

Robert Veysey of Chimney: ‘From Nothing to a Very Great Estate’?

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SUMMARY

This article sifts the surviving evidence to assess the career and character of the founder of Bampton School, Robert Veysey (c.1555–1635). He appears as deserving a contemporary’s judgment of him as ‘crafty’, but also as a man remarkable for raising not just himself but also his extended family to the ranks of the gentry, with a sphere of influence that stretched from Chimney in Bampton to Burford and Taynton. This essay is the necessary background for further published work on subsequent Veysey generations’ attempts to maintain the status bequeathed them by this pater familias, and on the bequest of hundreds of Veysey family books to Lincoln College, Oxford by Robert Veysey’s collateral descendant, William Vesey of Taynton (d. 1755).

Robert Veysey of Chimney earned a place in Oxfordshire history through his foundation of the grammar school at Bampton. By will written and proved in 1635, Veysey left £300 for the school’s construction and endowment.¹ Built and opened in the early 1650s, it has ever since been one of the suite of fine pre-Georgian stone buildings that grace the town. It served as a school until 1898, becoming the town’s library and archive in 1964.² More recently, the school achieved international fame for its supporting role in ITV’s hit historical drama, ‘Downton Abbey’ (2010–15) as ‘Downton Cottage Hospital’, which has spurred a major fund-raising campaign to restore the building.

But just who was Robert Veysey of Chimney, and how did he, a man of some obscurity, join the very small but distinguished number of private (versus corporate) founders of post-Reformation free grammars in Oxfordshire? Jennifer Sherwood describes him as ‘a woollen merchant’.³ The Bampton Community Archive calls him ‘a wealthy local merchant’. And the present fund-raising campaign hails the school’s origins as ‘an act of remarkable generosity on the part of a rich seventeenth-century wool merchant’, and continues, in ‘Downton’ vein, that ‘in a twist fit for a period melodrama all of its own, [Veysey’s] attempts at philanthropy were nearly thwarted by his less-than-enthusiastic family’, adding that ‘only the persistence of village people ensured that this kind man’s dying wishes were finally enacted.’ In this telling, playing the villain to Robert’s hero is his nephew and executor, William Veysey (d. 1667), because he ‘kept his hands on the loot for a dozen years’ before a charity commission squeezed the money out of him for Bampton’s school.⁴ This is a good script for a melodrama, and grounded in some documentary evidence. But if that script is based on the full range of archival sources about Robert Veysey, his profession as a ‘wool merchant’ is impossible to document. He also emerges as anything but a ‘kind man’, who, in the saga of Bampton School, should in fact swap hero and villain roles with his nephew and executor, William.

¹ TNA: PRO, PROB 11/169/189 (catalogued as ‘Robert Wesey [sic], Gentleman of Chimney’; 22 Oct. 1635).

² VCH Oxon. 13, pp. 58–9.

³ J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Oxfordshire* (2002), p. 431.

⁴ <http://bamptonarchive.org/the-bampton-community-archive/>; <http://www.bamptonarchive.co.uk/history> (both accessed September 2016).

The earliest ‘last word’ on Robert Veysey is probably the most accurate. The diary of Thomas Wyatt, rector of Ducklington 1610–52, is rich with observations on his reading, the weather, local harvests, and national politics. It is thin, though, on biographical remarks about locals. But in the summer of 1635 Wyatt was prompted to write this atypical entry: ‘Robert Veisey of Chimney a ma[n] [that] by vsury & crafty bargaining had raised himself fr[om] nothing to a very great estate a singul[a]r ma[n] almost 80 yeares old dep[ar]ted this life July 11 1635 at Chimney & was buried at Shifford. *Qualis vita, finis ita*.⁵ The concluding Latin tag casts a particularly dark shadow over Veysey. It loosely translates as, ‘as the life so its end’, and was a commonplace for asserting that the manner of one’s death and the fate of one’s soul reflected the quality of one’s life. Wyatt recorded then that Veysey either died in some kind of misery, or was destined for it in the afterlife (or both) as a judgement for egregious sins in this world. Uncharitable as that may be, the minister distilled everything that emerges from the historical record about Veysey’s personality – both ‘crafty’ and ‘singular’ (in the sense of ‘remarkable’) – and about the way he accumulated his wealth.

ORIGINS

To examine Robert Veysey’s origins, it helps to return to events at the end of his life, including the grammar school bequest. Unusually, Veysey gave no instructions for eligibility, curriculum, or tuition at the school. He did specify though that it was to be built ‘with Ashleare worke’, and that there was to be ‘some portraiture at the vpper end of the same’. The first stipulation suggests a desire for architectural prestige in the townscape, fit in material status to join the medieval landmarks of St Mary’s church, Bampton Castle, and The Deanery. The second is more peculiar. A ‘portraiture’ in the period could be a portrait in any medium, but given Veysey’s lapidary interest in the school’s exterior, he most likely had in mind a stone portrait bust of himself in the schoolroom, at the dais or master’s end, where he could look down in perpetuity on the beneficiaries of his endowment.⁶ Stone portrait busts were of course common for wall monuments in churches, but rare in schools.⁷ Far more common was the commemoration of a school donor on the exterior, either with an inscription or coat of arms, as for the group of Oxfordshire school donors that Veysey was joining: Lord Williams’ crest at Thame (1558), Walter Calcott’s arms at Williamscot (1574), and an inscribed lintel for Christopher Rawlins’ foundation at Adderbury (1589).⁸

Veysey’s unusual instruction for his ‘portraiture’ was most likely then a second choice for what he really would have liked – a coat of arms, that most coveted expression of gentry status. At exactly this time, in fact, Robert Veysey tried to get one. In July, 1634 he entered a pedigree at the heralds’ visitation in Oxford, but they tricked no arms. Clearly doubtful about Veysey’s genealogical claims, the heralds required him to subscribe that he would come to London ‘to give satisfaction concerning the bearing of armes both for myself & my kinsmen’ by the end of August.⁹ Whether he did so is unrecorded, but no arms were ever granted, and the submitted pedigree probably explains why. For it is a fine example of the “counterfeit” genealogies’

⁵ Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 378, p. 409; *VCH Oxon.* 13, pp. 82, 143.

⁶ *OED* ‘portraiture, n’, 1.b.: ‘a three-dimensional image; a statue’. There is no evidence that a portrait of any kind was ever executed.

⁷ The *National Heritage List for England* records one surviving contemporary example: St Mary’s Hall and Old Grammar School, Market Drayton, founded 1558 by Sir Rowland Hill, in the ground floor schoolroom, a ‘reset mid-C16 stone bust of Sir Rowland Hill . . . superscribed below: “Rolandus Hyll Miles”’: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1366464>, accessed September 2016.

⁸ <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1194095>, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1287353>, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1046372> (accessed Sept. 2016). For this comparison I omit corporation foundations (such as Burford).

⁹ *The Visitations of the County of Oxford* (1871), pp. 256–7, 337.

based on ‘elaborate fantasy’ commonly invented by those who aspired to armigerous status.¹⁰ But Veysey’s fantasy deserves some credit at least for its creativity. In it he claimed descent from his father, William of Chimney, the son of ‘John Vazie of Chimney’ – but with the added flourish that his grandfather was ‘brother to [blank] Vazie, Bp. of Exeter in Queene Marie’s tyme.’ The first clue to the dubiety of the claim is of course Robert’s inability to remember the Christian name of his grandfather John’s allegedly very distinguished ‘brother’ – something compounded by the fact that bishop Veysey’s Christian name was itself John. Further, bishop Veysey wasn’t even a Veysey, but was born John Harman and took Veysey as an alias, probably in honour of a benefactor, the Oxford scholar John Veysey (d. 1492).¹¹ Robert’s punt on a connection to the bishop can be explained, though, by the familiarity in Bampton with the names of Exeter dignitaries, since the dean and chapter had been lords of the manor of Bampton Deanery (of which Chimney was a part) since the eleventh century.¹² And John Veysey, before elevation to the bishopric, had been dean of Exeter (1509–19), thus making him Robert’s grandfather’s manorial lord, not his brother. Robert might also have desired to imitate the Midlands fame of bishop Veysey as benefactor to his native Sutton Coldfield, especially in the foundation of a school that would bear his name down the centuries – Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School (1527).

But if the claim of an episcopal great-uncle is dubious, there is, even with the loss of early registers for Shifford, corroborating evidence for the more modest husbandman, John Veysey of Chimney.¹³ Robert’s grandfather John Veysey appears clearly in a 1544 lay subsidy return as one of eleven Chimney householders assessed for goods in value greater than five pounds. His eight-pound valuation was higher than five others, but significantly less than the three with valuations of twenty pounds.¹⁴ John Veysey also left one of Chimney’s oldest surviving wills. Although a nuncupative testament written on 4 January, 1551, and lacking an inventory, the bequests in it reveal a prosperous husbandman who divided between his two sons and three daughters a range of valuable moveable goods: horses and cattle; farm implements; coffers, bedding, and linens; and a winnowing sheet each. Receiving the largest share was William, presumably the eldest son and Robert’s father.¹⁵ He is no doubt the ‘William Fesey’ of Chimney rated at four pounds in goods in a June 1581 lay subsidy assessment, but appears with certainty nowhere else in the historical record except in Robert’s testamentary request that he be buried in the chancel of Shifford ‘neere vnto my deceased ffather’.¹⁶ If there were monuments to either father or son, they were lost when the chapel was rebuilt in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ As for Robert’s mother we have only his claim in the visitation pedigree that she was ‘Margaret daur. of Thomas Minshull’. This seems specific enough to be reliable, but Minshull is a surname unwitnessed in searchable public records of the period in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, or Wiltshire. Its prominence in Chester and Shropshire, however, might suggest a Veysey marriage exogamous to Oxfordshire. In 1553 the manor of Cote, adjacent to Chimney,

¹⁰ F. Heal and C. Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500–1700* (1994), pp. 32–40.

¹¹ N. Orme, ‘Veysey, John (c.1464–1554)’, *ODNB*; TNA: PRO, PROB 11/9/138 (‘John Veysey of the University of Oxford’, 1498).

¹² *VCH Oxon.* 13, pp. 25, 82.

¹³ Shifford registers commence only in 1721. Robert Veysey himself recited 1593 and 1598 burial entries from the now-lost earlier register in a dispute with tenants in 1620 (TNA: PRO, C 2/Jasl/B14/60).

¹⁴ TNA: PRO, E 179/162/223 (Bampton hundred); with goods of £20 assessed value were Thomas Besels, Thomas Palmer, and Joan Kyne.

¹⁵ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 180/9 (‘John Veysey, Husbandman of Chimney’); denied probate for lack of a nominated executor, commission for administration granted to Robert Styles of ‘Moore’, 18 April 1551. John requested burial at Bampton, but there is no entry in the register. The second son, Robert, might be assumed as godfather of his nephew Robert (d. 1635). John named no wife; daughters named are Jone, Annyes, and Christian (the latter two specified as unmarried).

¹⁶ TNA: PRO, E 179/162/345, m. 5 (Bampton and Chadlington hundreds). He may be the William Veysey who witnessed the 1584 will of George Minchin of Chimney (OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 43/1/28); cf. though a William Veysey born in Chimney c.1557 (if accurate, then of Robert’s own generation, perhaps a first cousin), in J. Howard-Drake (ed.), *Oxford Church Court Depositions 1589–93* (1997), no. 78.

¹⁷ *VCH Oxon.* 13, pp. 109–10.

passed to the Hordes of Bridgnorth, so perhaps Margaret Minshull came to William Veysey in marriage through some association with the Hordes.¹⁸ Other documentary evidence for the family's presence in sixteenth-century Oxfordshire is almost non-existent. Surviving parish registers record in that century only the marriage of 'John Veysie of Chimnie' to Elizabeth Denman at Cumnor, 15 August 1591.¹⁹ Early testamentary evidence is also sparse; additional to the will of John (d. 1551) is only the 1597 administration of the goods of one Miles Veysey of Burford to his widow Juliana.²⁰ And the lay subsidy rolls of 1544 and 1581 returned no Veyseys except John and William (respectively). This suggests that the family's presence in west Oxfordshire dates to, and at that time was parochially limited to, John of Chimney (d. 1551) and his descendants. (see Fig. 1)

The rector of Ducklington's notice that Robert Veysey died 'almost 80 yeares old' helpfully fixes his birth to c.1555–6. But the first surviving notice of him comes over thirty years later – a tranche of 'lost years' which obscure when and why Veysey left Chimney, and, crucially, how he assembled the capital necessary to fund his subsequent property investment and moneylending. He certainly emerged from his childhood as literate. But since the history of education in Bampton begins only with the opening of Veysey's own school in 1653, and even later in adjacent Ducklington, he was himself most likely taught English reading and writing, and perhaps some Latin grammar, by local clergy.²¹ His personal experience of southwest Oxfordshire's dearth of education no doubt informed or even inspired his foundation at Bampton, as it did the generous financial rewards he gave to his more academically inclined nephews, as we shall see. Apprenticeship in trade, perhaps in London, must also have been a possible route to advancement, but no record of such survives.

