

GODSHILLWOOD AND WOODGREEN: A SQUATTER SETTLEMENT ON THE EDGE OF THE NEW FOREST 1600–1840

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ABSTRACT

Godshillwood and Woodgreen were extra-parochial squatter settlements probably established in the 1640s, and consisting of a dozen or so households in 1730. Three periods of rapid expansion occurred, during 1730–50 (the start of UK sustained population growth), 1790–1810 (during the agricultural boom of the French wars) and 1830–40 (a period of rural distress). By 1841 the total population was 485. The livelihood of the squatters depended on a range of activities, including maintaining orchards and gardens, farming, legal and illegal exploitation of New Forest resources, trades (notably shoemaking), agricultural labour (mostly for employers in neighbouring parishes) and leasing out of lands and cottages. A gradual pauperisation of the community between 1801 and 1841 is suggested. The settlement's extra-parochial status is explored, through its relationship with Breamore Overseers and its role in the illegitimate birth traffic. The colony's level of prosperity is assessed through examination of some key families and a study of settlement examinations and 40 or so surviving wills. The social range of the community is indicated by the presence of labourers and of gentlemen, with total bequests ranging from a few shillings to £700.

Woodgreen and Godshillwood were situated in Ashley Walk at the north western tip of the New Forest. Both were extra-parochial places, but were associated with the sparsely populated Godshill tithing in the parish of Fordingbridge (6,300 acres, population 2335 in 1801) to the south. The tithing included other extra-parochial areas fringing the forest, Godshill village (to the south of Godshillwood), New Grounds, Mudmore, Amberwood and Ashley Lodge. John Wise in 1863 contrasted the 'fuzzy holts' and 'dark oak and beech woods' of these

fringes with the adjacent Avon valley to the west with its 'silver coil of waters along the green meadows', its thick hedges 'white in spring with the scattered spray of the blackthorns' and orchards glowing 'with their crimson wreath of flowers'.¹ Immediately to the west and north west of Woodgreen was the parish of Breamore (around 2500 acres, population 488 in 1801), and to the north and north-west was the parish of Hale (1400 acres, population 147 in 1801). Both had tiny eponymous villages and, squeezed between them, were the two decayed parishes of North and South Charford, meadow land not forest. Downton parish to the north, across the border into Wiltshire, had a population of 2,688 in 1801. Woodland, heathland, acid grassland, scrub and valley bog formed the major part of the terrain of Woodgreen and Godshillwood. By contrast, Breamore and Hale parishes had richer farming land, with loam and gravel. Fordingbridge had mixed soil, on a subsoil of gravel, clay and sand.²

Godshill had been farmed from the middle ages, but Woodgreen and Godshillwood (not yet known by these names) were forested until the seventeenth century. A coppice called Northwood in Godshill Inclosure was listed in a 1565 survey of New Forest woodland by Roger Taverner, at which time it included 27 acres of hazel and oak. A further survey of 1609 by John Norden recorded 14 acres of good growing hazel and willow, with the remainder of the 67 acres planted with poorer quality oak. What may have been part of the embankment of the coppice was identified on the Hale-Woodgreen Road by Anthony Pasmore in 1976. Tithes were payable to the parish of Fordingbridge.³ Coppicing appears to have been abandoned at some point after 1609, and modest squatter colonisation occurred. The first references traced

in a parish register were the baptisms of Anne, daughter of John Kimber in January 1646/7 and of Sarah, daughter of Joseph Eldridge in 1649, both of Godshillwood. Joseph Eldridge and his male descendants can be charted in Godshillwood for the next 180 years. The first traced references to Woodgreen inhabitants were the death of Dorothy Brixie in 1663 and the baptism of Mary Downer, daughter of Thomas Downer and his wife Mary (probably née Drodge) in 1664 as the couple had married in 1656. However, it is very probable that Woodgreen's foundation, like Godshillwood's, dated from at least the 1640s, for some of the registered Godshillwood settlers from the 1640s and 1650s were subsequently (and very soon) accredited to Woodgreen, among them the Downers, Wits and Richardsons. Most explicitly, John Kimber of Godshillwood in 1647 became 'old John Kimber' of Woodgreen in 1683 and Samuel Gose was described as being of Godshillwood in 1661, but of Woodgreen in 1675. It is very unlikely that all these families cleared forest plots in both settlements in the space of 30 years. The explanation would appear to be that Fordingbridge clerks initially recorded all settlers under Godshillwood, and only started to differentiate between them in the 1660s. This interpretation is made more probable by the fact that Godshillwood remained a minor settlement with just five settlers recorded in the New Forest encroachment inquiry of 1802 and, of these, only three appear to have been encroachments predating the 1730s. If the seventeenth-century Fordingbridge register was taken at its face value, there would have been around ten Godshillwood families before 1700. A summary of recorded seventeenth-century settlers and their children is given in Table 1, but there were certainly other children unrecorded. A rough estimate of population in 1700 would be 16–20 in Godshillwood (3–4 households) and 35–40 in Woodhill (7–8 households).

It is possible that the first settlers arrived earlier than the 1640s. Fordingbridge parish register survives only from 1642 onwards, and Breamore's from 1675. Hale parish registers dated from the 1620s, but the first Woodgreen record did not occur until 1689. Two other documents gave some information about

the early period. A witness deposed before a Commission of Inquiry of 1677 that 'George Harrison hath cut a great number of trees in Godshillwood within this 14 years and the neighbouring tenants of Godshills have cut as many more'. Such was the destruction that 'there is not one tree left for twenty'. Joseph Eldridge deposed that he had seen the stools of two young trees cut and carried away in the South Coppice of Godshillwood by persons unknown, and Henry Lawse of Hale saw several quantities of great limbs cut from young timber trees the previous winter and observed that two teams had been loaded in the North Coppice.⁴ *A Brief concerning tithes payable from Woodgreen to vicarage of Fordingbridge* 1689⁵ provided further evidence on origins. According to the witness John Pinhome, the name Woodgreen was current from circa 1609 and its extra-parochial status was established from the 1630s if not before. Pinhome had rented the tithes of the vicarage of Fordingbridge in that decade and affirmed that during his time, no tithes were collected from Woodgreen nor from the adjoining King's Coppice. The nature of these Woodgreen tithes was unfortunately not recorded. They could have been tithes of coppice, in which case there may have been no squatters at this point. Subsequent farmers of tithes confirmed that no tithes were collected from Woodgreen and that it did not belong to the parish of Fordingbridge, but was within the New Forest. The document also shed light on its ambivalent extra-parochial status. Francis Barry of Fordingbridge, who rented the tithes later in the seventeenth century, reported that 'upon a flying report that the inhabitants... would endeavour to intrude themselves into the said parish [Fordingbridge]' put them to the test by demanding tithes for the 'very good corne' they then had growing. The inhabitants, however, 'positively denied there was any tyth due from them to the vicarage of Fordingbridge, the said Woodgreen not belonging to the said parish'. Further proof was offered by Daniel Blackford that Woodgreen residents had paid 4d for graves to be dug, whereas Fordingbridge parishioners paid nothing. Essentially, Widow Kimber (probably the Ann Brixie who had married John Kimber in 1647), who had paid 4d for the burial of her husband

Table 1 Seventeenth-century inhabitants: Godshillwood and Woodgreen

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Christian name</i>	<i>Earliest record</i>	<i>spouse</i>	<i>death</i>	<i>Children born in colony</i>
Woodgreen					
Kimber	John	1647	?Anne Brixie x 1647	1683	Anne 1647
	Robert	1684	Margaret + 1684	1690	?Margaret (x1712)
	Thomas	1690			? Richard 1686, Dorothy 1690 +1690, Thomas +1739
	John jun.	1670	Rachel +1670	1685	
	Roger			1691	
Witt	William	1651	?Mary		Isaak 1651
	William	1683			? unnamed +1676, Steven 1683, ?Gilian 1689, Mary 1689, Julian 1691, William?
Gosse	Samuel			1657	
	Samuel	1651	Rebecca +1675	1675	William 1651, Ann +1661
Richards(on)	William	1652			Rose 1652 +1663, William 1675 +1676
	William				George 1690, Philip 1691/2, Ann 1692, John 1694, Margaret 1696, Elizabeth +1689, Mary, Sarah, Catherine
Downer	Andrew	1657	Widow +1675?	1657	
	Thomas	1664	Mary Drodge		Mary 1664, Edward 1666 +1700, Martha 1668, John 1671, Thomas +1677
	John	1674	Mary		John 1674, Matthew 1683, Andrew 1689
Brixie	Dorothy	1663		1663	
Mowland	Henry	1669	Elizabeth	1674	Mary +1669, Robert +1669
	Steven	1681	Wife +1681		
Drodge	Edward	1679	Frances Downer x 1667 + 1679		Christopher 1670, Edith 1673
	Edward	1699	Grace Hayward x 1699		

and 4d for her child, was now seeking parish relief, her request possibly being the catalyst for the inquiry recorded in the brief. The same document indicated that the Kimber and Rogers settlers were pairs of brothers, whilst Fordingbridge parish register recorded three Downer squatters, Andrew, Thomas and John, who may also have been brothers (or perhaps father and two sons). Four pairs of brothers worked together in the reclamation from the forest of Nomansland, another squatter set-

tlement close-by, colonised in the 1780s and 1790s.⁶ The squatters' surnames were common in the neighbouring parishes, so they were probably local men and women.

The local method of reclaiming woodland by hand was described by Thomas Davis in 1794. He observed that:

The wood was cut off, the principal parts of the roots grubbed, and then the rough grass and moss, and the whole surface of the land, was



Table 1 (cont.)

