

# ***Account of Purley on Thames***

## ***William Wollascot***

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*An article by Jean Debney in the series From my History Notebook article 101 published in PPN August 1991*

### 101: William Wollascott's Will - 1547

On 30 March 1547, when Henry VIII had been dead just three months, William Wollascott signed his last Will and Testament. For reasons not yet known it was not proved until 1572 when it was taken to the Probate Court of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Henry VIII, an educated and deeply religious man, had no male heir and in 1527 asked the Pope to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. When this was refused, the Church in England was separated from the authority of Rome by a series of Acts of Parliament. Henry, now Supreme Head of the Church, retained his basic Catholic beliefs until his death and religious life in England was unchanged. After his death however, there were some who, during the short reign of his sickly 9-year-old son Edward VI, seized the opportunity to initiate religious reform, but in March 1547, England was still Catholic.

As might be expected, William made bequests in his will to family, relations and friends. He also asked to be buried in Tidmarsh "hard by the body" of Jane "sometyme my loving wife" and named his children, William, Richard, Roger, Suzanne and Elizabeth. But the most interesting aspect of his will is the religious detail it contains, reflecting his Catholic faith and some of

the religious customs of the times. In the following extracts, the spelling, punctuation and use of capitals has been modernised.

Edward VI was described as "King of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, and in earth immediately under God the Supreme Head of the Church of England and Ireland". William stated he was of "whole mind", repented his "old and detestable life" and asked to be forgiven for "sins and offences before this time done".

Anticipating the infirmities of old age and illness, he asked that when his "eyes shall lose their use" that the eyes of his soul may see Jesus and say: "O Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, take me to Thy great mercy". And when his mouth had lost its use, then his spirit may say, "O Lord and Saviour, into Thy hands I commit my soul."

At his burial, "five poor and devout priests" were each to receive 8d (4p) to say "five masses and no more". The masses were to be "said one after another and not together, nor in haste as the common use hath been". His executors were also to arrange for "dirges on month's mind and year's mind", i.e. services or masses for the dead.

Also at the funeral, "three score of the poorest householders in Pangbourne, Purley, Bradfield, Tilehurst, Sulham and Tidmarsh" were to receive 8d (4p) each. Only the poorest with at least three children were to qualify and nothing was to be given to "those common beggars or children, boys and wenches that happen to come roaming or gadding to my burying".

His daughter Suzanne was to have £100 but only if she "marry or handfast herself to any person" who is the "right mate" and approved by his Executors.

The Will stated he had leased the "manor, place and farm of Tidmarsh" and also mentioned property in Reading and Shropshire. Four Executors were to carry

out his wishes: "brothers" Alexander Fetiplace and Edmund Plowden, his son William and "Mr Englefield". Brother Fetiplace and Mr Englefield were each to have one of his "best mares for their pains", Mr Englefield to have "the choice".

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