LANDED INTERESTS IN TAYNTON

It was through a leading Tudor arriviste family in the Cotswolds that Robert seems to have made his adult break, first into elite service, and then the landholding by which he began to style himself 'gentleman'. These were the Brays, who had consolidated their status in the region with the acquisition by Reginald Bray, through marriage, of the manors of Little and Great Barrington (Glos.), near Burford, in 1553. His heir, Edmund Bray (d. 1620) increased the family's regional influence with marriage to Agnes Harman, eldest daughter of the royal surgeon Edmund Harman, who had been granted the manor and rectory of nearby Taynton by Henry VIII.²² In January 1588 Edmund and Agnes Bray purchased most of the interests in lands, including Taynton, that had been divided among the Harman daughters. And here appears, for the first time in the written record, Robert Veysey, as witness to that indenture.²³ For the next twenty years Veysey appears repeatedly as a Bray *factotum*. In 1595 he received the Oxford Consistory Court's administration granted to Cecily, widow and executrix of

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 67.

¹⁹ Cf. OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 196.402 (John Veysey yeoman of Chimney, naming as executrix his widow Elizabeth and mentioning no children, proved 21 July, 1621). Since Robert only included living brothers with issue in his visitation pedigree, this John may be a brother who predeceased him. Elizabeth Veysey was presented in the church courts for defamation in 1619, accused of telling a Chimney neighbour that his wife was 'not worthy to wipe their shoes' and that he was not his eldest daughter's father: Howard-Drake (ed.), *Oxford Church Court Depositions 1616–1622* (2005), no. 67.

²⁰ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 190.305. The lack of Burford parish registers before 1612 frustrates attempts to determine whether Veyseys were settled there before Robert's arrival from Chimney in the late 1580s. See below and R.H. Gretton (ed.), *The Burford Records: A Study in Minor Town Government* (1920), *passim*.

²¹ VCH Oxon. 13, pp. 58, 149. Veysey occasionally used a legal signature with a Latin flourish: 'p[er] me [by me] Rob[er]t Veysey'; cf. TNA: PRO, C 2/JasI/B14/60 (Bowld et al. v. Robert Veisey, answer 17 June 1613).

²² A.L. Browne, 'The Bray Family in Gloucestershire', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 55 (1933), pp. 298, 300. Harman is well-known for his monument in Burford church (Pevsner and Sherwood, *Oxfordshire*, p. 506).

²³ Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 2570; cf. Browne, 'Bray Family', p. 301.

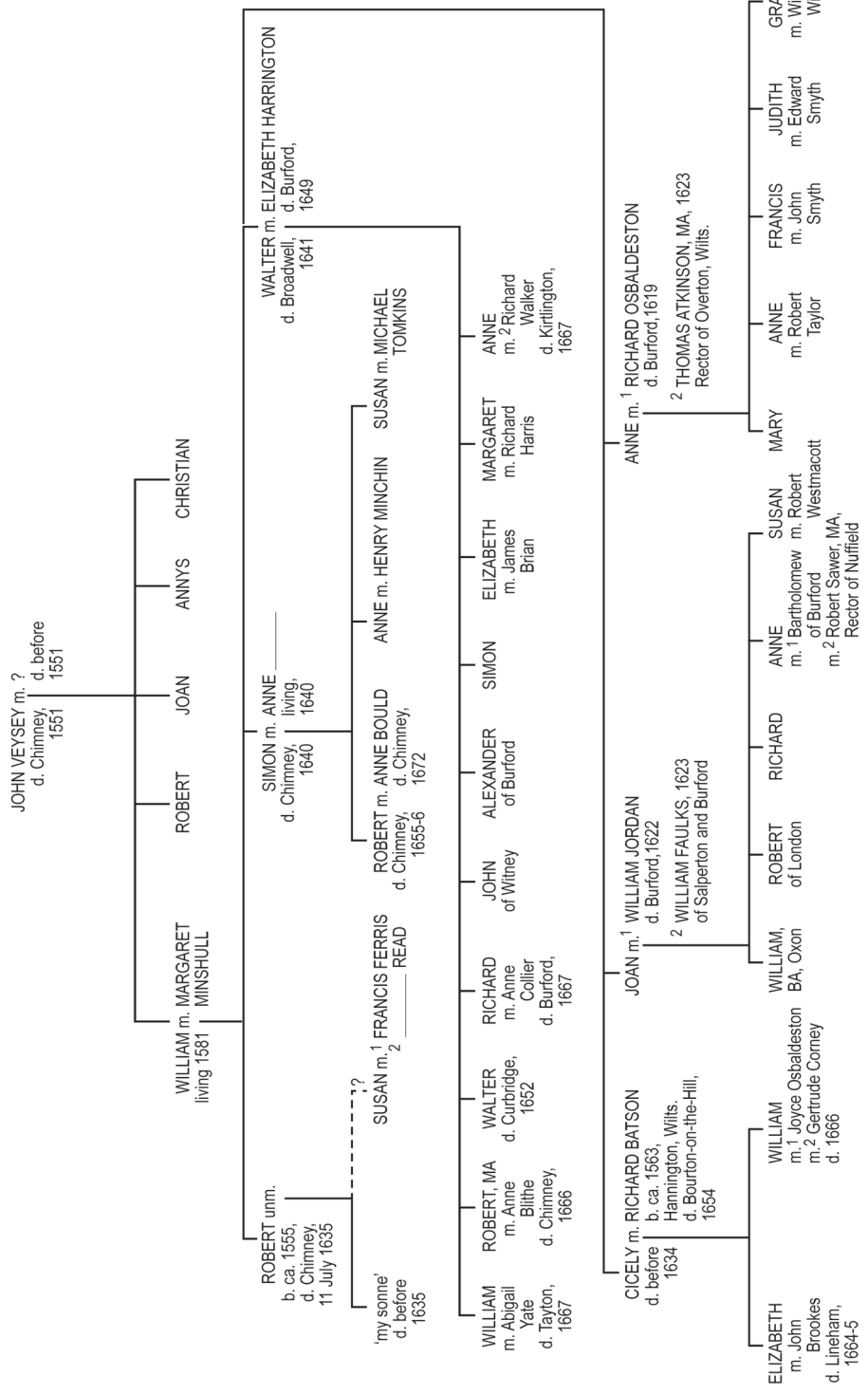


Fig. 1. The descent and kin of Robert Veysey (d. 1635).

Sylvester Bray, as ‘procuratoris eius in forma iuris,’ or ‘his legal agent.’²⁴ And it is in the mid-1590s that Veysey first appears in records of the Burford corporation; his settlement there is seen in court rolls and assessment schedules in 1596 and 1597, where he appears in the upper quartile of rates paid, with the title ‘Mr,’ which, as Gretton observed, fixes him as part of the ‘emerging leisured middle class’ just below the burgher elite. Gretton’s epitome of this new class is John Jordan, ‘at this time Steward to the Lenthalls.’²⁵ Robert Veysey seems to have achieved a similar rank through comparable service to the Brays. In 1605, he witnessed the settlement between Edmund Bray and Sir Richard Chetwode upon the marriage of the former’s grandson and heir Giles Bray (knighted 1607, d. 1641) to Anne Chetwode.²⁶ November 1610 saw Veysey nominated to prosecute writ of entry on behalf of Sir Giles at Fifield manor, adjacent to Taynton.²⁷ In 1611 the same 1588 indenture that he had witnessed for the settlement of Harman interests upon the Brays was endorsed as having been ‘shewed vnto Robte Veysye gent a witness produced on the behalf of Edmond Bray esquier’ in a suit in the Court of Wards.²⁸ Later the same year, the indenture of purchase of remaining shares in Fifield by Sir Giles Bray was endorsed as to be delivered to Veysey for Bray.²⁹ So Veysey was clearly an agent, perhaps an overseer or bailiff, to three generations of the Brays of Barrington, Taynton, and Fifield.

No doubt an important aspect to Veysey of his clientage with the Brays was the access it brought to favourable terms from them for interests in real property. In 1603 Giles Bray and his grandfather Edmund granted Veysey a 90-year lease of three-and-a-half yardlands with tithes of corn and hay in Taynton, albeit at the end of an existing life tenure, for which he had to wait until 1627.³⁰ But better followed. In 1604 the Brays leased to Veysey the ‘capitall messuage’ of Taynton rectory and five other parcels totaling some 190 acres.³¹ In the first surviving Taynton manorial rolls after this date (for 1611–13), Veysey, citing ‘an agreement with the lord of the manor and Sir Giles Bray,’ not only claimed exemption from tithes, but also from fines for commoning sheep.³² He confirmed in a 1631 deposition that the Brays had granted these exemptions. And the scale of animal holdings on his 190 acres is suggested by a deposition in the same case by the sub-lessee of part of them after 1629, Veysey’s serving man, Robert Collier. He deponed that on the four yardlands he let from Veysey, he kept 240 sheep and ‘six great beasts’ on the common.³³ So, if wool did play a part in Veysey’s accrual of wealth, it most likely came from farming Taynton rectory, and that on preferential terms from his master and patron, the lord of the manor. It was with his Taynton lease in hand that Veysey began to style himself ‘gentleman of Taynton.’ His status was further secured by acquiring a freehold in Taynton, since by the date of the next surviving manorial rolls (1626), he is not only styled ‘generosus’ (gentleman), but also listed among the freeholders. ‘Gentleman’ was of course a fluid denomination.³⁴ But without lineage, arms, or lordship beyond that of a rectory farmer, Veysey must have based his new style mostly on self-assertion, and some degree of local assent.³⁵ His patchwork gentility must also have been easier to carry-off in Taynton

²⁴ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 3/3/42 (Sylvester Bray, gentleman of Fifield, 27 Dec.), second son of Edmund and uncle of Giles; see Browne, ‘Bray Family’, pp. 297, 306–7.

²⁵ Gretton (ed.), *Burford Records*, 530, 543, 545; 213–14.

²⁶ Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 2571, 2572 (1 and 23 Oct.).

²⁷ *Ibid.* MS Ch. Oxon. 2573 (17 Nov.); cf. Browne, ‘Bray Family’, p. 314.

²⁸ Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 2570; Browne, ‘Bray Family’, p. 308.

²⁹ Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 2574 (15 Aug.); cf. Browne, ‘Bray Family’, p. 314.

³⁰ Recited in BL, Add. Ch. 42971 (1649); for Veysey’s entry upon the death of Robert Bell in March, 1627, Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. 108 (26 Oct. 1631).

³¹ Lease dated 31 April 1603 (term and rent unspecified), recited in Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 2577 (21 April 1711).

³² Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. 155 (manor courts of 10 Oct. 1611, 23 Apr. 1612, 8 March 1613).

³³ Howard Drake (ed.), *Oxford Church Court Depositions, 1629–34* (1997), no. 34. Collier was sued for breach of a new commons settlement agreed at the manor court 18 April, 1631: Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. 108.

³⁴ Heal and Holmes, *Gentry*, pp. 7, 16.

