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An Analysis of the Probate Documents of the Parish of Sheen, Staffordshire: 1540-1620

Introduction

Evidence about the lives of ordinary people during the Tudor and early Stuart period is limited. Information can be gleaned from records such as church warden accounts, manor court rolls, estate accounts and parish records, but any attempt to understand how a community functioned during this time also needs to examine local probate records. Although their usefulness has been questioned,¹ and they need to be used with caution, it can also be argued they give the widest glimpse into how a community lived, worked and functioned. They provide both qualitative and quantitative information which has been used to analyse areas such as religious beliefs and piety, the local economy, consumerism, literacy, as well as relationships and social structure.² They are of particular importance when other sources are limited. Consequently the aim of this exercise is to analyse the probate documents of the parish of Sheen i.e. the wills and testaments, (known as wills in future), and their accompanying inventories, to see what can be learned of this community, focusing on its economy, homes, beliefs and social relationships.

The Parish of Sheen

The relatively small parish of Sheen lies within the Staffordshire Moorlands, bounded by the River Dove to the east and the Manifold in the west. In 1532-3, thirty eight individual households

¹ Margaret Spufford, 'Religious Preambles and the Scribes of Villagers' Wills in Cambridgeshire' in *When Death do Us Part*, T. Arkell, N. Evans & N. Goose, eds, (Oxford, 2000), pp. 144-57; M. Spufford, 'The Limitations of the Probate Inventory' in *English Rural Society 1500-1800* J. Chartres and D. Hey, eds, (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 139-74

² For example Literacy: Jeremy Gibson, 'Books in Tudor and Stuart Wills and Inventories: A Comment', *Local Historian*, 37:2 (2007), pp. 117-19 and R. Mayer, 'Literacy in a Rural Community: An Assessment of the Use of Probate Records to Determine the Levels of Literacy in the Parish of Audley, 1650-1700', *Staffordshire Studies*, 15 (2003-4), 1-25 Religious beliefs: E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (1992), ch. 15; Caroline Litzenberger, 'Local Responses to Changes in Religious Policy based on evidence from Gloucestershire wills, 1540-1580', *Continuity and Change*, 8:3 (1993), pp. 417-39 Kinship: Clive Leivers, 'Family and Community in Early Modern England: A Study of Selston, Nottinghamshire: 1550-1669', *Family and Community History* Vol 14 /1 (April 2011), pp41-56 Local economy: Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Stroud, 2000), Pauline Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths: Livestock in the Dual Economy in South Staffordshire 1560-1720', *Agricultural Review* (undated) <http://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/29n1a3.pdf> (viewed January 6th 2016)

were recorded in the List of Families in the Archdeaconry of Stafford,³ and, in 1665, forty two were recorded during the hearth tax assessment.⁴ During the period concerned, the Manor of Sheen belonged to the Duchy of Lancaster, i.e. for the Sovereign, with manor courts being held, initially, at Hartington and, from 1571, at Sheen.⁵ Despite farming being the main occupation, in 1611 it was stated that Sheen was mostly 'cold, stony, barren ground' and during the winter was 'commonly so troubled with winds, frosts, and snow as cattle cannot endure to stay thereupon'.⁶

Limitations of Sheen's Probate Records

1540 has been taken as the start date for this analysis as this is when the first will was written by the local priest, Henry Longworth.⁷ Consequently, there is no information about Pre-Reformation religious attitudes. December 31st 1620 was chosen as the end date to allow a reasonable number of probate records to be studied within the time limit.

Within this period, seventy wills were written, of which fifty nine still survive, with most containing inventories.⁸ Additionally, another eleven inventories have survived from fifteen people who died intestate but were registered at Litchfield Consistory Court. With the surviving documents being unevenly distributed across the time period, together with the small numbers overall, (less than one a year on average), any conclusions drawn, especially across small time frames, can be easily biased by the surviving records.

³ Staffordshire Record Society, A list of the Families in the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1532-1533 (*Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 4th series, volume 8, 1976)

⁴ Staffordshire Record Society, Staffordshire Incumbents and Parochial Records: 1530-1680 (*Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 3rd series, 1915) <https://archive.org/stream/collectionsfor1915stafuoft#page/n315/mode/2up> p71 (Viewed December 18th 2015)

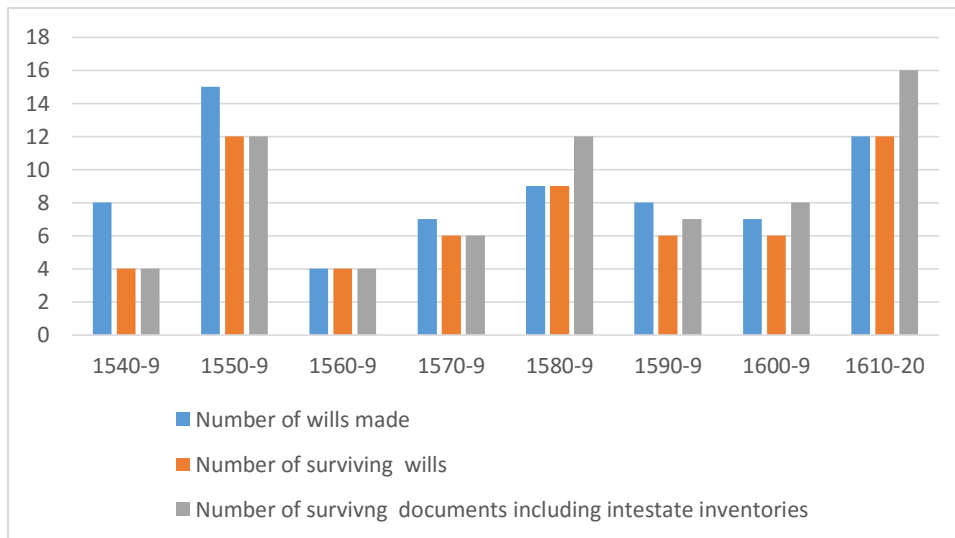
⁵ A P. Baggs, M. F. Cleverdon, D. A. Johnston and N. J. Tringham, 'Sheen', in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 7, Leek and the Moorlands*, ed. C R J Currie and M W Greenslade (London, 1996), pp. 239-250 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp239-250> [accessed 8 January 2016]

