

The Horton Wills Project: A study of wills in the period 1418 to 1603

The Horton History group

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Introduction

The history of Horton in Ribblesdale is very well discussed in the booklet ‘Horton-in-Ribblesdale – the story of an upland parish’ written by the Horton Local History Group in 1984. The Horton wills studied here range from 1418 to 1603, when Elizabeth I died. The first three are in Latin and the rest are in English.

A total of 117 wills was considered, 103 of those were made by men (88%) , 14 by women (12%). Most of the wills were made between 1509 (Henry VIII) and 1603 (death of Elizabeth) and the majority of these in Elizabeth’s reign (1558-1603).

The population of Horton parish is not known but using parish registers’ data averaging 20 burials/year and a lifespan of 40 years a figure of 800 is estimated.

In the later Middle Ages in the parish of Horton land was held by Furness Abbey (Selside and Birkwith), Fountains Abbey (Horton, Studfold), Jervaulx Abbey (Birkwith, Horton) and Clementhorpe Priory (Horton). Small parts were held by the Manor of Austwick and Sawley Abbey and possibly other manorial lords. Rents were due to these various landowners as manorial lords, and tenement entry fines (1561 Miles Wedderard ‘fyne of title’) or gressums (1536 Thomas Procter ‘ingressione’) when a tenant died and a new lease was arranged.

The content of wills must be considered along with knowledge of the testator’s family circumstances - the context needs to be known and generally this is not available. Wills are rather selective in nature since arrangements for widows and children may already have been made. Many men were content to die intestate because their affairs were settled or satisfied by common law descent of lands and goods. Wills are not representative of the population - perhaps about 30% of men left wills. A will was needed to devolve property in ways in which common law could not so we may see examples which are not representative of common practice. Any conclusions reached are specific to a parish since conditions elsewhere varied and generalization to conditions in the North of England cannot be sustained.

It may be that oral testimony was sufficient as a will in early times but there was a drift to written contractual agreements in common law as time went by. Declaration to ‘recorders’ was also an accepted procedure. The Statute of Wills of 1540 made an age of 14 for boys and 12 for girls the minimum for making a will.

Religious aspects

Nearly all the wills include a reference bequeathing the soul to almighty God. Further references are sometimes added, first in a Catholic manner, and later in a Protestant manner, or with no further mention. Pre-Reformation (1536), gifts were made to the church and clergy, money was bequeathed to priests to pray for a testator’s soul and payments of the obligatory mortuary fee and for forgotten tithes were normally made (to minimize any stay in Purgatory). Several wills mention tithe payments, tithe corn,

and wool but in general mention of forgotten tithe payments is absent since the monasteries as landlords were exempt from paying tithes.
Post-Reformation, bequests for church repairs, road and bridge repairs, and to the poor were encouraged.

Analysis of the religious preamble has been made in terms of reference to

- a) Mary and saints in heaven
- b) prayers or masses for the soul
- c) the glorious / celestial company in heaven
- d) Jesus and redemption
- e) no reference at all

From 1418 to 1557 (Mary's death) the reference to Mary was found in all the wills except when the Protestant Edward VI reigned (1547-1553). In Elizabeth's reign after 1558 the reference to Jesus was common but most of the wills showed a distinct lack of religious fervour. In the later 1500s a phrase such as 'with such liberality towards the poor as my friends think good to bestow upon them' is very common.

Clergy

Parish priests are often quoted as witnesses.

1511 Richard Lupton
1522 Sir John Joye
1534 Sir Edmunde Wy...stone
1536 Sir William Hougyll curate
1541 Miles Wedderhirde parish clerk
1542 clericals Fr Jeffray Holme Fr John Blakborne
1548 Geffraye Holme
1555 Arthur Redema (Redmayne?) curate
1561 Thomas Yveson curate
1567 to 1577 Roger Holden (Howden, Howlden, Hoolden) curate and clerk
1581 to 1599 William Waller (Walker, Walter) curate and clerk

The style adopted in some wills suggests that each priest had his own preference for what was written in the religious pre-amble.