³⁵ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. 109 (13 April 1626).

because the village offered nothing by way of gentry competition – with the Brays seated over the county line at Barrington Court (itself then an island of Berkshire), Taynton had neither a resident lord of the manor nor any armigerous families. Even the parochial living attracted only clergy who would be grateful for its mere £7 per annum.³⁶

ALLIANCES IN BURFORD

Burford's fluid middle class, though, afforded Veysey a regional centre only a mile from Taynton that was apt for investment both financial and social, something vividly seen in the marriages made there by his sisters in the wake of his arrival. Joan Veysey married William Jordan, of the ubiquitous Burford family.³⁷ And Anne Veysey, c.1609, married Richard Osbaldeston, gentleman of Burford and cousin to the lords of the manor of Chadlington (d. 1619).³⁸ Osbaldeston's will gives a fine measure of the status which Veysey had forged for his family in the locality. The dwelling house on the east side of the High Street (now no. 75) left to Anne and her heirs was in fact her dowry from her brother, Robert – an early example of him using property to buy upwards on the social scale in the marriage market.³⁹ This put not only Anne, but also Robert, in good company. In 1619, Osbaldeston appointed, as trustees for payment of his legacies, these 'good frendes': 'Mr Henry Heylyn gent[,] my brother in Lawe Mr Robert Veysey gent[,] my brother Mr Arthur Osbaldeston gent[,] my Cosin Mr William Batson gent[,] and my good friend Mr John Collier of Burford'. This group epitomizes the higher end of Burford's middling sort: none in trade, all given the honorifics 'Mr', and 'gent'; but also either entirely new to gentry status (Veysey), from the minor gentry (Heylyn), or from lesser branches of county families (the Osbaldestons), or burghers (Collier, an innholder). As we shall see, there are also among them important early examples of Burford professionals (vs craftsmen).⁴⁰ We know that Veysey craved armigerous status like the Osbaldestons.⁴¹ He probably also looked with envy on Heylyn, who, though from the minor gentry, had educated his sons at Burford grammar school and Oxford, died in 1622 possessed of an enviable gentleman's library, and could in his will ask his children to join him in giving thanks that God 'from a weake beginning and thorough my harde labors inabled me to breede them to what they now are'.⁴² Also in this list is another kinsman crucial to Veysey's alliances and career, William Batson. When naming Batson (along with Robert Veysey) as one of his overseers, Osbaldeston described him as 'my Nephue Mr William Batson of Staple Inn'. Batson was both

³⁶ J. Ecton, *Liber Valorum & Decimarum* (1723), p. 258.

³⁷ TNA: PRO, PROB 11/169/421 (sentence of Robert Veysey, Dec. 1635) names Robert, William, and Richard Jordan as the testator's nephews by a then deceased sister; Veysey's will (PROB 11/169/189) left legacies to their mother (Joan Faulks, then living), the same three sons, and their sisters Anne and Susan, children of 'William Jordan late of Burford' (probably William 'the Butcher', buried Burford 31 Aug. 1622). Susan had married Robert Westmacott at Burford 1 June, 1618, fixing the Veysey-Jordan marriage to c.1600. In an indenture of 1 April 1626, Robert Veysey describes William Jordan as 'of Gloucester Hall in the vniversitie of Oxon Batcheler of Arts, and Robert Jordan as 'Citizen and Lynendraper of London' (Bodl. MS dd Harcourt 109/28). William matric. Christ Church 15 Nov. 1622, aged 18, and proceeded BA from Gloucester Hall Feb. 1626 (Foster, *Alumni Oxoniensis*; but according to *The Clergy of the Church of England Database* (CCED), theclergydatabase.org.uk, Person ID Numbers 42415, 27553) he was not, as in Foster, the Kent vicar of the same name).

³⁸ Buried Burford 8 June, 1619; the couple had five daughters, the youngest of whom were baptized at Burford in 1614 and 1617.

³⁹ A. Catchpole, D. Clark, and R.B. Peberdy, *Burford: Buildings and People in a Cotswold Town* (2008), p. 175; Gretton (ed.), *Burford Records*, pp. 403, 452. The mid seventeenth-century tenant, and (from 1661) owner, John Jordan, was no doubt Anne Osbaldeston's great-nephew, by her sister Joan (married William Jordan).

⁴⁰ Catchpole et al., *Burford*, p. 48.

⁴¹ *Visitations of Oxfordshire*, pp. 202–3, 313; J. Burke and J.B. Burke, *Dormant Baronetcies*, 2nd edn (1841), p. 394.

⁴² TNA: PRO, PROB 11/140/506. In addition to extensive leaseholding, Heylyn was steward of the manor of Chipping Norton (TNA: PRO, C 21/C17/11). His third son Peter, one of Burford's most notable native sons, was the royalist polemicist and biographer of William Laud: A Milton, 'Heylyn, Peter (1599–1662)', *ODNB*.

Osbaldeston's and Veysey's 'Nephue' by virtue of being the son of Cecily Veysey (sister to Anne, Joan, and Robert) and Richard Batson of Hannington (Wilts.).⁴³ And the Osbaldeston-Veysey connection would be strengthened in the following year when Batson, 'of Hannington,' married at Chadlington 'Joyce Osbaston [Osbaldeston] eldest d[daughter] of Hercules of the Nether Court' and lord of the manor of Chadlington.⁴⁴ Batson was soon active as a lawyer in Oxfordshire, was legal agent for his uncle Robert Veysey in the latter's business dealings and lawsuits, described as under-sheriff of Oxford c.1620, and named one of Veysey's overseers in 1635.⁴⁵ The William Batsons seem to have been prominent in early Stuart Burford, where five children were baptized before Joyce's death (bur. 25 Nov. 1631). '[S]ome few yeares before the warre', in other words in the 1630s, Batson purchased and rebuilt a prestigious pew near the pulpit in Burford church, a sure mark of status. He married, second, Gertrude Corney at Bourton-on-the Hill (1 September 1634), soon thereafter his principal residence. Although Batson suffered financially for supporting Charles I, he died after the Restoration possessed of significant leaseholdings in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, and Wiltshire, and was active in the ongoing administration of Robert Veysey's estate as late as 1665.⁴⁶

In addition to his sisters, Veysey's brother Walter followed Robert up from Chimney to Burford and had a large family, members of which would play a central role in Robert's establishment of the Veysey name and fortunes. Fixing Walter's appearance in Burford exactly is frustrated by the commencement of the parish registers only in 1614. In 1606 he was cited and fined for non-appearance in the church courts as 'de Shifford' and 'de Chimney'. His son Richard matriculated at St John's, Oxford in 1626 as son of Walter 'of Bampton, pleb.' But Walter, Sr. is described as 'of Burford' in Taynton court rolls of 1613, when his brother Robert secured reversion of leaseholds there for Richard and his brother Robert, then minors.⁴⁷ Richard Osbaldeston, in his 1619 will, left to 'my sister [in-law] Walter Veyseys wife tenne shillings'. She was Elizabeth *née* Harrington. The couple, whose dwelling house was on the west side of Burford High Street, had seven sons and three daughters; each was carefully enumerated in Robert's 1634 pedigree, and all were still living when their widowed mother wrote her will in 1645. It seems that Walter was by trade a shoemaker.⁴⁸ His marriage to Elizabeth was, though fecund, evidently not happy. In November 1641 the Court of High Commission heard petitions from both, Walter's 'setting forth how he was prosecuted . . . at the complaint of his wife for alimony' agreed at £30 per annum 'until they could be reconciled.' The court referred the matter to the Bishop of Oxford 'to put a final end to this difference.'⁴⁹ As

⁴³ Like Robert's other sisters, Cicely was omitted from Veysey's 1634 pedigree (*Visitations*, pp. 256–7). Batson's descendants remembered her only as 'daughter of [blank] Veysie, wife of William's father, Richard (T.F. Fenwick et al. (eds.), *The Visitation of the County of Gloucester . . . 1682* (1884), p. 5); her Christian name is found in a 1616 indenture of property in Charlbury for William Batson's sister Elizabeth after her marriage to John Brookes of Lineham, executed by Batson and Robert Veysey (who endorsed it, 'My Neece Brookes her Iointure'), which describes the bride as 'daughter of Richard Batson And Cicelye his wife' (OHC, Sh. VII/ii/1; among the witnesses was Henry Heylyn).

⁴⁴ The marriage at Chadlington on 31 Aug. 1620 was entered in the registers of both Hannington and Chadlington. Richard Osbaldeston named 'my Cosen' Hercules as one of his overseers. For the latter, see *Visitations of Oxfordshire*, p. 313, and his PCC will (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/183/242, 1 June 1640).

⁴⁵ TNA: PRO, C 2/JasI/D6/12 (Dean v. Veysey, Batson, and Blower; Nov. 1623); C 21/C17/11; PROB 11/169/189.

⁴⁶ OHC, MS Oxf. Archd. Oxon. c 119, ff. 22r., 49v. (pew); TNA: PRO, SP 20/13/31 (Civil War delinquency; for which see also wills cited); Glos. RO, Consistory Court Wills 1666, no. 103 (will of Richard Batson, proved 1666; buried at Bourton-on-the-Hill, 7 Dec. 1654, 'aged above 91 yeares'); PROB 11/321/456 (will of William Batson, written 26 July, proved 25 Aug. 1666); C 6/172/87 (Read v. Batson and Vessey; answer of William Batson, prepared by Littleton Osbaldeston, later Bt. and MP, d. 1691, Batson's nephew by marriage).

⁴⁷ OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. d 9, ff. 18v., 28r. (17 and 24 May, 1606); Foster, *Alumni*, 'Vesey, Richard [Veysey]'; Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. 155 (8 March 1613).

⁴⁸ TNA: PRO, PROB 11/133/770 (Osbaldeston); Gretton, *Burford Records*, p. 328; *Visitations of . . . Oxford*, pp. 256–7; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 68/3/28 ('Elizabeth Veysey widow of Burford'; written 20 Sept. 1645, proved 6 June 1649).

⁴⁹ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1635–36*, pp. 271, 275, 280 (14 and 21 Nov. 1639). Some caution needs to

we shall see, their two eldest sons would figure prominently in the disposition of Robert's estate in 1635. Their fourth son, Richard, left St John's College, Oxford without taking a degree, and became a fixture in Burford society as innkeeper of The George in the High Street. The lease of The George had been purchased (followed by some dispute) by his uncle Robert in 1632 from the then innholder, John Collier, whose widow Anne then married Richard (an unnoticed link in the succession of the George).⁵⁰ Richard signed the Protestation Return as churchwarden of Burford in 1642, and even appeared in print as a conformist (at the time, presbyterian) interlocutor with the Ranter preacher Richard Coppin in John Osborne's pamphlet dialogue, *The World to Come . . . in a Discourse at Burford* (1651).

The deaths of Robert Veysey's brothers-in-law Jordan and Osbaldeston while his sisters were still marriageable even afforded him the chance to play a part in their second marriages – something that must have been quite an event for the family as both were solemnized at Burford on the same day, 24 April 1623. 'Mrs Ann Osboston of Burford, widow' married 'Mr Thomas Atkinson of Norbache [Northleach]'. In him we not only see the first Veysey alliance with that other social group which sat anxiously on the margins of gentility, the clergy, but also find clear evidence of Robert taking an active part as *pater familias* in managing his sisters' prospects. For just weeks after the wedding, on 4 May, Thomas Atkinson was instituted rector of Overton (Wilts.), upon presentation of none other than Robert Veysey – by concession (purchase for the single presentation) from the patron, William Earl of Pembroke.⁵¹ One of Atkinson's earliest appearance in written record was as the 'minister' (probably curate) who endorsed the parish registers of Salperton (Glos.) for the year 1624. It is probably not coincidence then that on the same day that Atkinson married Anne, her sister, then 'Joan Jurden, widow', married at Burford 'William Faulkes of Sapperton Com: Gloucs.', and that

be exercised with identification of Walter Veyseys, because of the repetition of the name in multiple generations and lack of any surviving wills. If the elder Walter, and not his son of the same name, was residentially separated from a wife Elizabeth, then the inventory and administration of the estate of 'Walter Veysey of Broadwell' to his relict Elizabeth dated 2 August 1641 may be this Walter (OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 300/5/5), and that of Walter Veysey of Curbridge in 1652 that of their third son (*Index of Acts of Administration . . . 1649–1654*, p. 378), though the High Commission case describes Walter as 'of Burford'. The elder couple's sixth son was Simon, so cf. also the binding by Walter Veysey, shoemaker of Bradwell (Broadwell), of his son Simon to the Currier's Company in 1632/3 (*London Apprenticeship Abstracts, 1442–1850*; <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/record?id=origins%2flondonapprentice%2f51497%2f126470> accessed Nov. 2016). Simon the son of Walter the elder received a £50 annuity in Robert's 1635 will. The residences of Walter Veyseys in Broadwell and Curbridge must be related to the leases held in each place by Robert the Elder at his death, including a mortgage of Curbridge lands to Walter Veysey for £700 (BL, Add. MS 38960). Cf. *Visitations of Oxfordshire*, p. 257. I can find no Oxon. burial entry for either Walter Veysey.