⁶ Baggs, Cleverdon, Johnston and Tringham, Sheen, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp239-250> [accessed 8 January 2016]

⁷ Lichfield Record Office (LRO) Probate Records B/C/11 Henry Longworth March 3rd 1541 NB References relate to the date proved but dates written have been used for analysis of all probate records. Years have been altered to current system with the New Year starting January 1st ie February 1601 been converted to February 1602.

⁸ 67 wills were registered at Lichfield Consistory Court and 3 at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury

Figure 1: Sheen Probate Records 1540-1620



Additionally, the probate records do not represent all members of the community. They are skewed in relation to gender, status, age as well as by survival. The law specified only adults of sound mind could write wills, specifically adult males, widows and unmarried women.⁹ Married women had to have the permission of their husbands before they were allowed to write a will and no married woman, who lived in Sheen, wrote a will in the time period considered. Similarly, single women were unlikely to write wills whilst their parents were living. Women, as can be expected, are underrepresented – 84% were written by adult males and out of the eleven women who wrote wills, only one was single. The other ten were widows.

In over 60%, of surviving wills, the testator refers to grandchildren, married children and/or nephews and nieces, implying they are older. James Hall, for example, mentions that he is of ‘great age’.¹⁰ However, how this affects issues is disputable due to the large variations in their wealth.

In order to see how representative the records were of the community, the Sheen burial records were analysed between 1595 and 1620.¹¹ Discounting married women, thirty adults, out of seventy potential will makers, made wills with a similar male: female ratio as during the whole time

⁹ 34 and 35 Henry VIII c5 Statute of Wills

¹⁰ LRO: James Hall October 12 1583

¹¹ The parish records of Sheen start in 1595. Find My Past.co.uk <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> Parish records of Sheen 1595- 1620 (Viewed December 18th 2015 – January 12th 2016)

period. However closer analysis shows that though just over 40% of adults left wills, only 20% were women but over half were men - a figure higher than many other studies.¹²

Table 1: Potential and Actual Will Makers in Sheen Parish: 1595-1620

Sheen Parish 1595-1620	Male	Female	Total
Potential will makers by number	52	20	72
Actual will makers by number	26	4	30
Actual will makers as a % of total will makers	87%	13%	100%
Actual will makers as a % of total potential will makers	36%	5.5%	41.5%
Actual will makers as % of same gender potential will makers	50%	20%	

The wealth indicated on inventories is not always a guide to status and actual wealth.¹³ The Sheen inventories, however, range from £1 18s 11d to over £200, and together with other information on assets, makes it appear that apart from the very rich and the very poor, a reasonable cross section of, at least, the adult male population is represented.¹⁴

¹² Leivers, 'Snelston' p43; Nigel Goose and Nesta Evans, 'Wills as a Historical Source', in *When Death do Us Part*, T. Arkell, N. Evans & N. Goose, eds, (Oxford, 2000), pp 38-71

¹³ T. Arkyell, 'Interpreting Probate Inventories' in *When Death do Us Part*, T. Arkell, N. Evans & N. Goose, eds, (Oxford, 2000), pp 95-99; Spufford, 'Limitations', pp 139-174

¹⁴ LRO: Joan Ball April 27 1551 left £1 18s 11d; Find My Past.co.uk <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> Staffordshire, Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry Wills and Probate, 1521 – 1860 Parish of Sheen, Staffordshire, Thomas Ward April 17 1616 left £207 14s 0d (viewed December 18th 2015 – January 12th 2016)

Figure 2: Sheen Probate Records 1550-1620: Range and Number of Testators according to Wealth and Time Span



The Economic Structure, Organisation and Activities within the Parish of Sheen

The 1540 Statute of Wills Act appears to have been the catalyst for will making in this parish. The effect of this Statute was to allow two thirds of lands held in fee simple (freehold) and all land in socage (tenanted) to be devised by will.¹⁵ However, methods of tenancy varied across the country. Leases were usually held for a term of years. Copyhold land, (land belonging to the manor), could be held for years, lives or inheritance; sold in some areas but not in others; and transferred by will and /or by surrender in the manorial court.¹⁶ ‘Though practice is inconsistent’ the Sheen wills ‘can be employed to indicate inheritance practices’ and landholders.¹⁷

From a number of the early records, 1555-70, the Sacheveralls, based at Ratcliffe upon Soar, owned land in Sheen which they leased, by years, to the community allowing them to pass on by will any remaining time left after their death to whoever they wished.¹⁸ Nicholas Crichlow left the

¹⁵ 34 & 35 Henry VIII 1540 Statute of Wills

¹⁶ Goose and Evans, ‘Wills’, pp 66-67

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p67

¹⁸ Henry Sacheverall, the elder, had married into the Pole family at Hartington, close to Sheen.

