

THE SOMER RENTALS IN THE WINCHESTER CITY ARCHIVES.

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AMONGST the documents preserved in the Winchester Archives which relate to the fifteenth century history of the city are a series of rentals of property belonging to Henry Somer, a royal official connected with the Mint and Tower of London. Somer also owned the Manor of Freefolk, Hampshire. His career has yet to be carefully worked out, but a study of his rentals throws much light on Winchester at a period when the city was in decline.

The documents relating to Henry Somer's property in Winchester consist of four rolls of parchment, and nine rolls and fragments of paper. References to the property are also to be found in the *Liber irrotulatus civitatis Wynton*, the *Black Book of Winchester* and in the various Tarrage Rolls.

Parchment Rolls. These are in good condition, though somewhat obscured by damp, erasure, annotation, and much use. Each roll consists of a single skin. Three are in Latin, and have been annotated a great deal at various dates, while the fourth is in English, and not annotated. They are "Rentals", *i.e.*, lists of the tenements of Henry Somer, arranged according to their parish, and showing the tenant and the rent he was required to pay. Frequent alteration and modification of the entries indicates that the Latin rolls at any rate were used as reference lists by the rent collectors.

1 & 2. The first is 8½ in. x 29 in., and the second 9 in. x 23 in. They are of the same date, 25 March, 1417, and are almost identical in detail, though the annotations differ. The entries relating to the parish of St. Rowald in Roll 2 are too much obscured to yield anything of value.

3. 9 in. x 20 in. Apparently of about the same date, though there is no heading. This is clear from the fact that all the tenants are the same, with the exception of one entry which indicates that this roll is slightly earlier.

It seems certain that these rolls were made out when Henry Somer and Katharine first acquired the property.

4. 8½ in. x 33 in. The English Roll, written in a different hand. The date is 10 Henry VI, *i.e.*, 1432-33. This forms a convenient complete list of the holdings (see below).

Paper Rolls. These consist of sheets 11½ in. x 16 in. sewn together to the required length. The watermark is a fine representation of a stag. They are the rent-collector's annual accounts, and are dated as follows :—

1.	4—5	Henry VI	-	1425/26	(conjectured)
2.	5—6	"	-	1426/27	
3.	6—7	"	-	1427/28	
4.	7—8	"	-	1428/29	
5.	8—9	"	-	1429/30	
6.	9—10	"	-	1430/31	(conjectured)
7.	13—14	"	-	1434/35	(conjectured)
8.	14—15	"	-	1435/36	(conjectured)
9.	16—17	"	-	1437/38	(conjectured)

The top part of the roll has rotted away in the last four accounts. The account always takes the same form. First comes a heading, giving the date and name of the collector, and then a statement of arrears from the previous account. This is followed by rents received, written out in the same order as the tenements appear in the rentals, and a statement of tarrage, tax and ground-rent paid. A detailed list of repairs and their cost is then given, and the roll concludes with an account of cash sent to the Manor of Freefolk in Hampshire, then also in the possession of Henry Somer. In some of the rolls, further payments and expenses are tacked on at the end. Several tenants got behind with the rent, and their debt is noted at the foot of the roll.

Attached to the account for 6-7 Henry V is a short list of effects of Geoffrey Blake, a leche, sold after the bailiffs had been called in to extract arrears of rent.

The first six of these accounts were rendered by William Gylle, a helier (*i.e.*, tiler), who watched over Henry Somer's interests in Winchester until his death in 1433 or 1434. William was Alderman of Goldstrete for some years, and apparently successful, since he owned some property on his own account. He himself carried out a good proportion of Henry's repairs, and converted a dovecot in Logge gardyn, in Shulworth Street, into an office for himself. He lived in the house near St. Maurice Church, paying a rent fairly high by contemporary standards. There is no record of his having received any payment for his services.

He was succeeded by Richard Holyman, who was sent to Winchester, apparently from London, at Easter 1434, and was responsible for the last three accounts. He was paid 13/4 a year for his stewardship, and granted a further 6/8 for clothing.

The property was originally acquired by Mark le Fayre, several times Mayor of Winchester, Member of Parliament for the town, and the most prominent citizen of his time. His connections with Henry Somer were close, but have not been completely worked out. The Manor of Freefolk, which Mark had acquired in 1403,

PLATE IV.