Mortuary payments

In medieval times it was customary to give the best animal belonging to the testator to the Lord of the Manor and the second best to the parish priest as a mortuary payment. An act of 1529 regulated the payment of the mortuary so that people with goods valued under 10 marks (£6-13-4) were exempt and those liable to pay were on a sliding scale.

Mention of the best beast is found in only four early wills, of 1418 (de Qwarff), 1439 (Taylor), 1511 (Hulson) and 1522 (Bentham). Thereafter the term 'at right will' is used in six wills, 1522 to 1565. In most cases after 1534 there is no mention of any mortuary payment so presumably the testators were worth less than 10 marks. The phrase

'all duties to be done as the law requires' is usual in the later 1500s.

In 1579 Edmund Procter of Selside uses the phrase ‘honored in secknes, and in healthe’ as used in our current marriage ceremony.

Charitable bequests

There are 15 wills out of 117 (13%) which bequeath to charity other than to clerics. This proportion is the same as that found for Giggleswick wills for the same time period.

True to common practice, in 1418 William de Qwarff leaves 5 pence to distribute to relatives and poor people on the day of his burial, but in addition he leaves 40 pence to distribute for his soul between poor people the day of his burial. In contrast he leaves 13s 4d to several groups of friars to pray for his soul for one year. He leaves 6s 8d to the parish of Clementhorp and 13s 4d to the Convent of Clementhorp, thought to be the landlord.

Many of the remaining charitable bequests are to the poor. John Hulson in 1511 gives 5d to every firehouse in the parish (*read household*). William Hughson (1544) bequeathes 8d to every house within Horton parish. In 1548 Thomas Howson gives 1d to ‘everie clerke that can (*is available to?*) singe’ at his funeral. Similarly John Sygeswike in 1548 gives 1d to every poor body and scholar at his funeral. In addition he leaves 3s 4d to the ‘power manns box’ and to 20 of the poorest in the parish 4d each. Furthermore he gives 40s to help build Leingill Bridge.

Thomas Proctor of Old Ing in 1534 leaves 10s to Our Ladies school of Horton. In 1536 Thomas Proctor of Birkquythe gives £6 13s 4d to the chantry of Our Lady and 13s 4d to the finishing of the new bridge. James Lyndsey of Selside gives a cow with calf to mend the steeple! Horton Church does not now have a steeple.

After 1548, i.e. after the death of Henry VIII, charitable gifts are less common, perhaps a sign of pre-Reformation religious attitudes to charity.

In 1570 John Procter gives to 20 of the poorest folk in Horton 20s to be divided amongst them at the discretion of his witnesses. Francis More in 1572 gives 3s 4d to the bridge of ‘branssilbecke’ and also to the bridge in Horton. In 1586 Anthony Twissilton bequeathes 12d to repair Horton church. Edmund Siggeswicke in 1591 gives 6s 8d to the poor people in Horton parish. In 1592 John Tompson alias Wyldman gives 3s 4d to the poor people of the chapel of ‘hubbram’ (Hubberholme) and 3s 4d to the poor of Horton. Miles Tayler in 1599 gives the remainder of his money to the poor of the parish at the discretion of his witnesses.

James More in 1596 bequeathes to the town of Horton and to Selside each of them a bull or so much money to buy one, as long as they provide sufficient ground to keep it on. The bull was to be marked or burned as belonging to ‘Moores of horton and hacneyshawe’.

Widowright and Title and Tenement right

Women generally did not hold tenements in their own right but based their titles on their husband’s or son’s agreement with their lord, hence ‘title and tenant right’ ‘with the licence of the lord’. Of the 41 wills passing the tenement right to the testator’s

wife 60% pass on the whole tenement, 29% pass on half, and 11% (in later years) one third. All these examples are found over the whole time period of 100 years.

The remaining wills divide the property in a whole variety of ways, to other family members typically, often because there is no mention of a wife. When the tenement passes on, the phrase, ‘my wife to be the best at my house’, or similar, is often used to make sure she has control until her death for example, so that she has money to raise children. In many cases goods are divided into three parts, the last part being the dead part which is disposed of as the testator wishes freely, not constrained by any law.

