

## WILLIAM LANGTON AND HIS FARM

At our November 2009 meeting we found out some of the details of the farming life of William Langton of Whilton. William was born in the time of Queen Elizabeth, would have lived through the scare of the Spanish Armada, the accession of James I, the Gunpowder Plot and the early years of Charles I. He died in 1636.

We cannot be sure where William's Whilton farmhouse stood four hundred years ago, but there is enough information to give us an idea of what his home looked like. With the aid of a model we considered William's yard, which included the farmhouse where he lived. This was probably well furnished for a yeoman, but we only have records of a bed, chair, cupboards and buffet stool. The house and buildings would all have been thatched and probably built of cob. The fireplace was vital for cooking and for warmth, and the fire was kept in all year. The Langtons had a yearly trip to Rugby to collect coal, presumably from the Warwickshire mining area, and they also burnt furze in the house. Furze could be used as a form of kindling or to raise a blaze when more heat was needed. When William later built another farmhouse, he reckoned there was a need for sixty faggots of furze a year, but the size of the faggots is not described! There were trees in or around his Great Close, from which, no doubt, firewood was obtained. There was timber stacked about the place, some in sheds, which William referred to as hovels.

The yard was almost certainly cobbled. The outbuildings housed his farming equipment, which included at least two long carts and two dung carts, his ploughs, with irons belonging to them, and one great harrow. This equipment would have been pulled by the six horses owned by William. In the stables and cow houses round the yard were gear for horses, racks, mangers and lures. The entry to this yard was through a gateway, with two garnerers over it, suggesting a wide entrance, with gates which were closed at night, something like the farm at Muscott.

Other equipment included a salting trough, used in the salting of meat, which would have been butchered and preserved for the use of the family. There were also barrels, probably for the storing of beer brewed for the family and its servants and labourers. William had his own malt kiln, with its steeping vat and hair cloth belonging to it, and used in the production of malt probably from his own barley. Thomas Hale, a writer of the next century compared methods for making malt, and wrote, "*Of all the methods the plain and simple hair cloth is the best for the finest malts. A slow fire under this dries it very gradually and equally, it is easily turned as is required, and when it is done there is no difficulty in getting it out, for 'tis only turning it at once and all is clean.*" This suggests William Langton knew what he was doing. He stored his malt in barns round the yard.

In July 1602 William was married in Nether Heyford, where his bride was Elizabeth Worley. Their marriage was to last 33 years, which was a good long time for those risky days, when many women died young. William and Elizabeth brought up their children in the old farmhouse. There were two sons, William and Thomas, and several daughters. William and Elizabeth Langton prospered during their lifetime, and William was able to build a second farmhouse on Nichols Yard in Whilton, so that after his death each of his two sons could have his own farm. This new house had two storeys and with it a yard, homestead, barns and "edifices". There was a great barn next to "Beane Well", with a grass close beside it to the west. This new house was probably comfortably furnished, but the records only mention a table with frame and form in the hall, a spit, cupboards, a swilling pot and brazen pots, but that there were other items of furniture too. After William died, his widow, Elizabeth went to live in this new house with her son Thomas Langton; she had a patch of south facing ground outside her parlour where she could sit in the sun.

William's closes included an orchard, next to Robert Langton's close, with different types of apple trees. A few cows were kept in the Great Close near the house, almost certainly for milking, and some sheep grazed here too. Besides his two farmhouses and the hedged fields connected with them, William held four yardlands of arable land in the open fields of Whilton, just as other farmers did. A yardland was not a precise measurement and varied from parish to parish, in this area often being between 25 and 30 acres. If we base our calculations on the lower figure, we can say that William held at least 100 acres in Whilton open fields. He also held ten lands, or strips, in Muscot Field. This was another open field, stretching up adjoining Whilton, beside Roughmoor Grounds, which was

communally held by Norton, Brockhall and Whilton parishes. In these open fields William grew corn and peas, wheat and barley. Some barley was used for malt, but other grain would have been threshed and taken to the windmill on the hill or the watermill in the valley, to provide flour for the family. He also harvested hay and held the sixth part of a yardland in the Farm Ground of Whilton. This may have been grassland for hay or grazing.

However, William's main business involved livestock. In his old age, he owned 16 cows and 8 heifers, and in the common fields he kept 30 young sheep, 15 ewes and lambs and 15 barren sheep, besides his sheep and cows in his Great Close near the house. There were also another 60 hogs (a local word for yearling sheep). His sons also had their own flocks and herds, and appear to have worked the farm with him.

Dung from the animals was an important by-product, used for fertilising the ground. William had dung carts for transporting this manure where required, but the sheep were sometimes folded on the arable strips which William held, the folds being carried out to the lands. After William died, the sons had to carry out his will that young William's sheep should be moved out to a fold on Thomas's arable in the open fields every year, so that Thomas should have the muck from his brother's sheep kept in Great Close; Thomas had the duty of carrying the sheep fold out to the fields.

After his death in 1636, William Langton was not buried in the churchyard, but in the church itself, usually the sign that he was an important and wealthy parishioner. He left the church a plate for the serving of the bread during communion, but no memorial to him has remained. His "beloved friends" whom he made the overseers of his will were other farmers, Thomas Linnell, William Hall and William Briggs. William Phillips, another farmer who probably lived in a farmhouse at the end of Buckby Lane, and the Rector, Samuel Phillips, witnessed the will. The value of William Langton's goods was reckoned to be £607-9-4, a considerable sum in 1636.