A Heraldic Seal of Henry Somer.
(By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's.)

was sold to Henry Somer in 1411.¹ By this time Henry had married Katherine, Mark's daughter by his first marriage.² At about the time he sold Freefolk, Mark married again.³ But it was his daughter and son-in-law who inherited his property when he died at the end of 1416.⁴ The only property Henry acquired on his own account was the Red Hat and two associated tenements, which he bought from John Blake in 1421. The property remained with Henry and Katherine Somer until it passed into the hands of the City, where much of it has remained ever since. In 1439/40, the city was granted a license to hold lands in mortmain in relief of the impoverishment of the city, and one of the first properties acquired was that of Henry Somer, an entry in the Black Book of Winchester dated 1442 referring to its purchase.⁵ In 1441 Freefolk was also disposed of.¹ By 25-6 Henry VI, the Winchester property is figuring in the accounts of the City Chamberlains, along with a number of other holdings.

It seems clear that Henry Somer lived normally in London, since whenever a direct payment of rent is made to him by a tenant, it is in London. The Chamberlains' Rolls indicate that he visited Winchester annually, and that he was treated as a person of some importance on these occasions.

It is clear from a study of these documents that Winchester at this time was in a process of rapid decline. While rents fall in spectacular fashion, the wage rate remains constant and shows some increase in later accounts. Tenancy changes very rapidly, and there are long periods during which many of the houses remain empty. This indicates a falling population and a rapidly declining prosperity. The peak-value of the property, estimating from the first rents quoted, mostly 1417-18, was just over £40 per annum. But it is doubtful if this was ever received. From the first rents began to be reduced, and later houses were vacant for a large part of the year. Amounts actually paid to Henry Somer in the years for which accounts are extant, after taxes and expenses are deducted, are :

			£	s	d	
4—5	Henry VI	-	14	3	9	
5—6	"	-	14	6	8	
6—7	"	-	12	17	4	
7—8	"	-	12	10	0	
8—9	"	-	12	8	6	
9—10	"	-	18	10	0	(This figure includes £4 arrears of rent)
13—14	"	-	6	10	0	
14—15	"	-	5	11	8	(Approximate)
16—17	"	-	2	0	0	(Approximate)

1. *Victoria History of Hampshire*, iv, 282. —

2. *Liber irrotulatus*, MS. Transcript, p. 361.

3. *Liber irrotulatus*, MS. Transcript, p. 329, 339.

4. *Liber irrotulatus*, MS., Transcript, p. 390.

5. *Black Book of Winchester*, ed. W. H. B. Bird, p. 79.

The decline in rents seems to have continued after the city acquired the property, although at a slower rate.

A parish by parish analysis indicates that the general decline was most serious in the north-east quarter of the city, where on the banks of the brooks which flow through the lower part of the city, the city's industries were then concentrated. In this area in particular a good deal of cloth manufacture was being carried on, as is indicated by a study of the occupations of tenants. A specific example of what was happening in the area is afforded by a tenement called the Dygh Hous. This was a house over a cellar containing vats and various other dyer's implements, all the property of Henry Somer, and let to William Grene, a dyer. Grene paid $13\frac{1}{4}$ rent for the house, and was allowed $26\frac{1}{8}$ per annum from the profits of his labour. It is stated (Parchment Roll 3) that just before 1417 the revenue for Henry Somer was 40/- per annum. But by the date of the first account (1424), it was not let, and was not again used for the purpose of dyeing. The account for 7-8 Henry VI reveals its fate. From an entry in the list of repairs, it appears that the building had been used for some time for the disposal of rubbish, which had to be cleared away so that the dyer's utensils could be sold. A large lead vat which had always received special attention in the rolls, was sold by weight, the "Kingesbeme" and other weights being carried down from the Guildhall for the weighing. From this time the house was used as a store by the neighbouring tenant.

An analysis of the tenancy in this same roll (7-8 Henry VI) shows that of eight tenements in the Shulworth Street area, five were unoccupied during the period of the account.

The lists of repairs included in each account provide a good deal of information about the economic and social condition of individuals in Winchester at this period. Wages appear to have been fixed at a definite level.

At the beginning of the period under survey the wages for a skilled workman doing casual work of this kind were 5d. a day, while his mate received 4d., as did unskilled labourers employed in such jobs as cleaning out rubbish or lopping trees. By the end of the period there has been a rise of 1d. all round, so that a skilled man received 6d. a day, and his mate 5d. At the same period a house with a garden could be rented for 12/- or $13\frac{1}{4}$ a year, and barley was 5d. a bushel. [Prices at the same time remained fairly constant, with a slight fall in a few cases.] The typical house was timberframed, with lath and mud walls and a tiled roof. The mud was covered with a white-wash prepared from burnt lime. There is no mention of glazed windows, though most houses apparently possessed a fire-place and a hearth. Wells were common, and in some places bull-pens and pig-sties were attached to the houses.