<i>Surname</i>	<i>Christian name</i>	<i>Earliest record</i>	<i>spouse</i>	<i>death</i>	<i>Children born in colony</i>
Rogers	Samuel	1681			Samuel +1681, ?Katherine 1689, Charles 1691, Ann 1694, Henry 1696
	Thomas	1683		1683	
Richman	William	1686	Anne Kimber x 1685		Elizabeth 1686, Jane 1690 +1690, (?Jane, Mary, Ann)
Godshillwood					
Eldridge	Joseph	1649		1694	Sarah 1649; Richard 1651, Elizabeth 1655, unnamed child +1658
	John	1687	Elizabeth Cox x 1678		John 1687
Trippock	Mary	1664	Zabedia? Batt x 1664		
	Bartholomew	1674		1674	
	Henry	1677			John 1677, Joyce 1679 +1679, Joyce 1681, Mary 1682, ?Henry (x1702), ?Ruby (x1704)
Curtis	Ann	1668	John + 1668		
Herrington	Hugh	1684	Ann + 1684		
	William (son)	1690	Elizabeth		Ann 1690, Hugh, William 1693-1765 (of Woodgreen)
Lawrence	Richard	1692		1692	
Percy	Thomas	1698			
Godshillwood or Woodgreen					
Over	William	1651	Alice +1651		John 1651
Wilder	John	1656	Alice +1656		

Sources: HRO:1725A/030 Parish registers Breamore, Downton, Fordingbridge, Hale; HRO:1729P/065 Wills of John Downer and William Richardson; HRO:1751A/046 Will of William Richman.

chopped up with a curved cutting mattock, and burnt to ashes, and then the land was prepared for sowing. This mattock was called a *beak*, and the operation was therefore, and is still frequently, called *beaking and burning*.

This system, also known as denshiring, was considered the most efficacious for cleaning encumbered land where it was almost impossible for horses or oxen to work the plough. The fire not only consumed the roots and

weeds, but also corrected the acidity of the soil. In some cases it rendered the soil fit for corn (as was the case with Woodgreen) and also good for potatoes, turnips and oats according to an informant of Arthur Young. Charles Vancouver, author of the *General view of the agriculture of Hampshire*, also extolled the virtues of paring and burning on fen, bog, morass, moor, heath and commons, wherever the soil and substrata were peaty or there was a layer of vegetable mould, but Vancouver insisted, and

twice repeated, that 'previous and effectual draining' was indispensable.⁷

Squatter settlement in forests was a feature of the sixteenth century in consequence of enclosure and the attendant demolition of houses even before the population growth of the late sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries added to the difficulties of rural inhabitants. Townships and hamlets in the Forest of Dean during the latter part of this period were said to be 'full of poor people and that such poor people have much increased and multiplied'. Cromwell was sent to destroy the cabins of these 'beggarly people' in 1656, numbering nearly 400. Woodland settlements in Nottinghamshire were 'pestered' with squatters. In Kent, the forest parishes were amongst the 'most thickly settled in the county', for, as two of the squatters explained, they were 'destitute of houses, and had seen other cottages upon the same waste, built by other poor men'. The same story was repeated in the Northamptonshire forests, in Deerfield forest in Hertfordshire and Rosendale forest in Lancashire.⁸ The resulting migrations, vagabondage and demands on the parish poor relief led to the Act of Settlement in 1662 (Statute of 13 & 14 Car II c12) which proposed to put an end to the practice whereby:

... poor people are not restrained from going from one parish to another, and therefore do endeavour to settle themselves in those parishes where there is the best stock, the largest commons or wastes to build cottages and the more woods for them to burn and destroy; and when they have consumed it, then to another parish, and at last become rogues and vagabonds...

By the new statute any settler could be ejected from a parish within forty days if likely to be chargeable on the poor rate. There were other problems for squatters following efforts to concentrate farm workers in villages or in converted farmhouses where farms had been engrossed, without gardens, or at most a quarter of a rood, such that by the latter part of the seventeenth century many earlier squatters and smallholders had been deprived of their land and brought within the orbit of estate management.⁹ In the context of these

restrictions, settlement in extra-manorial and extra-parochial places was attractive, both for the parish overseers, for whom such settlers would not be a burden on the poor rates, and for the settlers themselves, who would be left in peace. The New Forest offered a particularly favourable environment because its *raison-d'être* as a royal hunting ground had lapsed, and a century of management neglect ensued. The peace of the extra-parochial place of course had its own drawback as inhabitants had no access to parish poor relief in hard times, although, as will be seen below, this was not always the case in Woodgreen.

The most primitive houses built by squatters were of grass sods. In 1801 Arthur Young described such a house near Farnham near the Hampshire border:

The cot consisted of one small room: the floor, the earth; the walls and chimney, earth or sods; there had been a hole left for a window, but not being able to afford glass, it was stopped up for warmth; the bed was on the floor; no bedstead; a little straw, on that poor bed, one blanket, one bit of a sheet, and a rag or two of something else¹⁰

Seven children had been raised in this cottage and three buried. More frequently, however, houses were constructed with what was called mud, in fact clay, sand, straw, water and earth on a timber frame, the so-called cob houses. Charles Vancouver wrote in 1813 that 'the hovels on the sides of wastes and commons, are usually built with mud; the roof and other materials are as commonly purloined from the adjacent woods, or any other place that will most conveniently supply it.'¹¹

During the period 1700–30, there appears to have been little or no expansion of the settlements. The parish registers recorded no new surnames in Godshillwood. In Woodgreen the key families of the seventeenth century remained, apart from the Mowlands, who were not recorded at all between 1700 and 1730. The major new arrival was the Jones family, with transient references in parish registers and wills to the families of Hayward, Harrison, Bower and Coles. From 1730 however, a phase of rapid expansion occurred. It was at this time that Britain saw the beginnings of the sustained

