's court. Before the division of the property among the heirs an inventory had to be taken.⁸ The appraisers were three neighbours and the archdeacon's apparitor; they listed the goods, room by room. In the hall they found three long tables covered with cloths, a form, three trestles and a settle. Two cushions and part of a coverlet provided some comfort, while a painted cloth hanging on the wall brightened the room and kept out some of the draught. An array of brass, pewter and iron pots, pans, dishes and so on stood on the tables and round the hearth, with all the cooking equipment—cobirons, spit, pothangers, pothooks and a gridiron. Some farm tools hung on the walls. At a time when many quite well-to-do people lived in a one-roomed house rather like a barn, the Hill family had a chamber within the hall, as well as other rooms.⁹ In the chamber were a mattress, eight pairs of sheets, some chests and some clothes. Steps or a ladder¹⁰ led to the chamber under the hall, a safe place for the storage of valuable goods; yet the appraisers found little but spinning wheels for linen and wool. The kitchen, possibly detached from the house, contained miscellaneous goods, including a trough and a table. It may have been used for cutting up carcasses, rather than cooking.¹¹ The more valuable property was in the farmyard. Cattle, valued at £8, included a bull. Pigs and horses came to 32s. 8d. The winter stock of wheat, oats and peas in the barn amounted to £6 13s. 4d. "Nine score sheep and one" were worth £12 13s. 4d. The corn growing in the fields was estimated at £3 6s. 8d. Carts, ploughs and so on came to 27s. 8d. The sum total of all the

goods amounted to £36 13s. 8d. In the Muster Roll of 1522 John Hill was assessed at £1 6s. 8d. on lands and tenements and £30 on goods, corresponding fairly closely to the inventory.¹²

Richard Warwyke of Maids Morton had a small mixed farm which probably belonged to his father or another relative. He died intestate in the autumn of 1524, leaving a widow and son. The farm was stocked and he was ready for the winter with grain and hay in the barns, wood in the yard and a bacon pig. Nevertheless the appraisers were disparaging; many of the items were old—pots, plough, candlesticks, salt cellars, chair, bed, sheets, harrows, horse and mare. The total amounted to £6. 0s. 2d. on which a fee of 16d. was paid in the archdeacon's court. In the Muster Roll Warwyke's goods were assessed at £6 13s. 4d., while another Richard Warwyke had lands to the value of £10.¹³

In the case of William Say of Little Missenden, the Muster Roll assessment of £10 on goods bears no relation to the sum of 27s. 9d. given in his inventory.¹⁴ He died, apparently without surviving children, and administration was granted to a relative in Great Missenden. As he was poor, no fee was payable.

The inventory of a poor man is rare:

Inprimis a mattress and a coverlet	2s. 4d.
Item a gown	4s. 7d.
Item a coat	2s.
Item a pan, a trivet, a gridiron and a spit	4s. 4d.
Item a cradle cloth and a coffer	3s. 4d.
Item 3 bills for a mill and 10 lb. lead	13d.
Item a loom, 3 gears with the appurtenances	10s.

There may have been two William Says in Little Missenden. Alternatively, a recession in the clothing industry or ill-health may have reduced him to poverty.

The English will of John Newland of Wing, proved in 1507,¹⁵ gives some idea of life on the farm. He had thought out exactly how his family could manage after his death. It is refreshing to read his plans for the future, after going through Warwyke's possessions with all their defects.

In dei nomine Amen that this is the right mind of John Newland.

In primis that Maryon my wife shall have three beasts, my plough and the team as it goes.

And John shall have another plough with the coulter and the share and ox bridle and three strakes of a cart wheel and plough and plough tooth otherwise called a chain.

Also the tilth that is now for to be sown and at harvest my wife to have half and John my son for to have the other half. And if they cannot agree, then John my son for to have the third part and go his way and two of the best shares for to maintain the plough.

If so be that my wife do marry, John my son for to have all four shares, a ewe and a lamb.

Agnes my daughter the elder the best pan and the best pot save one, a cow calf, a ewe and a lamb.

And after the decease of my wife, Maryot my daughter to have a cow and the best pot.

Agnes my daughter the younger to have the best cow and a ewe lamb.

Joan my daughter to have a cow at Cublington and half increase of her.