'occupation of cow close .. for the time that I have' to a daughter; Richard Mort left a close 'for the years to come' to his wife; and Ellen Cock leaves the '10 years to come' to her cousin.¹⁹

Other landowners were Richard Manifold and John Needham (1562), Richard Slack (1581), William Mottram and Hugh Manifold (1579), William Armstrong (1607), Gabriel Armstrong (1618) and Robert Gillman of Longnor (1613) whose tenants were also able to bequeath their leases.²⁰

Whether as part of the above system or co-existing with it, was the system of copyholders who acquired, surrendered and had the ability to will land through the Manor Court. Richard Mort in 1595 refers to holding lands by lease and surrender implying more than one system but copyhold land could also be sublet²¹. In 1557, James Cocke leaves his wife and daughter a parcel of grassland which he held of Thomas Ward by 'copie of court roll' for certain years yet to come.²² Thomas Ward, in 1616, refers to surrendering all his messuages and tenants to the late Queen 'to customary uses contained in the said surrender for the time and term of 7 years next,' as well as surrendering parcels of land into hands of King James also for '7 years next'.²³

Women, widows and unmarried daughters, could be bequeathed the rest of a lease and did farm land but there is no indication if they were given leases in their own right.

Subletting of land between members of the community, on a temporary basis, also took place. Richard Slack was owed money by John Bonsall for wintering 40 sheep on his land; William Wheelden owed Richard Mort £3 for cow(s) in spring meadow for 5 years.²⁴

How much land was owned by the testators, and how much leased, cannot be ascertained through probate records, as freehold land was never included in inventories. Nine of the testators describe themselves as yeoman, with the inference of some land ownership, but freehold land is

¹⁹ LRO: Nicolas Crichlow (Crichelawe) July 9 1555; Richard Mort October 16 1569; Elizabeth Cock October 16 1570

²⁰ Find My Past: William Wheeldon (Wheldon) April 21 1563; William Wheeldon February 17 1613

LRO: Richard Botham June 12 1579; Thomas Sleight, (Sleyht) September 28 1582; Elizabeth Ryley October 16 1609; James Cocke May 11 1618;

²¹ PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, Yeoman of Sheen, February 2 1607

²² LRO: James Cocke September 17 1557

²³ Find MY Past: Thomas Ward April 17 1616

²⁴ LRO: Richard Mort October 16 1569

never mentioned except in Richard Sleigh's will when he 'purchased to me and my heirs for ever ... 1 close ... of 5 acres and 3 score sheep gates in, through and upon the moor and commons'.²⁵ Only a quarter of the records refer to leasing land, but not may have been willed, with testators preferring to use the manor court or it being included in the residue of his goods.

It is likely that enclosure of the moors was taking place at this time. Though the Victoria County History mentions the presence of an open field north of the village in 1677, the references to closes, messuages and fields in will bequests, and with 50% of testators owning their own plough, harrow or other husbandry ware, personal land, whether leased or owned, is indicated. Richard Sleigh's reference above to sheep gates (an area of land) on moors and commons also indicates that by 1620 the hill sides were being enclosed. Patterns of landholding can be mapped, due to names of farmsteads surviving until the present day, giving a picture of a parish consisting of scattered farmsteads, a small number of families grouped in, and around, the hamlet of Brund, as well as in, and around, the main village of Sheen. See Appendix 1.

Though glebe terriers and manorial surveys also 'refer to tenurial matters and legal rights', probate records can provide qualitative and quantitative information about the way a community functioned economically.²⁶

Though the most important economic activity was farming, the economy of the parish was dependant on rural credit.²⁷ With no formal banking system the local community borrowed and lent to each other. Although Goose suggests a range of reasons for borrowing, including buying stock, paying dowries, and setting up sons, only a few reasons are given in the Sheen probate records

²⁵ PROB 11/136/348 Will of Richard Sleigh, Yeoman of Sheen, Staffordshire October 26 1620

²⁶ Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths', p30

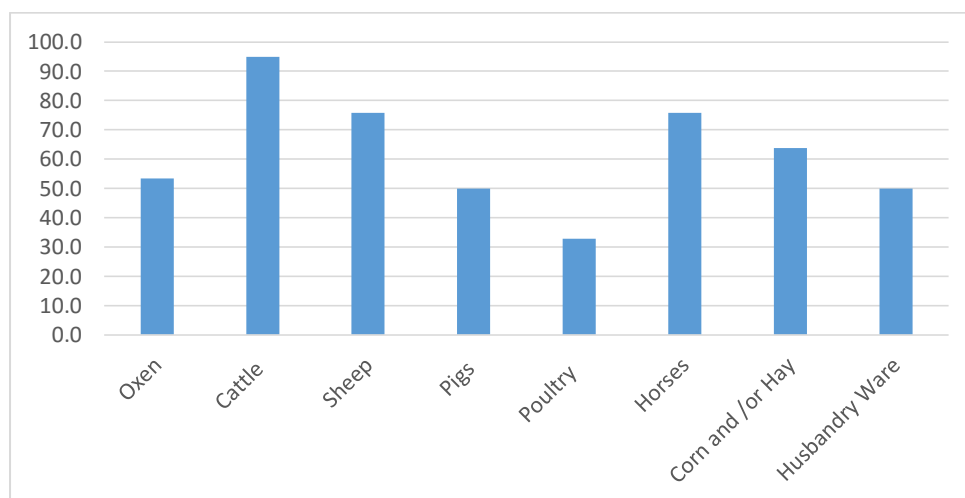
²⁷ Peter Spufford, 'Long term Rural Credit in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England: The Evidence of Probate Accounts' in *When Death do Us Part*, T. Arkell, N. Evans & N. Goose, eds, (Oxford, 2000), p 227

despite 42% of testators providing loans.²⁸ Most debts, whether owing or owed, are unspecified but, those that are include the wintering of sheep on land, and the sale of animals and cloth.²⁹

Lending was largely to other members of the family or to local members of the community but, also encompassed the wider area including Longnor, Sterndale, Alstonfield and Bakewell.³⁰ There are few clues to how the system operated apart from the impoverished Joan Ball's account of the, apparently, bullying tactics used by Thomas Clarke, giving him 13s 4d at his house, 6s 8d at the churchyard side, and 2s at the mill.³¹ Family members who had had loans were often gifted the money as their legacy.

