

A Sideways Look at the Hearth Tax: Shrivenham, Berkshire, in the Late 17th Century

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SUMMARY

The hearth tax of the 1660s has frequently been used by local historians to study the social structure of late 17th-century communities. A widely used method has been to locate individuals whose rank and personal wealth is known from probate wills and inventories, to ascertain the number of hearths in the houses on which they paid tax (itself a rough measure of wealth), and to project from this a rank onto others paying a similar rate of tax but for whom there is no probate evidence. However, other records for the period can also be used to refine and even correct the impression of social structure given by the hearth taxes. This article uses the manor court books and rentals of the 1650s and 1670s from manors in the parish of Shrivenham to identify the landed basis on which the social status of local willmakers rested, and to suggest that men who do not appear in the probate records but had similar amounts of land should be accorded similar status. This allows a rank to be given to more individuals and a more accurate assessment to be made of the make-up of this late 17th-century rural community.

The potential of the hearth taxes of the 1660s for the study of local societies and economies has been widely and inventively exploited over the past few decades, most recently by Margaret Spufford.¹ Given that the amount of hearth tax paid (at the rate of one shilling per hearth each half year) gives a rough guide to the social and wealth structure of the community, how accurately can the possession of a given number of hearths be related to wealth and status? Most frequently this has been done by linking probate evidence relating to individuals in a community with the number of hearths on which they paid tax. Since probate inventories usually state the amount of personal wealth held by the deceased and often their social status, it has been possible to relate this wealth and status to the possession of a certain number of hearths and thus to suggest the social structure of a single community and make comparisons with others.²

Unfortunately using inventories is not without problems.³ In particular they exclude real estate, i.e. freehold land and leases for lives as well as other property such as copyhold by inheritance or for lives, which was often far more valuable than farming stock, and which could be a more useful indicator of wealth for the local historian. This article will attempt to use documents relating to contemporary landholding in Shrivenham in conjunction with probate documents to contribute a Berkshire perspective to the debate on uses of the hearth tax, and will suggest a possible methodological approach to complement those already tried.⁴

¹ M. Spufford, 'The Scope of Local History and the Potential of the Hearth Tax Returns', *Local Historian*, 30 no. 4 (2000).

² R. Fieldhouse, 'The Hearth Tax and other Records', in A. Rogers (ed.), *Group Projects in Local History* (1977); M. Spufford for 3 communities in Cambridgeshire, *Contrasting Communities* (1974).

³ M. Spufford, 'The Limitations of the Probate Inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society 1500-1800* (1990).

⁴ The hundred and parish of Shrivenham was in Berkshire until 1974 when it was incorporated into Oxfordshire.

