

Account of Purley on Thames

Francis Leach

R200637 29/6/19

Two articles by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook articles 88 and 85

88. The Two Probate Inventories of Francis Leach in 1661

The first inventory of Francis Leach's goods and chattels was taken on 5th March 1660/1 by John Wilder and John Botham both of Sulham, and Francis Headeach of Pangbourne, and the second on the following 10th September was signed by William and Agnes Elliot. Both name the four rooms in Francis' house in Purley as the hall, two chambers (bedrooms) and a milkhouse.

The hall or main living room of the house was sparsely furnished with just a table, three stools and a cupboard. In the fireplace were two spits, two hangers, two augers, a pair of tongs and a fire shovel. The cooking and eating equipment listed were two brass pots, two kettles, two skillets, a skimmer, a brass ladle and also five pewter platters. The total value of the items in this room was £4 10 10d (£4 54).

In the "little chamber" (which was probably upstairs) was a bedstead with a flock bed (mattress), four bolsters and three blankets. The only other items stored in this room were a chest and five barrels. Total value £2 3 4d (£2 17).

In the "chamber over the hall" where, presumably, Francis had died, was his high bedstead and a truckle bedstead (which would have been wheeled under the high bed during the day). The bedding consisted of a flock bed with a coverlet, two blankets, two

bolsters, two pillow cases and four pairs of sheets. "A dozen napkins, a table cloth and three towels" were probably stored "with other lumber" in the "three chests and two boxes" kept in this room, the whole valued at £8 0 8d (£8 03).

The equipment in the milkhouse comprised a salting trough, four tubs, three "civers", eight bowls, two buckets, a butter churn, a table board and a "cofar" with shelves valued at £3 0 4d (£3 02).

Stored in the "hows" were provisions valued at £3 15s (£3 75) which consisted of eight little cheeses, fifteen pounds of butter and six bacon flitches (sides).

The livestock recorded was three cows and two bullocks, a colt, ten sheep, two hogs, ten "stocks" (hives) of bees and a cock with six hens at £18 7 6d (£18 38).

The corn, barley and rye in the barn which was worth £3 10s (£3 50) in March had increased to £4 11s (£4 55) by September, and "one acker of corn upon the ground" (i.e. growing) valued at £1 10s (£1 50) in the spring had decreased to £1 2s (£1 10) after it had been harvested.

Francis Leach's clothes were valued at £1 10 4d (£1 52) and he had £9 19s (£9 95) "redd muneey in the hows" which was not mentioned in the second inventory. He also had £70 due "upon bonds" (that is out on loan) in March which had by September increased to £100.

The altered value of items in the last two paragraphs account for the main difference in total between the two inventories of £126 7 2d in March and £145 13 7d in September.

Jean Debney

85. Francis Leach - was he a Catholic?

"On or about the one and twentieth day of February" 1660/1, Francis Leach, a husbandman (a small farmer) lay on his high bedstead in the "upper room of his dwelling house" in Purley. Although he was dying he had "good and perfect remembrance" and had summoned two of his friends to acquaint them with his last wishes before they hurried away to write it all down ready for his final signature. Unfortunately Francis died before they had completed his "last Will and Testament" and so a "nuncupative Will" (an oral will) was written up in the third person, e.g. "he did will and bequeath" etc.

The only things known about Francis Leach are that he married Magdalen Nightingale in Tilehurst on 25th May 1633 and in 1637 was a Churchwarden of Purley. Although he has not been found in any other records until his death in 1661, it is assumed that he remained in Purley during the turmoil of the Civil War and Commonwealth period.

Francis chose three known Catholics to deal with his estate - Francis Hyde and George Hyde of Sulham to write his Will, and Richard Hyde, gentleman and also of Sulham, to be an Executor. The religious conviction of Francis Headeach the elder, a yeoman of Pangbourne and the other executor, is unknown

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