

WHITCHURCH MANOR FARM

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ABSTRACT

Attention has been drawn to the rebuilding of farmhouses for demesne lessees in late-15th-century Hampshire, either by upgrading the small farmhouse of a bailiff or by refashioning an aristocratic residence, and six examples have been investigated in detail (Roberts 1996). To these is now added a seventh, for which both documentary and structural evidence survives, but which presents some unresolved problems.

WHITCHURCH MANOR

The manor of Whitchurch, in the medieval ownership of St. Swithun's Priory in Winchester, was leased during the 15th century. Chalk downland manors such as Whitchurch were often leased in stages, first the arable, then the manorial sheep flock and finally the whole manor, the last stage generally not occurring until the final decades of the century (Roberts 1996, 90). The few surviving 15th-century account rolls, presented by *firmarii*, show the progress of the leasing arrangements at Whitchurch. 1405 is the last surviving roll in which wheat (a small amount) was sold for cash, although the demesne continued to produce coarser grains for manorial and priory use until at least 1433. Demesne arable was probably let in parcels on short leases in the first quarter of the century. For example, when the death of John Mersshe, manorial *serviens* throughout the 1390s, was reported at the hundred court in May 1419, he was holding a meadow and 3½ acres of demesne arable. The Whitchurch account for 1433 shows the manor still in the prior's hand, but a note at the foot of the Whitchurch court roll for 1439 indicates that the court income was to be

divided between the lord and an un-named *firmarius*. In 1471 the *firmarius* was still accounting in some detail for his income and expenditure, and the account ends with an inventory of equipment which was to be returned at the end of the lease. From 1484 the leasing was complete, each *firmarius* paying £11 for the farm and some stock. The manor was in the hands of Thomas Clarke when the priory's estates were valued on dissolution, and he continued to hold it until his death in 1551 (Kitchin & Madge 1889, 88; *HRO* 1552B/035-7). The domestic buildings of the medieval demesne farm had included accommodation for a bailiff (Deveson 1998) and the farmhouse was part of the lease when the priory fully adopted leasing. Up to the time of Thomas Clarke, most *firmarii* appear to have lived in the manorial farmhouse and worked the land themselves. There is, however, some evidence of undertenancy, for in 1443 John Mone, *alias* Mowne or Mawne, sublet the manor to Stephen Bachelor, a butcher of Whitchurch (*HRO* 19M61/575).

THE NEW MANOR HOUSE

The house which was included in Mone's lease to the Whitchurch butcher in 1443 was a modest one, consisting of a hall and a cross-chamber at its east end, with a detached kitchen, stable and dovecot. By the time of Clarke's death a century later, this house had been transformed into a much grander one, with a hall, parlour and six chambers (including at least five upper rooms), a barn, stable and outhouses. Another century later, when the manor was surveyed during the Commonwealth, the six chambers had become nine, but the house was substantially the same (*WCL*

W52/76 i, 261–83). A rebuilding in the late-15th century can be dated with accuracy through the account rolls. The earlier 15th-century accounts show the normal maintenance of manorial farm buildings, and in 1464 the priory paid for repairs to the hall, chamber, stable and well-house. In 1484, however, it spent £7 10s. 3d. on a new dovecot, and in 1497 a new house was begun, at a cost in that year of £6 4s. 2d. The house cannot have been completed until the following year at the earliest, since there was no expenditure for infilling the walls, roofing or any fixtures and fittings.

The house which now stands on the site is, to all outward appearances, a four-square Georgian farmhouse, and a preliminary inspection of the interior, without disturbing plaster or panelling, would seem to confirm this impression. It is only in the roof that one can see elements of a late-medieval building. These elements comprise one sooted truss from an open hall and, at a right-angle to this, two unsoted roof trusses from a solar cross-wing.