Clothes

As may be expected, women place more importance on clothing. Of the 14 women amongst the 117, 50% leave clothes as bequests, whereas amongst the 103 male testators only 14% do.

Garments given are largely coats (of various colours e.g. blue, fawn or black, or just plain old), doublets (fustian, buckskin, leather or chamlett – a more expensive cloth) or more rarely a jerkin or jacket. Pairs of hose are also a popular bequest amongst men, or by 1581, a pair of stockings. Only two shirts (one testator) feature. Early in the century James Lyndsey leaves two gowns, red and blue – a man possibly with church connections as he leaves money to clerics. Headgear features – a bonnet in 1554, and a couple more bequests of hats and caps.

For a flavour of the times and an idea of how clothes were given as useful mementos, John Abbatson 1596 leaves to various parties his workday clothes and doublet, one hat and a cap, one coat, best hat save one and two shirts (no doubt coarse ones of flax or harden). As for the women, two at the end of the century just leave all their raiment to daughters, but the remainder make specific bequests. Petticoats are given (white, best and especially red). In 1570 widow Grace Howson left to various people most of what she probably had – two smocks, four kerchiefs, best red petticoat, best cloak and cap, apron, black and old coats, silk hat, rayle (*neckerchief*) and a gown. Presumably her hose were worn out. In 1586 Agnes Battersbie bequeathed a silk kirtle, linen bands or rayle and free sleeves (*as the name implies*), and a silk hat, clearly special garments of hers, as well as two red petticoats and a cap. John Wyldman 1558 left white cloth to make a petticoat, and John Wedderhead 1570 mentions a special bequest of a silver dight (*adorned*) belt plus other raiment not specified.

Shoes appear in about three cases only – after all they are not much good unless they fit. With the exception of the handful of special items the clothes are everyday garb, but still of great value for work in house and field to recipients who have little themselves.

Household matters

In 1548 Adam Eglyne of Studfold refers to a property he has built and in 1582 Anthony Clarke mentions ‘a paire of Crocks and a paire of Ribs upon the buyldinge of an house’. Robert Clarke mentions timber for a house in 1584.

The domestic contents of a house specifically mentioned include ‘pannes’, ‘potts’, ‘table and forme’, ‘arkes’, ‘a great chiste which standethe at the fyre end’, ‘chaires

Stauls one chest and one hamknop', 'one brasse pot chiste one meat table all other bordes', 'bedstockes Chaires bordes'.

John Tompsonn in 1592 bequeathes 'all my working toyles' and Christopher Litton (1586) has 'wombles, gavelock and axes' in his bequests. Stephen More in 1556 leaves his sword and buckler.

The unusual term 'fyer and flett' is used by Edmund Feildhouse in 1584, meaning fire and houseroom.

Livestock and produce

It is noticeable but not surprising how many of the 117 wills mention livestock – 53 or 45%. These are found throughout the whole century. Produce found in 9 wills is variously wool, wheat, grass, corn, oats, barley or hay.

The number of wills gifting cows, calves, heifers (or quys), kine, stirk, steers, stotts, bulls or oxen is 33 of the 53. The varied terminology shows the deep specialist knowledge of the population. Some cows are identified by colour e.g. red, or white-headed. The problem of the need for a local bull is addressed by James More 1596 who promises two bulls for Horton and Selside if ground for their keeping can be provided – and there is only one further bull mentioned (Edmund Grine 1597). One cow only is bequeathed in some wills (e.g. Giles Bentham 1595) – probably the family milk cow.

The Horton parish today will be thought of as a sheep-farming area. Of the 53 livestock wills, 34 bequest sheep in all their variety of nomenclature – sheep, lambs, ewes (or yowes), wethers, twinters, hoggs, gimmer hoggs, wether hoggs ... A lamb is often left to a child or woman or a servant. James Burton 1596 makes a bequest of 10 of his best sheep – so he had a sizeable flock. John Proctor 1570 also farmed sheep in a big way – six ewes of 52 and 26 hoggs of 52 are bequeathed.