⁵⁰ Gretton (ed.), *Burford Records*, pp. 352–3, 446. In Nov. 1648 John Jordan, clothier of Witney, entered a bill in Chancery complaining that he had bought the lease of The George from Robert Veysey's heirs for £800 in January, and that Richard occupied the same unlawfully, though he (Jordan) had lost the indenture in question (TNA: PRO, PROB C 3/449/120; bill only). For Richard m. Anne, widow of John Collier, see the 1665 will of her son, Robert Collyer, ironmonger of London: 'unto my honored Father in Lawe Master Richard Veysey' £10, 'and to my deare Mother Mistriss Anne Veysey his Wife' £20 (PROB 11/318/516). Richard was buried at Burford 27 March 1667; see further his will and inventory (OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 68/4/4); R. Moody, *The Inns of Burford* (2007), pp. 12–17; Catchpole et al., *Burford*, pp. 67–70, 99.

⁵¹ Pembroke's concession to Veysey was dated 23 Nov. 1622 (CCED, Appointment Record ID 89142), where 'Veysey' is mistranscribed as 'Noyse'. Atkinson, described upon institution to Overton as M.A. and a licensed preacher, does not appear with certainty in Cambridge or Oxford alumni registers. He died at Overton in 1643. His 1639 will's forceful affirmation of Church of England doctrine as 'true and orthodoxe' coupled with a rejection of the 'meere imposture' of 'popery' suggests defensiveness over charges of Laudianism; cf. also his testamentary request for burial 'at the North end of the com[m]union table where I vsed to kneele & celebrate the holy com[m]union', and complaints lodged against him in 1635 for preaching only once a month: Wiltshire and Swindon Archive, P1/A/92 (inventory 14 March 1643/4; will proved 12 March 1649); Richard Browne v. Thomas Atkinson, libel action and case papers from College of Arms Court of Chivalry, transcribed by Roy Price (<http://www.northcravenheritage.org.uk/NCHT/RoyPriceArchive/COURTCASES/EnglishCourtCasesdfs/75brownevatkinson.pdf>, accessed Nov. 2016).

Veysey purchased a long lease of Salperton rectory from Faulkes in 1625.⁵² So whereas the heads of more conventional gentry families enhanced their status through the strategic marriages of sons and daughters, and invested in legal training for sons that would be useful in managing family estates, the unmarried *arriviste* Veysey improvised the same in Burford through his siblings and their children. Also apparent in these manoeuvres, though, is Veysey's generosity, at least to members of his family. Veysey made remarkable efforts to raise not just himself, but also his entire extended family, to a status that neither their birth nor means would otherwise afford, and that in a single generation.⁵³

FEUDS IN CHIMNEY

While Veysey was busy accumulating wealth and status in the Cotswolds, he was also keeping a hand, if at a crafty arm's length, on family interests in his native Chimney. A remarkable series of case papers from two suits first tried at the Oxford Assizes in Trinity term 1612, and then in Star Chamber later the same year, gives the first glimpse of the kinds of behaviour that prompted the rector of Ducklington's damning obituary.⁵⁴ The trouble started, as so often, with a property dispute sparked by a second marriage. On 28 November, 1605, William Minchin, head of one of Chimney's more prosperous families, drew up his last will.⁵⁵ Witnesses later testified that 'a fewe dayes before his death', Minchin called to him his 10-year old son, Henry, saying, 'heare sonne Henry I doe give thee the Lease of my howse and Lyvinge with all thinges therein Conteyned', then handed the boy the lease, 'who presently deliuered the same to his Mother to keepe for him.'⁵⁶ The widow, joint executor with little Henry, proved the will, and about four years later, married one John Huckins. He entered the property allegedly bequeathed to his new step-son, 'keeping', he said, 'a large stock of cattle there' but paying rent.⁵⁷ All was quiet until early November, 1611, when Henry Minchin, then about 18, with a dozen accomplices, both men and women, allegedly used a 'false key' to steal from his step-father Huckins' chest the lease he had been given as a child. When challenged, the mob threatened to set fire to the house. Days later, they assembled again, this time 'armed and arrayed with longe bills longe pick staves long prongs guns chardged with shott and powder swords and Daggers and diuers other kyndes of vnlawfull weapons as well invasiue as defensiue' and therewith entered the lands, where they 'hunted and chased' Huckins' cattle 'and shortly after kylled them and conuerted the same to the[ir owne] vses'. Then on 1 December they stole a colt valued at £4. When challenged by the constable of Chimney, they threatened that he would 'neuer goe hence alyve' and he duly fled. Local justice thus intimidated, on 8 December the confederates came armed again, this time to Mrs Huckins and her brother-in-law, whom they 'assaulted beat and hurte thretninge & swering to kyl them if they did not presently depart' the property, and then stole a rick of hay.⁵⁸

⁵² *VCH Glos.* 9, p. 160.

⁵³ Cf. Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 60–8, 270–3.

⁵⁴ This narrative relies on the complaints, responses, interrogatories, and depositions surviving from the two Star Chamber cases, which seem to have been prosecuted simultaneously. Although there is significant overlap, TNA: PRO, STAC 8/156/29 (Hastings v. Veysey) sues for subpoena of defendants found not guilty at the Assizes of fraud relating to the disputed lease; STAC 8/174/1 (Huckins v. Minchin) requests prosecution of the same defendants for riot and assault over the same lease.

⁵⁵ OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 43/3/19 ('William Minchin of Chimney', written 1605, proved 1606); Minchin's was one of only four Chimney estates valued at over £100 in the century (*VCH Oxon.* 13, p. 83).

⁵⁶ TNA: PRO, STAC 8/165/29, m. 1 (joint answer of Toby Colclough and Joan Minchin, defdts). Colclough, witness and scribe of William Minchin's will, is described in the case papers as 'MA' and 'of Boxford, Berks, Clerk'; he does not appear in theclergydatabase.org.uk/; cf. *A Cambridge Alumni Database* [<http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search-2016.pl?sur=Colclough&suro=w&fir=Tobias&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&z=all&tex=&se=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50>, accessed Oct. 2016].

⁵⁷ TNA: PRO, STAC 8/165/29, m. 2 (joint complaint of John Hastings and John Huckins).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* STAC 8/174/1 (bill of John Huckins and John Hastings).

But just who was in this mob, and why was it prompted into action so suddenly in November, 1611? The answers are not unrelated. On 25 November, at Standlake, Henry Minchin had married Anne, daughter of Simon Veysey of Chimney.⁵⁹ And the abettor of Henry Minchin and ringleader of the violent Chimney gang was Simon Veysey – brother of Robert.⁶⁰ When a bailiff's deputy came in search of the stolen cattle, his party was met on the highway by Minchin, who shot at them, and Veysey, who brandished a pitchfork. And when a sheriff's party ventured to Chimney on 9 January, Veysey and Minchin were successfully arrested only after they 'sore beate hurte & wounded the said Sheriffs officers' in an attack with daggers.⁶¹ So young Minchin's sudden turn against his mother and step-father was supported, and perhaps prompted, by the determination of his new father-in-law to see him and his Veysey bride possessed of one of the finer messuages in Chimney. In the suits and counter-suits that followed, no witness ever denied the riots and assaults; in fact several corroborated John Huckins' account. One, John Robinson of Shifford, explained that he had happened into Simon Veysey late one evening and been invited to his house, where he found a large gathering of people who 'did drink together at the said house' before setting out on their assault and hay-stealing. William Wodley of Oxford added the further detail that when Mrs Huckins 'did crie out murther, murther', Simon Veysey had 'called for a gunn and sayed that hee would shoot' both her and her husband.⁶²

But where was Robert Veysey, now of Taynton, in all of this? He did answer interrogatories in the riot case, in which he denied being part of the cattle rustling or (he added, in point of fact) of stealing any of Mrs Huckins' butter. And he effusively acknowledged that he had made multiple visits to the disputed Chimney property in the entourage of the JP sent to investigate the disturbances – his patron, Sir Giles Bray.⁶³ But here we need to attend to the Star Chamber case that was concerned more with the disputed lease than the riot. Both cases were brought jointly by Huckins and his master, John Hastings of Yelford manor.⁶⁴ They disputed Henry Minchin's account of receiving the lease from his father's hand, maintaining instead that the widow Minchin had been forced by debt to sign the lease over to Hastings for a four-year term for £100, and that Hastings had in turn rented it out to his servant, Huckins. A conspiracy to 'defeate and defraud' them of their 'interests in the sayde messuage' was, they claimed, hatched by Minchin, who was confederated not just with Simon Veysey, but also with Robert Veysey of Taynton. On 27 December, 1611, Hastings and Hutchins claimed, Henry Minchin entered the property, where he sealed 'a writing purportinge a lease' of it to one William West, who had been retained as a front-man for Minchin and the Veyseys for 'thus dispossessing and defrauding' Hastings.⁶⁵ The brains behind the plot, 'The sayd Robert Veysey and Symon Veysey being very contentious persons', in February 1612 (after the sequence of assaults and riots) then 'at theyer owne charges' but in the name of William West, prosecuted a writ out of King's Bench for the arrest of Hastings and two of his servants. So, 'by the procurement and appoyntment of the sayd Veyseyes', Hastings et al were arraigned in Easter term, and their case, still prosecuted in the name of West, heard at the Oxford Assizes in July. The jury's

⁵⁹ Henry Minchin married Anne Veysey at Standlake, 25 Nov. 1611 (parish regs.).

⁶⁰ Simon was Robert's next eldest brother (*Visitations*, p. 256). He had brought suit for defamation in 1591 against John Canning of Standlake for calling him 'that whoremaster knave' and claiming that at the Blue Boar in Oxford the landlady 'had plucked [a] whore from between Veysie and [Canning's] father-in-law, who had never been the same man since' (Howard-Drake (ed.), *Depositions 1589–1593*, no. 68). Simon never removed from Chimney, but his sale of Burford property in 1636 and 1637 suggests that he benefitted from Robert's interests there (Gretton, *Burford Records*, pp. 327, 401). See further his will (signed with 'his marke' 14 May, 1640; proved 19 Aug.), and inventory (25 May) (OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 68/3/23).

⁶¹ TNA: PRO, STAC 8/174/1 (bill of Huckins and Hastings; interrogatories, Feb. 1611/12).

⁶² TNA: PRO, STAC 8/174/1 (depositions of John Robinson of Shifford, 20 May 1612; William Wodley of Oxford, 23 June 1612).

⁶³ Ibid. STAC 8/174/1 (deposition of Robert Veysey, 10 June 1612).

⁶⁴ For John Hastings of Yelford, see *VCH Oxon.* 12, pp. 208–9.

⁶⁵ Probably William West, husbandman of Standlake; cf. OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 70/1/73 (1621).

verdict went against Hastings and Huckins, and in favour of West. But, however biased, it is Hastings' and Hutchins' account of Robert and Simon Veysey's behaviour at the trial that is most interesting. Robert, Hastings said

not onely solicited & followed the same cause at the sayd assises in his owne person he not being any councellor attorney or learned in your Majestieis lawes but alsoe then and there ymbraced & surveyed the Jurye being returned and sworne for tryall of the sayd yssue & retheyned councell and attorneyes for and concerninge the sayd tryall & payd them theyer fees in that behalfe with his owne proper monyes against your majesties lawes and statutes in such case made and provided and in performance of the plott aforesayd[.]