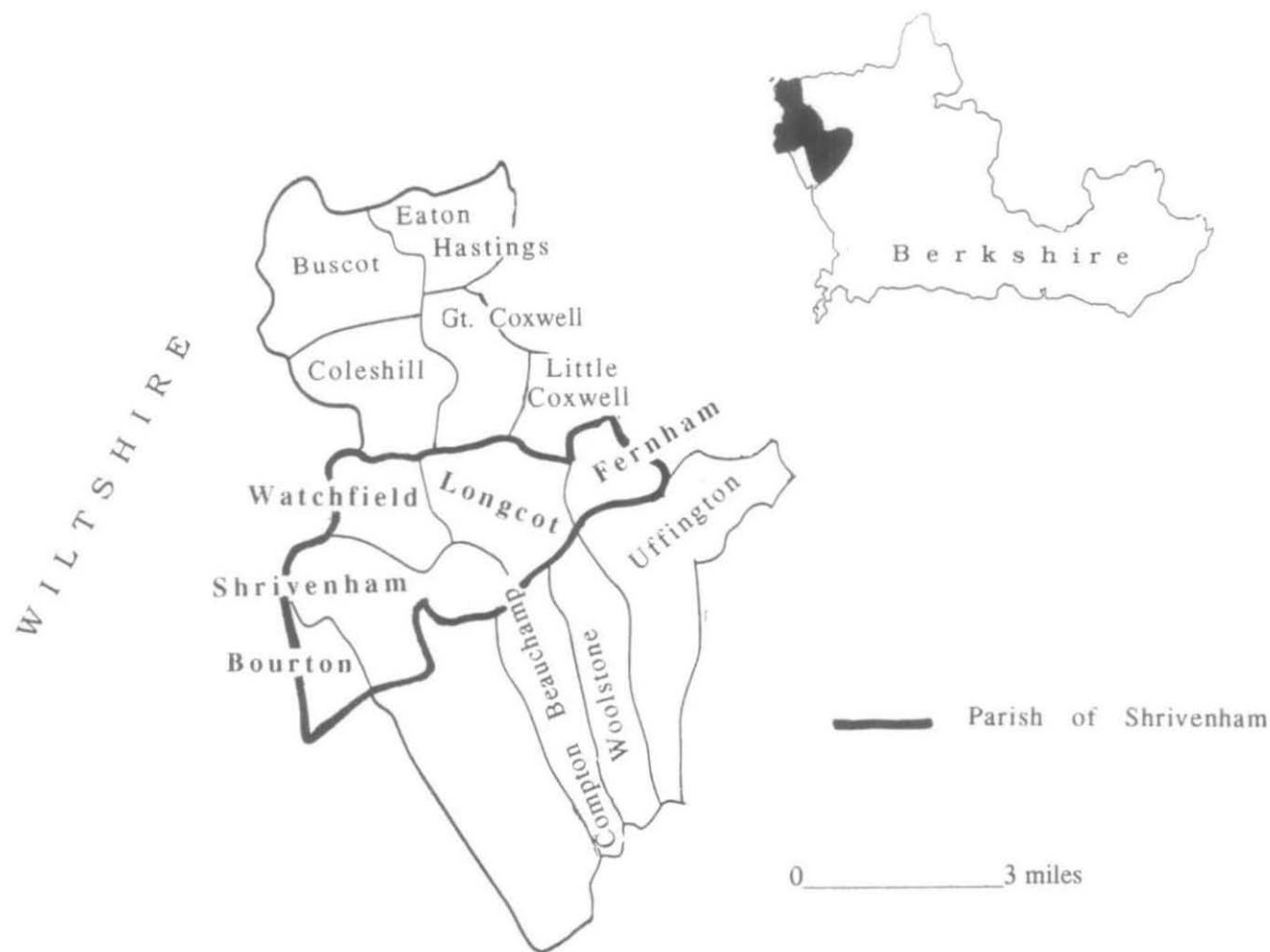


Fig. 1. The Hundred of Shrivenham Salop and Shrivenham Stallpits and the parish of Shrivenham (boundaries are based on those of 19th-century civil parishes).

Shrivenham, a large parish of 8,381 a., lies in the Vale of White Horse on the Berkshire-Wiltshire border; the small River Cole and its tributaries run through it. In the 17th century the soil, fertile sand and stone-brash with clay sub-soil, was given over to mixed farming – cattle, sheep and corn in open fields, and lot meadows, portions of which were distributed by lot to the customary tenants each year. There had already been some enclosure before 1657 when 1,502 a. of arable, ley and pasture were enclosed by an agreement which was confirmed by Chancery decree the following year.⁵ In the early modern period the central settlement was the village of Shrivenham, through which ran the road from Faringdon to Swindon; here was the parish church and Stallpits Farm which may once have been the manor house of Stallpits.⁶ Adjacent to Shrivenham village was Becket, a small community of about seven or eight houses, the grandest of which, Becket House, had been severely damaged in the Civil War.⁷ Scattered townships and tithings made up the rest of the parish and housed a substantial proportion of its population. Nearest to Shrivenham village were Bourton to the south and Watchfield, with a chapel-of-ease, to the north-east. Longcot, about 2 miles away and with a chapel and its own parish register, was more populous than Shrivenham village; Fernham, a further 2 miles away to the north-east was smaller.⁸ The Compton Census of 1676 for the whole parish including the chapelries of Watchfield and Longcot records 632 communicants, one papist and 17 nonconformists in the whole parish and chapelry, a suspiciously round total of 650, suggesting a population of between 900 and 1,100. According to the hearth tax returns of 1662-4 there were at least 224 households in the parish, below the real total since the returns for Longcot and Becket do not include those not chargeable. Even so the returns indicate a minimum population of between 850 and 1075, which, if these calculations are correct, would imply that at Shrivenham hearth tax returns may be a reasonably accurate record of the population.⁹

The parish was part of Shrivenham Hundred, formed in the middle ages from parts of three hundreds which occupied the far west of the Vale of White Horse in 1086. The hundred was divided into two, the so-called *intrinsec* or 'in-hundred' which contained Shrivenham village, Bourton, Longcot and Fernham, and the *extrinsec* or 'out-hundred' consisting of Becket and Watchfield as well as several surrounding villages including Buscot, Coleshill, Compton Beauchamp, Eaton Hastings and Uffington.¹⁰ Shrivenham parish also contained seven manors: Rectory, Becket, Fernham, Watchfield, Cleycourt, Shrivenham Salop and Shrivenham Stallpits. The lord of the manors of Salop and Stallpits was also lord of the Hundred of Shrivenham, sometimes called the Hundreds of Shrivenham Salop and Shrivenham Stallpits.¹¹

⁵ Berkshire Record Office [hereafter BRO], D/EPb E66A (Shrivenham enclosure 1658-9). An associated document states that only 1,463 a. were enclosed (D/EEL E35).

⁶ BRO, D/ER T68 (mortgage of Stallpits Farm by John Wildman 1692).

⁷ A Becket rental dated about 1673 states that there were then 6 tenants and 6 'several' houses in the hamlet (BRO, D/EEL E 35/21).

⁸ Based on the highest recorded number of households in each community in the Shrivenham hearth tax returns (PRO, E179/243/26).

⁹ A. Whiteman (ed.), *The Compton Census: a critical edition* (1986), 134; the population totals have been calculated based on the assumption that the number of those under 16 and so omitted in the Compton Census was between 29% and 41% of the population and that the average household size in this period was between 3.8 and 4.8. See T. Arkell, 'A Method for Estimating Population Totals from the Compton Census Returns', in K. Schurer and T. Arkell (eds.), *Surveying the People* (1992), 114. An estimate of population size from baptisms in the parish and chapel registers gives a similar total.

¹⁰ BRO, D/EEL/M57 (customs of the hundred of Shrivenham c. 1725). The terms 'in' and 'out' hundred refer to a division in the middle ages which no longer had any practical administrative significance once ownership of both parts was in the same hands.

¹¹ *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 531-9.

