

Account of Purley on Thames

Ann Viner

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 60 published in PPN April 1986

60 - Ann Viner's Will - 1756

Until just over one hundred years ago everything that a married woman possessed, even the clothes she stood up in, belonged to her husband. This meant that if she predeceased him she could not make a will; however, a widow or spinster could.

Ann Viner, who leased Westbury Farm in 1741, was a widow for almost fifty years. It is not certain when her husband John died, but their three children were baptised in Purley - William (1704), Mary (1707) and John (1709) - and she was described as a widow in 1711.

On 13 September 1756, Ann made her will which is full of interesting details and is quoted here in full, together with all the original spellings, but modern punctuation.

- "In the name of God, Amen
- I, Anne Viner of ye Parish of Purley in ye County of Berks, being in perfect health, praised be God, do make this my last Will and Testament as followeth:
- Imprimis I give to my daughter Mary Viner all my wareing apparrell full & wholely, & a pair of Holland sheets & a pair of pillow cases & one table cloth & half a duzzen napkins & one duzzen of plates & four dishes, one sacepan (saucepan?) and one coffee pott & my wedding ring.

- Imprimis I give to my son John Viner one shilling & to his wife Anne Viner one gold ring;
- Imprimis I give to my son William Viner, whom I make full & whole Executor of this my last Will and Testament, & to his heirs all within & without whatsoever their is left;
- In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal ye thirteenth day of September & in ye year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifty six.

Anne Viner X my mark

- Sealed, published and declared by ye above named Anne Viner for and as her last Will and Testament in ye presenced of us
- John Hamlin, Ann Hamlin and Elizabeth Knight".

Ann was buried in Purley on 27 Jan 1758 and her Will was proved by her son William at Reading in the court of the Archdeacon of Berkshire, the 12 May following.

Her daughter Mary never married and was buried in Purley in 1784 aged about 77. The list of items that she was to receive give a brief insight into her mother's personal possessions. Coffee, which became popular in the coffee houses of 17th century London, was not a common drink when Ann wrote her Will. Her coffee pot was obviously a prize possession and might have been of earthenware, or even of silver.

Her youngest son John, who may have received his inheritance some time previously, was left a nominal shilling by his mother in order to name him in her Will.

Her eldest son William, who inherited the bulk of the estate, continued to farm in Purley until his death. His double headstone can be seen on the right of the path by the south door of the church and is one of the oldest in Purley. It reads: "In memory of William Viner - died Aug 23rd 1773 aged 68 years; In memory of Mary wife of William Viner - died Feb 10th 1778 aged 56 years".

Jean Debney