Though only twenty two testators gave their occupation i.e. one priest, twelve husbandmen and nine yeoman, the probate records clearly indicate the majority of testators, at time of their death, were involved in agriculture. The presence and values of husbandry ware, livestock, crops and other items in inventories indicates a community which is dominated by pastoral farming, largely self-sufficient in relation to food, and implies a degree of dual occupations.

Figure 3: Inventories for the Parish of Sheen 1550-1620: Percentage of Testators leaving Livestock, Crops and Husbandry Ware



²⁸ Spufford, 'Rural Credit', p 222-

²⁹ LRO: Nicolas Crichlow 1555; Find My Past William Wheeldon February 17 1613

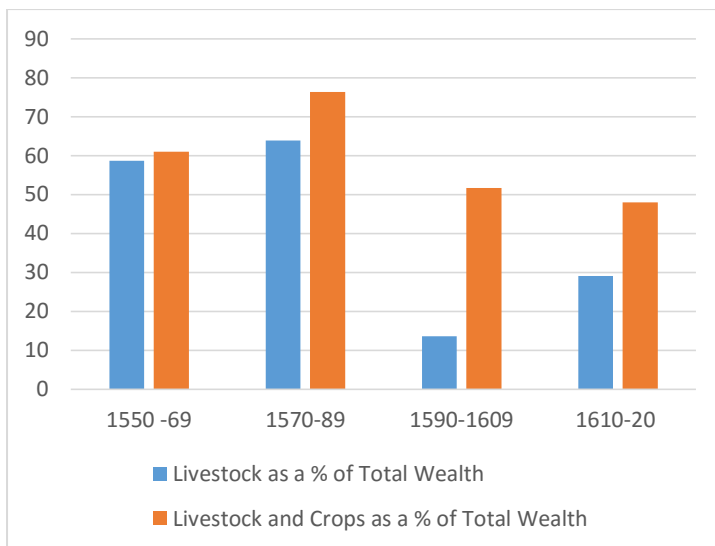
³⁰ E.g. LRO: James Slack (Slacke) April 16 1572, Thomas Mort (Morte) October 21 1558

³¹ LRO: Joan Ball April 27 1551

Although seasonal variations affect figures, e.g. numbers of livestock fluctuate over the year, pigs were killed around November, corn and hay stored in barns had been usually been used by April, the vast majority of households focused on pastoral farming. Of the fifty eight inventories studied only three people had no livestock at all. All the rest kept cattle and just over 75% kept sheep.

However, a more detailed analysis shows a marked decline in the value, (i.e. number), of livestock kept between 1590 and 1609. Further research is required to determine if this change was due to climatic conditions, associated livestock diseases, economic or other reasons. Though speculative, the gift of a bushel of meal, ‘for the poorest people of the parish and around’, made at this time may indicate this was a time of difficulty, though testators’ average wealth continued to rise (Figure 4).³²

Figure 4: Inventories for the Parish of Sheen 1550-1620: Livestock and Crops as a Percentage of the Total Wealth of Testators



Apart from this period, livestock were the main source of testators’ wealth in inventories and, often, their source of surplus funds through sale of unwanted stock. But the community’s

³² LRO: Thomas Cantrell July 23 1605 England had several severe winters and some wet spring and summers during this period.

agricultural practice included a large element of subsistence farming and there is evidence that several households, due to type and number of livestock, must have been reliant on other sources of income such as labouring.³³

Cattle were held by 97% of testators, but numbers were small, with an average herd consisting of five to ten cattle for the whole of this period. In this society cattle were often the most valuable, and valued, items. Their importance is indicated both by them being the first items appraised, on virtually all inventories, and their comparative price. William Horobin's inventory, of 1606, valued four oxen at £10 10s, four kyne, one heifer and two calves at £9 13s 4d, whilst thirteen sheep were worth 43s 4d.³⁴ Only a few farmers had either the land, or wealth, to keep larger herds noticeably the Halls, (father and son), who were slowly increasing their stock with nineteen cattle in 1585 and twenty seven in 1592.³⁵ This very high number of cattle compared to their contemporaries and the presence of nearby drovers' routes, implies this herd being kept for beef or to sell as stock. The smaller herds appear to be multipurpose, being kept for dairy produce, male calves sold for beef and surplus heifers for stock, e.g. Ellen Wardle leaves 6 little cheeses and a pot of butter,³⁶ Nicholas Crichlow is owed money for selling a cow and 16 sheep.³⁷ Few testators left a bull, or ram, suggesting the community used these animals to service their own, possibly for a fee.

Oxen were used as the main draught animal throughout the period, to pull the ploughs, harrows and wains (two wheeled waggons) mentioned in the inventories.³⁸ It is unlikely horse were used as draught animals as 84% of those who had husbandry ware also owned oxen. Most testators kept just one mare, with seasonal colts and foals, used for breeding and transport.³⁹ Only in James

³³ E.g. LRO: Thomas Tonge July 23 1605; Richard Johnson April 16 1601

³⁴ LRO: William Horobin December 2 1606

³⁵ LRO: James Hall October 12 1583; James Hall July 15 1592

³⁶ Find My Past: Ellen Wardle May 9 1611

³⁷ LRO: Nicolas Crichlow (Crichelawe) July 9 1555

³⁸ E.g. LRO: John Cocke September 23 1553; John Milward January 10 1616

³⁹ E.g. LRO: John Sheene August 2 1580

Hall will, of 1585, are horses referred to as draught animals, leaving husbandry ware for his son to be used with his 'own draught of oxen or horses'.⁴⁰

Although the number of sheep varied, from four to over a hundred,⁴¹ the average flock size was thirty one, similar to many other areas in this period. In South Staffordshire flocks consisted of twenty seven sheep, on average, and Frost also cites examples of median flock sizes, during the sixteenth century, ranging from twenty to forty in Lincolnshire and thirty in Leicestershire.⁴²