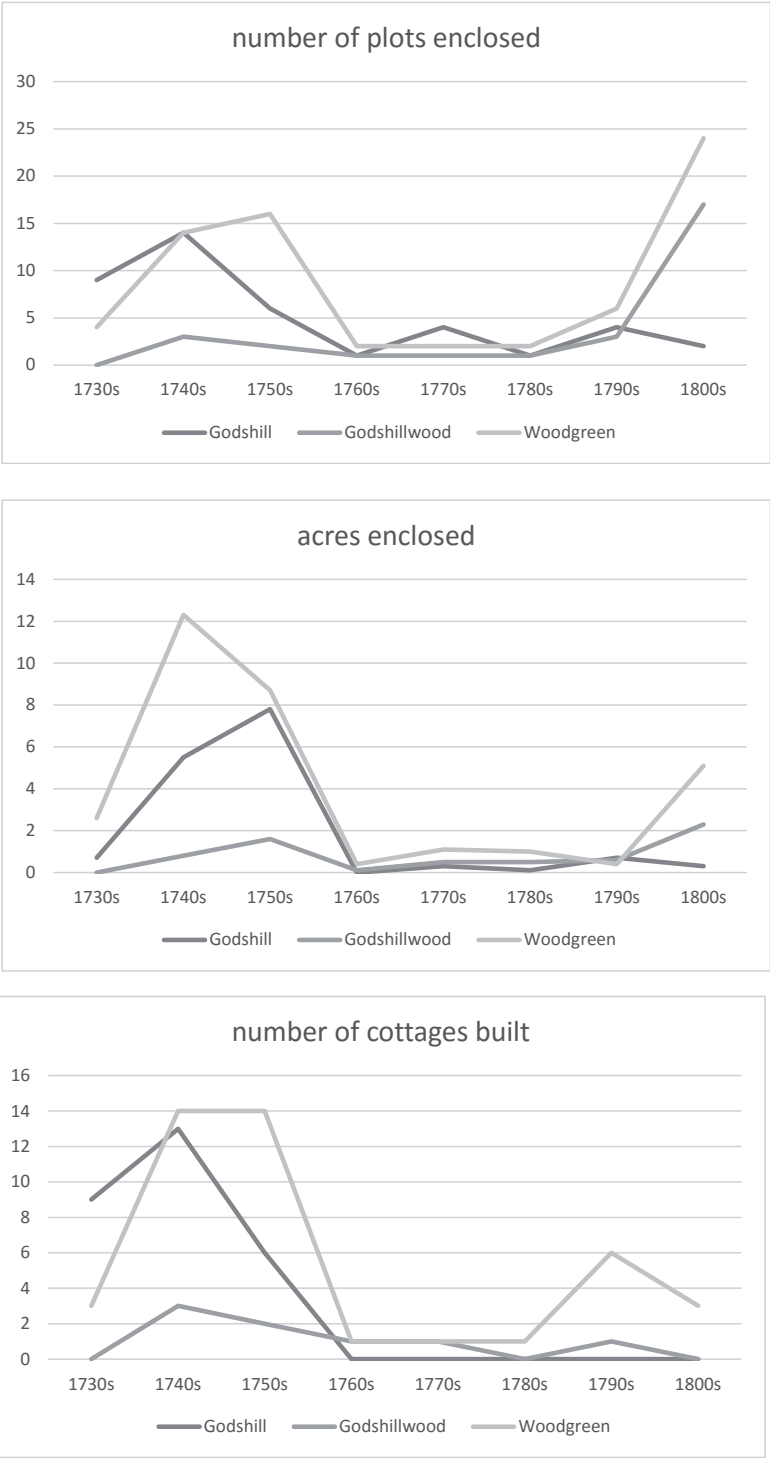


Fig. 1 Godshill, Godshillwood and Woodgreen 1730–1800



Table 2 Godshill, Godshillwood and Woodgreen 1730-1800

<i>Godshill</i>	<i>1730s</i>	<i>1740s</i>	<i>1750s</i>	<i>1760s</i>	<i>1770s</i>	<i>1780s</i>	<i>1790s</i>	<i>1800s</i>
Number of plots enclosed	9	14	6	1	4	1	4	2
Area enclosed – acres	0.7	5.5	7.8	0	0.3	0.1	0.7	0.3
Number of cottages built	9	13	6	0	0	0	0	0
Plots discharged 1802	9	14	6	0	1	0	0	0
Lease/compensation offered 1802	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	0
Encroachments 1802	0	0	0	0	1*	0	2	2
Cumulative data								
Total area of settlement – acres	0.7	6.2	14.1	14.1	14.4	14.5	15.1	15.4
Number of cottages	9	22	28	28	28	28	28	28
Number of orchards	2	4	7	7	8	8	9	9
Number of gardens	7	16	17	17	17	17	17	17
Cottages with land	0	4	7	7	7	7	7	7
<i>*plus one plot for adjudication</i>								
<i>Godshillwood</i>	<i>1730s</i>	<i>1740s</i>	<i>1750s</i>	<i>1760s</i>	<i>1770s</i>	<i>1780s</i>	<i>1790s</i>	<i>1800s</i>
Number of plots enclosed		3	2	1	1	1	3	17
Area enclosed – acres		0.8	1.6	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.6	2.3
Number of cottages built		3	2	1	1	0	1	0
Plots discharged 1802		3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Lease/compensation offered 1802		0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Encroachments 1802		0	0	0	0	1	3	16
Cumulative data								
Total area of settlement – acres		0.8	2.4	2.5	3	3.5	4.1	6.3
Number of cottages		3	5	6	7	7	8	8*
Number of orchards		3	3	3	4	4	4	4
Number of gardens		0	1	2	2	2	2	2
Cottages with land		0	1	1	1	1	2	4
<i>*only 5 occupied 1802</i>								

population growth that persisted for 250 years.¹² One new family was recorded in Godshillwood, the Mists, and a half dozen important new arrivals in Woodgreen, Fiford, Langtree, Trim, Wort, Harrison, Barter and Britten, plus a new Mowland family. Some marked similarities and some marked differences were demonstrable

in the expansion of Woodgreen, Godshillwood and Godshill tithing (Table 2 and Fig. 1). All three showed peaks in the 1740s and 1750s in respect of acreage encroached, number of plots enclosed and cottages built, but the expansion in Godshillwood was much flatter. In all three communities the period 1760–90

Table 2 (cont.)

<i>Woodgreen</i>	<i>1730s</i>	<i>1740s</i>	<i>1750s</i>	<i>1760s</i>	<i>1770s</i>	<i>1780s</i>	<i>1790s</i>	<i>1800s</i>
Number of plots enclosed	4	14	16	2	2	2	6	24
Area enclosed – acres	2.6	12.3	8.7	0.4	1.1	1	0.4	5.1
Number of cottages built	3	14	14	1	1	1	6	3*
Plots discharged 1802	4	14	10	0	0	0	2	1
Lease/compensation offered 1802	0	0	6	2	2	1	1	0
Encroachments 1802	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	23
Cumulative data								
Total area of settlement - acres	2.6	14.9	23.6	24	25.1	26.1	26.5	31.6
Number of cottages	3	17	31	32	33	34	40	43
Number of orchards	0	4	13	13	14	15	15	15
Number of gardens	2	10	10	11	12	13	15	15
Cottages with land	1	4	10	11	11	11	12	14

Source: TNA, CRES40/8, printed under the title *Return made by Commissioners as to incroachments, &c to the said forest [New Forest]* (London:HMSO, 1853), Ashley Walk schedule pp 11–27, pp 186–9.

witnessed little development and, in Godshill, this continued to be the case into the nineteenth century. By contrast in Woodgreen and Godshillwood there was a big rise in the number of plots enclosed in the 1790s and early 1800s, but no corresponding increase in the number of cottages. The key factor was probably the French wars, when rising food prices led to an agricultural boom. Land which had been uneconomic and could be brought into cultivation was plentiful in Woodgreen, but seemingly not in the older settlement of Godshill. Existing settlers and some outsiders enclosed 42 new parcels of land, ranging in size from half a lug to two acres.

The two colonies were surveyed and mapped for the first time in 1787 by A. and W. Driver, as part of the preparation for the 1789 first official map of the New Forest.¹³ An accompanying schedule (summarised in Table 3) listed proprietors, buildings and acreages. Woodgreen was a dispersed colony of sinuous lanes and curvilinear plots, typical of the organic growth of squatter settlements. By contrast, nearby

Nomansland, with a grid layout, reflected the latter's more abrupt colonisation. The schedule revealed two striking differences between Woodgreen on the one hand, and Godshillwood and Godshill encroachments on the other. There was not a single orchard recorded in Godshill and Godshillwood, but ten in Woodgreen. However, the figures in 1802 were nine, four and fifteen respectively, which cast some doubt on the accuracy of the Drivers' data. Secondly, Woodgreen boasted 18 brick cottages as against three of mud, whereas in Godshill the figures were nine and eight and, in Godshillwood, two and five respectively. Squatter cottages built of brick and tile were noted by Arthur Young in Farnham in 1801, and he estimated the cost of building one at £30. Young added: 'these poor people run in debt to build the cottage, which remains a heavy burden, that sinks them in poverty.'¹⁴ The apparent prosperity of Woodgreen was confirmed by the rateable values, an average of £3 8s per acre in Woodgreen, £3 per acre in Godshillwood, and just £2 4s per acre in Godshill.

Table 3 Godshill, Godshillwood and Woodgreen 1787

	<i>Godshill</i>	<i>G'hillwood</i>	<i>Woodgreen</i>
acreage	39	4.1	33.3
rateable value	£86 10s	£12 8s	£114 19s
value per acre	£2 4s	£3	£3 8s
cottages	13	0	18
brick cottages	9	2	18
mud cottages	8	5	3
turf houses	4	1	2
hovels	4	0	12
fuel houses	15	1	0
outhouses	8	0	5
workshops	3	0	3
orchards	0	0	10

Source. Drivers' survey of Ashley Walk 1787.

The schedule distinguished in some cases between brick-built and mud-built cottages; in other instances 'cottage' was indicated without further specification. The turf houses were outhouses for storage of turves (i.e; peat), not houses constructed with turf, as confirmed by William Herrington's will of 1765 (HRO:1765B/15) in which a 'mudd wall turfhouse' is referred to. In Godshill alone, a number of fuel houses were also listed. Hovels were sheds and outhouses for farm equipment; other outhouses and farm buildings were barns, stables and calf houses.

1802 was an important year in the colonies' history, for New Forest commissioners investigated and adjudicated on more than a century of encroachments and the title claims of squatters. The commissioners adopted a pragmatic approach. Encroachments which had occurred prior to 1750 were discharged while those between 1750 and 1780 were adjudged encroachments on the forest, but the squatters were offered leases or compensation. Post-1780 appropriations (in other words those that had been established less than 20 years) were directed to be returned to the forest without compensation. The total area judged encroached for the whole of Godshill tithing, including Woodgreen and Godshillwood was almost 13.5 acres, plus 17 houses and two other buildings. The total area discharged was around 27.2 acres plus 65 houses.¹⁵ The records of the commission

included witness evidence about the dates and circumstances of enclosures, the sexagenarian and septuagarian men of the community being called upon to state which encroachments had taken place within living memory and when. Their evidence, although occasionally conflicting (and there were also discrepancies with the data in the Drivers' 1787 schedule), formed the basis of the above analysis of the growth of the settlements between 1730 and 1800.

Contemporaries observed that New Forest management in the first half of the nineteenth century left much to be desired. Whether, therefore, the judgements of the 1802 commissioners were followed by the destruction of enclosures is uncertain. The razing of cottages or eviction of squatters were unlikely, as there had been only two cottage encroachments post-1780 which had not been offered leases. There was certainly no reduction in popula-

Table 4 Population and families: Godshill, Godshillwood, Linwood and Woodgreen 1801–41

	<i>1801</i>	<i>1811</i>	<i>1821</i>	<i>1831</i>	<i>1841</i>
Godshill with Godshillwood, New Grounds, Ashley Wood			158	211	265
Godshill without Godshillwood	<i><134</i>				109
Godshillwood	<i>24</i>				85
Woodgreen	<i>206</i>				400
Woodgreen with Linwood			357	363	
Linwood					14
Total	392	488	515	574	679

Number of families: Godshill, Godshillwood, Linwood and Woodgreen 1801–41

	<i>1801</i>	<i>1811</i>	<i>1821</i>	<i>1831</i>	<i>1841</i>
Godshill with Godshillwood, New Grounds, Ashley Wood			42	54	57
Godshill without Godshillwood	<i><28</i>				24
Godshillwood	<i>5</i>				14
Woodgreen	<i>43</i>				83
Woodgreen with Linwood			72	71	
Linwood					2
Total	103	113	114	125	142

Sources: Enumeration abstract 1801, County of Southampton, 323-4; Observations and enumeration abstract 1811, County of Southampton 298-9; Observations, enumeration and parish register abstracts 1821, County of Southampton, 298; Enumeration abstract 1831 (part two), County of Southampton, 574-5; Enumeration abstract 1841, 279; 1841 census enumeration books HO107/397/14 (the 1841 abstracts for Godshillwood have inaccurate data – the figures here were compiled from census enumeration books).