All the rolls, except one (Vellum Roll No. 4) are in Latin. The text of this English roll is given below, and the map which accompanies it has been drawn up from its contents. The arabic numbering of tenements does not occur in the original.

WYNCHESTRE. This is the Rentale of Harr Somer & Katherine his Wyf in the Citee of Wynchestre made the Xthe yer' of Kyng Harry the Syxte.

The tenements in the parish of seynt Petre in fflesshmongerstrete.

1. ffyrst there is a tenement called Georges yn yeldyng sumtyme be yer' vi l. xiii s. iiii d. The which tenement is occupied now for times of viii yer' be William Benham yeldyng for the seyde tenement be yere as hit apereth be his endenturs - v l. vi s. viii d.
2. Also there is a nother tenement joynyng to the seyde Georges yn the which Thomas Coteler occupieth yeldyng be yer' - xii s.
3. Also ther' is a tenement sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xxvi s. viii d. The which John Alecre now occupieth yeldyng be yer' xxiii s. iiii d.
4. Also ther' is a Gardyn in fflesshmongerstrete sumtyme yeldyng be yer' ii s. The which Gardyn Rauf Smyth now occupieth yeldyng be yer' - xx d.
5. Also ther' is a Gardyn in the same strete sumtyme yeldyng be yer' iis. The which Gardyn Richard Syndre now occupieth yeldyng ther' for be yer' - xx d.
6. Also ther' is a nother Gardyn in the same strete the which John Chalkpoll occupieth yeldyng ther' for be yer' - ii s.
7. Also ther' is a tenement called Reed Hat occupied with Tymbre of the lordes the which is worth be yer' whan hit is lett to ferme xx s.
8. Also ther' is a nother tenement besyde the same Reed Hat vnoccupied the which was wont to yelde be yer' vi s. viii d.
9. Also ther' is a nother tenement besyde the same Reed Hat vnoccupied the which was wont to yeld be yer' vi s. viii d.

The tenements in the parish of seynt Laurence.

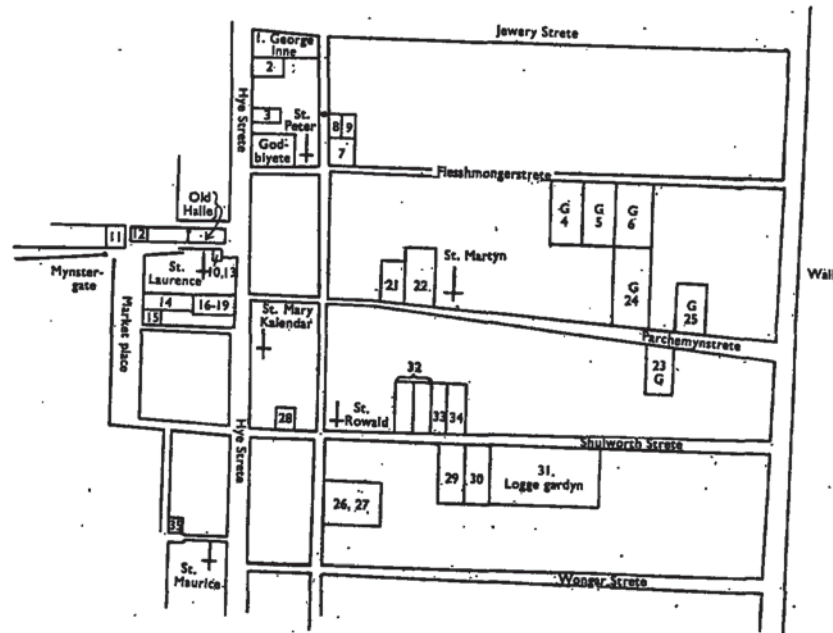
10. ffyrst ther' is a tenement in the same parish vpon a celere called paradys sumtyme in the tenur' of Harr Cornysch that is vnoccupied sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xxx s.
11. Also ther' is a tenement wyth a shoppe in the same parish simtyme yeldyng be yer' xiii s. iiii d. The which is occupied now be John Warner yeldyng be yer' - xii s.
12. Also ther' is a nother tenement in the same parish occupied be John Chary Tailleur yeldyng therfor be yer' xiii s. iiii d.
13. Also ther' is a celer called paradys occupied be the Executor of Albred Werdman yeldyng be yer' for the seyde celer - xl s.
14. Also ther' is a tenement in the market place yeldyng sumtyme be yer' xxvi s. viii d. the which is occupied be Thomas Sadeler yeldyng for the seyde tenement be yer' - viii s.
15. Also ther' is a tenement in the same parish sumtyme in the tenur' of John Gylot that is now vnoccupied and was wont to yelde be yer' xiii s. iiii d.