Wool, from at least larger flocks was sold. Elizabeth Cock, with over a hundred and thirteen sheep, had thirteen stone of wool at the time of her death. The presence of woollen cloth in both the houses and debts, woollen yarn, weaving looms and a spinning wheel, indicates that some wool was made to produce cloth either for their own uses and/or to sell.⁴³ Weaving may have been a dual occupation at this time – not just for women. In 1591 Roger Percival leaves his son Richard, his looms and the gears 'he works with'.⁴⁴

Though surplus stock and produce would have been sold, hens, geese and pigs, due to their low numbers, (on average two to four hens, one to two pigs) and bacon flitches being mentioned in inventories appear to have been kept for the household.⁴⁵

The main grain crop grown was oats, ground at the local mill and often stored in a 'great meal ark in the barn'.⁴⁶ Hay was used for winter fodder.

Agricultural implements were limited, being ploughs, harrows and wains 'with all things belonging to', i.e. yokes, teams or gears for harnessing animals. Generally all other items were

⁴⁰ LRO: October 12 1583

⁴¹ LRO: eg Alice Morte had 4 sheep April 13 1553; Thomas Precevall had 102 March 31 1614

⁴² Frost, 'Yeomen and Metalsmiths', p36

⁴³ LRO: William Horobin June 12 1606; Find My Past Ellen Wardle May 9 1611, Agnes Webster March 12 1612

⁴⁴ LRO: Roger Percival (Pearsevall) October 14 1591

⁴⁵ LRO: William Crichlow (Chrichlowe) January 25 1612

⁴⁶ LRO: George Bullock March 31 1592

included in the almost universal term 'other husbandry ware' but iron bound wheels, a technical advancement, were sometimes given as bequests.⁴⁷

There is limited information on any other occupations. Only clergy and servants are mentioned within the wills.

The Community's Homes

Though there are some limitations when trying to understand the furnishing and fabric of contemporary houses, probate records provide the best source of evidence in understanding their composition.⁴⁸ Though objects may be omitted due to their low cost, the main weakness of the Sheen inventories is the grouping of goods together, e.g. 'all wood ware', 'in bedding and raiment' in a number of them. However, using will bequests, as well as the more detailed inventories, there is enough information to provide a realistic understanding of the material goods in the community's homes, both across the range of testators and across the time period.

Goods were not valued according to rooms, so there is no evidence whether, at any point during this period, people were still living in the traditional one storey house, or had started to divide spaces either through creating separate rooms and/or storeys. The only, disputable, hints are in a will bequest which includes 'loft joists'.⁴⁹ Overton has argued that, in Cornwall, inventories did not divide items into rooms because houses were small, and this may be the case here.⁵⁰

What can be argued, with more certainty, is that houses had unglazed windows. Sacks and window cloths/sheets, (normally oiled cloth to keep out draughts from non-glazed windows), appear regularly e.g. Richard Mort (1569) has two 'winnow sheets'; Elizabeth Hall, a comparatively wealthy testator, bequeaths five sacks and a new window cloth in 1615.⁵¹ Platt's comments that, 'early in

⁴⁷ LRO: John Bateman March 31 1588

⁴⁸ Spufford, 'Limitations' p 145

⁴⁹ LRO: James Cocke May 11 1618

⁵⁰ Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darren Dean and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households: 1600-1750* (Abingdon, 2004) p 171

⁵¹ LRO: Richard Mort October 16 1569; Elizabeth Hall January 10 1616

the next (i.e. 17th) century the only Staffordshire households to have glass in their windows were those of the more prosperous citizens of Lichfield', seems to apply.⁵²

Though it is questionable if the number of sacks or cloths, when specified, gives an idea of the number of windows, and therefore the relative size of the building, it is possible there is a link.⁵³ In 1551 William Mellor in leaves only one sack and Nicholas Crichlow, a sack and a winower (window cloth), whereas later testators' inventories seems to imply much larger buildings.⁵⁴ Richard Mort, in 1620, leaves twelve sacks and three window cloths; Elizabeth Ryley leaves eight sacks and a window cloth in 1609.⁵⁵

Peat and turves were used as fuel, as timber was scarce.⁵⁶ There is tentative evidence the cooking and equipment, associated with open fires, was slowly giving way to those associated with chimneys. Golberts, (an iron rack in a chimney that supported pot hooks) with pots hooks which appear in 1605 are associated with chimneys,⁵⁷ and Richard Mort leaves two 'backstands', (iron back to chimney hearth), in 1620 implying more than on hearth.⁵⁸

Overall very little change appears to be taking place in the style of living and standard of comfort until around 1606 when there are indications of either more wealth or more aspirational lifestyles with new, and better, furnishings beginning to enter inventories culminating in Richard Mort having four silver spoons in 1620.⁵⁹ However, the material goods within homes continued to focus on the essentials: furniture, eating and cooking equipment and bedding.

Cooking in all houses was done over an open fire, using brand irons, (iron grate or trivet with short legs for supporting cooking vessels over or in front of an open fire), or the pot hooks and

⁵² Colin Platt: *The Great Rebuildings of Tudor and Stuart England: Revolutions in Architectural Taste* (Abingdon 2004) p21

⁵³ A number of inventories simply state 'sacks and window cloths' without specifying the number.

⁵⁴ LRO: William Mellor October 27 1551, Nicholas Crichlow (Crichelawe) July 9 1555

⁵⁵ LRO: Elizabeth Ryley October 16 1609; PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607

⁵⁶ Baggs, Cleverdon, Johnston and Tringham, Sheen, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp239-250> [accessed 8 January 2016] reports on scarcity of timber in 1611.