Figures in italics are estimates.

tion or the number of inhabited houses. On the contrary, for the remaining period of the Napoleonic Wars, up to 1815, Woodgreen grew on both accounts, seemingly unchallenged by the forest authorities. New families settled between 1802 and 1812, including the Durdles, who appear to have established five or even six different households. Population statistics 1801–41 are listed in Table 4. Woodgreen was described as a ‘small Forest hamlet’ in 1811,

called ‘Wood or Woody Green’. Godshillwood was described as a ‘waste land’ without ‘a tree or bush upon it; though there are persons now living, who remembered the time when the greater part of its surface was covered with Pollards, and when so much Holly was growing upon it that a person might mistake his road.’¹⁶ Collecting holly for the urban Christmas market was a source of income for forest-edge communities in the nineteenth century.

Notwithstanding Woodgreen's extra-parochial status and its vague attachment to Fordingbridge parish, it developed a much closer relationship with Breamore parish and its overseers. The first evidence was the will of Henry Johnson, 1703, in which he directed that income from £100 invested in land should be used by the overseers to finance apprenticeships of poor children from Woodgreen. Another Breamore-based apprenticeship charity, John Doddington's, established in 1638, with a remit covering Breamore, Fordingbridge, Harbridge and Ringwood, also supported Woodgreen apprentices. Later in the eighteenth century, the overseers bought a cottage in Woodgreen, that of the late George and Sarah Wort, from their son Henry in 1779. A further purchase took place, in 1817, of a cottage belonging to Samuel Eastman and his wife Rachel (née Gilbert).¹⁷ The reason for these purchases is unclear. More unexpectedly, surviving account books of the Breamore Overseers 1806–19 and 1819–33 itemised various Woodgreen poor relief payments and provisions. For example Widow Curtis received sheets and woollen garments on two occasions, was recompensed for caring for a sick traveller and both she and Widow Downer were given turfs. In 1806 the expenses for placing children in the poorhouse at Burgate were met, Jane Cutt and Annie West had rent arrears paid, the latter for several years, and three bottles of brandy worth 18s were supplied for 'persons in the small-pox' in 1808. Eleven shillings were spent in 1815 on spinning turns for the maids of Jacob Downer and George White (Witt?), and rethatching and other house repairs were carried out. It is impossible to say at which date this practice began, as the account book previous to 1806 is missing. The account book covering the years 1729–69, which does survive, made no explicit mention of Woodgreen, but did include persons with a strong resemblance to Woodgreen residents. For example Susan Rogers, in receipt of benefits in 1767–8, could well have been the Susannah Rogers of Woodgreen who was buried in Breamore in 1788 aged 70 and whose burial entry is annotated with the word 'poor'.¹⁸ At no time does it appear that Woodgreen residents were assessed for poor relief contributions, so

the support for the colony by the Breamore overseers appears to have had a strong altruistic content, possibly explained in part by the usefulness of the nearby squatters for seasonal farm labour. Forest squatters were noted for their flexibility and willingness to travel.

At the same time as these payments were being made, Breamore Overseers were wrestling with a problem of illegitimacy. Illegitimacy amongst the settlers was rare, with just one case recorded between 1660 and 1760, that of Matthew Rogers, son of Catherine Rogers in 1710. There were probably a few others that went unrecorded. Between 1760 and 1812 there appears to have been a further four local cases, three of them in the Witt family. The situation, however, was complicated by a new phenomenon – the use of Woodgreen as a 'receptacle for pregnant women come [from elsewhere]...to be deliver'd privately'.¹⁹ The first such case may be that of an unidentified Maria on Christmas Day 1751 from 'John Ryo's house in Woodgreen'. The practice was perhaps a useful source of income, for some of these illegitimate children remained in Woodgreen (presumably boarded). 'Base-born' Elizabeth Spratt was four years old when she was buried in Breamore on 25 March 1773. The rationale behind the practice was probably in part that of minimising scandal by hiding the pregnant women in out-of-the-way places, but more importantly, the motive was a financial one on the part of parish overseers. For, in contrast to legitimate children, who took their fathers' parish of settlement, illegitimate children took their birthplace as their parish of settlement²⁰ and, if that birthplace was an extra-parochial place, went the reasoning, nobody would be responsible for their relief. Woodgreen was not the only target: *The Fighting Cocks* pub in nearby Godshill (an encroachment of the 1730s or before) hosted at least nine illegitimate births between 1788 and 1805. Woodgreen itself recorded 28 such births between 1760 and 1812, but the real figure was certainly higher because as many as nine of these Woodgreen cases were identified through the burial of the children, for none of whom was the baptism recorded. Thus many of the children who survived were also likely to be unrecorded. By 1817 the situation had become

serious enough for the Breamore overseers to seek legal counsel after magistrates in some parishes were directing mothers to seek poor relief from the parishes adjoining the extra-parochial place, including Breamore in the case of Woodgreen.²¹

Legal opinion given to Breamore in 1817 was that adjoining parishes had no obligation to support those born in extra-parochial places, but the problem did not go away until 1834 when the law was changed so that illegitimate children took their mothers' settlement. Meanwhile the farming-out continued, with a spate of cases in the 1820s in Nomansland. However, the issue was not perceived as entirely clear-cut, and the parish overseers did not wash their hands altogether of the problem, for they took pains to identify and pursue some of the fathers of the children farmed out to Woodgreen. Bastardy orders, for example, were served on Samuel Turgosine, apothecary of Amesbury in 1794, Sidner Williams, gent, of Sherborne, Dorset in 1800, and Charles Norton, cabinet maker, St Thomas, Salisbury in 1809.²² The Breamore Overseers also took legal counsel in 1815 as to whether single mothers could be obliged to reveal the names of the fathers of their children.²³

Between 1821 and 1831 Woodgreen stagnated, after which there was renewed and substantial expansion, possibly linked to the widespread agricultural distress of that decade. Woodgreen's population in 1841 was double that of 1801 while, by comparison, the population of the parishes of Breamore and Hale had grown only modestly in the same period from 488 to 597 and 147 to 209 respectively, and that of Godshill (without Godshillwood) had actually declined, from more than 134 to 109. Godshillwood grew from approximately 24 to 85, a figure which swelled temporarily as it was also used as a major gypsy encampment.²⁴ Some of the nineteenth-century expansion of Woodgreen appears to have been along a tongue of land stretching eastwards immediately to the south of Hale, for the parish of Woodgreen, when it was established under the Extra Parochial Places Act 1857, included this territory in its 47 acres. Population density, which had stood at *circa* 6.5 persons per acre in 1802 was 11.5 per acre in 1851.

Strategies for making a living were various. No individual, much less a family, could be supported from the resources of the Woodgreen and Godshillwood cottage plots. In Woodgreen they averaged half an acre, with the largest in 1802 an atypical three acres held by William Jones. In Godshillwood, the average plot was a little larger, three quarters of an acre, and the largest two acres. 29 or 30 of the 43 Woodgreen cottage plots in 1802 had only gardens and/or orchards, as had four of the eight Godshillwood plots. The use to which the land attached to the remaining 18 cottages was put can be surmised. Growing corn, as mentioned above, was noted from the 1670s. In the 1753 will of Robert Downer, arable and pasture ground was mentioned (presumably in Woodgreen, but possibly not), plus cow houses, barns and a stable. A number of barns, stables and outhouses were listed in the 1787 Drivers' survey (Table 3). Stocks of cattle were specified in the wills of Deborah Lawes and Joseph Trim, the latter also possessed of 'horses, mare and colts'.²⁵ In 1813, Charles Vancouver cast a jaundiced eye on the encroacher, grabbing a few perches from the forest from time to time until a plot of 2/3 acres was constituted, upon which he grew 'as much grass and hay as will suffice to bait his working horse or horses, night and morning; a few potatoes; and some bread-corn for his family'.²⁶

Eleven inhabitants between 1725 and 1837 were described at one point or another as yeomen, an epithet patently not attributable to the strength of their Woodgreen or Godshillwood holdings. They must therefore have been copyholders, leaseholders or even freeholders in neighbouring manors and estates in the parishes of Hale (Archer's estate), Breamore (Hulse's Manor, South Charford) and Godshill tithing, incurring a distinct disadvantage in having to travel each day to and from their land. This inconvenience perhaps explains why yeoman John Jones had let his Woodgreen house in 1802. John Triphook, yeoman of Godshillwood was tenant of a tenement and various closes in the lands of Coventry of Burgate in 1760. By 1787 he appears to have had no property in Godshillwood, but had twelve holdings in Godshill, a total of more than 18 acres.²⁷ William Hayward was farming Barns

Farm, Godshill in 1792. William Witt (possibly the Woodgreen William) was renting East Mill Farm from the Hulse Estate in the 1780s and Philip Trim, the eldest son of Joseph Trim, one of the designated yeomen, occupied land valued at 2/- in Breamore Liberty in 1808. On the other hand the land tax returns for Hale and for North and South Charford included no Woodgreen names and some, at least, of the Woodgreen yeomen must have been at the bottom end of the yeoman scale.²⁸ For example, John Downer was styled husbandman on his Wiltshire marriage licence in 1746, but yeoman eight years later in his will.²⁹ William Harrington was described as a labourer in 1787 and in his 1820 will as a yeoman, although he had in the meantime inherited.³⁰ It is also the case that the word ‘yeoman’ was losing its historical significance by this time, a process culminating in the description of George Witt in 1853 as ‘yeoman and labourer’.³¹

Access to forest resources was a key element in the survival or prosperity of the settlers. The most important rights were common of pasture (for cattle), common of turbary (turves for fuel) pannage (for pigs) and common of estovers (cutting wood for fuel, repair of houses, fences and tools). A total of 19 residents had commoners’ rights in 1792, including two of the yeomen noted above, William Drodge and William Harrington as well as James and Philip Trim, sons of Joseph. Whether other Woodgreen settlers had any rights in the New Forest is a moot point, but as J.M.Neeson observed ‘...families living in places with large common wastes, in forest, fen and heath, were most likely to have access to commons and to be able to use it, whether by right or custom.’³² Of the rights, common of pasture was the most prized, for the dung as much as the produce. According to Nathaniel Kent in 1775, three acres was required for the support of a single cow, although Cobbett maintained in 1821 that 40 roods of land planted with cabbages and interplanted with 3000 turnips would suffice to give a year’s supply.³³ From the references to ‘stocks’ of cattle in the wills cited above, it seems likely that some settlers were taking considerable advantage of New Forest common of pasture.

