

## WICKHAMFORD MANORIAL BOOK, 1631 – 1650

In about 1935, local historian Ettwell Augustine Bracher Barnard examined various documents relating to Wickhamford Manor and wrote articles about the contents of the Manorial Book. He says that Penelope Sandys had been left a widow in 1626 (*Edwin Sandys actually died in 1623 and was buried in the chancel of Wickhamford Church on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1623*) and her eldest son, Samuel, had been born in 1615. He was sixteen when, in 1631 the lawyer Samuel Langston, of Sedgeberrow, appeared as steward of the Wickhamford Court Baron. This was a domestic court pertaining to manorial lordship generally in which alienations and disputes as to property were arranged, by-laws made and breaches of such by-laws presented by the jury of tenants (otherwise known as ‘homage’) and fines made.

The following is a summary of courts held between 14<sup>th</sup> October 1631 and 30<sup>th</sup> April 1650. There was then a cessation of the court records following an Act of Parliament declaring the establishment of a Commonwealth and Free State. The Court Baron and Steward are mentioned along with the tenants who paid homage and acted as jurors, and those appearing before the court. Barnard’s writings run to many pages on this subject, so only shorter summaries are given here.

Of the terms used at the time, ‘messuage’ is a dwelling house and an ‘heriot’ is a fine, usually as the best beast, payable to the lord on the decease of the tenant. ‘Demise’, in the context below, is the transfer of a lease for a term of years or on payment of a fee, or ‘fine’. A ‘yardland’ was an area of land varying from 12 to 40 acres or more, depending upon in which part of the country a court was held. Locally, at Crophorne, for example, it was between 14 and 23 acres, whilst in Kempsey only half a yard was known to be 26 acres.

The spelling of names at this time sometimes varied, so ‘Booker’ or ‘Bowker’ appear, as does ‘Blissard’ or ‘Blizard’. As well as naming many Wickhamford tenants, the court rolls also specify the name of fields in the village and give an insight into the type of livestock raised and crops grown in the period.

### 14<sup>th</sup> October 1631

Court Baron	Steward	Homage	Cases
Penelope Sandys	Anthony Langstone	Thomas Booker Edward Mickleton Roger Farmer John Wilkes William Birt James Allen Edward Blissard Richard Horne	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ann Booker, spinster, granted land called ‘Gowldings’, late in occupation of John Jones, clerk, in the right of Catherine, his wife. Ann Booker to hold the land for her natural life with a yearly rental of 3s and the heriot of 2s when it falls due. She also gave £36 for a fine and was admitted tenant and did her fealty.</li> <li>2. The court grants to William Mickleton the reversion of a messuage called ‘Parsons’ and one yard of land called ‘Redon’, once William Pypleton’s, and</li> </ol>

			<p>late Thomas Mickleton's. It is now Edward Mickleton's, at a yearly rent of 14s and a hen. Also, the reversion of a messuage and a yard land called 'Walshis' at a yearly rent of 6s 8d and an heriot. The heriots for either of these messuages, etc., to be his best beast. A plot of meadow, about half an acre, lying in the 'Long Meadow' to be excepted. Fine, £105.</p> <p>3. Licence granted to Margaret Spooner to demise her messuage and two yard lands for seven years. Fine, 50s.</p> <p>4. Licence granted to Elizabeth Bowker to demise her messuage and two yard lands for eight years. Fine, 50s.</p>
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At the next court, on **6<sup>th</sup> March 1632-3** (*the year ended on 24<sup>th</sup> March under the Julian calendar, so 6<sup>th</sup> March would have been towards the end of the Julian year 1632, but would be considered as 1633 in the Gregorian calendar*). Anthony Langstone was again Steward and the homage consisted of James Allen, Thomas Wilson, William Birt, Thomas Booker, Edward Mickleton, John Wilkes, Roger Farmer, Edward Blizard and Richard Horne. The case of the messuage and yard lands involving the two Mickletons came before the court again. It was also presented that Elizabeth Booker had died outside the jurisdiction of the court and that the heriots are a gelding and a cow, valued at £7, and also the sum of 3s 4d. Margaret Spooner, widow, also died away from Wickhamford and a sorrel horse had been taken for a heriot and also the sum of 6s 4d. (*Elizabeth Bowker was buried in the Churchyard on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1631 and Margaret Spooner on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1631-2.*)