In addition to suborning the jury in a case in which he was a defendant, Robert was also charged by Hastings with suborning witnesses. Also implicated was Simon Veysey, who Robert, it was said, 'produced as a witnes to testifie' and to display 'a certayne writinge' said to be 'a true copie' of the lease to West.⁶⁶

But having lost this case at the Assizes, Hastings and Hutchins pursued their two cases in Star Chamber, one against the Assize ruling (based on Veysey's suborning at the trial), and another pressing the charges of riot and assault. And, although Robert was not named as defendant in the fair copy of the complaint, his name was later interlined, not just to add him to the list of the defendants, but also to accuse him of planning the riots, having promised the rioters that he 'would maintaine them and save them harmles', and securing and paying for their representation in court.⁶⁷

No rulings from Star Chamber survive. But in an ironic documentary twist, we do know its outcome for Robert Veysey. It is ironic not just because it is from Veysey's own hand, but also because it is in the course of Veysey revealing himself in another act of brazen self-interest. In the State Papers is the December 1616 'humble petition of Robert Vesey' to the Lord High Treasurer Suffolk, which opens, 'whereas your poore petitioner was in the Michaelmas Terme 11^o Jacobi Regis [1612] by a decree in the high Court of Starre Chamber fyned in three hundred powndes to his Maiesties vse for riotts and other offences . . .' It would be a boon to know what the 'other offenses' of which he was found guilty were. But we do know that although he was miles away in Taynton, Robert Veysey orchestrated the riots and assaults in Chimney. Perhaps true to form, Veysey's petition to the Lord Treasurer had nothing to do with contrition, but rather was written to thank Suffolk for already having reduced his fine to £100, and to ask further that he be allowed to pay in instalments, 'your poore petitioner being no way able to make present payment . . . for that his estate is very much empayed'.⁶⁸

AN HEIR AND A SEAT FOR THE HOUSE OF VEYSEY

Whether Veysey's estate was 'impaired' in 1613 may be open to question. For it was at exactly this time that he took his first steps to settle it upon a chosen heir. His choice is good evidence of how new the Veyseys were to gentry status, for in it Veysey ignored the stabilizing custom of primogeniture. As Robert declared to the heralds in 1634, he had never married. In the absence of legitimate issue of his own, convention, then, would recommend inheritance of his estate by his brothers: Simon of Chimney, and Walter of Burford. Were Robert to prefer instead one of the next generation, the eldest nephew would have been conventional, and it would

⁶⁶ TNA: STAC 8/165/29, m. 2. Joan Minchin of Chimney, named as a defendant, denied upon examination that either Robert or Simon had suborned her or any other witnesses, but claimed that she and her husband were 'serued with process' by Simon to appear at the Assizes; when she asked him 'who shall beare our Charges . . . for our travell to Oxford', he 'deliuered her sixe shillings or thereabouts towards ther Chardges & expences' (STAC 8/165/29, m. 4).

⁶⁷ Ibid. STAC 8/174/1 (interrogatories, Feb. 1611/12). No responses survive.

⁶⁸ Ibid. SP 46/70, f. 137.

have been almost impossible to exhaust Robert's supply of nephews. Simon's son Robert, as the eldest son of Robert's next-eldest brother, must have had the strongest genealogical claim, and had no doubt been christened with precisely such great expectations from his namesake uncle.⁶⁹ And Robert and Simon's younger brother Walter had a perfectly biblical tally of seven sons. Of these, the obvious heir would have been Walter's eldest, William. But though William Veysey would eventually be appointed Robert's executor, he was not to be his chief heir. That honour went to his next younger brother, Robert, in a sharp deviation from conventions of inheritance, and for reasons simply of affection and sentiment.⁷⁰ As this younger Robert (d. 1666) claimed in one of the many suits that would ensue between him and his elder brother, their uncle 'did always manifest his love in a more free waye' to Robert, not least because he was 'of his name' (no doubt as another godson). But further – and here we might see one of the motives for the foundation of Bampton Grammar – Robert the elder was taken with his young namesake's more academic bent. William's 'educacion being but in a meane condicion,' his younger brother Robert was evidently thought to be brighter, and this was rewarded in his being 'brought vpp in Learninge, and for diuers yeares meyntheyned in the vniuersitye of Oxford' at his uncle Robert's expense.⁷¹ Generous though this was in itself, it suggests a further lack of gentry nous on Veysey the elder's part. As Heal and Holmes have shown, a university education was frowned upon by many in the period as unnecessary, even frivolous, for an heir who needed to be trained up in estate management, not the liberal arts. Furthermore, only among the 'greater gentry' was university education common.⁷² So in educating his heir at Oxford, we see Veysey rushing to imitate the truly grand among the class he had only nominally joined, and ignoring the fact that young Robert had neither a landed upbringing, nor even a rural agricultural one, but instead was the son of a shoemaker, raised in the high street of a provincial town – very much 'of Oxon pleb.'⁷³ Yet the wholesale preferment of the younger nephew was, the uncle said, for nothing less than 'the rayseing and meynthenance of his [Robert the elder's] house.'⁷⁴

Robert the elder had decided to settle the 'house' of Veysey on his nephew Robert long before he matriculated, aged 18, at Queen's in 1618. In about 1613–14 his uncle contracted the boy's marriage to the daughter of Edward Chadwell of Chipping Norton. According to his own later testimony, Chadwell at this time thought that he would never have a son, and he settled on Veysey as partner in his plans for his two daughters because he thought Veysey 'a man of good estate and hauinge noe children and intendinge to make one Robert Vesey his brothers sonn his heire and to conferr vppon him all his wholle estate'. Their articles of agreement stipulated that after the marriage of the elder Chadwell daughter to young Robert Veysey, Chadwell's estate would devolve upon the young Mr and Mrs Robert Veysey. In exchange, the elder Veysey would give Chadwell £1,500 for his younger daughter's marriage portion. Later realizing that Chadwell's lands were held *in capite*, and thus subject to wardship by the crown if Chadwell died while his daughter was a minor, Veysey convinced Chadwell to lease him all of

⁶⁹ Robert son of Simon Veysey was a lifelong tenant of Chimney, one of three of that name living or associated with the manor during his lifetime and a great source of potential confusion. He m. before 1620 Anne, dau. of Robert and Margery Bould of Chimney, with a marriage portion from his uncle Robert, the terms of which (gift or loan) were fiercely disputed between Veysey and the Boulds (TNA: PRO, C 2/JasI/B14/60; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 5/5/1). The couple seem to have been childless. Robert's will was written 20 May 1655 and proved 15 Feb. 1656 to his relict Anne; he styled himself 'Gent' and requested burial 'in the Chancell of Sheifford near to my father & Vncl'e' (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/252). See also his widow Anne's nuncupative will and inventory (OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 68/4/5; Jan. 1672).

⁷⁰ *Visitations*, pp. 256–7; the pedigree itself reflects the promotion of 'Robert 2nd sonne' to the primary position in descent from Walter, with William displaced and unenumerated.

⁷¹ TNA: PRO, C 2/ChasI/U8/61 (Veysey v. Veysey, joint answer of Robert and Anne Veysey, 19 Jan. 1640).

⁷² Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 261–4.

⁷³ Foster, *Alumni*, 'Veysey, Robert [Veysey]'. It seems highly likely that Robert would have attended Burford Grammar School.

⁷⁴ Bodl. MS dd Harcourt 109/28.

his Oxfordshire property, with allowance for Chadwell to retain the profits. '[M]anie mutuall curtesies and kindnesses' afterwards passed between the two men, including Veysey making several loans to Chadwell and settling some of his very large debts, until, lo and behold, Chadwell had a son, and the deal was off. Amicable though their initial relationship had been, each man would have recognized in the other a desperation to maintain landed gentry status. For Chadwell, this was an almost frantic effort to recover from his own father's debts, which had necessitated sale of the lordship and many lands in Chipping Norton in 1608.⁷⁵ Chadwell was on his way down. But Veysey was on his way up, and the latter no doubt saw in the former a gentleman whose vulnerable rank and finances could be turned to his advantage. Accordingly, once Chadwell had reneged on the marriage alliance, Veysey unleashed his full repertoire of what the vicar of Ducklington later called his 'crafty bargaining': deliberately making loans to clients who were already in debt or otherwise vulnerable to default; swiftly pursuing suits for debt in the court of Common Pleas; alleging that leases originally for other purposes were actually security for debt; bribing tenants to enter sub-leases and undertake suits to disadvantage their landlords; and exacting the full pound of flesh from 'penal bonds' for loans, whereby, at the moment of default, the debtor was obliged for twice the principal sum, plus interest.⁷⁶

But if Veysey was set back by the collapse of the Chadwell marriage alliance, he soon redoubled his efforts to secure the future of his estate, this time back in his native Chimney. In 1617, he purchased the lease of Chimney itself, part of the manor of Bampton but with its own manorial rights.⁷⁷ Even if this was not the gentry *non plus ultra* of a freehold estate, it did carry with it the social marker of lordship. By this point, Veysey was already 62. But the 'rayseing and meynenance of his house' was to go further. To Chimney he added in April 1623, for £1,300, the 99-year lease of the adjacent manor of Shifford. In November, his nephews, the brothers Robert and William (acting for their uncle?) added for £1,633 a further 200-year term to the lease, upon expiry of the first. And in 1624 and 1625 there followed purchase by Robert the elder of two of Shifford's manor farms.⁷⁸ Then in April 1626 Veysey gathered all up in one indenture which represents one of the apogees of the family fortunes. Citing his interests in both Chimney and Shifford, he vested all of Shifford in the hands of his brother Walter of Burford, Walter's son John of Northleach, and Robert and William Jordan (sons of his sister Joan) as trustees to ensure that his lands 'maye remaine and contynewe in his name blod and kindred soe long as yt shall please god to conynewe the same'. The profits from Shifford were to be set aside for four years after his death 'for the raysing of such porcions and . . . legacies' as should appear in his will, after which it was to pass 'to th'vse of Robert Veysye of Queenes Colledge in the vniuersity of Oxon, Master of Arts', and then to his son (another Robert), and if issue of that son failed, then to the issue of sons two through six. Clearly anxious about failure of issue with the Veysey name, he added further defaults in turn to his brother Walter, then his eldest William, followed by his five remaining brothers; and, just in case, then to any sons of Walter's son Richard, then of St John's College, Oxford.⁷⁹

Veysey's 1626 indenture makes direct reference to a newly composed will, which suggests of course that the aging man thought it time to set his worldly house in order. But he had almost a decade of life in him yet, and he used it in 1630 finally to secure a bride

⁷⁵ A. Rosen, 'Two Monuments at Little Rollright, Oxfordshire: William Blower and the Dixon Family', *Oxoniansia*, 70 (2005), pp. 52–3.

⁷⁶ TNA: PRO, C 2/ChasI/C111/41 (Chadwell v. Veysey; bill of Edward Chadwell, Feb. 1626); for detailed enumeration of Chadwell's debts to Veysey, see the depositions taken at Burford 22 Aug. 1628 (C 21/C17/11). In Feb. 1650 Chadwell's son, Michael, sued Veysey's executor and heirs for unlawful prosecution of debt and seizure of lands exceeding the original amounts due (C 5/407/28).

⁷⁷ *VCH Oxon.* 13, p. 82.

⁷⁸ Bodl. MSS dd Harcourt 109/20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* MS dd Harcourt 109/28.

and a manorial house fit for his heir and his new wife. She was one Anne Blithe. And in Veysey's second clerical turn, her father was Adam Blithe, rector of Ogbourne St George (a connection perhaps made through the Atkinsons of nearby Overton). But he is described in the marriage settlement as 'Adam Blithe of Okebourne St George Parke'. This unusually gentrified style for a clergyman was probably on the strength of the purchase of leaseholds in his parish 'which cost him one thousand pounds.' In consideration of the marriage of Anne, his sole heir, Blithe promised £1,000, the £100 marriage portion she had been left by his late brother, John (a fellow and benefactor of Peterhouse), plus all of his Ogbourne lands. For Veysey's part, he superseded his 1626 deed of trust by promising 'out of his mere loue' to give Robert and his heirs sole possession of both Chimney and Shifford, reserving his own life interest, but throwing into the bargain 'one man servant and maid servant, and two geldings, sufficient keeping & maintenance & one hundred pounds yearly during his naturall life.'⁸⁰ Although such domestic maintenance in the home of the older generation was conventional for gentry newlyweds, it is possible that Veysey was remembering the very similar provision made for Giles Bray and Anne Chetwode in the marriage contract he had witnessed for their fathers twenty-five years before.⁸¹ But there was a difference that again highlights how new the Veyseys and Blithes were to the arts of gentility. Because domestic maintenance, as that for the young Brays, was conventionally in the home of the bride's parents, which allowed the young couple to learn their seigneurial roles from their elders, and in particular for the bride to learn household management at her mother's side.⁸² But although Veysey imitated the Chetwode's provision of lodging, servants, and horses for the young Brays, Robert the younger and Anne Blithe – an only child, aged only 18 – were to learn management of marriage, estate, and household not with her parents, but with the groom's 75 year-old bachelor uncle.⁸³

That the domicile of the Veysey heirs was to be in Chimney is suggested first by the marriage settlement, where Robert Veysey denominates himself for the first time not as 'of Taynton', but as 'gentleman of Chimney'.⁸⁴ Also, from April 1631 Veysey began paying fees for non-attendance at the manor courts of Taynton. This very likely fixes the date of Veysey's first architectural instantiation of his gentry status, the new manor house of Chimney. A *terminus ad quem* for its construction is a letter by Veysey to his landlords, the dean and chapter of Exeter, dated 21 July 1634. On the defensive over accusations of manorial mismanagement while trying to renegotiate his rents, Veysey pressed the point of his several capital improvements to the estate, including that he had 'buylte a house w[hich] Cost me at or [about] 500^l the buyldinge and did p[ro]vide timber from other plases besides what I had of the mannor to the vallue of 50^l at Least'.⁸⁵ Probably stone, Chimney manor survived until the 1830s; two inventories of the property suggest that it was built on a traditional manorial plan of one central hall range with two projecting wings.⁸⁶ The house was no doubt deliberately of materials and scale fit to address the nearest local competition, Thomas Horde's Cote House, something captured, however impressionistically, by Michael Burghers' map for Plot's 1670

⁸⁰ Bodl. MS dd Harcourt 109/29 (15 May 1630). Adam Blithe was adm. sizar of Emmanuel College, Cambridge April 1594; BA 1598, MA 1601 (Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, 'Blythe, Adam'). His elder brother John was of Peterhouse, BA 1583, MA 1587, BD 1594, Fellow 1587–1617; and vicar of Impington, Cambs. 1588–1617 (Venn, *Alumni*, 'Blyth, John'). By his will, John left their father's Cambs. estate to Adam, and to Adam's 'daughter little Anna Blithe an hundred poundes sterling' (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/130/143).