According to Vancouver in 1813 the forest

encroacher’s principal exertions outside their immediate occupation were ‘directed to the ‘cutting, rearing, and carting of peat-fuel and ...any other combustible matter...wood-fuel, fern, furze &c from the forests to the large towns and villages in the surrounding country-side’, at least for those who had the resources to ‘drive a miserable horse and cart’. He continued :

In winter, he jobs at wood-cart and in carrying stones or gravel for the highways; and thus, with raising a forest colt or two, provincially called *heath-croppers*, and one or two of an equally inferior species of neat cattle, is found to get on easily, and in some respects independently, through life.³⁴

Table 5 summarizes the evidence of occupations from wills, settlement examinations, apprenticeship records, bastardy orders and parish registers between the years 1714–1837. Trades and crafts offered an alternative or supplementary occupation for a substantial minority of residents, some providing a service to the community and others supplying markets elsewhere. The blacksmith probably fell, in part at least, into the first category. Edward Spicknell was the earliest to be traced,

Table 5 Occupations: Godshillwood and Woodgreen 1714–1837

Labourers	20
Husbandmen	4
Yeomen	11
Shoemakers	9
Shopkeepers	6
Blacksmiths	5
Carpenters	3
Tailors	1
Butchers	1
Wheelwrights	1
Sawyers	1
Millers	1

Sources: apprenticeship records, bastardy orders, parish registers, settlement examinations, wills.

Table 6 Main employment of families: Godshill, Godshillwood, Linwood and Woodgreen 1801–41

	1801			1811			1821			1831			1841		
	<i>Agric</i>	<i>trades</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>Agric</i>	<i>trades</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>Agric</i>	<i>trades</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>Agric</i>	<i>trades</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>Agric</i>	<i>trades</i>	<i>other</i>
Godshill tithing (with Godshillwood)							25	13	4	38	11	5			
Godshill tithing (without Godshillwood)													24	8	11
Godshillwood													13	0	1
Woodgreen with Linwood							72	0	0	61	10	0			
Woodgreen													54	14	15
Total	25	42	36	87	26	0	97	13	4	99	21	5	91	22	27

Sources: see under Table 4.

The 1821 figure is seriously flawed because 72 families in Woodgreen were recorded as engaged in agriculture and none at all in trades, manufactures, handicrafts and retail, a claim belied by evidence of tradesmen in wills and other documents.

in the 1730s. His successor was Thomas Barter, who had married Spicknell's widow. Barter died in 1782 and the next known practitioner was Thomas Hobbs, who built a blacksmith's shop in the early 1790s, subsequently thrown down by the forest authorities but then rebuilt. Hobbs was still there in 1802. Two other blacksmiths, the Ballard brothers, worked mostly, if not altogether, outside Woodgreen, in Lymington, Lyndhurst and elsewhere. The younger, Edward, also served his apprenticeship outside, indentured to his brother.

Other Woodgreen apprentices served their time elsewhere, for example Isaac Witt junior as a butcher in Downton in 1765 and John Herrington as a shoemaker (to master Francis Herrington) in 1787.³⁵ Shopkeepers were a group exclusively serving the local community. The earliest recorded shopkeeper was John Witt in 1777, but his wife Sarah was probably the widow of Matthew Jones, who may himself have been a shopkeeper, for two of his sons, William (born 1760) and John (born 1766) were described as shopkeepers in wills (1836 and 1803 respectively). Matthew Downer (1759–1816), John Dyer and William Drodge (c. 1742–1811) were also recorded as shop-

keepers.³⁶ The most widely practiced trade was shoemaking, of which nine representatives were identified. Some of these at least must have been supplying external markets. The earliest recorded was Matthias Harrison in 1736, in which year he engaged William Fiford as apprentice, funded by the aforementioned Henry Johnson's charity. Fiford was still in Woodgreen in 1802. Fiford's son, another William, was working for Harrison when he died in 1789 and was bequeathed his lasts and other working tools. The business seems to have prospered, for Harrison left over £400 in bequests.³⁷ The Mowlands were the most prominent in shoemaking, with four representatives between 1792 and 1841. The importance of trades and crafts in the local economy, however, declined relatively in the nineteenth century (Table 6). From 1801, when 42 tradesmen were recorded, the figure dropped to just 10 in 1831.

The 'cottage speculator' (in the words of Earl Nelson)³⁸ derived an income from the rent or sale of property. Some settlers cleared a piece of ground, built a cottage, and then moved on to clearing and building a second, or even a third. In some cases the motive was to make

provision for sons and daughters, and new encroachments coincided with the marriages of children but, in other cases, the motive appears to have been to generate a rental income. In 1802 19 plots were in the hands of tenants, in three of the cases the tenants being family members. The rent proposed for one of these in 1788 was £2 10s.³⁹ In 1824 William Witt, carpenter, owned five houses in Woodgreen plus one in Lyndhurst, all tenanted except the one in his own occupation.⁴⁰ The practice extended to absentee landlords, for instance the three cottages enclosed before 1740 which Mr Richard Wing of Fordingbridge possessed at Godshillwood, though they appear to have been untenanted in 1802, and the two which William Nippard was letting in Woodgreen in 1802. Some 21 families or individuals were represented in Godshillwood and Woodgreen records by a single life event, be it baptism, banns, marriage, bequest or will, and presumably the majority of these were short-term tenants rather than squatters who had cleared land and built houses. Of course, given the many lacunae in the registers, some of them undoubtedly had longer-term associations which were unrecorded. There is also evidence of cottages being bought and sold. The earliest known sale was in 1742 when Thomas Kimber, husbandman, sold a cottage and one acre of land to William Harris (or Norris?), gentleman of Fordingbridge, for £35.⁴¹ Buyers included existing settlers: John Clarke of Breamore bought a messuage and one acre in Woodgreen and sold it to Philip Trim of Woodgreen who in turn sold it on, loaning £70 to the buyer at 5% interest. William Drodge bought a cottage and an acre of land from the daughter of widow Blansbury and Matthew Jones had a cottage let to Joseph Durdle in 1772 which he had 'latterly purchased of Joseph Cull and the widow Wolff'.⁴²

Near the bottom of the economic scale were the farm servants and agricultural labourers. Their semi-nomadic existence was typified by the story of George Herrington, told at his settlement examination in Lyndhurst 9 April 1811.⁴³ Born in Woodgreen, at the age of 15 he went to Charlton in Downton parish to work for Philip Whittle for a year at £4 per year. He then returned to Woodgreen for three years, then lived with Thomas Powell of Breamore,

yeoman, for six months, and hired himself for a further year. He had a wife and three children aged between 3 and 8 years. It must have been a relatively rare opportunity for labourers to get employment with Woodgreen yeomen, but one example is known, that of Vincent Mist, born Godshillwood, who hired himself for a year to William Hayward of Woodgreen at 4s per week.⁴⁴ In 1831 just one of the 86 male inhabitants aged 20 and over was employing labourers.

It was considered a truism that squatters derived much of their livelihood from theft and plunder. Charles Vancouver in his references to squatters purloining materials from the forests for building their houses and enclosures noted that 'The establishment is thus begun by plunder and continued without controul (sic) the seat of an idle, useless, and disorderly set of people.'⁴⁵ Joseph Hinxman wrote in 1748 'Woodgreen is part of the Forest and every house there is trespass, and all the inhabitants live by pilfering and cheating out of the forest'. Hinxman had evidence to support his view. He had employed a 'poor man', John West, who lived in the neighbourhood of Godshillwood, to look after the wood 'having been much abused by idle people thereabout in lopping, topping and cutting the trees and stealing the wood'. West's vigilance led to the conviction of eleven men at the Forest's Swainmote Court, but on the Friday night following he had 'two horses and three beasts stabbed so that they all died the Saturday morning'. Hinxman wrote to the Secretary of State the Duke of Bedford on 26 September, pleading that a pardon be declared for any of the gang who betrayed his accomplices.⁴⁶