Alyn my daughter to have a ewe and a lamb.

Agnes my daughter the older a white coverlet and a pair of blankets and a pair of sheets.

Clearly it was sensible to continue to run the farm as a unit, but, if mother and son fell out, a just division of the property was laid down. Each of the five daughters had her marriage portion.

Sheepfarming was the most profitable form of agriculture. Bequests of one or two ewes and lambs are common, but flocks seldom come into wills. In 1524 Thomas Bovington, smith, of Little Missenden¹⁶ made eleven bequests totalling a hundred and ten sheep. Robert Newman of Chalfont St. Peter died in 1520,¹⁷ expressing the wish: "I would that my sheep shall keep perpetual obit for my soul and all christian souls." The parish of Dunton which in the early fourteenth century had increased the acreage of arable land annually under cultivation¹⁸ was reversing the process in the early sixteenth century; sheep were taking over. The enclosure inquisition of 1517 reported amalgamation of holdings and destruction of farms; in 1515 John Sutton had turned ninety acres of land from tillage to pasture. These changes upset the recognised system of tithe collection.¹⁹ When he died in 1518, Richard Alwey, blind rector of Dunton, sued his executors and his heir for payment of tithe both in Chancery²⁰ and the archdeaconry court. An offer was made which was rejected. Finally at a court held at Aylesbury on 5 March 1520,²¹

John Sutton confesses that he had thirty-nine score sheep, bought from his father in 1518, and these sheep pastured and slept in the parish of Dunton from the time of St. Martin in Winter until shearing time. They were sheared with his own sheep in the same parish. Further he confessed that from the increase of the sheep he had fourteen score lambs, valued at 16s. 8d. the score. Further he says that he sold the wool from the said sheep at the rate of 8s. 8d. the tod (28 lb.).

It looks as though the father had given his son his sheep on his deathbed and that the two flocks had been combined, being driven backwards and forwards over parish boundaries.

Fortunes were being made in the wool trade. The rise of the Dormer family took place during this period. They had a family business extending from Thame and Wycombe to the City of London and beyond. Sir Robert Dormer of Wing and even his father William, described as woolman of West Wycombe, were beyond the range of archdeaconry jurisdiction. A generation earlier in 1488 the will of a William Dormer²² was registered in the act book. He was fairly well-to-do and appears to have outlived wives and children; all he had was left to religious purposes. Among the new families moving into the borough of Wycombe in the early sixteenth century were the Gerards.²³ From 1503 to 1506 Nicholas Gerard was mayor and in 1509 Thomas Gerard, gentleman, was living there. They were probably in business together as clothiers. A Nicholas Gerard who died in 1521 is unlikely to have been the mayor, as his heir was his only daughter Elizabeth, still a child. In his will he left her his fulling mill at Loudwater, placed in the hands of trustees, until

her marriage. In the event of Elizabeth's death, the mill was to go to William Gerard. The will was proved in September 1521;²⁴ an inventory was taken on 4 February 1522,²⁵ probably on account of a lawsuit. There was considerable confusion in the mill and in the dwelling house which seems to have adjoined it. The tools and other effects connected with his trade were:

A pair of fuller's jacks	3s.
The flocks (wool refuse used in fulling)	2s. 8d.
6 yards of woollen cloth	6s. 6d.
A pair of stockards (troughs in which cloth was beaten with mallets)	12d.
5 sheep	8s. 4d.
2 todweights, 9 lb. weights and a gogion (gudgeon) ²⁶	3s. 4d.
A weighing beam with a pair of scales and 3 tubs	15d.
Pair shearman's shears	6s. 8d.
Hair cloth	2s. 5d.
Sheep sold	55s. 8d.
His silver consisted of:	
3 silver spoons	7s.
4 silver rings	2s. 4d.
A pair of silver taches (clasps)	3s. 4d.
A tooth pick of silver	2d.
In broken silver	5d.
A dimisent (girdle) ²⁷ of silver	10s.
Other metal goods, and articles stuffed with feathers were itemised, but also weighed:	
The laten	20 lb.
The pewter	41¼ lb.
Pot brass	55 lb.
Pan brass	63 lb.
Feather bed	46 lb.
Bolster	14 lb.
Pillows	10 lb.

