

WHILTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

The Local History Society met on 7th March 2013, when the subject was “**1656: one document’s story.**”



The lawyer’s clerk seems to have enjoyed decorating the date with his inky squiggles.

Who was Robert Hill?

During the evening we heard that Robert Hill came from a Whilton farming family. In 1554, in the time of Mary Tudor, there were a Henry and Thomas Hill living in Whilton; it seems likely that Robert was a descendant of this family. His house had been in the family since at least his grandfather’s time, possibly longer. Grandfather John Hill had married Elizabeth Salorcke in Whilton Church in 1598. When John died he left the farm to his son, Robert. Robert and his wife Joan spent the rest of their lives on their Whilton farm. They had two children; their son, another Robert, was baptized in 1635, and a daughter, Elizabeth, arrived two years later, no doubt named after her grandmother.

By 1656 young Robert’s father was dead, and at 21 he had inherited the farmhouse, with its sitting tenant. Robert would have grown up during the Civil War, and maybe experienced the possibilities of leaving the land. During the Civil War Northampton had supported the Parliament and provided footwear for its Army. Young men learning the skill of shoemaking would have realised that the place to make your money was in the town, not a little village like Whilton. By 1656 young Robert had departed from the family farming tradition and had become a shoemaker, living in Daventry. By selling the house, Robert was closing his links with Whilton. The document we looked at was William Langton’s part of the indenture; he would have signed the document which Robert Hill kept as a record, and from other evidence we know that William

A document has recently come to light, which is dated 1656, during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell.

The document records the sale of a Whilton house by Robert Hill to William Langton. The price was £28 and at the time the house was let to Widow Linnell.

Langton could write. But Robert Hill could not write. He just “made his mark.” After this the Hill family disappears from Whilton’s records.

Who was Widow Linnell?

When the house was sold in 1656, Widow Linnell was living in it. The records suggest that the Linnells, already an old Whilton family, were related to the Sallockes, and this may explain why she was there.

Because there were a number of Linnell families, it is impossible to be certain, but it is most likely that Widow Linnell had been born Elizabeth Phillips in Whilton. She had married farmer Thomas Linnell in 1615, and they had gone on to produce 14 children, some of whom did not survive childhood. The last child, a daughter was baptized in 1641 and so would have been seen as able to fend for herself by the time her father died in 1655. After all this child-bearing, however, Elizabeth may well have seemed an old woman.

Who was William Langton?

The Langton family had been well established here since early Tudor times, but the Langtons of Whilton are very difficult to disentangle at this period. However, we do have some clues.

On 1st April 1681 William Langton, husbandman of Whilton, made his will, leaving certain property to his son, Thomas Langton. This property was “the house which I bought of Robert Hill” and all the goods therein at my decease and 30 shillings more for taking my grandchild Thomas Davis to be his apprentice. This must surely be the house in our document. William’s other son, Robert Langton, was executor and received all the rest of my goods, chattels and cattle, both within doors and without, with crops of hay and corn growing on the ground at my decease.

After old William died in 1683, an inventory was taken of all his possessions. These were:

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| “His wearing apparel and money: | 10 shillings |
| An old cow and a small heifer | £2 |
| Ten sheep | £1 |
| An old garner and chest | 6 shillings and 8 pence |
| An old brass pan and other refuse trumpery | 3 shillings and 4 pence” |

The total came to £4.

All this sounds rather pathetic, and we may well ask: how did such a man find £28 to buy a house in 1656? But we need to read behind the lines. Old William had been a farmer. He had adult sons. He was no longer really farming, but kept a few animals for interest. He was probably living with his

son Robert in the main farmhouse, where he had always lived. Robert was the farmer of the next generation.

In 1683 Thomas Langton received the house which had been bought from Robert Hill. Old Widow Linnell was no doubt long gone. Perhaps Thomas was already living there? There is no suggestion that Thomas was receiving land or even that Thomas was a farmer. There is a real suggestion that he had a different trade and had taken on a nephew as an apprentice. He may well have been the Thomas Langton who was a weaver. This was the time when the worsted cottage industry was thriving around Long Buckby, and does not preclude Thomas from being a farmer too.

After this the story becomes more murky. A number of Langtons died in the mid 1680s, including a Robert Langton, which may mean that the farm descended to his brother Thomas. The house deed remained in Langton hands, and the house itself may possibly have been on the site of today's Langton House, but that cannot yet be proved.

We finished the evening by remembering the last descendants of the Langtons here, who were the twins Beatrice and May Gammage, who died in 1976. Their mother had been Julia Langton before her marriage. Like them we tasted seedie cake and currant cake, which they used to cook in Langton House.