Derogatory remarks at the expense of squatters were replicated in numerous contemporary sources, albeit at the same time there was often a grudging admiration for their independence and self-reliance. For independence was a key factor in the squatter mentality. As Arthur Young expressed it, talking of their attachment to their sometimes squalid habitations: 'the love of property keeps them from the parish'.⁴⁷ Religious non-conformism reinforced the independent spirit, for it was in 'heaths and forests that the millenarian leaders of the Interregnum, the Methodist preachers

of the eighteenth century, and later messianic sects...found many of their most devoted adherents.' Calvinist baptists were licensed to use the house of Martha Cool for worship in 1798, and a further meeting house certificate was granted to Wesleyan Methodists in the house of John Herrington senior in 1821.⁴⁸ Vancouver also observed that 'labourers detached from villages certainly spend their time not actually engaged in their employer's service, much better to themselves, their families and the public at large, than when such are grouped together in gossips in the country villages.' The nub of the issue was encapsulated by Vancouver's next comment. He suggested that 'on the sides of the wastes and commons they become in a manner independent of the farmers and many of the country gentlemen; and it is not without much difficulty that, under such circumstances, the ordinary labour of the country is performed.'⁴⁹ In other words, landowners and farmers increasingly required a flexible pool of labour, constantly on call, to operate the new farming methods, conditions which a man with his own plot and agenda was less likely to fulfil, least of all when he also managed to have a cow and a couple of acres to support it. The horns of this dilemma was that the squatter was at one and the same time less amenable but also less likely to become a burden on the poor rates. The dilemma became more and more pressing in the latter part of the eighteenth century, for that period saw a dramatic increase in the poor rate. The sum raised nationally rose from £1,720,316 in 1776 to £5,348,205 in 1803 and £7,068,999 in 1815.⁵⁰ A few observers, including Nathaniel Kent, Arthur Young and the Reverend David Davies attempted to press the message that a substantial increase in the provision of wastes and commons for settlement would be of economic benefit, but this was mostly in vain. Opinion held, on the one hand, that the livelihood and stock of squatters were miserable and inadequate, a 'starved pig or two, together with a few wandering goslings...half-grown horses, and half-starved cattle', whose owners wasted their time 'picking up a few dry sticks, or in grubbing up, in some bleak moor, a little furze, or heath'⁵¹ and, on the other hand, that the needs for a flexible work force outweighed

other considerations. Progress lay in the new farming methods, enlightened management and economies of scale.

Altogether 94 different family surnames were traced in Woodgreen and 23 in Godshillwood between 1660 and 1812. The Downers had the most numerous representation in 1802, with nine families. Seven of these appear to have been the descendants of John (c1650–1725). The relationship of Andrew (died 1657) and Thomas (recorded from 1664) to John (Table 1) was not established. Also unknown was the connection between John and Robert (1728–1815), son of an earlier Robert (c. 1675–1753). The two Roberts were typical representatives of those Woodgreen colonists who eked a living by hiring themselves to yeomen based in Woodgreen and its vicinity, an income supplemented by the enjoyment of rights of common, as recorded in the 1792 list of commoners. They had a long and steadfast attachment to Woodgreen, lasting more than a century (1708–1815). Others in the labouring class were more frequent flitters, often expending much time and energy in search of a parish settlement elsewhere (ten examples of settlement examinations survive for the years 1780–1821). Both the Roberts left wills. The younger, having no male descendants, left his estate to his daughters' families, the Herringtons and Trims.⁵²

The most extensive Downer family group, to which the Roberts may or may not have belonged, had a more complex economic relationship with Woodgreen. Andrew (baptised 1689), son of John (c1650–1725) and recipient of two bastardy orders, was described in them as a miller, which is consistent with information in the will of his brother John (1674–1754) concerning 'his part of the mill scheme at South Badgely' in Boldre.⁵³ These interests were of such a nature that the Downers appear to have had a permanent address in Boldre, for some of the children of John the younger and his brother Matthew had their baptisms recorded there. Both the Johns were concurrently yeomen farmers in Woodgreen. In 1787, five Downers were resident in Woodgreen, with land holdings of almost three acres valued at £12 4s, but only one of them, Matthew, was a forest commoner in 1792. The most recent

arrival was Benjamin Downer of Whichbury, seemingly unrelated to the group descended from John. Benjamin lived in Woodgreen from around 1782, when he married Phoebe Winter, daughter of James Winter, who himself had moved into Woodgreen relatively recently, in the early 1760s. At the time of his death in 1834, Benjamin Downer was described as 'of Whichbury, but residing in Woodgreen'.⁵⁴ In 1802 the Downers owned an acre and a half in Godshillwood and Woodgreen, and leased a further 1.5 roods. Not all of them were prosperous. Jacob (baptised 1763) was the subject of a removal order from Downton to Breamore in 1791, together with his wife Elizabeth (née Northover) and their 18 month old son John.⁵⁵ He immediately took advantage of the agricultural boom by enclosing eight lugs of land in Godshillwood around 1792, and then a further twelve around 1800, both of which were deemed encroachments in 1802. Thereafter he seemed to have prospered to some extent, for he had a maid in 1815. As already noted Widow Downer (probably wife of Matthew 1732–93), also fell on hard times, receiving a load of turves for fuel in 1806.⁵⁶

A well-documented example of a family that survived rather than prospered was the Ballards. Charles Ballard, born at Plumley, Harbridge, perhaps in 1738, hired himself as a farm servant to yeomen in Fordingbridge and Ringwood between 1758 and 1762 following his marriage to Betty Jones, daughter of Matthew Jones, yeoman, of Woodgreen (23 July 1758). In c.1762 they moved to Woodgreen where he had built a cottage, and here the last three of five children, four boys and one girl, were born. Matthew Jones left his daughter Betty part of his orchard in Woodgreen in his will. The eldest son, Charles (born c.1758), was apprenticed as a blacksmith. By 1782 he had served his time, and two years later his brother Edward (born 1769) was apprenticed to him for six years at Lyndhurst 'and supported by him, except for shirts and stockings, which his father provided...' The father's story was slightly different. According to him, it was he who had supported his son through his apprenticeship. In 1787 Charles had two cottages in Woodgreen (30 lugs in total), plus a quarter of an acre old enclosure in Godshillwood.

Thereafter the fortunes of the family appear to have declined. Betty had died in 1782, aged 53. After he was out of time, Edward worked as a blacksmith for four or five years, and then drifted to London where he worked as a weekly servant for a number of employers, rarely for more than a year at a time. He married in 1807 and in 1821 was back in Lyndhurst. Another of the sons, Henry (born 1762), sought a settlement in Brockenhurst in 1808. He had rented a house there for three years in 1801, but had done nothing to gain a legal settlement elsewhere. In 1821 the father was in the poor house in Ringwood, said to be aged 87 (actually 83 if his was the birth recorded in the Harbridge register in 1738) and seeking a settlement.⁵⁷

The fortunes of the Mowland family, who had been yeoman farmers in the area for centuries, were more solid than most. The seventeenth-century settlers noted above (Table 1) appear to have left or died out and all the Mowlands present in Woodgreen in the early years of the nineteenth century were direct descendants of William Mowland (born c.1705), who was possibly the son of Edward Mowland of Godshill. William enclosed 50 lugs of land and built a cottage at Woodgreen before 1733, probably around the time of his marriage to Dinah Drodge in 1731 (who may or may not have belonged to the Drodges already established in Woodgreen). The baptism of six Woodgreen children were recorded, including that of his son William junior (1733–1805), a shoemaker. This son enclosed a further 10–15 lugs and built a second cottage in the late 1740s prior to his marriage in 1755. Of his seven recorded children, two, William (1756–1835) and Edward (1765–) were also shoemakers. The second and third generation Williams, father and son, enclosed another acre in 1772, on which they built a third cottage, and a further five lugs in 1780 with a fourth cottage added in 1786. The family's land holdings in Woodgreen in 1787 totalled two and a half acres, with a valuation of £7 10s. William Mowland was recorded as having rights of common in the New Forest in 1792. By 1802 the family had also acquired a further two cottages built around 1750 by William Crews, making a total of six, and in four different operations in the 1790s,

they added an extra three quarters of an acre. In 1802 three of the cottages were in possession of tenants, and three occupied by members of the family. From 1814 Matthew and William were recorded as land tax payers in Godshill and Linwood, and it could be this same plot for which William Mowland (1756–1835) was registered as a voter in 1834 following the Great Reform Act as lessee of land for lives, Matthew Mowland being the tenant.⁵⁸ William Mowland was the only Woodgreen resident on this voters' roll.

The Witts were present in Woodgreen from at least 1651 (Table 1). There were lines of descent from Steven 1683–1774, John, William and Richard. William Witt who died in 1824 had a total of five houses in Woodgreen, plus one in Lyndhurst. Some 2.25 acres were held in 1787 valued at £10 4s. The family recorded the widest range of apprenticeships in the colony, one tailor, one butcher and two carpenters. John was a shopkeeper in 1777.⁵⁹ The Witts were present in both Godshillwood and Woodgreen, as were the Herringtons (variously Harrington, Hetherington). The latter, represented by three generations of William (1693–1765, 1720s–?, 1750s–1822), intermarried with other key families, the Jones, the Witts, the Downers and the Trims, and inherited property from the Downers and the Trims when their male lines became extinct. The third William had risen to the status of yeoman at his death in 1822.⁶⁰

One of the dilemmas facing a landowning peasantry was how to maintain the family's holdings as a viable economic unit without disinheriting offspring, particularly male. In this respect the Woodgreen and Godshillwood squatters had an important advantage – there was more land for the taking to accommodate other sons, as happened with the Downers, the Mowlands and the Witts. It is interesting that in the squatter settlement of Nomansland, where there was no extra land for the taking, a very high level of endogamy was recorded (30.3 % between 1800 and 1850 within an original group of only a dozen or so families). Precise endogamy levels in Woodgreen in the eighteenth century were more difficult to establish given the inadequacy of parish registers in that period, but the impression left is that the level was somewhat lower. In the descend-

ancy of John Downer, for example, in which 20 marriages were recorded and in which two wives were identified by christian name alone, only four were endogamous candidates (that is, the spouse bore a surname known in Woodgreen or Godshillwood – two Curtis, a Mowland and a Royall). At the same time, endogamy was a key factor in maintaining viable holdings, as illustrated by the Harringtons cited above. There were also cases of extended family networks being established. A striking example was Matthew Jones, yeoman, who had four sons-in-law and their families resident in Woodgreen in the latter part of the eighteenth century – Charles Ballard, William Harrington (both noted above), Benjamin Britain and Valentine Sheppard. Notwithstanding such kinship networks, the English custom of residence in nuclear households remained dominant.