In the 16th century the manors of Salop, Stallpits, Cleycourt and Becket came into the single ownership of Sir Henry Unton who also held the lordship of the hundred. This dual lordship was held until 1635 by Sir Henry's widow, Dorothy, as part of her jointure, then by Sir Henry Marten and later by his son Henry, the regicide. After young Henry's bankruptcy, the estate was bought by Major John Wildman, a fervent parliamentarian and nonconformist, apparently some time between 18 December 1656 and 4 June 1657.¹²

The records of the hundred court of Shrivenham which met every three weeks survive for most of the 16th and 17th centuries (more specifically from 1528 to 1731) with only a few gaps.¹³ Apart from appointing tithing men, constables and other officials, most of its business was dealing with suits for debt, trespass and minor assaults.¹⁴ Manorial records are less prolific: apart from rentals for Becket, no manorial records and few records of any kind survive for Rectory, Becket, Fernham or Watchfield manors, but for the mid 17th century there are several rentals and a good though not perfect run of court books for the manors of Stallpits and Salop (1636-1702) and Cleycourt (1620-72). In particular, the change in lordship in 1657 and the enclosure of the same year seem to have prompted a check on the validity of all copyholds and leaseholds, and the court books of the manors of Salop and Stallpits include long lists of copies and leases produced in court by tenants in 1657. The court records identify the tenants and the rent payable in 1657, the acreage of the arable, the extent of meadow and pasture, the existence of gardens and closes, whether the property was held by customary tenure (including widow's free bench) or by lease for years or lives (naming the lives), the date of the original contract and the nature of the buildings (messuage, dwelling house or cottage). In the late 18th century an extremely comprehensive abstract of tenancy agreements was drawn up from the court books, obviously taking 1657 as its starting point though giving, as in the court books, the dates when copies or leases were originally agreed. Manorial surveys when property changed hands are by no means unusual and in this case perhaps particularly necessary. The sale of the property by Henry Marten was occasioned by his bankruptcy and the times were uncertain; caution was the order of the day.¹⁵ Very useful rentals for Becket and the Shrivenham manors also survive for the late 1650s and early 1670s, suggesting that Major Wildman was intent on ensuring a good return on his investment at a period of fluctuating rents.¹⁶

A few years after Wildman became lord the hearth tax was levied. Unless exempt, every householder was liable to pay 2s. a year for every hearth (sometimes described as every chimney) in two instalments, one on Lady Day (25 March) and the other at Michaelmas (29 September). As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, the survival of the returns for Shrivenham is patchy: only for September or October 1662 are there returns for the whole parish. Thereafter there

¹² Shrivenham Salop Court Book (BRO, D/EEL M43 no pagination) records Henry Marten as lord up to 18 Dec. 1656. The 'lords' were then Sir John Pettus and Thomas Husey, esquire, possibly caretakers or trustees until 4 June 1657 when the lord was John Wildman.

¹³ BRO, D/EEL M32-59 (court books of Shrivenham 1528-1731).

¹⁴ A study of debt litigation in the hundred court is in progress.

¹⁵ Henry Marten, a regicide but opposed to Cromwell's Protectorate, lost his official posts and their income in 1652. This compounded his financial problems and may have prompted the sale of Shrivenham. See A. Hicks and D. Lewis, *The Story of Henry Marten* (1993); BRO, D/EEL M56 (court books of Shrivenham Hundred and the manors of Stallpits and Salop 1636-73); BRO, D/EEL M80 (anno 1791 index and quit rent roll of estates within the manors of Shrivenham Stallpits, Salop and Cleycourt). Also useful are the court books of Cleycourt manor 1621-55 and 1656-72 (BRO, D/EEL M54 and 55).

¹⁶ BRO, D/EEL E35/1 ('The Rentall of ye Manor of Beccott as it was settled by Jn. Wildman Esq. 25th March 1658'); BRO, D/EEL E35/2 ('John Rieleyes Accompt made with Maior Wildman in Mich[aelm]as terme 1559'); BRO, D/EEL E35/3 ('Rentall of the Severale Estates 8th April 1710').

are returns for Longcot and Fernham in March 1663; for Shrivenham, Becket and Watchfield in September 1663; for Watchfield, Bourton and Longcot in October 1663; for Bourton in November 1663 and for Fernham in October 1664. There are therefore at least two returns for each community which together provide sufficient material on which to base a study.¹⁷

TABLE 1. COMPARISONS OF THE HEARTH TAX IN SHRIVENHAM'S COMMUNITIES
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1662

number of hearths	Shrivenham* & Becket	Bourton	Longcot	Watchfield*	Fernham
1 hearth	19 39%	25 61%	24 53%	12 37%	4 25%
2	12 24%	4 10%	6 13%	11 34%	3 19%
3	8 16%	8 20%	10 22%	5 16%	5 31%
4-5	6 12%	3 7%	5 11%	3 9%	2 12%
6-10	4 8%	1 2%	0 0%	1 3%	2 12%
total households	49	41	45	32	16

* totals include those 'not chargeable'.

TABLE 2. COMPARISONS OF THE HEARTH TAX IN SHRIVENHAM'S COMMUNITIES
SEPTEMBER 1663 TO OCTOBER 1664

number of hearths	Shrivenham* & Becket	Bourton*	Longcot	Watchfield*	Fernham*
1	16 34%	40 73%	19 46%	14 39%	22 67%
2	11 23%	2 4%	8 19%	13 33%	3 9%
3	9 19%	8 15%	11 27%	5 17%	5 15%
4-5	7 15%	4 7%	3 7%	3 8%	1 3%
6-10	4 8%	1 2%	0 0%	1 3%	2 6%
total households	47	55	41	36	33

* totals include those 'not chargeable'.