⁸¹ Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. 2571, 2572; see above, n. 26.

⁸² Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, pp. 68–70.

⁸³ Anne Blithe was baptised at Ogbourne St George 5 Nov. 1612 (Wiltshire Family History Society transcripts).

⁸⁴ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. 108 (18 April, 26 Oct. 1631; 3 April 1633).

⁸⁵ Dean and Chapter of Exeter (DCE), MS 1998.

⁸⁶ *VCH Oxon.* 13, p. 82; BL, MS 38960 (inventory of Robert Veysey, 20 July 1635); TNA: PRO, PROB 4/25725 (inventory of Robert Veysey (d. 1700); damaged); a fair copy of the latter is in C 5/219/14. The 1700 inventory has not been consulted before in work on Chimney, and is part of my work in progress on the later generations of the Veyseys.

Natural History, which shows Chimney on the same architectural scale as Cote, and larger than the figure used for smaller establishments like the manor house of Shifford.⁸⁷

Such a seat must have been a prerequisite for attracting a match like Anne Blithe. For in addition to her father's university learning, clerical status, and lands, Anne Blithe also brought elite Oxford associations through her mother, who rejoiced in the maiden name Susan Sunnybank.⁸⁸ Her father Andreas (sometimes anglicized to 'Andrew'), perhaps a German émigré, was a Ludlow vintner or innkeeper.⁸⁹ But her brother Charles Sunnybank was a canon of Windsor, and, since 1610, ensconced in the fine south Oxfordshire rectory of Great Haseley.⁹⁰ Earlier he had proceeded BA, MA, BD, and DD from Christ Church, was a client of archbishop Whitgift, and a published Paul's Cross preacher. And he was of means substantial enough to be one of the benefactors of the Van Linge painted glass windows in Christ Church, and to advance interest-free loans to Robert Veysey the younger's Oxford college, Queen's, whose provost, Christopher Potter, married one of his daughters.⁹¹ Adam Blithe's pride in his wife's lineage also gave us the only surviving church monument to anyone associated with the Veyseys, and the most precious survival in the Victorian rebuild of Shifford chapel – the memorial to his wife Susan. When seen by Richard Rawlinson in the early eighteenth century, the 'black marble tablet' was 'Against the North wall of the chancell', in a white marble frame with coat of arms.⁹² Now, although broken and without its heraldic frame, it survives on the west wall of the rebuilt church, its faint inscription notable for its pride in lineage, if not for its poetry:

HERE VNDER LYETH INTERRED YE^E BODY
OF M^{RS} SVSAN BLITHE YE^E WIFE OF M^R
ADAM BLITHE RECTOR OF OGBORNE
S^T GEORGE WILTS HER FATHER M^R
ANDREAS SONIBANKE WAS AN
HIGH GERMAN NEERE ALYED TO
THE DVKE OF BRVNSWICK HER
MOTHER WAS OF THE ANCIENT
FAMILIE OF THE BRADFORDS OF
LVDLOW IN SHROPSHIRE THIS

⁸⁷ See Pevsner and Sherwood, *Oxfordshire*, pp. 557–8, 666.

⁸⁸ Blithe married Susan, then the young widow of John Sutton, girdler of London (d. 1603; TNA: PRO, PCC 11/102/534), at Merstham (Surrey) on 3 Oct. 1607, where Blithe was curate and Susan's brother Charles Sunnybank the rector: Bodl. MS Rawl. c 800, ff. 107r., 110r.; T. Fisher (ed.), *The Registers of Merstham, Surrey, 1538–1812* (1902), pp. 40, 43, 60.

⁸⁹ Eight children of Andrew Sunnybank and his first wife were baptised or buried at Ludlow between Dec. 1570 and 1578, including Susan, baptised 24 April 1572. He was churchwarden 1594–5, buried 14 March 1601/2; in 1584, he was one of over one-hundred vintners bound nationwide to pay 20s. per annum to monopolist Sir Walter Raleigh for license to sell wines: W.G.D. Fletcher (ed.), *Shropshire Parish Registers Diocese of Hereford*, 13 (1912); *HMC Reports 80/1 (Sackville I)*, p. 79.

⁹⁰ Baptised at Ludlow 12 Feb. 1562; collated to the 8th stall of St George's Windsor 3 Nov. 1598 (CCED Appointment Record ID 51567). Presented to the rectory of Great Haseley 31 Dec. 1610; although the true patron was the dean and chapter of Windsor (of which he was a member), this presentation was by the king, by right of the next presentation after a patron's (here Windsor's) conviction for simony (CCED Appointment Record ID 79902). Sunnybank (formerly Blithe's rector during his curacy at Merstham; see n. 86), was no doubt influential in Blithe's 1609 appointment to Ogbourne St George, which was, like Great Haseley, a Windsor dean and chapter living (CCED Appointment Record ID 176497).

⁹¹ Foster, *Alumni* ('Son(n)ibancke, Charles'); his presentations in 1597–8 to Wrotham (Kent), Little Wittenham (Berks.), and Windsor were all from Whitgift (CCED Appointment Record IDs. 241993, 241789, 41467); *The eunuch's conuersion A sermon preached at Paules Crosse, the second of February. 1617. By Charles Sonnibank, Doctor of Diuinitie, & Canon of Windsor* (1617); J. Ingram, *Memorials of Oxford*, 3 vols. (1837), vol. 1, p. 7; The Queen's College, Oxford, MS 390 (diary of Thomas Crosfield), transcript, p. 247; A.J. Hegarty, 'Potter, Christopher (1590/91–1646)', *ODNB*.

⁹² Bodl. MS Rawl. 400 b, f. 61r. The arms recorded by Rawlinson are unidentified: 'or a chevron sable between 3 black lions rampant of the 2^d. empaling azure a bend or between 3 [illeg. – 'Lions?'] of the same'.

GENT: WOMAN IN HER LIFE TIME
 MADE THIS FOLOWINGE EPITAPH
 TO BE SETT VPON HER TOMBE
 Christ birth life Death
 And doleful payne
 In life and Death
 To mee is Gaine.
 SHE DEPARTED THIS LIFE NOVEMB-
 THE 9TH 1645 AGED 75 YEARES AND
 LEFT ISSVE ONELY ONE DAVGHTER⁹³

ROBERT VEYSEY AT BUSINESS

With new connections like these, Robert Veysey must have been thrilled, and the early 1630s were (though he would not have known it) to be the pinnacle of the family fortunes. Robert and Anne had produced heirs (duly christened Robert and Anne) before old Veysey died, so he had the comfort of a secure succession. And he could survey a little empire, anchored by the larger agricultural holdings at Chimney and Shifford to the south and Taynton rectory farm to the north, with a range of smaller holdings, many of them domestic and commercial, in towns and villages like Witney, Curbridge, Ducklington, and of course Burford with not only the George Inn, but also the Rectory House.⁹⁴ Much of this was held by default from those to whom Veysey had made large loans secured by real property (in effect, mortgages), probably in the knowledge that subsequent possession was highly likely. For example, in March 1633(?) Veysey 'let' 'Guylden Mill' in Cogges for 99 years for £100 from Richard Wright and his son, with the proviso that the Wrights could redeem the same in one year for £80 plus £180. The lessors failed to meet those conditions, whereby 'Robert Veysey in his liefe tyme was absolutely possessed of the premises'.⁹⁵ Veysey had been accused of more explicitly dubious practices in the past, as in 1623 when John Deane of Stokenchurch alleged that Veysey, colluding with William Batson, Christopher Blower, and others 'did pick quarrells' with him and 'caused him to be Causelesslie arreasted . . . and to be Cast in the prison at the Castle at Oxford', whereupon Veysey and Batson, 'did p[re]tend kindnes' to him and 'proffer to lend' £200 for 'the reliefe of himselfe and his poore wife', which he 'tooke very kindlie'. They then drew conveyances of his property (which he understood only to be security for the loan) for themselves. Veysey and Batson responded that, merely 'haueing Compassion vpon the miserable estate' of the young man, they had drawn up the conveyances to help him.⁹⁶ In February 1634 Veysey was prosecuted in Chancery by none other than the vicar of Burford, Christopher Glynn, for double-dealing over malt compounded by extortionate loans and suits at Common Pleas which cheated Glynn and left one of his parishioners insolvent and fugitive – all, Glynn said, because of Veysey's 'ayminge to enriche himselfe' and 'to vex, molest, and trouble' anyone gullible or poor enough to fall into his hands.⁹⁷

⁹³ Author's transcription; the text was copied by Rawlinson. I have not been able to corroborate the intriguing claims of alliance with the duke of Brunswick, nor do the Bradfords appear in Shropshire visitations.

⁹⁴ Gretton (ed.), *Burford Records*, pp. 136–7; TNA: PRO, C 142/579/69, WARD 7/93/154, WARD 7/90/78 (inquisitions *post mortem*); BL, Add. MS 38960 (probate inventories, Aug.–Oct. 1635).

⁹⁵ Bodl. MS Ch. Oxon. a 32/781, 782.

⁹⁶ TNA: PRO, C 2/JasI/D6/12 (Deane v. Veysey, Batson and others, Nov. 1623).

⁹⁷ Ibid. C 2/CHASI/G37/51 (Glynn and Hunt v. Veysey, 1 Feb. 1634). Glynn's second wife, Margery, was not only the widow of Marchamont Nedham the elder (father of the Parliamentary pamphleteer of the same name) but later also the step-daughter of Veysey's nephew, Richard, keeper of The George: n. 48 above; OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 12/3/27 (John Collier, innholder, March 1634/5); J. Raymond, 'Nedham, Marchamont (bap. 1620, d. 1678); ODNB.