There are other signs of luxury: eight pieces of painted cloth with cellers (curtains), three cushions, a carpet and a bed helyng (canopy). Nevertheless the sum total only amounted to just over £16.

Thomas Gerard whose relationship to Nicholas is not known died in 1523.²⁸ He owned the bridge mill which he left to his brothers. House property left to his brother William figures in the marriage settlement of a John Gerard in 1530 and in a quitclaim of 1588 by John Gerard citizen and goldsmith of London to John Gerard of Merton, Oxfordshire.²⁹ The pedigree of the Gerards cannot yet be worked out; their sphere of influence was similar to the Dormers', extending from the City to Oxfordshire. Thomas was unique among archdeaconry testators in owning a suit of armour; a pair of "almane revetes" with splints, standards and sallet, the latest fashion in armour, first made in Germany. It was flexible, with overlapping plates sliding on rivets. The splint protected the arm, the sallet was the headpiece, and the standard the mail collar.³⁰

Wycombe had many inns, not only as an important industrial centre, but as a stage on the road from London to Worcester. They were valuable properties, often owned by country gentlemen, as in the case of the George which belonged to Richard Grenville of Wotton Underwood.³¹ Watling Street ran through the north and east of the county; people living there had more connections with other counties and places on the highway than with Aylesbury and the south. It was one of the busiest roads in England, linking north-west England and North Wales with London. Three Buckinghamshire towns lay on it: Stony Stratford, Fenny Stratford and Little Brickhill. In the reign of Elizabeth, Stony Stratford had more inns than any other town in the county;³² it was probably so in the early sixteenth century. When Richard Alchyn, one of the innkeepers there, died in 1522, his debts exceeded his assets, so his brother John refused to act as executor of his will, and was appointed administrator of the estate. An inventory was made of the contents of the inn, but no plan of the building emerges.³³ There was accommodation for upper class travellers in the hall. They were provided with a table, chairs, a cupboard and a bench with cushions, while on the wall hung a painted cloth; there was a basin and ewer for washing and backgammon to pass the time. They ate off pewter and had candlesticks, a chafing dish and salt cellars. The hearth is next mentioned with brass pots, fire shovel and fork, and pothangers; nearby were ten tubs of ale and three chests. Forms and trestles were provided, perhaps, for servants and the common people. The guests had proper sleeping quarters, where there were eleven pairs of sheets, tablecloths, towels, a feather bed, a bolster, a mattress and five bedsteads, and again a painted cloth. The kitchen may have been detached from the house and contained a spit and a little spit for birds; it was probably used for cooking for the more sophisticated guests. Alchyn combined inn-keeping with shoe-making; on the premises were ten dozen pairs of shoes, two dozen boots and three dozen lasts.³⁴ He was also the owner of a mill³⁵ which in his will he left to "the finding of my children", each of whom was to have a feather bed, "if it may be spared". He had no wife.

Naturally provision for widow and children is described in many wills. Sometimes the three parts are mentioned, the goods being divided equally between the widow, the children and the "dead".³⁶ The testator could only dispose of his own part; William Thorne of Hulcott in 1524³⁷ left to Richard his son "my part of cart and cartgear, plough and ploughgear". This method of distribution was statutory in the City of London. When William Gardiner of the Grove at Chalfont St. Giles made his will in 1541,³⁸ he stated that he had given up his freedom of the City twenty years before and should not be bound by that custom. Nevertheless it was an equitable and common practice which must often have been commended to testators. There is no evidence in the archdeaconry wills of this period that a testator mentioned all his children in his will; there appear to be no token bequests nor was it stated that some of the children had already had their portions, though that must often have been so.