The fact that the two trusses in this cross-wing are linked by one surviving side purlin and are set about ten feet apart (an average bay length) strongly suggests that they are *in situ* and that this part of the solar roof is not composed of disparate elements brought together from elsewhere. One truss probably formed a gable end to the block. It has three queen struts and its principal rafters, which diminish above the clasped purlins, are linked by a horizontal yoke at about one foot below the apex. These rafters have void mortices for wind braces only where they face the second truss. The second truss has mortices on both faces of its principal rafters and this alone would be enough to show that it was set within a room. However, void mortices for arched braces to the cambered collar beam, and principal rafters diminishing above the purlins and swelling at the apex to form a graceful arch, clearly indicate a decorative central truss of a high-status, first-floor chamber, or solar. The limited nature of the evidence makes it impossible to say whether this was a two-bay solar, or whether it extended further.

The sooted hall truss is even more fragmentary. Only the two undiminished principal rafters of what appears to be the hall truss survive, but their position in relation to the chamber block suggests

that they, too, are *in situ*. There is mortice evidence for clasped purlins, wind braces and braces from the principal rafters to a missing tie beam.

Clasped purlin, queen-strut roofs were common in central Hampshire from the mid-15th to the 17th century, but the arched-brace collars over the solar and in particular, the open hall, would place this roof, at the latest, in the early-16th century. Moreover, a re-used timber (in the solar roof) with a typical late-perpendicular ogee-and-roll moulding would confirm a date-range of 1450–1525, assuming that it came from this building.

Although nothing of the late-medieval house remains below eaves level, its walls were probably timber-framed, for it is unlikely that substantial stone walls would be demolished without trace, and the 1497 account is certainly for a framed house. Even in Hampshire, where building-stone was expensive, the residences of the heads of religious houses would be stone-built in the Middle Ages. Surviving examples are Lyss Place, belonging to the Abbess of St. Mary's, Winchester, and the Prior of St. Swithun's house at Michelmersh. The surviving elements of Whitchurch manor farmhouse are more likely to represent the accommodation of a late-medieval farmer than the prior.

DISCUSSION

We may now ask for whom, specifically, the priory undertook the rebuilding, and here the problems appear. The surviving 15th- and 16th-century accounts were all presented by named *firmarii*, two of whom (Robert Botrell, and then his widow Christina) were granted leases of the manor, for thirty and fifty-one years, in 1519 and 1537 respectively (*WCL* W57D/2–3). If one had seen nothing but these documents, one would have no reason to suspect anything other than a normal leasing arrangement between the priory and a local farmer. John Mone, however, had not been a farmer but a landowner, who left about twenty properties, mainly in Dorset, at his death in 1479 (*Cal IPM* iv, 394). Whitchurch manor was one of the two Hampshire properties in his possession at that time, and yet there is no mention of him in the surviving accounts or in the priory's

register during his tenure (Greatrex 1978). There are, indeed, no leases at all for Whitchurch manor in this register, and only the two Botrell leases in the next three volumes.

Free tenants generally did not appear in person at the local hundred courts, and their estates can be identified by a succession of defaults in the court records. There were two such estates in Whitchurch tithing (the relevant administrative area) in the late-15th and early-16th century. One was called 'Durdants' after a prominent local family, the other was that of John Mone and his successors. The succession of Mone's estate cannot be proved beyond doubt, but it appears to have passed to John Harrys of Broughton, who then enfeoffed John Kingsmill of all his Whitchurch lands in 1493 (*WCL Evingar* hundred court rolls; *HRO* 19M61/581). It can be glimpsed in court defaults in Whitchurch tithing during the 1520s, in the formula 'the tenant of the lands and tenements lately of John Kingsmill for the lands lately of Harrys de Broughton'. John Kingsmill's son, another John, defaulted in October 1537 for lands 'lately Mones'.

The two John Kingsmills were members of a family which rose to political and ecclesiastical prominence in the 16th century, and they were also building up their estates in north Hampshire from the late-15th century onwards. Richard Kingsmill, whose descent can be traced from forebears in Barkham (Berks.) in the 14th and 15th centuries, was called 'of Basingstoke' at the time of his son John's marriage in 1490 (*HRO* 19M61/1076-88). Richard Kingsmill began to purchase lands in Litchfield, just north of Whitchurch, in 1468 (*HRO* 19M61/238-327) and his presence in the town is indicated in 1471 when one of his servants was assaulted there (*WCL* Whitchurch borough court roll). He or the servant, however, may simply have been passing through. John Kingsmill the elder began to buy lands in Whitchurch and Freefolk in 1493 (*HRO* 19M61/554-86), and also had property in Whitchurch borough by the 1490s, when he was defaulting regularly in the borough courts. Indeed, the succession of defaults in the court records in the 1470s and 1480s suggests that Kingsmill's borough property had also been held by Mone and then Harrys. This John Kingsmill was princi-

