

Account of Purley on Thames

Christopher Stenton

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An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 83 published in PPN October 1988

83. Christopher Stenton, died 1578

It is difficult to discover much about the inhabitants of 16th century Purley. There are no early parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, but surviving probate records do tell us a little about some of the families and how they lived.

Christopher Stenton (sometimes spelt Stanton or Stainton) lived in Purley for at least 22 years before he died. In 1556 he appraised John Holloway's probate inventory and again in 1574 for John Goodboy. A tailor by trade, he had a wife and five children when he made out his own will on 28th April 1578. It was witnessed by Thomas Stoning, parson of Purley, Elizabeth Stoning and John Justice. His wife Margaret and son Thomas were to be the executors, and John Justice the overseer to superintend them. Margaret and John were to receive the residue of the estate after all the legacies were made, the funeral expenses and other debts paid.

Christopher left Margaret his best cow plus the best coverlet of his bed which son Thomas was to have after her death; Thomas was to have the other cow, his cloak and a platter; son Henry was to receive a platter, a porringer, a form and table,

a pair of tressles, a new broche (spit), six wooden dishes, 12 trenchers (wooden plates) and three boards. The three other children, Joyce, George and Joan were each to have a platter. Joan was under 21 when her father died.

The inventory of Christopher's goods was appraised eight weeks later on 20th June by his neighbour John Northe with Thomas Goodmonger and Edward Fuller. They listed and priced the contents of each of the four rooms in the house, the hall, kitchen, a chamber (a loft used for sleeping and storage) and the shop before examining the stock and crops. The original dialect and phonetic spelling has been modernised below and additional information added in brackets.

In the hall were 2 tables, a form and 2 benches at 2s 8d; a cupboard, stool, shelves, boards and painted cloths (to decorate the walls and keep out draughts) at 3s 2d; (probably stored in the cupboard were) platters, five porringers (for soup or porridge), four saucers (shallow dishes for drinking?), three salt (cellars), two candlesticks, two pewter pint pots and a chafing dish (a double dish used with coals to heat food or drink) at 10s.

In the kitchen were four old kettles (two handled cooking pots), a brass pot and two frying pans at 7s; a pair of andirons (to support the logs in the fire), three spits (for roasting meat), a rack, a pair of pot hooks (to suspend the brass pot over the fire) and a grid iron at 3s 4d; plus wooden vessels at 5s 4d.

In the shop was a shop board (?tailor's work bench where he would work sitting cross-legged), a form, a pressing iron (probably heated on the kitchen fire) and 2 pairs of shears. Listed with these trade goods were also a hatchet (or axe to chop wood), a bill (a curved blade on a long handle for hedging etc.), a powdering trough (in which meat was cured with salt and spice) and two hooks worth altogether 5s 4d.

In the chamber was a bed, a bolster and bedstead with two coverlets, a blanket, a pair of sheets, a hanging (probably a curtain for the bed which may have been a four-poster) and two pillows at £1 3s 4d; his clothes at 15s; two chests (to store clothes, linen, etc.), three coffer (strong boxes for valuables) and a watchinger(?) bill valued at 10s 6d; (this room was also used to store some) boards, 2 pieces of timber, two ladders at 15s and two spinning wheels at 1s 4d.

Outside were two kine (cows) valued at £2 8s and 3 pigs worth 6s 8d. Growing in the fields were an acre of rye and half an acre of barley valued at £1 6s 8d.

The total value of the estate was £9 3s 8d, out of which was owed, in addition to 5s to the appraiser John North, 5s 10d to Edward Comber and 2s 8d to Watlington in Reading. Probate was granted to Thomas Stenton (? his son), a tailor and Thomas Stoning, Rector, both of Purley.

Next month, Thomas Stoning's inventory suggests a different lifestyle.

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