Wives were partners with their husbands in domestic and business affairs; in most cases the wife is appointed executrix by her husband, sometimes jointly

with a son or other relative, but often sole. She was to rule the household in his place. For instance, John Richardson of Wavenden in 1522³⁹ left his son William half his corn and cattle to be delivered "against the day of his marriage so that he deny none of this my last will and also be counselled and ruled in his marriage by his mother and John Shepherd". Though there was no divorce in the modern sense, marriages did not usually last long. Either partner might be struck down by a serious illness for which no remedy was known, while the dangers of childbirth were great. Widows' wills with dispersal of goods among members of several families indicate two or more marriages. Some husbands guarded against another man and a new family taking advantage of his own children. John Crippes of Farnham in 1521⁴⁰ provided for Agnes his wife "houeroom and wood for to make her a fire, if she marry not, and, if the aforesaid Agnes do, she for to have her dower and no more". John Lechingham of Wendover, carpenter, in 1510,⁴¹ showed real concern for his widow. He set aside "my chamber with the loft over it above the dais in my said tenement with all the stuff within them being, the which I fully and wholly give and bequeath to Christian my wife, and I will that my said wife shall enjoy and have them for the term of her life with all ingayt and outgayt as well in that said chamber and loft as in my said hall and by the fire the sitting, where her place is, with all other places necessary for her commodity and pleasure and half the fruits in like manner of my orchard".

A widow's will may contain a long list of her goods, giving more detail than an inventory. Three wealthy widows died between 1519 and 1522. Joan Waller was of higher social status than the other two, but how her husband fits into the family tree of the Wallers of Beaconsfield and Coleshill is not yet known. She had been predeceased by her elder son John, so she left the most valuable goods to his wife and two sons.⁴² The share of the elder grandson William consisted of:

£3 6s. 8d. and a mazer (a wooden bowl bound with metal) with a bond, silver and gilt, and two spoons marked with a key. A feather bed, a bolster, a pillow, three pairs of sheets, two board cloths, two blankets and a covering of woollen cloth. A great cauldron, a great brass pot, two pans, two candlesticks. Eight pieces of pewter vessels, that is to say, two platters, four dishes, two saucers; a latten basin with an ewer, a little chafer and a coffer.

William had been left a house by his father;⁴³ his grandmother left him essential furnishings and silver. The will of Elizabeth Jeffes of North Marston⁴⁴ is more homely. Though "somewhat aged", she had a complete grasp of household affairs. Her bequest to Agnes Ingram, probably her step-daughter reads:

My great brass pot, broken at the rim, and my best coverlet and my hanging of blue for a chamber, the which lieth on her bed, and one bolster that lieth on my bed and two pillows and two silver spoons and three pewter platters and two latten candlesticks, one latten basin, one pair of sheets and one great wort pan (brew pan).

Agnes must have been connected by marriage with Joan Ingram, another wealthy widow of North Marston. Her will⁴⁵ too is long and detailed; even the livestock are described—"one horse with colour black on him, also a speckled cow calf". These old ladies had in their keeping valuable goods and

could exercise great influence in family circles. Professor W. K. Jordan found that more women's wills have survived for Buckinghamshire than for the other eight counties which he studied for the period 1480 to 1660 and suggests that the status of women in this county may have been higher.⁴⁶ There is another possible explanation. Just as lands were granted to feoffees, so goods were bequeathed to widows, to preserve them from confiscation if the men of the family were condemned as traitors or heretics, a not unlikely happening at this period.

The ambition of every father was to provide a landholding, however small, for each of his sons. In his will he often did not mention the patrimony, the family property, because it would go to the eldest son by hereditary right. Provision was made for the younger sons, according to the testator's circumstances and their own ability. Laurence Wycombe who was responsible for re-building the chancel of Langley parish church on behalf of St. George's Chapel at Windsor⁴⁷ was a wealthy man. In his will made in 1494,⁴⁸ he left a messuage called Huntles to his eldest son, Walsshes to the second and Sherwynnes to the youngest, while lands called Palmers were left to his wife to hold in her own right. Thomas Nash of Amersham,⁴⁹ dying in 1521, had an heir Richard for the family holding, and left William the younger son three half acres in a common field. Roger Water of Dinton,⁵⁰ dying in the same year, belonged to a higher social class. All his landed property was settled on his son John who had the custody of the younger children. Schooling is seldom mentioned in archdeaconry wills and is usually associated with the priesthood. Anthony, Roger's younger son, may have been destined for the law. He was to be educated in the schools with proper provision of food and clothing. John had charge of the three daughters with their marriage portions and of Roger's two wards, who were to be brought up according to their rank and ability.