That the social structure of each community was distinct is evident from the 1662 returns, and even more so from those of 1663-4 where those householders not chargeable were more often recorded.¹⁸ In 1662 those living in households with only one hearth varied from 60% in Bourton to 25% in Fernham; Becket with only six households, five of which had a single hearth, is extreme and possibly untypical. In 1663-4 in those communities recording non-payers the proportions of one-hearth households rose to 72% in Bourton, 61% in Fernham, and 38% and 31% in Watchfield and Shrivenham respectively. Unfortunately neither return for Becket and Longcot includes those not chargeable. There are similar differences in the proportion of houses with large numbers of hearths. Shrivenham, with 23% of households

¹⁷ PRO, E179/243/26. The data used in Table 2 for Watchfield are from Oct. 1663, and for Fernham Oct. 1664.

¹⁸ Exemption from payment did not necessarily imply poverty. A householder was exempt if he/she did not pay church or poor rate, occupied a house rented at 20s. or less or had land or goods worth less than £10: T. Arkell, 'Printed Instructions for Administering the Hearth Tax', in Schurer and Arkell, op. cit. note 9, pp. 39-49.

paying tax on four or more hearths, was by far the most comfortable and affluent community; the vicar, four gentlemen, two gentlewomen and the lord of the manor, John Wildman, all lived there. Bourton was home to three gentry families and Fernham to two; Longcot and Watchfield had none.

The broad picture of society as illustrated by the hearth tax is easy to establish but the detail is another matter. Only the Fernham returns for 1664 give the status of all taxpayers and those not chargeable. Those with one hearth were three yeomen, five husbandmen, a craftsman, two widows and 11 labourers, none of whom left wills.¹⁹ The presence of so many labourers and husbandmen among the one-hearth householders is unsurprising. The large proportion of yeomen, however, needs explanation, although this can only be speculative since it has not been possible to identify any of them as landholders in the parish, possibly because they held of the manor of Fernham whose records do not survive. However, the court books do provide some interesting details about the property of one occupant of a single-hearth dwelling, William Dorrell. He did not appear in the 1664 return and was not chargeable in 1663 when no status is given in the returns, but the previous year he had sold his holding, a messuage and a yardland, to William James, gentleman. In 1662 he would undoubtedly have been regarded by the community as a yeoman, perhaps was still so regarded in 1664 even though he had lost the economic base on which this status rested. In 1657 Dorrell had put his signature to witness the will of Thomas Fettiplace, and when another Thomas Fettiplace made his will in 1670 he left £100 for William Dorrell (*sic*) to pay his debts. It is possible that Dorrell was a household or estate steward whose one-hearth house was an apartment and by no means accurately reflected his living standards.²⁰

The Shrivenham court books which recorded William Dorrell's land tenure can therefore provide an alternative source with which to match the ownership of hearths and social status, and so to modify an otherwise simplistic assessment of social structure based solely on tax returns. Considerable numbers of probate documents for the parish also survive. Some individuals appear in both sets of records. By matching these individuals' probate and manorial wealth and status, the latter giving the amount of property on which social status largely rested, it is possible to devise a set of criteria to use across the community. Individuals for whom no probate records survive but holding similar amounts of property to those whose status is known can then, with some confidence, be attributed a similar rank.

The majority of taxpayers lived in houses with only one hearth. In Fernham, as has been shown, the majority were labourers, not necessarily landless but without enough to allow them to survive without another source of income. It is not possible to state with certainty the proportion of labourers in the other communities but some indications can be made. In Longcot six taxpayers who can be traced in the manorial records occupied cottages or parts of messuages and no more than 4 a. of land. Two men paying on one hearth in Bourton have no known status though they also owned small amounts of land: Richard Harper had a close on which were two houses; John Povey some arable, pasture and meadow. Judging by the standards of Fernham and Longcot, these men were probably labourers.

In Shrivenham, probate evidence survives for five taxpayers owning one hearth, all of whom were craftsmen: a blacksmith, a cordwainer, a gardener, a mason (though owning a

¹⁹ There were 18 taxpaying households and 15 not chargeable; the latter were 11 labourers, 1 husbandman, 1 mason and 2 widows.

²⁰ BRO, D/EEL M80, p. 232 (abstract of court books of the manors of Shrivenham Salop, Stallpits and Cleycourt 1791). This abstract was made from the court books 1657-1791 and includes details of agreements made prior to the earlier date. See also BRO, D/A1/68/91 and 68/130 (wills of Thos. Fettiplace 1657 and Thos. Fettiplace 1670).

forge) and a weaver. Their personal wealth varied from £33 to nearly £50. Four of them appear in the manorial records, each leasing a dwelling house with a garden or backside and a small amount of arable ranging from 4 to 13 a. Typical was Richard Ayers, a gardener, also in the 1650s the moletaker for Shrivenham tithing. He had a lease for 3 lives or 99 years of a dwelling house, a small piece of land adjoining and 6 a. of arable.²¹ Two others, John Stratton and Robert Harding for whom no probate evidence survives, also had a cottage or dwelling house and a few acres; their occupations or status are so far unknown.²² In Bourton five single-hearth households also belonged to craftsmen: two butchers, a weaver and two carpenters. Only for the latter are there records of landholding: in 1642 William Gressam had bought a 99-year lease of a cottage and a small amount of arable to which he added 4 a. bought in 1656, and John Gressam had purchased 6 a. and rights of common for 10 sheep in 1657.²³ Among the single-hearth taxpayers in Longcot was a carpenter, Isaac Poffley. In 1649 he had acquired a messuage and appurtenances though he did not have the pasture rights until 20 years later. He made good use of them, keeping 10 cattle and over 60 sheep by the time he died in 1678.²⁴ It seems that each of these communities in the parish contained some small craftsmen who had leases on a house or cottage (rather than a messuage) and supplemented their earnings from the produce of a small amount of arable and pasture. They paid the same tax as labourers and cottagers but exceeded them in status and security.