The tenements in the parish of seint Mary of Kalendre.

16. ffyrst ther' is a tenement in the same parish under a pentyce sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xl s. The which Thomas Shether now occupyeth yeldyng be yer' xxxiii s. iiii d.
17. Also ther' is a shop' besyde the same tenement yeldyng sumtyme be yer' xiii s. iiii d. The which is now occupied be Thomas Heyne brasyer yeldyng be yer' - x s.

HENRY SOMER'S WINCHESTER PROPERTY

Approximate positions and extents
From Vellum Roll No. 4



7. Red Hat
10, 13. Parady
16-19. Tenements in the Pancel
26, 27. Dygh Hous and John Bishop's tenement

The numbering of the tenements corresponds to that of the transcript of Vellum Roll 4.

18. Also ther' is a tenement joynnyng to the tenement above seyd vnoccupied which was wont to yeld be yer' xxiii s. iii d.
19. Also ther' is a tent' besyde the tenement above seyd in the same parish sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xxiii s. iii d. The which Thomas Emmott mercer occupieth yeldyng be yer' - xx s.
20. Also ther is a for in the Gardyn of Thomas Sadeler occupied be the seyd Thomas Emmott yeldyng for the seyd Gardyn - iii s. iv d.

The tenements in the parish of seint Martyn in parchmynstrete.

21. ffyrst ther' is a tenement wt' a colverho' in the same parish sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xl s. The which Thomas Heyne brasyer now occupieth yeldyng be yer' for the seyd tenement - xxxiii s. iii d.
22. Also ther' is a tenement wyth a Gardyn besyde the tenement above seyd sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xvi s. viii d. The which Edmond Pychard now occupieth yeldyng be yer' - x s.

23. Also ther' is a Gardyn in the same parish sumtyme in the tenur' of John Huchon cornr' sumtyme yeldyng be yer' ii s. The which John Chapman now occupieth yeldyng be yer' - xvd.
24. Also ther' is a Gardyn that Harr Cornysch sumtyme occupied yeldyng ther' for ii s. The which Gardyn John Stane hosyer now occupieth yeldyng ther' for be yer' - xx s. [sic]
25. Also ther' is a nother Gardyn in the same parish that John Chalpoll holdeth yeldyng ther' for be yer' - viii s.

The tenements the parish of seynt Rowold.

26. ffyrst ther is a tenement in the same parish that John Bisshop occupieth yeldyng be yer' - xxxiii s. iii d.
27. Also the same John holdyth a tent' called Dygh' ho' joynyg to the tenement above seyde yeldyng yeldyng for the seyde tent' be yer' - vi s. viii d.
28. Also ther' is a tenement in the same parish sumtyme yeldyng be yer' xl s. The which William Baker now holdyth yeldyng ther' for be yer' - xxvi s. viii d.
29. Also ther' is a tenement in the same parish su'tyme in the tenur' of John Potell the which is now vn occupied su'tyme yeldyng be yer' xx s.
30. Also ther' is a nother tent' su'tyme in the tenur' of Geffrey Leche that is vnoccupied su'tyme yeldyng be yer' xx s.
31. Also ther' is a Gardyn in the same parish wt' a colverho' called the Logge Gardyn in the tenur' of Will'm Gylle for his office the which is worth be yer' - x s.
32. Also ther' is a nother Gardyn in the same parish su'tyme in the tenur' of Thomas Mark the which is vnoccupied and was wont to yelde be yer' xvi s. viii d.
33. Also ther' is a tent' wt' a Gardyn su'tyme in the tenur' of John Herde the which is vnoccupied and was wont to yeld be yer' xvi s. viii d.
34. Also ther' is a tenement wyth a Gardyn sumtyme in the tenur' of Reynold Grygge yeldyng be yer' xvi s. viii d. The which Richard Harden now occupieth yeldyng ther' for be yer' xiii s. iii d.

The tents' in the parish of saint Maurice.

35. ffyrst ther' is a tent, in the same parish su'tyme in the tenur' of Geffrey Wayland the which William Gylle now occupieth yeldyng be yer' - xxvi s. viii d.
- The sum' of the tents' that are occupied - xxiii l. xvi s. vii d.
- The sum' of the tents' that are vnoccupied - viii l. xiii s. iii d.