Robert Dover now appears as the Steward of Wickhamford Manor, a man now more commonly associated with Dover's Hill near Chipping Campden. Born around 1575, he died and was buried at Barton, near Moreton in Marsh, in July 1682, a little over two years after his last appearance as Steward at Wickhamford.

<b>23<sup>rd</sup> October 1632</b>			
Court Baron	Steward	Homage	Cases
Penelope Sandys	Robert Dover	Thomas Booker Edward Mickleton Roger Farmer John Wilkes William Birt James Allen William Mickleton Richard Horne  Ann Booker	1. The Steward grants to John Acton, gentleman, and Francis ffollyot, gentleman, for the term of their natural lives, a messuage and one yard of land called 'Yeates', at a yearly rent of 14s and a hen.; also a messuage and one yard of land called 'Julians', at a yearly rent of 10s. These premises were formally in the occupation of Margaret Spooner. Fine, £260.

		excuses herself for non-attendance.	<p>2. The Steward grants to George Blissard, senior, and his son, George, for the term of their natural lives, a messuage and one yard of land called 'Wellen', at a yearly rent of 12s and a hen; also a messuage and one yard of land called 'Grettens' at a yearly rent of 8s; also half a yard land called 'Morris', at a yearly rent of 4s. These premises were formally in the occupation of (<i>illegible</i>) Bowker. Fine, £230.</p> <p>3. Confirmation is made of the exchange made between Thomas Booker and Thomas Wilson. Booker's land is one acre lying in 'Twelve Acre Furlong', between the lands of the late widow, Spooner's and the land of widow Ryman. Likewise an exchange of three acres between Thomas Booker and James Allen.</p> <p><i>(There are also notes of exchanges of land between [a] Mr Acton and Edward &amp; William Mickleton, [b] between Thomas Booker and George Blissard, - here land against Pitchers Hill is mentioned and some belonging to widow Kinman, lying in 'Millswiers', [c] between George Blissard and Thomas Blissard, [d] between Thomas Beard and George Blissard, [e] between James Allen and Roger Farmer on Longdon Hill, [f] between William Birt and Edward Blissard next Murcott Fields.)</i></p>
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There is no record of a court in 1634, but in that year John Acton, 'of Wiconford', gentleman, was indicted at Worcestershire Quarter Sessions for not scouring his ditch.

<b>1<sup>st</sup> November 1635</b>			
Court Baron	Steward	Homage	Cases
Penelope Sandys	Robert Dover	Thomas Bowker Edward Mickleton Roger Farmer John Wilkes William Birt James Allen William Mickleton Richard Horne John Acton	<p>1. Ann Hunt, wife of John and daughter of Thomas Bowker, had business concerning 'Gouldinges' and certain yard lands, with reference to John Jones, clerk.</p> <p>2. Mary, wife of Edward Mickleton and sister of Thomas Bowker, senior, and daughter of William Bowker, appeared in relation to a case that was heard at the</p>