Savings were invested in land as it came on the market. Negotiations for marriages took place long before the children were grown-up and involved protracted haggling over property. A father of a family expected to be obeyed; in most cases his plans were carried out. A daughter was betrothed to the man of her father's choice, as a rule in her own home, in the presence of witnesses; they had then made a binding contract of marriage which was solemnised in church at a later date. In the cases which came before the courts one party denied that a contract had in fact been made. The parties were represented by proctors who had to attend many sessions of the court and arrange for depositions to be taken from witnesses. The expense, borne presumably by the parents, was considerable. The wrath of a father defied by his daughter is understandable. In 1520 the father of Joan Stevyns⁵¹ had refused his consent to her marriage with William Stevyns and warned her that she would receive no marriage portion. Nevertheless, on her bended knees, she implored his blessing on her marriage. "Void, harlot, out of my sight!" he cried. When in the following year William brought an action for fulfilment of the contract, tension at home became so great that the judge ordered Joan to be taken away from her parents and sent to live with a cousin in Aylesbury.⁵²

The suit between Richard Baldwin of Aston Clinton and Julia Ravenyng alias Carter of West Wycombe had a happy ending for her. On 6 November 1524⁵³ Richard with some friends rode to Julia's house in West Wycombe, where they found her warming herself "by the mantle of the chimney" in the hall. Alexander Scott, one of the witnesses, took a ring from Julia's finger and asked, "Shall I deliver this ring to this young man?" She replied, "Nay." Richard put three rings on her fingers saying, "Of condition that ye will be my wife, I have rings enough for you and me both." Julia protested, "Nay, sir, I have rings enough of my own." But Julia had another suitor, Robert Rocold, who came to her house with witnesses on 24 November⁵⁴ and asked her to marry him. This time all was in order. Asked whether she would take Robert to be her husband by her faith and her troth, she replied, "By my faith and my troth with all my heart." The judge decided that there had been no contract between Julia and Richard Baldwin and that her marriage to Robert Rocold of Harpsden was valid.

The correction of moral offences was one of the duties of church courts. Illicit unions were detected and the parties cited to appear in court. The accused might deny the crime and offer to purge himself, i.e. take an oath that he was innocent, supported by the oaths of responsible neighbours who vouched for his good character. The judge decided the number of neighbours—up to six was usual in this court. Guilty parties had to do penance. Reporting of these cases was usually brief. At Marlow in 1525⁵⁵ Agnes servant of Thomas Clerke had a child by Thomas Hakewell. He confessed and submitted to the penance of walking before the cross in the procession round the churchyard on the following Sunday. He was ordered to support the child. An example of a more precise maintenance order occurs in the same year.⁵⁶ Richard Kybbell of Turville was warned, on pain of excommunication, to pay 2d. weekly for the food and nursing of his illegitimate child till he could fend for himself. Some illegitimate children may have been welcomed into the family. Mortality in childhood and infancy was high. Some parents lost all their children; most families appear to have been small. When Thomas Timberlake made his will in 1524,⁵⁷ he had children and grandchildren living, yet he left the residue of his goods to Elizabeth, the lovechild of William his son, who was to have custody of the goods for twenty years, provided that he kept the child and an annual obit for his father's soul.

It was a mobile society. In a small way, the story of Julia Ravenyng and the suitors from Aston Clinton and Harpsden illustrates the point. The widespread operations of the Dormers and Gerards have already been traced. London merchants had estates in Beaconsfield in the middle ages. In the late fifteenth century there appear to have been two groups active in the area. Roger Grove, citizen and grocer of London, was an old man living at Grove Place in Chalfont St. Giles; he may have been associated in business with his neighbours John and William Gardiner of the same City company. John lived in London, but owned the King's Head at Beaconsfield, perhaps an inn and warehouse, certainly his country house. When he made his will in 1507,⁵⁸ he was rebuilding it and asked John Hawdener tailor "to be good overseer in the works and building done and to be done" there and render an account to his