A study of 33 Woodgreen and Godshillwood wills between 1705 and 1834 confirmed a strong bias against division of land holdings amongst offspring, although it must be remembered that wills were the exception rather than the rule, and that even where wills were made, much of the transmission of heritage, particularly of land, was often organised within the family outside of the will. Even with this partial evidence, some clear impressions can be formed. Equal division of holdings among sons or children was not found in any of the wills, though John Eldridge of Godshillwood did require his house and orchard to be sold after his wife's death and the proceeds equally divided amongst his four sons and one daughter. The eldest son Stephen, however, was to receive the remainder of his freehold estate, such as it was.⁶¹ Some 16 of the testators had no male children, and 13 no living issue, male or female (this being the commonest reason for making a will). Of the remaining 17 wills, in six cases the main legatee was the eldest son. The second son appears to have been the main beneficiary in three cases, although it is interesting that, in one of these, that of Joseph Trim, the eldest son was overlooked because he had already inherited a Woodgreen holding from his Richardson grandfather. Estate aggrandizement was obviously not a driving factor, rather sufficiency. This Richardson will was one of a

few which attempted an *ad hoc* entail in order to preserve land-holding integrity.⁶² The third son was the main beneficiary in one will, and the youngest of six sons inherited the house in another, perhaps an echo of English borough practices. There were two instances in which the main legatee was a daughter despite the presence of sons, and daughters received bequests in a total of twelve wills. A son-in-law was the main beneficiary in three cases. It is also interesting to observe the strategies of the 16 childless testators. Cousins were the most frequent principal legatees (five instances), but brothers were chosen in four, and sisters in two. There were only seven wills in which non-relatives received any bequests, and six of these were the wills of testators without issue.

It is clear from the above evidence that squatting was a complex phenomenon involving diverse motivations and encompassing different strata of rural society. The original settlers of the 1640s may well have largely belonged to a single social class of 'beggary people', but important social distinctions were already apparent by the end of the seventeenth century. At the opposite extreme from the stereotype of the wretched squatter and his hovel was the example of William Coles Esq. of Woodgreen, gentleman. Coles was an unexpected early squatter, if this is what he was. In his will, drawn up in 1709, Coles had £500 of trust money to dispense, of which nearly half went to his sister Elizabeth, married to John Antrum, vicar of Kilbolton, but most of the rest went to the Richardsons of Woodgreen, one of whom, his godson William, was also the recipient of his 'study of books'. The Richardsons had continuous residence in Woodgreen from 1652 to 1778. The residue of Coles' estate went to his kinsman Francis Coles of Downton who was in the process of carving out for himself the farm known as the Moot or Thrings.⁶³ There were parallels between Coles' will and that of a later incomer, Richard Spragg, originally of Hampreston in Dorset, who died in Woodgreen, also without issue, in 1802. Spragg had £600 of New South Sea stock to bequeath, plus a £100 bond and the main recipients were likewise members of an established Woodgreen family, William Witt and his wife Ann, for reasons unknown.⁶⁴ Third in value amongst wills was

that of Mathias Harrison the shoemaker noted above, who, like Coles and Spragg, had no issue. His monetary legacies amounted to more than £400, and an impressive array of legatees across four counties attest to the breadth of the family's connections. The major legatee was a cousin and gentleman, Thomas Mist Harrison, baptised in Breamore in 1756 but living in Salisbury at the time of his cousin's death in 1788.⁶⁵ He was bequeathed the house, but already had local interests, for on 8 August 1788 he sold by lease and release to William Witt of Woodgreen, carpenter, a messuage and garden on the west side of the road leading from Woodgreen to Breamore, several months before Harrison's will was proved.⁶⁶ Signs of evident prosperity were also to be found in the household goods of Thomas Barter the elder, blacksmith, who died in 1782. His son Joseph was bequeathed his 'best coat, waistcoat and breeches, hatt and wigg', plus a 'large oval yew table'. His daughter Elizabeth was to receive, in addition to the usual bed and bedding, a chest of drawers, a great iron pot, his largest pewter dish and a silver table spoon. His son Thomas inherited a brass brewing kettle, a large oak chest, two pewter dishes and six pewter plates, whilst his grandson, also Thomas, received his bible and an oak coffer. His daughter in law (that is, his step-daughter) Mary Chalk, wife of John Chalk of Breamore was bequeathed bed and bedding and a little iron pot, whilst his son in law Francis Spickernell (that is, his stepson) got a clock, plate shelves and dressen drawers.⁶⁷ Amongst household goods, a 'large looking glass' was specified in the will of Mary Drodge.⁶⁸ The value of monetary legacies in other eighteenth-century wills, ranged from one shilling to £90–95, with the majority closer to the lower extreme.⁶⁹

In drawing up the balance sheet of the prosperity of the colony, it would be a mistake to place too much weight on the occasional presence of affluent gentlemen, resident or otherwise. As well as the five already mentioned in this paper, there were Mr John Dyer and Mr Richard Wing in 1802, but these were probably not themselves squatters, but rather purchasers of properties, maybe already brick-built cottages at the time of purchase. Why these gentlemen bought into

Woodgreen is unclear. The purchases were perhaps parts of their portfolios as cottage speculators but none of them were forest commoners in 1792, so the acquisition of New Forest commoners' rights does not appear to have been a motive. It is possible that the independence from landed interests and the payment of tithes was an attraction, and political or religious motives may have played a part. It would seem, on the other hand, that no squatter *rose* to the status of gentleman in Woodgreen. Their achievements were more modest. Certainly a good number of them had built themselves brick cottages, but in the long run Vancouver's observation on forest settlers, that some of them get 'a little forward in the world', but that others 'from the losses they are liable to meet with in their forest stock, are alternately in poverty, and again recruiting to the condition which again subjects them to fresh losses' seems appropriate. 'Very few', concluded Vancouver, 'are seen to rise gradually above that condition of life in which they first started.'⁷⁰ Time-served tradesmen such as William Fiford, cordwainer, 1722–1800, were forced in old age to seek settlement and relief.⁷¹ Charles Ballard, despite his two cottages, ended his days in the poor house, and Widow Downer, wife of a forest commoner was the recipient of handouts from the Breamore Overseers. The evidence from the census abstracts 1801–41, despite their flawed data, also suggests a gradual pauperisation of the community, faced as it was with a more ruthless farming regime based on the liberal economics of piece-work and casual labour. 'Agricultural labourer' had become the predominant status in 1841. Of those working on the land, 59 out of 60 were agricultural labourers in Woodgreen, and 18 out of 18 in Godshillwood. Of course, these landless agricultural labourers vaunted by the farming interests were no more likely than the squatters to 'rise above that condition of life in which they first started'.

Key to abbreviations

HRO Hampshire Record Office; TNA The National Archives; WSHC Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

Notes

- 1 Wise, J. R., *The New Forest: its history and its scenery* (London, 1863), pp 117, 118.
- 2 *A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 4* (1911), <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56883> 'Parishes: Breamore' pp 596–602; 'Parishes: Fordingbridge', pp. 567–577; 'Parishes: Hale' pp 577–579.
- 3 Pasmore, A., 'The location of Norwood Coppice' in Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society New Forest Section *Report No 30*, 1992, 8–10; Norden, J., 'Survey of medieval coppices in the New Forest' in Sumner, Heywood *Local papers: archaeological and topographical, Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire* (London, 1931).
- 4 TNA, E/178/6453 Commission of Inquiry 1677, published in Reeves, R. P. (ed.), *Use and abuse of a forest resource: New Forest documents 1632–1700* Lyndhurst: New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust: New Forest Museum and Library, 2006, pp 146–147.
- 5 HRO, 24M82/PB1 *Brief concerning tithes payable from Woodgreen to vicarage of Fordingbridge 1689*
- 6 The source for this and subsequent references to Nomansland is Moody, D., 'Nomansland 1780–1860: a squatter colony on the edge of the New Forest' *Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Magazine* Vol.106, 2013, pp 230–51.
- 7 Davis, T., *General view of the agriculture of the county of Wilts* (London, 1794), p 92; Vancouver, C., *General view of the agriculture of Hampshire, including the Isle of Wight* (London, 1813), p 332. For denshiring, see Young, Arthur, note 10, p 104.
- 8 Thirsk, J. & Finberg, H. P. R., *The agrarian history of England and Wales: 1500–1640* (Cambridge, 2011), p 96, p 107, pp 409–11.
- 9 Holderness, B. A., 'Open' and 'close' parishes in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries *Agricultural History Review* 1972, part 2, pp 126–39.
- 10 Young, A., *An inquiry into the propriety of applying wastes to the better maintenance and support of the poor* (Bury, 1801) p 85.
- 11 Vancouver *op.cit.* note 7, p 505.
- 12 Hey, D., 'Population levels and trends' in Hey, D. (ed.), *Oxford companion to family and local history* (Oxford, 2008), pp 177–83.
- 13 TNA, F17/237 *Survey of Ashley Walk, Castle Malwood Walk, Bramble Hill Walk, Eyeworth Walk, and Broomy Walk, part of the New Forest in the County of Southampton, referring to a Plan of the same made by A & W Driver, 1787*. The published