		Thomas Wagstaff George Blissard Thomas Wilson Thomas Beard	court of 19 <sup>th</sup> November 1574 ( <i>the records no longer exist</i> ). 3. Thomas Bowker, senior, is present, his business concerning the reversion of a messuage and one yard of land called 'Hawkins'; and of a messuage and half a yard of land called 'Jackmans', all formerly in the tenancy of Thomas Bowker. 4. Thomas Beard, also a juror, was fined 6d for his swine being unringed and committed various trespasses. 5. James Allen, another juror, is presented for enclosing seven acres of arable land. He is ordered to lay it open before the Feast of the Purification of Our Lady next ensuing, upon pain of £6 13s 4d.
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On **14<sup>th</sup> April 1637**, Samuel Sandys, esquire, who had now reached his majority, held the first court. Robert Dover continued as Steward and nine of the previously appearing jurors were sworn in as the homage. It was ordered by the court that by next Michaelmas Day that certain attention be paid to the field furrows and that tenants should scour, prune and cut all bushes that hinder the passage of water between the mill and the bridge leading to the church. This had to be done before the feast of St John the Baptist (24<sup>th</sup> June), the default being 40s for failing to deal with the matter of the furrows and 3s 4d for not dealing with the watercourse. It was also recorded that Richard Horne had died since the last court and that he had held a tenement, a garden, a close and five and a half acres of arable land. (*Richard Horne was buried in the Churchyard on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1636*). Proclamation was made that the lord now grants the property to Mary Jones, wife of John Jones, chaplain of the Church of Wickhamford, and their daughter, Mary, now four years old, at an annual rent of 20s, for the term of their lives. Fine, £22.

Samuel Sandys' second court was held on **4<sup>th</sup> November 1637**, with eight jurors, of whom Thomas Mallett was making his first appearance. A number of orders were made, which give an idea of the minutiae of the rules governing the farming year at this time – (1) no sheep shall be pastured or turned out into the white stubble before Michaelmas. Penalty, 20s; (2) "there shall be three men set out to oversee all such hades\* as shall be eared or ploughed beyond their limits"; (3) no sheep to be taken into pasture before Our Lady Day in Lent. Penalty, 10s; (4) no sheep to be taken out of the field before the feast day of SS. Simon and Jude (28<sup>th</sup> October). Penalty, 10s; (5) all the beast pasture to be preserved and hayned\*\* for the good of the beasts a fortnight before Our Lady Day in Lent. Penalty, 20s; (6) every man shall and may dispose of his several lands in 'Waterlew' and lay it in 'Little Field'.

\*'Hades' are the ridges in a ridge and furrow field. \*\*'Hayned' was the term used at that time for fenced.

James Allen, one of the customary tenants, and his daughter, Alice, now wife of John Bowker, were to surrender a messuage and one yard land called 'Bennetts', a messuage and a yard land called 'Morrells' and a messuage and yard land called 'Playwells' now in the tenure of James Allen, and held by copy of court roll dated 9<sup>th</sup> October 1624. The lord now grants this property to the said James Allen and to his son, James, now ten years old, for the term of their lives and for specified payments.

It was nearly a year before the next court and this was held on **30<sup>th</sup> October 1638**, with only six of the tenants present. The orders of the previous meeting were repeated and more added – (1) every tenant shall be enjoined to “boord and table the hayard and heard for the Tearme he is hyred”. Penalty, 6s 8d. ; (2) hereafter ‘Gloucway’ shall for ever remain and lie for best pasture and no horse shall be tied there. Penalty, 20s. (3) Thomas Wagstaff and George Blissard, junior, shall before the feast of St Andrew (30<sup>th</sup> November) mend all such hades and furrows as are eared and plough beyond their limits with their discretion. Penalty, 10s. ; (4) every tenant shall sow fallow fetches in one field as Thomas Wagstaff and George Blissard shall think fit. Penalty, 20s. ; (5) everyone shall ring their pigs after harvest and take them up as soon as the wheat is sown. Penalty, 3s 4d.; (6) none shall keep above 24 sheep for a yard land. Penalty, 20s. Regulations seemed to be multiplying.