Peat and turves listed in LRO: Elizabeth Ryley October 16 1609; PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607

⁵⁷ LRO: Thomas Cantrell July 23 1605

⁵⁸ PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607

⁵⁹ PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607

chains.⁶⁰ From 1600 baxtons were also being used to cook on, being a flat metal surface which was swung over the fire and used for cooking a number of items from oatcakes to meat.⁶¹ The only spit mentioned is in William Horobin's inventory in 1617.⁶² Meal and malt along with white meat, butter and cheese were produced, using vats.⁶³ Bacon and, occasionally beef flitches, were hung up in the house, especially during the winter months.⁶⁴

Cooking utensils remain similar throughout the period with a variety of brass pots and pans being used and which were valued objects. In 1551 William Mellor had a skillet (a long handled cooking pan with three short legs for placing on a fire), a pot and a pan.⁶⁵ In 1605 John Cantrill had three brass pans, two pots and a skillet.⁶⁶ Other types of pans are occasionally specified such as kettles, (a form of pan) and skimmers,⁶⁷ and a frying pan.⁶⁸

Boards were placed on trestles to make tables, with forms, stools and chairs to sit on e.g. Hugh Ward had five chairs and stools in 1579.⁶⁹ Cushions were placed on the hard wood for comfort.⁷⁰ Board cloths, (table cloths, were used from 1579,⁷¹ with later inventories indicating a more aspirational lifestyle with the introduction of napkins, towels, and linen cloths in the wealthier homes.⁷²

Even the poorest households were using both treen ware (wooden ware) and pewter dishes until, at least, 1607 when treen ware is last mentioned.⁷³ Though indeterminate boards are mentioned throughout the period, dish boards and cupboards begin to appear from 1606⁷⁴ and

⁶⁰ LRO: Thomas Moorte October 21 1558

⁶¹ LRO: William Horobin December 2 1606

⁶² LRO: William Horobin December 3 1617

⁶³ Find My Past : Agnes Webster October 27 1612

⁶⁴ LRO; William Mellor October 27 1551

⁶⁵ LRO :William Mellor October 27 1551

⁶⁶ LRO: Thomas Cantrell July 23 1605

⁶⁷ E.g. LRO John Wardle September 29 1608

⁶⁸ LRO: William Crichlow (Chrichlowe) January 25 1612

⁶⁹ Find My Past: Hugh Ward October 12 1579

⁷⁰ E.g. LRO: Richard Botham June 12 1579

⁷¹ Find My Past: Hugh Ward October 12 1579

⁷² E.g. Find My Past : Agnes Webster October 27 1612; PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607; LRO: James Cocke May 11 1618

⁷³ LRO: Richard Botham June 12 1579

⁷⁴ LRO: William Horobin December 3 1617

occur frequently afterwards allowing dishes to be displayed. Even so, the very affluent Thomas Ward of 1618, only has a dish board and a little 'cupp borde'.⁷⁵ Most goods however, continued to be stored in arks (chests), coffers (chest for storing clothes and valuables) or ambories (various spellings but believed to be a cupboard for storing food).⁷⁶

The majority slept on simple beds with little bedding. Bedstocks were used throughout the period even by the wealthiest.⁷⁷ Chaff beds or mattresses (filled with straw) were still in use in 1610,⁷⁸ though there are three references to feather beds.⁷⁹ Coverlets, sheets and blankets are used from the earliest inventories, with bolsters and pillows occurring from 1569 and pillow biers (cases) from 1605.⁸⁰

In Sheen, as in Cornwall and Kent, changes were appearing after 1600 but the difference between the wealthiest and the poorest testators often depended on the number, of such things as pewter dishes and sheets, rather than type of goods.⁸¹

Social Relationships

The community was linked by kinship. Families were interrelated by marriage and by support through neighbours and friends. As well as loans given between members of the community, references to support for themselves or their families, (not including the executor and supervisory role), occur. Richard Botham asks William Horobin and Roger Percival to divide the residue of his goods between his children at their discretion;⁸² Thomas Cantrill has left his coffer containing money at Nicholas Crichlow's house for safe keeping;⁸³ Elizabeth Ryley leaves the residue of her goods to her friends Nicholas Percival and Thomas Rogers.⁸⁴ Younger children, who would

⁷⁵ Find My Past: Hugh Ward October 12 1579

⁷⁶ E.g LRO: James Slacke April 16 1572.

⁷⁷ Find MY Past: Thomas Ward April 17 1616

⁷⁸ LRO: William Crichlow (Chrichlowe) January 25 1612 Find My Past Ellen Wardle May 9 1611

⁷⁹ LRO: Elizabeth Ryley October 16 1609; Find My Past: Thomas Tonge July 23 1605

⁸⁰ LRO Richard Mort October 16 1569

⁸¹ Overton, Whittle, Dean and Hann, *Production and Consumption*, Chapter 3 pp 33-64

⁸² LRO: Richard Bootham June 12 1579

⁸³ LRO: Thomas Cantrill July 23 1605

⁸⁴ LRO: Elizabeth Ryley October 16 1609

not be left with land, were employed by wealthier members of the community e.g. Elizabeth Cocke was employing Thomas Crichlow and Thomas Mort in 1570.⁸⁵

Perhaps the most telling evidence of community relationships is Richard Mort's comments regarding his unsatisfactory eldest son. Richard states he has two decrees, regarding the custom of the manor and the tithes, which are to be kept by his son if most of the parish feel he is fit. If they do not, then his executors are to choose another man to keep them 'with agreement, and content, of the greater part of the parish'.⁸⁶