executors. Possibly his brother William was never so active in business. He married one of Roger Grove's daughters and by 1518 was living as a country gentleman at Grove Place.⁵⁹ The other group was headed by the Bulstrode family. In his will of 1478 William Bulstrode, citizen and draper,⁶⁰ asked to be buried in Beaconsfield church, though he had much property in London and Middlesex. Some of his family continued in business and were probably connected with John Brown, citizen and draper, also of Beaconsfield. The Bulstrodes seem to have used the Balon family of Coleshill to distribute their goods; when John Balon a chapman made his will in 1504⁶¹ he appointed Master William Bulstrode of London esquire, overseer, and John Hawdener executor. John Brown had an interest in the Crown which was on lease to John Dabney (Davenie) who died in 1510.⁶² Dabney and Balon had archdeaconry wills; Hawdener appears to have had the same status, but a superior education. The Gardiners and Bulstrodes belong to a different class; they were wealthy Londoners in origin, soon to become country gentlemen. Beaconsfield's position at a great cross-roads attracted traders. The names of the Ends or tithings—London, Wycombe, Windsor and Aylesbury—indicate outward-looking inhabitants.

London merchants and lawyers influenced the development of many towns and villages of Buckinghamshire. Some farmers were content to endow their children with land, but others had connections with London and regularly sent younger sons to establish themselves there. The Wigg family of Mentmore followed this practice. Wiggs had been living in the neighbourhood since the early middle ages; two branches equal in wealth resided at Mentmore in the 1520s. Robert Wigg died there in 1522,⁶³ evidently a prosperous farmer, with land in Cheddington and Wing as well as Mentmore itself. The passing of the land is not mentioned in the will, as it had been placed in the hands of trustees, one of whom was Thomas Fowler, a well known Buckingham lawyer. The will of Thomas Wigg, the head of the senior branch, proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury in 1553,⁶⁴ is more informative. He had come into his property in 1519 and at the time of his death had five sons, among whom he divided his goods, roughly according to seniority. There was land by inheritance for the eldest and by will for the third, while the two youngest were left enough capital to buy farms. The second son Thomas had been lent the capital sum of £120 to set himself up in business in London, the loan to be repaid a year after the testator's death. Young Thomas was not a "prodigal son", but an able member of the family, appointed overseer of his father's will. Probably a circle of relatives and friends in the City and in government service had been ready to offer him employment and to look after him, when he had first arrived. His father was in the wool trade and had business relations with the Courthope family which stemmed from Kent and Sussex.

Fortunes were soon made and lost in the Tudor period. A modest livelihood could be dissipated by a run of bad luck or mismanagement. The possession of land provided a reserve; it could be mortgaged as a last resort. Most of the registered archdeaconry wills were made by landed proprietors,⁶⁵ some very small. Their well-being depended to a large extent on a network of family and business connections, reaching far beyond their home parish.

The testators give the impression of being hard-working and prudent, enterprising and ruthless. Children worked from an early age and were brought up as befitted their station in life and their ability. The unfit and the disobedient went to the wall; they became farm labourers and so did their children after them. For strong, capable children, provision was made according to their fathers' means. Some of them prospered, built up businesses and bought estates; in the next generation they became landed gentry, armigerous, but enterprising and ruthless still, destined, some of them, for high office in state or church.

REFERENCES

¹ The court books of the archdeaconry of Buckingham are in the Bucks. Record Office. The period 1483 to 1523 is covered by D/A/We/1, D/A/V/1, D/A/C/1 and D/A/Wf/1. My transcript is to be published by the Bucks. Record Society; I am most grateful to Mr. E. J. Davis, County Archivist and Hon. Secretary of the Society for all his help. F. W. Ragg, "Record of the Archdeaconry Courts of Buckingham 1521" and "Archdeaconry Courts of Buckingham 1491 to 1495", *Rec. Bucks.*, x, 304-331; xi, 27-47, 59-76, 145-156, 199-207, 315-42, contain a transcript of C/1 and V/1, sometimes abridged, with a translation. For a full discussion of the court books and their place in the history of the Reformation in England, see Mrs. M. Bowker, "Some Archdeacons' Court Books and the Commons' Supplication against the Ordinaries of 1532" in *The Study of Medieval Records. Essays in Honour of Kathleen Major*, ed. D. A. Bullough and R. L. Storey. I have also used D/A/We/2, wills and court proceedings, 1523-7.

² We/1/f.134.

³ We/1/Will 169.

⁴ R. A. Marchant, *The Church under the Law, 1560-1640*, shows this routine being followed in Yorkshire in his period.

⁵ We/1/Will 30.