Also mentioned at this court were that George Blissard, senior, was to surrender to his son, George, half of the messuage and one yard land and a quarter, the younger man being admitted as a tenant; John Acton was in trouble for cutting four elms without licence and making wilful waste – he was fined 20s which was reduced to 5s; Thomas Bowker had similarly cut one ash (fined 18d, reduced to 12d) and allowed his barn and other buildings go out of repair (fined 10s, reduced to 5s and ordered to carry out the repairs before next Midsummer or pay a penalty of 40s.); Richard Wilson, who was not at the homage, had taken up ‘the Pound hedge’ and taken it away and was fined 3s 4d, reduced to 18d.; finally, William Birt had let his house go out of repair and had to put it right by the feast day of St John the Baptist (his fine of 40s was reduced to 5s.).

*The term used in the original for the changes in the fines was ‘afferred’. The ‘afferatores’ were officers who assessed the fines and in these cases they seem to have been on the side of the tenants.*

**10<sup>th</sup> April 1639**

<b>10<sup>th</sup> April 1639</b>			
Court Baron	Steward	Homage	Cases
Samuel Sandys	Robert Dover	Thomas Bowker Edward Mickleton Roger Farmer William Bowker George Blissard, junior Thomas Blissard Thomas Curtice	1. The lord grants to Francis Mickleton the reversion of ‘Parsons’, ‘Redon’ and ‘Walshes’, now in the occupation of Edward Mickleton, and before him in the occupation of the aforesaid Francis, and Frances Mickleton, widow, for the term of his life and for specified payments.

			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. William Birt is behind one year and a half with his rent and suffered his housing to go out of repair, whereby he hath forfeited his estate. 'We leave him to the mercy of the Lord of the Manor'.</li> <li>3. John Acton, gentleman, does not keep his outhouses in repair and tenatable. Fined 10s and ordered to amend before Midsummer. Default, 40s.</li> <li>4. It was agreed that the penalty for cutting hedges in the fields shall remain and be reviewed at the next court.</li> <li>5. John Flower shall be our hayward for this summer until Michaelmas, at 3s a week. Whosoever refuses to pay his wages weekly and not pay before one month shall for every default pay to the lord 2s 6d.</li> </ol>
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*The term 'hayward' described a warden whose job was to ensure that all allotted tasks were carried out on time.*

The next court was held on **22<sup>nd</sup> October 1639** and, a little way down the list of routine affairs dealt with, there is a case of homicide. Samuel Sandys and Robert Dover were present, along with seven jurors – John Acton, Thomas Bowker, Edward Mickleton, William Bowker, Thomas Wagstaffe, Thomas Curtis and John Wilkes. Thomas Francis was 'presented for homicide' and therefore all of his lands and goods are forfeited to the lord.

*There are no further details given in the court record, but the spot on the Willersey Road now known as 'Frances Grave' may be associated with this case. If Thomas Francis was hanged for his crime he could have been buried at a crossroads on the parish boundary, as was the practice at the time. Two skeletons were found at this spot in 1927, but one was said to be that of a woman and the other of a male adult, but thought at the time to be 1,500 years old. (Neither was examined forensically as they would be today).*

Also of interest, Roger Farmer and Thomas Farmer are presented to the court for receiving as inmates one Francis Ayle and his wife and children. They were fined 40s and ordered to remove them out of their house before the feast of All Saints (1<sup>st</sup> November). Default, £30. A parish had only to maintain its own existing poor and the homage did not want the Ayle family to become a charge on them. They had probably come from Cropthorne or the Lenches, where there were families of that name.

At this court Edward Wilkes surrendered into the hands of the lord all of his estate in the 'moiety of his messuage', and all of his right and estate in one yard land 'with the appurtenances', except the little pleck in the meadow which he is to hold during his life.