Some one-hearth householders were more than cottagers, perhaps better described as husbandmen, small-scale farmers ranging from those who were barely self-sufficient to others who were able to market some surplus produce. In the fertile Vale of White Horse relatively small amounts of arable together with the right to pasture animals on the common fields, or a lease of pasture and meadow, could ensure self-sufficiency except in poor harvest years. The few husbandmen's inventories surviving from late 17th-century Shrivenham (the vast majority are those of yeomen) typically show a farm with small amounts of corn and hay, a few sheep and cattle and perhaps a horse. John Day of Shrivenham, a one-hearth taxpayer, inherited from his husbandman father a 1,000-year lease on a tenement, garden, backside, 4 a. of arable and right of common belonging to a yardland. John Joyner, also of Shrivenham, rented a close of pasture and some meadow land at a cost of £44 in 1658, rising to £50 by the early 1670s; in Bourton Edward Smith had a messuage, 10 a. and a close.²⁵ Both men were one-hearth taxpayers and would certainly have been able to claim husbandman status. Two Longcot men with one hearth – Edward Harding with a messuage, closes and half a yardland, and Arthur Pitman with a half-yardland – could also in landed terms have been husbandmen, as could Thomas Dyer who had nearly as much.²⁶ Even if no probate evidence of their status exists, men appearing in the manor court books as copyholders with no more than half a yardland and the rights attached to it, or as leaseholders with a modicum of good grazing land, can be fairly certainly assumed to be husbandmen. This is borne out by the case of Thomas Munday of Bourton for whom probate evidence does exist. He held a messuage and 9 a. of arable with rights of common which passed to his son John on his death in June 1663. Thomas claimed in his will to be a

²¹ BRO, D/A1/66/16 (will of Richard Ayers 1667); D/EEL M56, pp. 21, 49v.; D/EEL M80, p. 22.

²² BRO, D/EEL M80, p. 22; M56, p. 42.

²³ BRO, D/EEL M55, p. 8; M56, p. 52.

²⁴ BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 47; D/A1/107/163 (will and inventory of Isaac Poffley 1679).

²⁵ BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 49; D/EEL/35/1 and 35/21 (Becket rentals 1658 and c. 1670); D/EEL M42 (April 1662 no pagination).

²⁶ BRO, D/EEL M 80, p. 77; D/EEL M56, pp. 23v., 47v., 50.

yeoman but his neighbours altered this to husbandman in the inventory which was valued at £64 11s. 2d. John, who appeared instead of his father in the hearth tax of October 1663, was also called yeoman in the bond of administration entered into by his widow, Elizabeth, after his early death in 1672, though he had no more land than his father.²⁷

So far we have observed some occupiers of one-hearth houses being the poorer sort, cottagers and labourers, as well as some who were husbandmen at various levels of prosperity. Further up the social scale were men who, despite occupying one-hearth houses, were or would become yeomen. Regardless of the value of personal estate at death, which could vary according to the stage of the individual's career, the time of year and several other factors, yeoman status depended on the ownership of enough land to support a yeoman's lifestyle and standing in the community. In Shrivenham in the late 17th century this appears to have been at least a yardland (which Dr. Ross Wordie has recently estimated as 18 a. in this parish) and included rights of common for horses, cattle and sheep.²⁸ This was the landed wealth of the 'middling sort' of this community, men who had enough land to justify the employment of farm servants either by the year or at busy times, who marketed some of their produce, sometimes on a commercial scale, and who were the leaders of the community, acting as churchwardens, tithing men, manor court jurors and appraisers of inventories. It seems safe to add to the ranks of those described in probate records as yeomen those for whom such evidence does not survive provided they held the requisite amount of property.

The only taxpayer in Bourton whose yeoman status is known is Francis Hayward who was so described in his inventory. In the 1660s he was a copyholder of 15 a. of arable with common of pasture; he acquired another 23 a. by 1672, so progressing in wealth in the period after the hearth tax was collected. When he died in 1687 at the age of about 60 his son and daughter were already dead, he had almost given up farming and his personal estate was worth a mere £12 18s. 2d.²⁹ In terms of landed wealth he could have been a prosperous husbandman in the prime of life in the 1660s who moved up the social scale in his later years. There were also three will-making yeomen among the one-hearth householders in Longcot; they and others can also be identified in the manorial records. Thomas Townsend, who died in 1666 with a personal estate of only £36 5s. 2d., held in 1657 what would seem to be below the minimum for a yeoman: a copyhold cottage, half a yardland and a close. William Sanders claimed only right of pasture in the manor court in 1657, but by 1665 when he made his will he had a messuage and at least one yardland and left a personal estate of over £94 in 1671. Even wealthier when he died in 1672 was John Hughes. His inventory amounted to £219 10s. 6d. and included 46 a. of crops and fallow, though less than a yardland can be traced in the manor court books. It is possible that he held land in surrounding villages where he had debtors.³⁰ His case highlights a difficulty to be found when using the records of one manor to ascertain social status, namely that many substantial farmers held land in more than one manor, parish or county. It is a problem which can be encountered occasionally even when dealing with several large manors such as those used in this study.

²⁷ BRO, D/EEL M80, p. 79-81; D/A1/98/65 (will and inventory of Thomas Munday 1663); D/A1/204/111 (admon., inventory and account of John Munday 1672).

²⁸ K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (1982), 31-2; R. Wordie (ed.), *Enclosure in Berkshire 1485-1885* (Berks. Record Soc. v, 2000), 137.

²⁹ BRO, D/A1/197/106 (admon. and inventory of Francis Hayward 1687); D/EEL M80, pp. 72-4.