⁶ We/2/Will 72.

⁷ We/2/Wills 5 and 6.

⁸ We/2/f.56; We/2/Inventory 8. (Inventories and wills are in the same numerical sequence.)

⁹ *Oxfordshire Inventories 1550-1590*, ed. M. A. Havinden (Oxf.Rec.Soc., xlv, 1965) 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 21.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 20.

¹² Musters, p. 231. The editor, Professor A. C. Chibnall, has kindly allowed me to use the page proofs of "The Certificates of Musters in Buckinghamshire in 1522" to be published by R.C.H.M. and Bucks. Rec. Soc. later this year.

¹³ We/2/f.77; Inventory 40. Musters, p. 65.

¹⁴ We/2/Inventory 11; f.55v. Musters, p. 83.

¹⁵ We/1/Will 205.

¹⁶ We/2/Will 4. Musters, p. 82: £20 in goods; a churchwarden.

¹⁷ We/1/Will 98.

¹⁸ *Rec. Bucks.* xiv, 245.

¹⁹ I. S. Leadam, *Domesday of Inclosures 1517-18* (R.H.S.), i, 166-8.

²⁰ E. Chanc. Proc. v, 379, 24; 462, 3.

²¹ We/1/f.67.

²² We/1/Will 179.

²³ The 24 archdeaconry wills of Wycombe inhabitants 1483-1523 are revealing, because much work has been done on the borough's history. See L. J. Ashford, *History of the Borough of High Wycombe from its Origins to 1880*, chapter 4; and R. W. Greaves ed., *The First Ledger Book of High Wycombe* (Bucks. Rec. Soc. 1956), 43-99.

²⁴ We/1/Will 42.

²⁵ We/1/Inventory 62.

²⁶ The large pivot of the axis of a wheel: J. O. Halliwell, *Dictionary of Provincial and Archaic Words*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ We/2/Will and Inventory 3.

²⁹ Greaves, *Ledger Book*, pp. 74 and 98.

³⁰ *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

³¹ We/1/226.

³² P.R.O. SP 12/115.

³³ We/1/Will and Inventory 50.

³⁴ For an account of shoe-making of slightly earlier date, see P. R. V. Marsden, "Recent Excavations in Southwark", *Trans. London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, xxiii, pt. 1 (1971), 37-39.

³⁵ Mrs. D. Warren of Yardley Gobion has kindly identified the site of this mill as near the market place.

³⁶ *Lincoln Wills* ii, ed. C. W. Foster (Lincoln Rec. Soc. x) Introduction pp. xx & xxi.

³⁷ We/2/Will 23; see also John Newland's will, p. 57 supra.

³⁸ P.C.C. F 4 Spert.

³⁹ We/1/Will 87.

⁴⁰ We/1/Will 88.

⁴¹ We/1/Will 213.

⁴² We/1/Will 63; V.C.H. iii, 158-9.

⁴³ We/1/Will 43.

⁴⁴ We/1/Will 107 and 110, the same in substance.

⁴⁵ We/1/Will 103.

⁴⁶ W. K. Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660*, pp. 27 and 28, citing his *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660*.

⁴⁷ See Shelagh Bond, p 4 of this number.

⁴⁸ *Rec. Bucks.* xi, 334-7.

⁴⁹ We/1/Will 32.

⁵⁰ We/1/Will 44.

⁵¹ *Rec. Bucks.* x, 316.

⁵² *Rec. Bucks.* x, 323.

⁵³ We/2/f.81.

⁵⁴ We/2/f.83.

⁵⁵ We/2/f.103.

⁵⁶ We/2/f.98.

⁵⁷ We/2/Will 49.

⁵⁸ P.C.C. 29 Adeane.

⁵⁹ V.C.H. iii, 189.

⁶⁰ P.C.C. 35 Wattys; transcript in *Berks, Bucks. and Oxon. Journal*, iv, 92.

⁶¹ We/1/Will 211; Cal. Close, Henry VII, ii, 510.

⁶² We/1/Will 212.

⁶³ We/1/Will 64.

⁶⁴ P.C.C. 3 Tashe.

⁶⁵ Real property is mentioned in about 2/3, of the wills. As it would pass by inheritance in many other cases, it can be presumed that most of the testators held land.