Horses also feature, a necessity to those who wanted to get around. Horses, mares, colts, staggs and fillies, appear as bequests. Money is left toward the shoeing of a horse (Margaret Jenens 1591). Christopher Hesselden leaves a female relative one gray horse to do her necessities with, and John Sygeswike 1548 leaves a less exciting bay nag.

Crops and wool also feature - one bushel of wheat, stones of wool, straw, and crops of corn and hay still growing. Roger Procter 1585 leaves oatage and grass for two oxen and William Howson 1593 gives money raised from tithe wool. Edmund Grine 1597 bequeaths bushels of oats, bigg or barley to a son.

Money

There were no banks so money was held in cash. Money was lent out to others and sometimes the debt was forgiven in the will. John Grene (1567) kept 'xx s which a pann lyeth upon'.

The mark, (not an English coin), worth 13s 4d (two nobles of 6s 8d) was a measure of weight of gold or silver and a monetary unit originally representing the mark weight of pure silver, worth 13s 4d in English and Scottish currency. People thought in terms

of units of 13s 4d (mark), 6s 8d (noble) and 3s 4d as well as pounds, shillings and pence. The shillings commonly come in sets of 5, 10, 20 and 40. They are all mixed up in any one will. Many of the large sums are for money owed and for marriage gifts, typically of tens of pounds. Yearly rent of a tenement is quoted in many later wills – ranging from 3 shillings to 46 shillings and eightpence.

In 1543 a sum of seven pounds is quoted, then repeated as ‘5 marks and fourtie pence’ to be paid twice. Now 40 pence is half a mark (or one noble). One mark is 13s 4d, i.e. 160d. Five marks is 800d. The total is then 840d, i.e. £3.5 since 240d make one pound. Now did Thomas Bentham of Studfold (1543) do this sum in his head? Three marks is four pounds but this does not help much.

The phrase ‘penny or pennyworth’ is used in 1579 and 1581 meaning to be paid in cash or kind.

Schooling

In 1543 Thomas Procter refers to ‘Our Ladies scoole of horton’.

In 1579 Edmund Procter of Selside makes a long will and includes arrangements for his son Peter as follows.

It'm I will that whereas my sonne in lawe, Alan Wharffe owe the me the som'e of Tenne poundes whiche I lent hym upon condicon that he should bourde my sonne Peter at gegleswicke scoole so longe so longe (sic) as he kept that Tenne pounde, Therefore I will that my wyf and Roger my sonne shall keipe Peter my sonne at scoole or at learnyng the Space of eighte or nyne yeares, and yf they p'ceyve that he cane proffyt by learnyng, I will that Roger my sonne shall paye, or cause to be paid to hym the said Peter at twentye one yeares ende, the som'e of fortye markes, in consideracon of his holle agreement of my fermhold or tythe agayne Such tyme and tymes as he be aible to proceyd to further learnyng. And yf he cannot p'ffyt by learnyng, I will that he be kepte at home, and obbedyentlie obaye his mother, and his brother, and have meate drynke and clothynge honestlie, and at twentye one yeares and to have Rowme for a bedd, and his cloise in the lofte in the chamber, and such other thynge as he haith neyde of until he come to better preferment of lyvynge, It'm I will that yf allan my sonne in lawe bourde my sonne Peter honestlie at Gygleswicke Scoole accordyng to o'r bargayne, I will that my wyf and Roger my sonne shall fynde Peter clothynge, and give allan Tenne shillinges by yeare Nowe yf allan Wharffe thinke yt not good to bourde hym for the laine(?) of the tenne poundes and the Tenne shillings, let Allan gyve Peter the Tenne pounds of lawfull money and so be acquyted, And yf Peter do not lyke of his bourde, lett Peter gyve Allan a wholle yeares warnyng, for the p'paracon of the payment of the money, and them paye him yt, and so be acquyted.

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