That Veysey had enemies is clearly seen in the summons' he received in June 1634 to appear before the Court of High Commission. 'Being a man very aged and infirm', he pleaded 'disability to travel' (even though two months later he swore to the College of Heralds that he could come up to town about his coat of arms). So a commission was appointed instead to take his answers to charges of desecrating a chapel in Chimney, making unlawful leases of lives, and deforesting the manor.⁹⁸ Veysey was here at the sharp end of Archbishop William Laud's campaign to protect and enhance ecclesiastical revenues, especially cathedral ones like those generated for Exeter by Chimney.⁹⁹ For once, Veysey seems to have been largely innocent. As the dean and chapter itself explained sheepishly to Laud, Veysey's lease gave him the manorial right to fell trees.¹⁰⁰ In his own pre-emptive gesture Veysey warned the dean and chapter about 'a greate complainte against me in the highe commission about a house that was sometimes called a Chappell'. He explained that it was no longer a church, but 'beyond the memory of man it hath been vused as a Church house to keepe whitsonales in . . . this seaventie yeares'. 'Which Church house', he said, 'was aboute tenn or twelve yeares agoe downe to the grounde . . . but I caused it to be buylt vpp'. Depositions taken from locals in the 1650s, when the same complaints were heard by the commissioners for church lands, corroborate Veysey's account, one remembering that although the building had at some point been called variously a 'house' or the 'old chapel', and been used for cattle, much earlier the Lord's Prayer, Creed, and Ten Commandments had been read there 'on procession days'.¹⁰¹ What Veysey did not explain, though, was that he had probably been under considerable local pressure to rebuild the 'church house'. In summer 1630 he had been fined for non-appearance in the Oxford church courts. In the following summer his steward, Robert Collier, had to appear to give satisfaction for the past year's failure to observe the 'Ancient custome' of 'providinge a drinkinge at the perambulation of Shifforde'.¹⁰² So, though Veysey did repair the redundant Chimney chapel, he seems to have been strong-armed by the courts into doing so when tenants demanded traditional manorial hospitality that Veysey had neglected. But Veysey also told the dean and chapter who was stirring up trouble for him with High Commission, albeit in an attempt to discredit the accuser: 'one Stampe whoe is a man of a most base condicion and hath neither creedid [credit] nor honestie'. Hardly base, William Stampe was a gentleman of Standlake and Chimney. And yet another Chancery case, from 1620, reveals the cause of the bad blood between the Stampes and Robert the elder: the Veysey specialty of a disputed marriage portion, this time to Stampe's sister-in-law who had married the son of Robert's brother Simon. Stampe's reporting Veysey to High Commission for alleged manorial deprivations was probably an attempt to settle scores.¹⁰³

THE WILL OF ROBERT VEYSEY

Robert Veysey wrote his last will, on 'the first day of Iuly' 1635, styling himself 'Robert Vesey th'elder of Chimney in the Countie of Oxon gent.'. It is a long document, of interest not just for the Bampton School bequest, but also for the map it draws of the Veysey clan and its interests across the county, for some startling further hints about the man's life, and for the very long shadow it cast over the lives of subsequent generations. After requesting burial by his father

⁹⁸ TNA: PRO, SP 16/261/37b, 57, 128.

⁹⁹ See A. Foster, 'The Clerical Estate Revitalised', in K. Fincham (ed.), *The Early Stuart Church* (1993), pp. 139–60.

¹⁰⁰ DCE, MS 3499/166 (21 June, 1634).

¹⁰¹ DCE, MS 1998 (21 July 1634); TNA: PRO, E 134/1656–57/Hil20.

¹⁰² OHC, MS Oxf. Dioc. c 2, ff. 41, 44, 50, 55; 187 [190]r. –v., 195 [198]v., 205 [208]r. (Vicar General, act book, July 1630; April–May 1631)

¹⁰³ See above, n. 67; TNA: PRO, C 2/Jas1/B14/60 (Margery Bould, William Stampe and Mary Stampe v. Robert Veisey, June 1620); OHC, MSS Wills Oxon. 173/4/37 (William Stampe, gent. of Chimney, 1642), 85/4/29 (John Stampe, gent. of Standlake, 1612).

in Shifford church, and a sprinkling of small gifts to the poor there and at Chimney, Taynton, Brize Norton, and Cote, the overwhelming majority of the will is taken up with bequests to his kindred. Veysey was haphazard about identifying their relationships to him and each other, so only careful genealogical work has revealed what is in fact a coherent structure to the document. He began with three sisters of unidentifiable affinity to him – Alice and Anne Vesey and Deanes Grindy (*née* Vesey), all of Standlake. Evidently Robert was one to forgive a moral slip, for Deanes, who received his ‘new erected Cottage with the Close thereunto adioyning’ in Standlake, had a ‘filia spuria’ (illegitimate daughter) baptized at Duckington 6 Dec. 1617.¹⁰⁴ Veysey turned next to his two living sisters Anne Atkinson (formerly Osbaldeston) and Joan Faulkes (formerly Jordan). He confirmed having settled upon Anne a life interest in a ‘mansion house . . . being in Burford in the streete commonly called the high streete’, reverting next to her five Osbaldeston daughters, plus marriage portions of ‘threescore pounds’ for three of them, all to be paid out of a loan of £250 made to their stepfather Thomas Atkinson. Joan too received an annuity and bequests for children and grandchildren from her first marriage, as did the Batson children of his deceased sister Cicely.

Those first bequests to his female relations and sisters show well how Veysey did not limit his ambitions for advancing the family to only male relations, but raised the women too, by marriage, marriage portions, and annuities. Next he turned to his brothers, Simon of Chimney and Walter of Burford, upon both of whom, their wives, children, and grandchildren he settled annuities. All of these were to be cash from unspecified sources, unsecured by property. Two sets of trustees were to be given £500 each to invest in properties to be held for nephews as yet minors. Then came the legacy for the Bampton Grammar School, and finally the appointment as his executor of his nephew William of Burford, younger brother of Robert, upon whom Chimney and Shifford had already been settled by indenture. With the exception of the small benevolences to village poor, and the school endowment, only blood relations received any of Robert Veysey’s estate. And the scale of William’s task as executor is seen in Veysey’s stipulation that William must bind himself for ‘three thowsand pounds’ to the will’s overseers, and undertake no transactions without their approval and signature. A final gesture, perhaps in acknowledgement of having passed William over for the inheritance of the manors, was to make William’s eldest son Robert (then a minor) his residuary legatee, as well as beneficiary of leaseholds in Broadwell and Oxford. Whereupon Robert Veysey set his hand and seal with witnesses.¹⁰⁵

But rather than settling the house of Veysey, the will tore it apart; the document’s flaws and the in-fighting caused by it more than explaining the twenty-year delay in the construction of Bampton School. The will was proved, with William Veysey as executor, on 22 October. But a case was immediately brought against the probate by Robert’s three remaining siblings (Joan Faulkes having died) and some of their children, who claimed that the testator ‘did not live to perfect’ the will. This, they claimed, was evidenced by a suspicious blank left at the end of the document, the omission of ‘divers of his kinsemen and freinds’, and the irregular mention of plural ‘executors’ when only one, William, was actually named.¹⁰⁶ The judges responded in December by upholding the will, and William’s executorship.¹⁰⁷ But, being Veyseys who had

¹⁰⁴ The father was alleged to be one Nicholas Parsons, whose sister Joan Sury ‘out of malice, got the wench [Veysey] to say’ that the father was Robert Whiting of Hardwick (Howard-Drake (ed.), *Depositions 1616–1622*, no. 32). Deans Veysey married William Grindy at Standlake, 4 June 1632.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: PRO, PROB 11/169/189. Appointed as overseers were ‘my loving Nephew William Batson of Burford gent Iohn Iorden Robert Cleeter and Richard Veysey’. Batson, Jordan, and Veysey were all nephews. Robert Cleeter (buried Clanfield 2 Jan. 1638) died owing £26 to William Veysey (presumably a debt to Robert’s estate); see OHC, MS Wills Oxon. 296/3/2 (inventory and account, 13 Jan. 1637 and 13 July 1640). The will was witnessed by ‘Robert Veysey Iunior’ (his heir), Thomas Napkin (curate of Standlake; *CCED* Person ID 13866), and Edward Bush (unidentified).

¹⁰⁶ Recited in TNA: PRO, C 2/ChasI/U8/61 (Veysey v. Veysey; joint answer of Robert and Anne Veysey, 19 Jan. 1639). These alleged irregularities do not appear in the registered copy.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* PROB 11/169/189; PROB 11/169/421 (sentence; another copy is OHC, DY VII/i/2).

not received the ruling they wanted, they turned to Chancery, where a stream of cases shed light on what the real problem was – not just that William was not paying out legacies quickly enough, but, further, that the will bequeathed far less than the legatees had been verbally promised, and finally, that the estate was nothing as large (in real terms) as all had expected. Within the year, Walter and John Veysey (nephews of Robert the elder by Walter the elder) sued their elder brothers (the manorial heir Robert and executor William), claiming that their uncle had left them properties now falsely occupied by Robert and William. Walter claimed that his uncle had already given him an ‘estate’ of £700 upon marriage. But the probate inventory shows that this was a typically self-interested ‘gift’, being in fact the assignment of Curbridge property by Walter to his uncle for a ‘consideration’ (loan) of £700, the bond to be cancelled only upon payment of £56 per annum for seven years. But further, he said, his uncle, ‘haueing a good respect and affeccion vnto him . . . for the prosecution and lookinge to of diurse of the suites in lawe and affaires of him’, had also promised him Chimney lands not engrossed in the Bampton manor moiety settled on his brother, Robert. John, for his part in the suit, complained that his uncle had granted him leases of property in Witney and promised others, and ‘often promised and declared freely to give’ him ‘several summes of money for and towards his education and otherwayes’.¹⁰⁸ The next year, the sisters Osbaldeston (Veysey’s nieces) petitioned that they had not received their marriage portions ‘as might suffyciently advance and preferr them according vnto their degree and quallyties’. This, they said, was in spite of the fact that Veysey had died ‘possessed of a greate personall estate in mony hushold stufte plate Iewells leases goods and other thinges to the value of £20,000 and vpwards’. The culprit, they said, was their executor cousin, William, who was ‘mynding and intending to deceave and depryve’ them, even though as executor ‘the some of £10,000 att the least’ had come into his hands.¹⁰⁹ All of these claims demand attention, since at exactly the same time the townsfolk of Bampton were becoming equally restless because no funds had been forthcoming for their promised school. They successfully petitioned for a charity commission, which convened in Oxford in January 1638 and commanded William’s compliance with the terms of the will relating to the school.¹¹⁰

But there were reasons why William was slow to pay his own kin, much less the trustees for the new school. These become apparent in his answers to the early complaints in Chancery. First, in 1636, he noted the delay caused by the legal challenge to his executorship, and the need for ‘some other p[er]son that is learned’ to help him ‘pervse [Robert’s] Chest of writings’. A year later the size of his task was clearer. To the Osbaldeston sisters’ specific complaint about their marriage portions, he rightly pointed out that according to the will, their legacies were to be paid out of a loan that Veysey had made to their step-father. In the suit against his younger brother Robert, now tenant lord of Chimney and Shifford, William further explained the difficulty caused by Robert the younger and Robert the elder having lived together for five years at Chimney manor: ‘all the books writings specialties of debts and accompts of and concerning the goodes and personall estate’ of the testator were under the same roof as the chief heir and his wife, where they ‘had access to the roomes, closets, studies, chests trunks and boxes, wherein his money, gould specialties debtes plate iewells and cheifest estates lay’, as well as his ‘divers books’ of accounts. To all of this, William said, Robert the younger and his wife Anne forbad access by either him or the appraisers appointed for probate – all, William said, ‘to hinder . . . recovery of the same’ by him as executor.¹¹¹

As so often in Chancery cases, there is no doubt exaggeration on both sides, clearly animated here by William’s pique at the favouring of Robert (‘being but a younger brother’), and by everyone involved ‘repyning at the smale meanes’ left them. Fortunately the probate inventory

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. C 2/ChasI/U10/23 (Veysey v. Veysey, May 1636).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. C 2/ChasI/09/30 (Osbalston v. Veysey, June 1637).

¹¹⁰ J.A. Giles, *History of the Parish and Town of Bampton* (1847), pp. 28–30.