- map of the New Forest based on the surveys was entitled *A Plan of His Majesty's Forest, called the New Forest, in the County of Southampton. Laid down from surveys undertaken by Thomas Richardson, Wm King and Abm. and Wm. Driver. By order of the Commissioners of the Land revenue, appointed by Act of Parliament passed in the 26th year of King George III^d. Engraved and published by order of the said Commissioners, by William Faden, Geographer to the King, 1789*. Woodgreen was also mapped in Thomas Milne's *Hampshire*, 1791. McClelland, E M and Hall, Pat *Woodgreen: village without title* [no publisher named], n.d. includes a plan annotated with the names of the settlers
- 14 Young, A., *op.cit.* note 10, p 93.
 - 15 TNA, CRES40/8, printed under the title *Return made by Commissioners as to incroachments, &c to the said forest* (London:HMSO, 1853), pp 11–27, pp 186–9. This document is also the source for subsequent references in this paper to Woodgreen and Godshillwood in 1802.
 - 16 Lewis, P., *Historical inquiries concerning forests and forest laws with topographical remarks upon the ancient and modern state of the New Forest* (London, 1811), p 79.
 - 17 HRO, 20M83/PK1 Deeds of land purchases of the Johnson charity; HRO, 20M83/PK2 John Doddington's charity; HRO, 20M83/PO40 Maintenance of parents order Henry Wort; HRO, 20M83/PO36 Deeds concerning an ancient cottage and one acre of ground at Woodgreen leased in trust to the parish officers of Breamore 1742–1836.
 - 18 HRO, 20M83/PO14 *Overseers account book* Easter 1729–Easter 1769; HRO, 20M83/PO15 *Breamore Overseers account book* 27 April 1806–April 1819; HRO, 20M83/PO16 *Overseers account book* 1819–1833.
 - 19 HRO, 20M83/PO32 *Case for the opinion of Counsel concerning Woodgreen, an extra-parochial place near Breamore being a 'receptacle for pregnant women'* 11 January 1817.
 - 20 Probert, R., *Marriage law for genealogists* (Takeaway, 2012), p 37.
 - 21 *Case for the opinion of Counsel...* *op.cit.* note 19.
 - 22 WSHC, B18/100/5, 21/1/1794; G23/1/144/69; G23/1/144/142 bastardy orders.
 - 23 HRO, 20M83/PO31 *Case for the opinion of counsel as to whether a woman with a bastard child can be compelled to say who the father is*, 5 May 1815.
 - 24 Mayall, D., *Gypsy travellers in nineteenth-century society* (Cambridge, 1988), p 29.
 - 25 HRO, 1753A/26 Wills of Robert Downer; HRO, 1798B/23 Deborah Lawes; HRO, 1803A/101 Joseph Trim.
 - 26 Vancouver *op.cit.* note 7, p 81.
 - 27 HRO, 8M59/795; 1787 holdings from Drivers' survey *op. cit.* note 13.
 - 28 Hayward's land-holding listed in Stagg, D. J. (ed.) *New Forest Commoners AD1792*, (New Forest Association, 1983); Witt's in HRO, 2M37/152 Account of rents due to Sir Edward Hulse Bt of Breamore 1756–1786, including lists of tenants; Trim's in HRO, Q22/1/1/384; HRO, 24M64/9 Land tax returns for Hale; 24M64/23 for North Charford; 24M/64/29 for South Charford.
 - 29 Wiltshire Family History Society *Wiltshire, Berkshire and Dorset Marriage Licence Bonds* CD, 2002 Bishop's marriage bonds Wiltshire; HRO, 1754A/33 John Downer's will.
 - 30 HRO, 20M83/PO33/36 Apprenticeship John Herrington 1787; HRO, 1822A/34 will.
 - 31 *An abstract of claims in the New Forest* (London:HMSO, 1853), pp 272–3.
 - 32 Neeson, J. M., 'English enclosure and British peasants: current debates about rural structure in Britain c1750–1870', in Kain, R. J. P., Chapman, J. & Oliver, R. R. *The enclosure maps of England and Wales, 1595–1918* (Cambridge, 1977), pp 17–22.
 - 33 Kent, N., *Hints to gentlemen of landed property* (London, 1775), p 235; Cobbett, W., *Cobbett's Cottage Economy No 4, 1 November 1821* (London, 1821), p 89–90.
 - 34 Vancouver *op.cit.* note 7, pp 81–84.
 - 35 For Ballard references see note 57; for Witt see note 59; HRO, 20M83/PO33/36 John Herrington's apprenticeship.
 - 36 HRO, 1836B/052 Will of William Jones; HRO, 1803A/101 Will of Joseph Trim; John Witt in *Hampshire marriage licences*.
 - 37 TNA, PROB 11/1180/148 Will probate of Mathias Harrison.
 - 38 Nelson, E., 'Downton. report on the present conditions and prospects of Wiltshire agriculture' in GB Parliament House of Commons *Reports from Commissioners Employment of Children, Young Persons and women. Second report* Part 1, (London, 1869), p 246.
 - 39 TNA, PROB 11/1180/148 Will probate of Mathias Harrison.
 - 40 TNA, PROB 11/1681/21 Will probate of William Witt.
 - 41 HRO, 20M83/PO36 Deeds concerning an ancient cottage and one acre of ground in Woodgreen, leased in trust to the parish officers of Breamore, 1742–1836.

- 42 Clarke/Trim transactions in McClelland, E. M. & Hall, P., *Woodgreen: village without title* [no publisher named] n.d., 15; HRO, 1784A/31 Will of William Drodge; HRO, 1772A/68 Will of Matthew Jones.
- 43 HRO, 20M83/PO19/34 and 25M84/PO12/26.
- 44 HRO, 20M83/PO19/38 Vincent Mist settlement examination.
- 45 Vancouver *op.cit.* note 7, p 505.
- 46 HRO, 149M89/R4/6141/62, printed in Roberts, Peter (ed) *Ruin and reform: New Forest administration 1739–1769*. (Lyndhurst: New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust), 2006, pp 120–121.
- 47 Young, A., *op.cit.* note 10, p 5.
- 48 Quotation from Thirsk & Finberg, *op.cit.* note 8, p 463; Calvinist Baptist certificate HRO, 20 July 1798 21M65/F2/3/135; Wesleyan Methodist certificate HRO, 21M65/F2/4/18.
- 49 Vancouver *op.cit.* note 7, p 505.
- 50 *Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Laws* (House of Commons, 1817), p 10.
- 51 Eden, Sir F. M. *The state of the poor* Volume 1. (London: J.Davis, 1797), pp xviii–xx.
- 52 HRO, 1753A/026; 1815B/28 Wills of Robert Downers.
- 53 HRO, 1754A/33 Will of John Downer.
- 54 HRO, 1834A/31 Will of Benjamin Downer.
- 55 HRO, 20M83/PO23/4.
- 56 HRO, 20M83/PO15 *Breamore Overseers account book*, 27 April 1806–April 1819.
- 57 HRO, 1772A/68 Will of Matthew Jones; HRO, 25M84/PO44/119 Settlement examination of Charles Ballard, resident of the poor house at Ringwood, 13 June 1821; HRO, 25M84/PO44/120 Settlement examination of Edward Ballard, resident of Lyndhurst, blacksmith, 19 June 1821; HRO, 90M/71/PO20/56 Settlement examination Henry Ballard, 9 Feb 1808.
- Charles Ballard's own version of events at his settlement examination varies slightly from the account given in the text, which gives precedence to parish register evidence.
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- 59 TNA, PROB11/1681/21 Will probate of William Witt; HRO, 6M65/6 lease and release to William Witt; marriage licence 25 April 1777 John Witt (Hampshire marriage licences); HRO, 20M83/PO33/21 apprenticeship indentures Isaac Witt, butcher; 20M83/PO33/1 David Witt, tailor.
- 60 HRO, 1765B/15; 1822A/34 Harrington/Herrington wills.
- 61 HRO, 1824B32 Will of John Eldridge.
- 62 HRO, 1778A/075 Will of Philip Richardson.
- 63 TNA PROB 11/538/207 Marriage of Elizabeth Coles and John Antrum, St Luke Chelsea 23 November 1703; will probate of William Coles; for the estate of Thirings see 'Parishes: Downton' *A history of the county of Wiltshire*, vol 11 *Downton hundred; Elstub and Everleigh hundred*, pp 19–77 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=115483>.
- 64 TNA, PROB11/1373/205 Will probate of Richard Spragg.
- 65 TNA, PROB11/1180/148 Will probate of Mathias Harrison.
- 66 HRO, 6M65/5 and /6.
- 67 HRO, 1782A/06 Will of Thomas Barter.
- 68 HRO, 1768A/30 Will of Mary Drodge.
- 69 HRO, 1731/B25 One shilling left in will of Drodge; HRO: 1730P/07 & HRO:1803A/101 examples of circa £90 in wills of Bower and Joseph Trimm respectively.
- 70 Vancouver *op.cit.* note 7, p 84.
- 71 HRO, 20M83/PO19/30 Settlement examination William Fiford 1795.

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