³⁰ BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 46v.; D/A1/128/63 (will and inventory of Thomas Townsend 1666); D/EEL M56, p. 47; D/A1/121/20 (will and inventory of William Saunders 1671); D/A1/81/50 (will and inventory of John Hughes 1672).

There were also tenants in Becket who already were or would become yeomen. In a rental which can be dated to the early 1670s, all three householders paying on one hearth were leasing pasture and meadow land for which the rent but not the acreage is given, though this can be ascertained in another rental of the early 1650s. John Farre had 82 a. for a rent of £115. Edward Rose, youngest son of Gabriel, a yeoman who died in 1662, was already in about 1650 leasing 100 a. at a cost of £95 a year. When Edward himself died in 1690, called a yeoman by his neighbours, he left goods worth £1,098 6s. 4d. Henry Godfrey, yeoman and dairyman, employed farm servants and on his death in 1671 left personal goods valued at £116 11s. 0d. He had debts of £54 3s. 8d., including part of his rent of £60 a year.³¹ These rents are substantial sums and sit oddly with the concept that all one-hearth households are by definition likely to be poor. It seems more likely that at least some of these householders were content to put more of their income into leasing land and building up a thriving farm than into improving their houses, and that others were young men who had not yet reached the height of their prosperity. Other men, as we have seen, practised a craft and/or rented pasture, making a comfortable but not affluent living supplying their neighbours' wants or in dairying which at this period was a significant part of the local economy.

A few yeomen had one hearth but more had at least two. The status of several of these is evident from probate records, including Henry Pemberton of Becket who died in 1682 leaving a personal estate of £287 12s. 6d. His farmstock included 72 cattle which had produced the 200 cheeses in the chamber over the 'dayhouse'. One of his two hearths was in the chamber over the hall. In the Becket rental of the early 1670s he appears paying £205 to rent meadow and pasture.³² On the basis of equivalent land ownership others who had two-hearth houses, including John Cutler with 2 messuages and 2½ yardlands and John Sammon with one yardland, both of Shrivenham, and Richard Jenner of Watchfield, would also qualify for this status.³³

For Fernham, with its useful list of ranks in 1664, only two inventories survive for hearth tax payers: William Bryant, a yeoman who died in December 1663 and whose widow Elizabeth inherited his property for her widowhood, and James Rowe senior, also a yeoman. William Bryant held a messuage and yardland called Wallingfords and left a personal estate of £97 14s. 6d. In 1657 James Rowe claimed to hold 2 messuages, a yardland and 2 a., yet at his death in 1668 his personal estate was a mere £27 14s. William and Elizabeth Bryant's house had two hearths, James Rowe's three.³⁴ James Rowe junior, also called yeoman in the 1664 returns with a three-hearth house, occupied a messuage and yardland inherited from his father, Arthur, who was also a yeoman.³⁵ These examples can be repeated from the other communities in the parish. It is possible to identify seven more yeomen from the other communities who had two- or three-hearth houses, made wills and held at least a yardland.

Some yeomen owned substantially more than a yardland and could afford to live in fine style; several such families can be found in Shrivenham parish. Two of them, Richard Franklin and William Fairthorne, both of Watchfield, each held the lease of a mill. Richard

³¹ BRO, D/EEL/35/11 (rents of Becket c. 1649-54); D/EEL 35/21 (particulars of some parts of John Wildman's estate of Beckett alias Beaucott c. 1670-73); D/A1/211/84 and 192/90 (admon. and inventory of Edward Rose 1690, and admon. inventory and account of Henry Godfrey 1670).

³² BRO, D/A1/108/12 (will and inventory of Henry Pemberton, yeoman, of Becket 1682); D/EEL 35/21 (particulars of some parts of John Wildman's estate of Beckett alias Beaucott c. 1670-3).

³³ BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 49; M80, p. 42.

³⁴ BRO, D/A1/113/23 and 178/70 (wills and inventories of James Rowe 1668 and William Bryant 1663); D/EEL M80, p. 236; D/EEL M56, pp. 41, 48.

³⁵ BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 41.

Franklin lived in an eight-hearth house, the largest in the hamlet which, since there was no resident gentleman, may have been a former manor house. William Fairthorne held 6 yardlands and left a personal estate of £588 in 1680. Very few other yeomen in the parish could claim such wealth or enjoy his standard of living.³⁶

Men like William Fairthorne might live very comfortably, have as much or more wealth as some gentlemen and pay as much or more hearth tax, but gentry status was beyond their reach as long as they worked their farms. Gentlemen lived on income from land or at worst supervised workers on the land they farmed. They might work with their heads, as lawyers, clergymen or physicians, but never with their hands. Above all, as with all ranks of society, their status was accorded to them by their neighbours on the basis of their superior lifestyle including a fine house, clothes and several servants. Their titles also marked them out: master and mistress was the way to address a gentleman, his wife and his children in written or spoken words.³⁷ In the manorial records, the rank of gentlemen and women is always given making record linkage relatively straightforward; even so, records from a single manor or even a group of manors are not nearly as useful in determining the wealth of gentry taxpayers as of those of lesser social standing, since frequently the gentry's lands were scattered over the county and even further afield.