*'Moiety' is a half; 'appurtenances' are accessories; a 'pleck' is a small piece of ground or enclosure. There is no record of Edward Wilkes being buried in Wickhamford, so he must have moved on.*

Apparently the next court was not held until **16<sup>th</sup> October 1641**, nearly two years later. (1640 had been a turbulent year nationally, with a Scottish army entering England in the Autumn, and occupying Newcastle-upon-Tyne). As usual, Samuel Sandys and Robert Dover sat with village tenants, in this case John Acton, Thomas Bowker, George Blissard, Edward Blissard, Thomas Curtis, and newcomers to the homage, William Mallett and Richard Wilson. Francis Mickleton surrendered 'Parsons', 'Redon' and Walshes' (which he had received in 1639) and the lord granted the properties to Richard Oldakers. William Birt had died since the last court and his best beast was due to the lord for a heriot. Joyce, his wife, by custom of the manor, was given, for the term of her life, freebench and widow's estate to all of the lands and tenements of her late husband.

*'Freebench' meant that until she remarried a widow could retain her late husband's tenure. William Birt was buried in the Churchyard on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1640, but his widow, Joyce, did not enjoy her new privileges for long. She died later that winter and was buried on 25<sup>th</sup> January.*

Also, Margaret Reynolds, a widow, had died since the last court and a mere 2s was due to the lord as a heriot. William, her son, 'is the next taken in reversion' under the rent of 1d per annum. This must have been a very poor family. There is no record in the register of Margaret Reynolds being buried in the village.

The Civil War period led to sporadic meetings of the court, the next being on **17<sup>th</sup> February 1643**, held by 'Colonel Samuel Sandys, Governor of the Town of Evesham, with Robert Dover still as Steward. The jurors were Thomas Bowker, Thomas Willson, George Blissard, Thomas Curtis, William Bowker, Edward Blissard and Rickard Oldakers. The deaths were reported of Joyce Reynolds, whose holdings fell to the lord, and of John Gibbes, whose widow became tenant. (There is no record of John Gibbs burial in Wickhamford). The remainder of the cases are similar to those in previous courts. For example, Thomas Bowker was fined 10s and ordered to repair his tenement before Michaelmas Day; a quarter of an acre of land was exchanged between John Beard and John Combe; the lord granted to Francis Dingley, gentleman, and his son, James, a messuage and yard lands called 'Haykes'.

It was another three and a half years before the next court, which was held on **9<sup>th</sup> October 1646**. In the intervening period, things had changed in Wickhamford and this court was held by Mary Barker, widow. Also present were Francis Dingley of Charlton and Humphrey Davis, described as lords of the manor, and Robert Dover, as Steward. (*Mary was the widow of Dr Hugh Barker and her daughter, also Mary, married Samuel Sandys*). There were an unusually high number of jurors, with some new faces present – John Acton, Thomas Bowker, James Allen, Stephen Fisher, Edward Blissard, George Blissard, William Bowker, Richard Oldakers, John Woodes, John Warner, Edward Hale and Robert Hanks.

Thomas Wilson had died and nobody knew what heriot was due, perhaps because of the length of time since his death – he was buried on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1645. Similarly, John White had died and the heriot was unknown. A number of tenants were in trouble for not repairing their properties – Thomas Bowker, John Acton, James Allen and Francis Dingley. Again, this was, perhaps, a reflection of the civil situation in the country; the Civil War effectively ended in June 1646 when the King surrendered Oxford to Parliamentary forces and being held prisoner at time of this court. Other matters included - Anthony Beard surrendered to the lord one acre in ‘Press Meadow’; Alice Combe, wife of the lately deceased John, was admitted as tenant of two and a half acres in ‘Press Meadow’; Stephen Fryer and George Blissard were appointed overseers for the year.

Mary Barker held another court on **14<sup>th</sup> November 1647**, together with Robert Dover. The homage was Stephen Fisher, George Blissard, William Bowker, William Fisher, Edward Blissard and Richard Oldakers. The same situation as of the previous year, poor building maintenance, led to orders against the same tenants - Thomas Bowker, John Acton, James Allen and Francis Dingley. John Acton was also in trouble for entertaining inmates into his house contrary to the law and was amerced (fined) 10s and ordered to remove them before St Mary Day next on pain of a further fine of 40s.