As in other areas,⁸⁷ most people's wills indicate concerns for their family with a practice of giving children their portion, ie goods, livestock and/or money, on marriage. Richard Mort, above, leaves his daughter Grace 12d 'over and besides her marriage goods and money'; John Bateman makes it clear that his sons in law have had all such goods 'he had covented, promised or granted them'.⁸⁸ Though reference to 'well beloved wife' and 'most beloved' brother may indicate loving relationships, the phrase does become formulaic after 1606. Occasional comments do hint, though, at family disputes. Richard Mort's frustration with his eldest son is palpable, leaving him 12d 'if by the laws of England, he ought to have it'.⁸⁹ A later Richard Mort leaves his daughter £60 provided 'she is contented to be advised' in the choice of her marriage by her mother and Nicholas Crichlow 'for her own good'.⁹⁰

Women could, at least, continue leases but keeping land within the family was a deep concern. Though land was often left to wives or daughters it was usually given with the caveat that once they died, or married, it would revert to a son. Ellen Gyllman is left 'her part' and the remains of the 'time he has' on the land along with the husbandry ware until she dies when it goes to his son

⁸⁵ LRO: Elizabeth Cocke October 16 1570

⁸⁶ PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607

⁸⁷ Goose and Evans, 'Wills', pp 64-66

⁸⁸ LRO: John Bateman March 31 1588

⁸⁹ PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607

⁹⁰ LRO: Richard Mort May 29 1620

William.⁹¹ James Cocke leaves the leases between his wife, son and daughter until the women marry when it all goes to his son.⁹² Nicholas Crichlow leaves a close to his daughter provided she 'keep herself sole and unmarried' – or it goes to her brother.⁹³ The desire to keep the land within the family is most directly spoken by the Richard Sleigh above, who states that having 'no heirs of my body lawfully begotten and being minded' that his land 'shall continue and remain in the line and the blood of the Sleighs' and leaves it to his nephew.⁹⁴

Some of the more important members of the community, were educating younger sons to give them the opportunity for other occupations – particularly to be members of the clergy. Not only would Richard Mort's son, Gervaise, become curate, then vicar, of Sheen, another son, Raphe, became vicar of South Wingfield. James Hall's son becomes vicar of Thorpe, William Horobin refers to his son John as clerke (clergy) and Thomas Ward's son Gervaise will become a reader at Alstonefield.

Within this interlinked community, certain personalities and/or families emerge as being leaders or having higher social standing. The importance of the clergy, Richard Malkyn in the first half of this period and Gervaise Mort after 1600 is obvious. Not only as local clergyman had they standing in the community, but both being able to write made them responsible as a scribe for a large percentage of wills and inventories.

Five out of the nine testators described as yeomen belonged either to the Ward or Mort families. Not only were they among the wealthiest, Richard Mort was responsible for keeping the decrees of the parish and manor, and he, and other members of his family, feature regularly as appraisers. Both Thomas Ward and Richard Mort state they wish to be buried in the church, rather than the church yard, a sign that they also felt they were of higher status than others.

⁹¹ LRO: Roger Gylman September 20 1562

⁹² LRO: James Cocke September 17 1557

⁹³ LRO: Nicholas Crichlow (Crichelawe) July 9 1555

⁹⁴ Taken from probate records (PROB 11/109/191 Richard Mort, February 2 1607; LRO John Hall April 18 1592; William Horobin December 3 1617; PROB 11/136/348 Will of Richard Sleigh, October 26 1620) and CCEd Clergy of the Church of England database <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/locations/index.jsp> (Viewed January 5 2016)

The Community's Beliefs?

Studies of sixteenth century wills, particularly during the Reformation period, have been used to support claims, and counter claims, about individual beliefs and the progress, or otherwise, of Protestantism.⁹⁵ However, in this parish there is limited evidence of most testators' beliefs with the community, at least outwardly, conforming to the current doctrine. This is made more noticeable by the majority of wills being written during the Reformation by Richard Malkyn, originally the local priest, but who later describes himself as clerk or curate.

Between 1540-7, unsurprisingly, all three wills can be considered Catholic with testators bequeathing money, or goods, to support the church at Sheen. Henry Longworth, the local priest leaves corn and hay 'which the parish oweth him' for a steeple – provided they start building it within three years of his death.⁹⁶ The community seems reluctant to provide these tithes as Thomas Mort is providing 6s 8d for the building of a steeple in 1558.⁹⁷

During Edward's reign no traditional wills were made, though Richard Malkyn continues to refer to himself as priest and writes every one. Despite this outward conformity the Visitation of 1552-3 indicates that a number of accoutrements, associated with Catholic practice, were still in existence, and that ornaments were in the hands of Richard Malkyn and Thomas Percevall.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Margaret Spufford, 'Religious Preambles and the Scribes of Villagers' Wills in Cambridgeshire' in *When Death do Us Part*, T. Arkell, N. Evans & N. Goose, eds, (Oxford, 2000), pp (Oxford, 2000), pp 144-57; Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Chapter 15)

⁹⁶ LRO: Henry Longworth March 3rd 1541

⁹⁷ LRO: Thomas Mort October 21 1558

⁹⁸ Staffordshire Record Society, William Landor, Staffordshire Incumbents and Parochial Records: 1530-1680 (*Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 3rd series, 1915)
<https://archive.org/stream/collectionsfor1915stafuoft#page/n315/mode/2up> (Viewed December 18th 2015)

Table2: Religious Preambles in the Probate Record of Sheen Parish 1540-1620

Date	Traditional/Catholic Reference to Lady Saint Mary; company or saints of heaven; and/or bequests relating to catholic practices	Neutral 1 Reference to Almighty God with/ without simple additions e.g. creator, redeemer	Neutral 2 Reference to Almighty God and Jesus Christ with simple additions e.g. saviour, redeemer	Protestant References to only salvation, everlasting life, merits of Jesus Christ passion and blood shedding
1540-Jan 1547	3	0	0	0
Feb 1547- July 1553	0	5	0	0
August 1553- December 1558	4	3	0	0
December 1559- 1585 (Death of Richard Malkin)	0	14	0	5
1586 -1605	0	4	3	2
1607-1620 (Appointment of Gervaise Mort as curate)	0	0	3	13