Two men are described as gentry in the Fernham hearth tax returns. They owned the two houses with most hearths in the hamlet and belonged to the Fettiplace family, long-established county gentry with several seats in Berkshire of which Fernham was one of the most important.³⁸ Both were listed among the armigerous gentry in the heraldic visitation of 1665-6. Thomas Fettiplace, esquire and JP, had inherited free and copyhold land in the parish from his father in 1661 and with it a ten-hearth house, the largest (on this basis) in the whole of Shrivenham. It was probably the manor house of Fernham manor which the family held.³⁹ Edmund Fettiplace, who belonged to another branch of the family from Besselsleigh, held 2 messuages and 3 yardlands in Fernham and was also a freeholder; his house had seven hearths.⁴⁰ Like other gentry in the parish, the Fettiplaces had other properties elsewhere; this, and the fact that the extent of their freeholds in Shrivenham is not given, makes it difficult to estimate their total landed wealth.

Two other communities, Shrivenham and Bourton, had resident gentry. Shrivenham had more houses with six to ten hearths than any other community; two were occupied by gentlemen and one possibly by a yeoman.⁴¹ All three left wills though not inventories, and the manorial records provide details of only some of their local landholding. Oliver Pleydell, esquire, belonged to a long-established North Berkshire family which had been acquiring freehold, copyhold and leasehold land in the parish for generations, amounting in the 1660s

³⁶ BRO, D/A1/68/138 and 69/7 (wills and inventories of Richard Franklin 1672 and William Fairthorne 1680); D/EEL/M56, pp. 22v., 42v.

³⁷ Wrightson, *English Society*, 24-6.

³⁸ C.G. Durston, 'London and the Provinces: the association between the capital and the Berkshire gentry of the early 17th century', *Southern History*, 3 (1981).

³⁹ *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 537.

⁴⁰ BRO, D/EEL M56, pp. 92, 99; W.H. Rylands (ed.), *The Four Visitations of Berkshire* (2 vols. 1908), i, 204; ii, 26.

⁴¹ A Thomas Clarke paid hearth tax on a 6-roomed house; possibly at or about the time of his marriage in 1641 he negotiated a 90-year lease of a messuage called Whitehouse, a dwelling house and another messuage and lands (D/EEL M80, p. 13). He was summoned to the heraldic visitation of 1665-6, being recorded as not having arms. The only Thomas Clarke leaving a will is a yeoman who died in 1700 (D/A1/58/50). Both Thomas Clarkes had a son, Edward.

to at least 3 messuages and 90 a.; he also held land nearby in Wanborough (Wilts.), his wife's home.⁴² William Langton and his wife Katherine occupied an eight-hearthed house which was almost certainly Stainswick manor house; William and later his widow held the manor, probably the major part of their property in the parish, though in addition Katherine held in her own right a messuage and a close in Bourton with rights of common, and William held an additional half-yardland. His will made in December 1668 recorded bequests of over £2,000, perhaps optimistically in view of the fact (revealed by manorial records) that he had recently mortgaged his half-yardland for £230, a sum repaid the following year about the time of his death.⁴³ Two other gentry in Shrivenham lived in five-hearth houses. John Ridley, who had married into the wealthy Stratton family, held freehold, copyhold and leasehold land in Shrivenham and Faringdon and as steward held the hundred and the manor courts. Charles Blagrove, whose 2 messuages and 4 yardlands allowed him to live in considerable comfort, had also made a good marriage with Mary, sister of Thomas Hinton of Bourton.⁴⁴

Thomas Hinton, esquire, head of one of Bourton's three gentry families, was 35 in 1662/3 when he inherited his father's lands and was among the armigerous gentry listed in the 1665-6 visitation. The family had been established in the parish since the early 16th century. Like other gentry his lands, acquired through his own and his father's marriages, lay in several parishes and counties; in Shrivenham he was high constable of the hundred, a freeholder and had a small amount of copyhold land. His house with its parlour and five chambers had seven hearths, but when he died intestate in 1675 he owed £176 11s. 7d. including £25 10s. 0d. paid to doctors, surgeons, nurses and apothecaries in London where he had fallen sick and died, and for his burial there. The manorial records can add little to this except that for about a year he was guardian to his nephew John, son of his sister Mary and Charles Blagrove, and handed a messuage and yardland over to him when he came of age in 1673.⁴⁵ The other two gentlemen, Henry Hedges and John Haggard, lived more modestly in three-hearth houses and had comparatively small amounts of land in the parish, Mr. Hedges with about 22 a. and Mr. Haggard with a mere half-yardland. Like other gentry, both held lands elsewhere, both in Wanborough (Wilts.).⁴⁶

Only 15 of the 28 widows appearing in the hearth tax can be traced either in the probate or manorial records. Their living standards and wealth depended to a large extent on what their husbands had owned. Five of the 15 widows lived in one-hearth households. Widow Allen and Mary Vicars each had a cottage, Widow Allen's being rented from Richard Ayers, a gardener mentioned above, and Mary Vicars also having a garden and a close, the heriot for which was a pig. According to the custom of the manors, three widows held their husbands' lands for widowhood, a custom known as widows' free bench. Both Florence Westwell who had half a yardland and Anne Povey who held some arable, meadow and pasture land had a standard of living approaching that of a husbandman's family, as did

⁴² BRO, D/EEL M80, passim; PRO, PROB 11/371 (will of Martha Pleydell, widow, 1682). The Pleydells occupied a 7-hearth house, possibly Rectory Manor which they owned: *V.C.H. Berks.* iv, 539; their son Thomas married Mary, only daughter and heir of Sir George Pratt of Coleshill (D/EEL M55, p. 5v-7v. Cleycourt manor court roll 1656-72).

⁴³ BRO, D/A1/94/44 (will of William Langton 1668); D/EEL M80, p. 264.

⁴⁴ BRO, D/A1/113/86 and 178/145 (wills of John Ridley, gent. 1672 and Charles Blagrove); D/EEL M55, p. 2 and M80, p. 31.