¹¹¹ TNA: PRO, C 2/ChasI/U10/23.

survives and allows judgment of the competing claims. First to ring true is William's claim that his younger brother and his wife, even if they did not go so far as to deny entry to the manor house itself, might have laid claim to some of the testator's moveable goods in it. The room-by-room inventory, taken 21 July 1635, does reveal a handsomely furnished property: the two parlours and two bedchambers and cockloft all with feather beds, pillows, linen, curtains and rods, and carpets; and those and the hall and study with joined tables, stools, presses, cupboards, and trunks; the two kitchens fully equipped with utensils, pots and tubs, and one with mills, vats and measures for malting; the dairy house with weights, measures, a cheese press, and cream pots; a linen store with diaper napkins and sheets; and barn, brickyard, and carthouse with grain, hay, carts and two ploughs. Livestock totalled eight horses, thirty-four cows and calves, and five bulls. But although the 'Lower Studdie' contained '40 peeces of pewter', there was no silver, plate, or jewels, and only £60 in ready money.¹¹² The sum total 'in readye money household and Cattell' was 324^l 11^s 11^d. But most useful for understanding the nature of Veysey's greater wealth and how he had accrued it is, first, the inventory's concluding enumeration of 'Leases and morgages', twenty-two in all and amounting to 3844^l 17^s 8^d value. Only ten of these, including Taynton rectory farm (at 600^l, the most valuable) are simple leases by Veysey of property without provisos. The other eleven are mortgages with provisos for their cancellation only upon repayment. Veysey's major manorial leases of Chimney and Shifford are of course not included, already having been settled upon Robert the Younger. There then follows an unenumerated sum of 'debts by bond conceaued to be good', at 3228^l 8^s 9^d; and a further 1072^l 19^s 8^d of 'hopefull debts conceaued to be due'; and 947^l judged 'desperate debts'. With the household stuff and cattle, the grand total of Veysey's inventoried estate was 9502^l 17^s 7^d. Setting family disputes aside, it must first be said that, in Chimney terms, this was indeed a staggering amount in a century when only three other testators there left property worth more than one hundred pounds. And it proves that the Osbaldeston sisters were well-informed when they claimed that ten thousand pounds of net value came into William's hands as executor. But for William the devil was in the detail – some mortgages were already settled and void, others disputed, and yet others bequeathed in the will. Over £3,000 pounds of Veysey's net worth was in the moneylender's ('usurer's') instrument of penal bonds, often difficult even for a sharp like Veysey to realise. The sizeable amount of 'desperate' debt would likely never be recovered.¹¹³ As he answered to his Osbaldeston cousins' suit, having paid Veysey's debts ('above £800 besides legacies') he had 'payd more then this defdt hath received'.¹¹⁴

So, far from becoming rich through his executorship, as some of his siblings and cousins alleged, William faced not just decades of suits from them, but also costly suits of his own against his uncle's debtors and mortgagees (like the Chadwells) to raise cash to meet his obligations, including that for Bampton School. These efforts were then further complicated by the disruptions of the 1640s, when, as he lamented in 1648

these intestine warrs and distractions, and this defendant livinge where the course of law and Iustice was obstructed by the souldiary could take noe course for foure or fiue years . . . to recover one penny of the money due to his Testator, And the Legacies beinge due, before these tymes, and some Annuities run in arreare, and this defendant sued and threatned by many . . . And many of the debtors which were endebted to the said Robert

¹¹² BL, Add MS 38960; far more sparsely furnished were Veysey's other properties: a hall and kitchen at Taynton (5 Aug., presumably the rectory farmhouse); a Ducklington property with 14 acres of crops (8 Sept.); a ten-room hall house at Broadwell, with 'woolhouse' and brew-house (2 Oct.); and a house at Burford void of all but a chest (6 Oct.).

¹¹³ BL, Add MS 38960. Two mortgages valued at £200 each (to Robert Collier for four yardlands at Upton and to William Collier for two yardlands at Taynton) are marginally annotated as paid. Of further interest is entry number 20, 'Two leases', presumably mortgages, 'from Iohn Tompson of the Manno[ur] of Bradwell Odingsells in Com Oxon w^{ch} haue byn twice decreed to Robt Veysey . . . by the direction of the said Court of Chancery' for which Tompson was in default. Cf. *VCH Oxon.* 17, pp. 27–8.

¹¹⁴ TNA: PRO, C 2/Chas1/09/30.

Veysey . . . are dead . . . and many other soe disabled and impouerished . . . that hee hath beyn & is inforced to absent himselfe from his home for feare of Arrests.

He even sold in the same year the only land (in Taynton) that he had been given by the uncle who left him the poisoned chalice of executorship.¹¹⁵ It is small wonder that Bampton School was not finally built and opened until 1652.

ROBERT VEYSEY – CHILDLESS?

William died in Taynton in 1667, having weathered suits, family acrimony, and a civil war, and he must have breathed a sigh of relief when the Restoration brought some degree of domestic and national calm. But in February 1665, he had received another bill of complaint issued out of Chancery, this time from a pauper who described herself as ‘Susan Read of the parish of Newington in the County of Surrey widow’, ‘being of the age of eighty yeares and upwards’, and none other than ‘sole daughter and heire of Robert Vessey’. Her story, told in the third person by her advocate, deserves quoting at some length. She claimed that she was:

by reason of the death of yo[ur] Oratrixs mother presently after yo[ur] Oratrix was born put out . . . to Nurse sometye in one Countrey then in another and so . . . continued a Boarder at Worcester & other places by the appointment of her said Father till . . . the age of about eighteen yeares when yo[ur] Oratrix father placed her with the Lady Gray in the County of Oxford as a Companion for her where yo[ur] Oratrix unfortunately married one Frances Ferrys Gardner to the said Lady Gray Where vpon yo[ur] Oratrix said father conceived so great displeasure . . . hee declared hee would neuer owne yo[ur] Oratrix for his daughter any more Your Oratrix said husband . . . finding the great expectac[i]on hee had of yo[ur] Oratrix great fortune as being the sole and only daughter and heire to her said Father to bee frustrate . . . did leave the said Countrey and coming vp to London with yo[ur] Oratrix lived in Southwarke where . . . giving himselfe vpp to ill husbandry did very much abuse and wrong yo[ur] said Oratrix by beating and otherwise so as shee was often in danger of death by his cruell vsage.

Upon hearing of her alleged father Robert Veysey’s death, she said, she had come up to Burford where she was ‘consoled’ by his executors and overseers, who told her ‘to bee of cheere and to feare nothing for shee should not bee wronged by any[,] that they would haue a care and looke after her said fathers estate for her vse.’ Soon after, William and one of the will’s overseers, William Batson, came up to London to tell her that the will ‘had not so much as taken notice of yo[ur] Oratrix in it or giuen her any thing’. Whereupon she entered a caveat in the Prerogative Court against the will, which prompted Veysey and Batson to come to her again ‘in a very loving maner’ where they said ‘that they much wondred shee would put them and herselfe to trouble in opposing the prooffe of her said Fathers will since what they did was most for her good and benefitt’, because if her husband found out about her inheritance, he would ‘spend it all and beate and abuse her’. They allegedly convinced her to withdraw her challenge to the will upon payment of ‘twenty shillings as a present earnest’ for more to come. But the two men never made good on their promises of more, latterly even denying her paternity, and thereafter did ‘suffer your poore Oratrix for foure yeares last past in her old age to begg from doore to doore’. She added that ‘the Church booke of Shepheard [i.e., Shifford] Church’ where she ‘was baptized is imbezzelled’ and that in the sixty years since she left Oxfordshire her closest relatives had all died, leaving her destitute.

Was Susan Ferris a fraud? There are some holes in her story. By the time of his death, Robert was not ‘of Burford’, nor was he buried there. There is no ‘Lady Gray’ to be found

¹¹⁵ Ibid. C 7/348/70 (Turner v. Veysey, 1648).

in Oxfordshire at the time. She identified Batson as ‘of Moreton Hinmost in the County of Leicester’, but he was then of Bourton-on-the-Hill, with property in Moreton-in-Marsh (Glos.).¹¹⁶ Were these just the mistakes of old age and fading memory, or were they clumsy errors in a fabrication? Several things, though, ring true. Spiriting an illegitimate child into service in another county is believable, and Ferris’ meetings with Batson and Veysey sound too specific to be made up. As for the purloined Shifford registers that she infers would have proved her paternity, Robert Veysey had used them in evidence in a court case with tenants in 1620.¹¹⁷ So they had existed, and had been in the hands of Veysey himself. Moreover, even though Veysey and Batson denied in their joint answer that Robert Veysey had ever married or had any children, they did admit that Susan Ferris challenged the will in 1635 and that she withdrew the case when they gave her ‘twenty or thirty shillings’, and that they later paid her an unspecified further sum.¹¹⁸

If Susan Ferris was a fraud, how did she mount a challenge to Robert’s will that was sufficiently threatening to inspire an executor and overseer to rush to London to buy her silence? Who, in short, was Susan Ferris, allegedly *née* Veysey? The Shifford registers may not survive – but the registers of adjacent Standlake do. And therein is recorded the marriage, on 22 September 1619, of Susan Veysey and Francis Ferris.¹¹⁹ She may of course have been just a distant relation, aggrieved that she had been left out of the rich man’s will. But the question mark over her paternity persists, especially given another detail in Robert’s will, where he again makes a self-incriminating slip: ‘Item I doe further give vnto my said brother Walter my sonnes best Gowne’. Here is firm proof that although Robert Veysey may never have married, he did father a son. His bequest of that son’s gown to his grown brother suggests, of course, that Veysey’s son predeceased him, but also that he lived to maturity. And that son was also presumably illegitimate. Veysey’s reasons for keeping base children – certainly a son, and perhaps a daughter – out of the public eye are obvious. They would hardly have been what a man obsessed with raising his family into the ranks of the gentry would have wanted to own. And they were also something that all of his legitimate relations, desperate as they were for a share of his estate, would have connived never to mention.

CONCLUSION

Such was the man who founded Bampton School. The surviving historical record confirms the rector of Ducklington’s opinion that Robert Veysey was a ‘crafty’ and ‘singular’ man, even a ‘usurer.’ There is no evidence that he was esteemed by any who were not allied to him by blood or marriage. But he did achieve in a single lifetime the gentry status that most yeomanry families took several generations to attain, and he did so not just for himself, but also for his siblings and their children. Gentility required not just an individual’s wealth, but also a dignity in one’s wider family, preferably expressible in terms of lineage, as well as in present status and for future inheritance. Most odd in Veysey’s life of ambition (and perhaps something that colours the rector of Ducklington’s remarks on Veysey’s being ‘singular’) was his failure to marry. Moralists in the period not only considered marriage ‘essential to the achievement of patriarchal manhood’ generally, but for some, failure to marry was a marker of nothing less than ‘exclusion of young men from yeoman status.’¹²⁰ Veysey’s illegitimate son (and possibly

¹¹⁶ But cf. *ibid.* E 115/48/48, certificate of residence showing William Batson liable for taxation in Leicester, 1641.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* C 2/Jas1/B14/60.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* C 6/172/87 (Read v. Batson and Vessey, Feb. 1664/5).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Francis Ferris, son of Humphrey and Joan, baptized 27 Dec. 1593 at Standlake; and the will of John Yate, yeoman of Standlake (TNA: PRO, PROB 11/96; 20 Aug. 1600, proved 10 Nov. 1600): ‘I will and bequeath vnto Humfrey Ferris Tenne shillinges in mony and my apparell w[hich] I doe vsually weare on working dayes and furth[er] I forgeue him the money and debte he oweth me’.

¹²⁰ A. Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (2006), p. 24.

a daughter), combined with his invisibility in the record until his mid-thirties, might suggest that the financial independence necessary for marriage came too late – though even then marriage and paternity were hardly impossibilities. But, as we have seen, Veysey chose to play a paternal role in his nephew's and sisters' marriages instead. And thereby he established not just himself, but his entire 'house' – albeit clumsily, sometimes fraudulently, and occasionally criminally.

There is certainly no evidence that Veysey paid very much heed to that other great marker of early modern gentility, religious piety. In a period so often thought to have been obsessed with godliness, or sermon-gadding, or private devotion, or the stirrings of Laudianism, Veysey is one of the understudied many for whom religion seems to have been little more than a settled social norm, and the church useful only for economic advantage, but never as a cause for voluntary religious enthusiasm. On this matter too, though, there is at least a consistency in the way that even when writing his will, Veysey eschewed any testamentary gestures toward piety (no instruction for a funeral sermon), nor pious endowments (no church repairs, no almshouses), not even a church monument to assert that he was a local figure to be admired. It is in fact most fitting that Robert Veysey's only visible and lasting monument is a school. For education is the only social ideal ever known to have intersected repeatedly with Veysey's usually undiluted self-interest. He educated at least three nephews at Oxford at his own expense – Robert Veysey the younger, Richard Veysey, and William Jordan, and allegedly promised another (John Veysey) similar support for education. And he recognized and addressed the need for basic grammar to be taught in the large expanse of his native southwest Oxfordshire. If in Robert Veysey the people of modern Bampton have a 'colourful' character from the past whose hard dealings and even crimes can at best be smiled at as the excesses of an ambitious rogue, they also have in his school a fine testament to the one thing about him that all can commend.