On **7<sup>th</sup> January 1647-8**, only a few weeks after the previous court, Mary Barker and Robert Dover convened another court, with just three tenants in homage – George Blissard, William Bowker and Richard Oldakers. The only matter recorded was that John Acton and Francis ffolloyt surrender ‘Yeates’ and ‘Julians’, which the lord granted to Francis Knight and his son, Richard, now fourteen years old.

A further two years passed before the final court was held before a long break until well after the Restoration of King Charles II. Samuel Sandys was back as lord on **30<sup>th</sup> April 1650**, still with Robert Dover as Steward and many familiar names as jurors – Stephen Fisher, William Bowker, William Fisher, George Blissard, Richard Oldakers and James Bowker. A number of new tenants were admitted with small plots of land – Eleanor White and Robert Gibbes (both with 2½ acres at the rent of 2s 1d) and Francis Gibbs with one acre at 1d rent.

It was presented that ‘Widow Gibbes is dead, but that nothing is known as to the heriot due to the lord’; Robert Gibbes was to be their next tenant. Thomas Bowker had died and had no cattle or goods, ‘and what is due to the lord we do not know’.

*Thomas Bowker had been buried over a year earlier in the Churchyard, on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1649.*

Other matters raised concerned the clearing of a ditch, by the smith’s shop, by Richard Curtis and an order for William Bowker to repair his house (yet again !). Other instructions involved the keeping of sheep on pasture, the mowing of furrows and ploughing. Stephen Fisher and William Booker were appointed to see that the orders were kept or to make offenders pay forfeitures. For the first time in the records, highway maintenance appeared as a topic. ‘Every man that has a team shall carry six loads of stone to the highway and for every load’s neglect, 5s’. Lastly, the surrender is presented of Francis Knight and his wife and son of the whole of their estate to Richard White and his son, William, for the sum of £300.



Although the Manorial Book was only half filled by this time no further courts were held until 1675. A summary of men acting as the homage after 1675 is given below.

**Tenants mentioned as the Homage in the Manor Court records of 1675 – 1716**

Tenants Mentioned	Court Sessions (see below for dates)																	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
John Baylies	X	X																
William Bowker	X																	
Richard Oldacre sen.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X								
Thomas Bowker	X	X																
William Fisher	X	X	X	X														
William White	X	X	X	X								X						
John Jones	X									X		X		X	X			
George Blissard sen.			X	X														
Thomas Blissard			X	X											X		X	
Richard Oldacre jun.				X	X	X	X	X										
George Blissard jun.						X	X	X		X		X						
John Baylis							X	X		X	X	X		X	X		X	
Edward Marshall										X	X							
William Winter										X								
Stephen Fisher										X								
Joseph Sargeant														X	X	X	X	
Timothy Beard															X			
Anthony Hyatt															X			
Ralph Stephens															X			
Edward Smith															X			
John Jones jun.																X		

1= 14 Jun 1675; 2= 2 Sep 1675; 3= 26 Apr 1688; 4= 5 Mar 1688/9; 5= 8 Mar 1690; 6= 10 May 1690;  
7= 6 Mar 1691; 8= 28 Apr 1694; 9= 6 Apr 1696\*; 10= 19 Apr 1698; 11= 1 Sep 1699; 12= 18 Oct  
1699;  
13= 7 Jun 1704\*; 14= 2 Jan 1705; 15= 10 Oct 1707; 16= 28 Oct 1710; 17= 7 May 1715; 18= 22 Oct  
1716\*.

*\* The transcription of the records does not give the names of the tenants in the  
homage on these three dates.*

*Acknowledgement: Thanks are due to Jean Ford the loan of the Barnard transcript of  
the Court proceedings. A copy of the transcript is held in the Badsey Society Archive.*

*Tom Locke – May 2014 (1675-1716 table added August 2014)*