⁴⁵ BRO, D/A1/197/25 (inventory and account of Thomas Hinton, gent. 1675); D/EEL M80, p. 31.

⁴⁶ BRO, D/EEL M56, pp. 44, 47v.; D/A1/178/171 and 82/86 (wills of Henry Hedges 1638, father of Henry, and John Haggard 1686).

Dorothy Meysey despite her two-roomed house. Jane Willier, who as the widow of Richard held his messuage and yardland in Longcot and was working at least part of it at her death in 1670, enjoyed the lifestyle of a yeoman's wife.⁴⁷ She had a single-hearth house, unlike the other yeomen's widows, all of whom (except Elizabeth Bryant) had three hearths. Above them in status and wealth was Mrs. Jane Stratton, whose husband Thomas died in 1656; she continued to live in their nine-hearthed house, meeting the upkeep from the revenue from his lands in Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire as well as from 3 messuages and 4 yardlands in Shrivenham. She may have been living at Salop Farm which she also held. Similar in status though not perhaps in wealth was Mary Langton, widow of William, who had a five-hearth house in Bourton which she had recently bought.⁴⁸ Women as well as men in Shrivenham can be seen as part of a pyramid of social status based largely on landed wealth.

No status can be attributed to a large number of individuals listed in the hearth tax returns; they did not make wills and do not appear to have held customary or leasehold land. Some were undoubtedly renting property from absentee landlords, who are recognisable in the court books because the heriot due on surrender or death was paid in money with a note that the deceased or the tenant had no animals on the manor, or sometimes even in the hundred. This was the case when John Hinton of Draycourt (Wilts.), late of Longcot, surrendered a cottage to another absentee owner, John Burnam of Shilton in April 1656 and paid 2s. 6d. as a heriot. Landholders living outside the parish can also be identified as appearing in the 1657 presentations of copyholds but not in the hearth tax returns or the parish register. One example is John Harding, gentleman, who held a messuage and yardland, Jaspers, and another called Drapers in Bourton, and a half-yardland called Palpotts: each of these was in a different manor in the parish. His death was presented in the manor court on 22 April 1667 but sadly none of his tenants is named.⁴⁹

There were also undoubtedly more poor men and women in the parish than appear in the hearth tax. No poor law records survive for this period, but in his will made in July 1661 and proved the following April, John Blagrove left £10 to be divided among 27 poor men and 17 poor women in Shrivenham. Only two can be identified in the hearth tax, William Day of Shrivenham and Robert Willes of Longcot, both of whom paid the tax on one hearth. Where the others were living is impossible to say though it may be significant that there are frequent references in the court books to the illegal building of cottages without 4 acres of land.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 47-47v; M54, p. 65; M80, p. 91; D/A1/137/181 (will and inventory of Jane Willier 1670).

⁴⁸ PRO, PROB 11/254 (will of Thomas Stratton); BRO, D/EEL M56, p. 48 and M80, p. 2; D/A1/370/59 (will of Mary Langton, made 1667, proved 1682).

⁴⁹ BRO, D/EEL M56, pp. 14, 226; D/EEL M 55, p. 4v.

⁵⁰ BRO, D/A1/45/97 (will of John Blagrove, yeoman 1662); D/EEL M56, pp. 27, 92 (court books of Salop and Stallpits manors 1656-73); D/EEL M54, p. 70 (court books of Cleycourt manor 1621-55); D/EEL 56, pp. 88, 92 (court books of Salop and Stallpits).

TABLE 3. SOCIAL STATUS BY HEARTH TAX, PROBATE DOCUMENTS AND LAND TENURE

number of hearths	gentry		yeomen		husbandmen		craftsmen		cottagers/ labourers	
	a*	b*	a*	b*	a*	b*	a*	b*	a*	b*
1	0	0	9	4	6	15	8	3	1	18
2	0	1c	8	5	0	5	3	2	0	0
3	2	2	12	5	0	1	2e	1	0	0
4-5	4d	0	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
6-10	2	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
totals	8	7	34	17	7	21	13	6	0	18

a* social status known from probate documents

b* social status not known from probate documents but stated in hearth tax, inferred from landholding or stated in manor court books

c John Wildman, esquire. Becket House was leased for £15 a year to William Wilkins in 1658 (Becket rental D/EEL 35/1). It is not known where John Wildman was living.

d includes Thomas Bunce, the vicar, who owned land in Marcham; his inventory made in 1675 totalled £851 10s. (D/A1/46/115).

e includes William Warren, described as a mercer in 1668 and in a bond of administration 1679. He leased almost a yardland (D/EEL M80, p. 36; D/A1/223/6).

CONCLUSION

Table 3 summarises a suggested social structure for Shrivenham using manor court records as well as probate evidence; substantially more individuals have been accorded a rank than would have been possible using probate records alone. Records of land ownership in the manor court have proved useful in corroborating and justifying social status as given in probate material, and providing evidence on which to attribute status to those otherwise judged merely on the number of hearths they owned. This has been a particularly profitable exercise in Shrivenham where landholding documents are closely related in time to the hearth tax and in sufficient quantity to be applied to a meaningful number of tenants. The manor court books proved especially valuable at the lower end of the social scale where wills are less common, helping to identify the 'lesser' and the 'middling sort' of people. Though just a case-study for a single parish, the results of using this method in Shrivenham suggest that cross-referencing hearth tax, probate and manorial or similar records could be developed more widely to extend our understanding of late 17th-century communities. There is perhaps only a limited chance of using this combination of material in comparative studies since the likelihood of manors changing hands and of the new lord ordering a survey at the crucial time is probably slight, but this remains an area of study which would merit further investigation.

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