With the accession of Mary and the return to catholic worship, followed by the accession of Elizabeth and a return to Protestantism it is possible to see some differences. The Cocks appear to be genuine Catholics with John Cocks's will, containing the traditional preamble in 1553, followed by his son James Cocks leaving money for lights in the church in 1557. It is conceivable that the Crichlows had more protestant leanings, leaving a 'neutral will' under Mary, followed by a son

leaving money for the 'reparacion' of the church' in 1561, and in 1576 Thomas Crichlow's, very protestant preamble, being noticeably different from his contemporaries' neutral wills.⁹⁹

From Elizabeth's accession no traditional/catholic wills are written and most religious preambles are, noticeably, written to a script with two other exceptions. James Hall's will contains a long and very Calvinistic preamble involving being saved by faith alone and being one of the elect, though it appears to have been written by his son James, a 'clerke' (clergyman), and who becomes Vicar of Thorpe.¹⁰⁰ The other exception may again relate to the scribe's own views rather than the testators. John Cantrell's will of 1559, written soon after the accession of Elizabeth, contains the words 'God save the Queen' minutely written into the ornate 'In' at the very start of the will.¹⁰¹

Compared to other communities, e.g. Kirkby Malhamdale, this was much more conforming society.¹⁰² At the same time very few gave donations to the church or other charities with only four donating after Elizabeth's accession.

Conclusion

Though probate records of Sheen show 'some insight can be gained into the beliefs, customs, attitudes and material wealth together with the social relationships and communities in which they lived', their limitations are also evident.¹⁰³ They were not designed to provide evidence of the contemporary economy and life and, not only need to be used with caution, but with other sources for a full understanding of how the community functioned. The above interrogation of Sheen's probate records and suppositions reached, need to be further evidenced by other contemporaneous records, e.g. manor court rolls, glebe terriers, before confident conclusions can be made. As Goose and Evans state 'they need to be set aside other available evidence, allowing the

⁹⁹ LRO: John Cocke September 23 1553; Jame Cocke September 17 1557; Nicholas Crichlow (Crichelawe) July 9 1555 Nicholas Crichlow (Kryechelaw) April 18 1561; Thomas Crichlow (Chrichelawe) May 4 1576

¹⁰⁰ LRO: James Hall October 12 1583

¹⁰¹ LRO: John Cantrell October 6 1559

¹⁰² Victoria Spence, 'From Late Medieval Piety to Religious Conformity in a Northern Parish: Kirkby Malhamdale, Craven, 1454-1606', *Northern History* 47: 1 (March 2010) p74

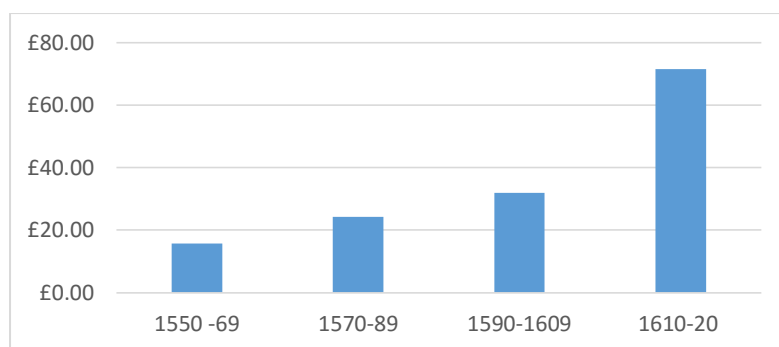
¹⁰³ Leivers, 'Snelston' p41

insights, they appear to provide, to be tested to produce a more rounded and convincing view of early modern economic and social structures and development'.¹⁰⁴ Additionally in order to contextualise any conclusions made, comparisons need to be drawn with other localities.

Despite these issues, the probate records show that Sheen was an interrelated community, with a complex pattern of landholding and dependency, both between the community itself, and with minor gentry or wealthier landowners.

It was not a wealthy parish, with the community focusing on the essentials required to survive rather than, what were for the time, advances and improvements, e.g. glass windows, and luxury goods, e.g. silver spoons. Probate records emphasise this priority through the giving or passing on livestock and husbandry ware, whilst indicating the lack of material goods. Their furniture consisted largely of beds, a board table, forms and stools for sitting on and a number of chests for storing goods. Furnishings consisted of a few cushions, a table cloth and, despite the weather in the area, only a few covers for the bed.

Figure 4: Average Wealth of Testators from Sheen Inventories 1550-1620



However, the wealth of the community, as a whole, was slowly growing. Accurate comparisons of wealth over time are not possible with probate records, due to issues of accuracy and inflation, but the inventory figures indicate growth. After 1600, there is evidence that some of

¹⁰⁴ Goose and Evans, 'Wills', p71

the surplus wealth is being used for the acquisition of more, and better, domestic goods. This improving wealth may have lead, or will lead, to the rebuilding of their houses –‘TW’ rebuilds his house in 1620.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Baggs, Cleverdon, Johnston and Tringham, Sheen, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp239-250> [accessed 8 January 2016]

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Appendix 1

Map 1: Identifiable Homes of Sheen Testators 1540-1620¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Yates's Map Of The County of Stafford 1775 (Part) Scale Reduced To About 1 In. To 1¾ Mile (Approx. 1:110,000) taken from A P Baggs, M F Cleverdon, D A Johnston and N J Tringham, 'Alstonefield: Introduction', in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 7, Leek and the Moorlands*, ed. C R J Currie and M W Greenslade (London, 1996), pp. 1-8 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp1-8> [accessed 11 January 2016].
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