pally associated with Freefolk at the time of his death in 1509 (Fritze 1981, 403-4) but his son John was called 'of Whytchurche' when he was granted the manors of Sydmonton, Sandford and Litchfield in 1540 (*Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* xv, 290). The latter was a kinsman, probably a cousin, of William Basyng *alias* Kingsmill, the last prior and first dean (Carpenter Turner 1973, 12).

John Kingsmill the elder made a comprehensive feoffment and demise of all his lands and tenements, including those in Whitchurch, to three feoffees in 1506 (*HRO* 19M61/1095-6). This procedure was a device for avoiding the payment of relief, and for keeping land in the effective ownership of the feoffor and his descendants. Was the manor part of his Whitchurch estate? There is no inquisition *post mortem* for John Kingsmill the elder, who died in 1509, and his will does not clarify the matter, since he left his entire estate, apart from small charitable bequests, to his wife Jane, with no accompanying description of his property (*PRO* PROB11/16Q17). There is no extant will for Jane Kingsmill, and the younger John Kingsmill had no obvious connection with Whitchurch after 1540, although there is a suggestion that the family was influential in securing the town's parliamentary franchise in 1584 (Hasler 1981 i, 172-3). If the Kingsmills had no involvement in Whitchurch manor, it is hard to account for the preservation of Mone's lease in their family archive.

After a chequered period during the Commonwealth and until the 19th century, Whitchurch manor farm was in the hands of a succession of gentry lessees, who themselves had undertenants. The Georgian and earlier reconstructions were not reflected in an increase in the rent, which remained constant at eleven pounds a year, and indeed was twice reduced in the late-18th century when two portions of the farm were split off (*WCL* W57D/24-5). Eleven pounds cannot have been an economic rent but a ground-rent, since the earlier leases generally mentioned 'divers good considerations' in addition. A truer value of the manor is indicated by £80 paid for the transfer of a three-year portion of the lease in 1615, and £945 paid when the manor was illegally sold in 1652 (*WCL* W57D/7; *HRO* 15M84/BOX/20). In the 15th century, the *firmarius* named in the accounts had often collected the manorial rents, but from 1500 at the

latest, a local man acted as collector. The lessees were still called *firmarii*, and their origin as manorial bailiffs is shown in the fact that the rent was always reduced by 6s. 8d. a year in lieu of an official gown (cf. Evans 1996, 212). But it is clear from the Cathedral's post-dissolution receipt books and registers that lessees did not reside locally.

It is not suggested that either of the John Kingsmills ever lived in Whitchurch manor farmhouse themselves. But if the land for which they were defaulting in the local courts was *not* the manor farm, it has not left even the fragmentary traces outlined above. If it was, it implies that at least some of the medieval *firmarii* and 'the tenant of the lands and tenements lately of John Kingsmill' were undertenants rather than principal lessees. The Bishop of Winchester paid for the rebuilding of Overton Court Farm for John Langton, possibly his kinsman, between 1496 and 1507 (Roberts 1996, 93). The priory's rebuilding of Whitchurch manor farmhouse, at almost ex-

actly the same time and to a relatively high standard of construction, may have been intended to make the lease an attractive proposition to a lessee such as John Kingsmill the elder, rather than to the farmers who actually lived in it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to Mr and Mrs J Hyslop, of Whitchurch Manor Farm, for permission to disturb the spiders in their roof-space, and to publish the documentary history of their house. Thanks are also due to Mrs Diana Coldicott for references to Whitchurch in the Winchester Cathedral Registers, to Mr Martin Smith for help with the structural evidence, and to Professor Michael Hicks for his valuable comments on a draft of this paper.

Particular thanks are due to R J Smith & Co, Builders, of Manor Court, Boswood Lane, Whitchurch for their financial support for the publication of this article.

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