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A NOTE ON SOME FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURY KENTISH WILLS.

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PROVISION FOR WIDOWS IN KENTISH WILLS.

A SHORT time ago Mr. Arthur Hussey sent me extracts from thirteen Canterbury wills, which appear of some interest since they throw light on a custom of providing by will for the housing and comfort of the widow among middle-class and yeoman families. These extracts, by his leave, I give in this note.*

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the houses of yeomen and smaller gentry were, in Kent, roomy structures, being mostly timber built, with walls which do not occupy much space. Nevertheless, it seems somewhat curious that the best rooms appear to have often been reserved entirely for the testator's widow. The plan of these houses in the fifteenth century was generally a central hall open to the roof, with two rooms one over the other at the parlour end, and at the opposite a buttery or larder, with one room over, and possibly also a loft at each end: so that it does not seem that the accommodation was very great, and consequently one must imagine that the inheriting son and his family must have enjoyed but a very limited degree of comfort.

It will be noticed in reading these abstracts that, although a right to use the *aula* is generally specified, in only one instance is the "aula" itself bequeathed. In the same way, although an easement in the kitchen is not unusual, "a kitchen" is only once bequeathed. The kitchen was, I believe, originally always an out-of-door structure,

* Mr. Hussey writes me that in some cases these abstracts are from Latin wills, and in most cases the (English) spelling is modernised.

and, from the last-mentioned bequest, it is possible there were sometimes more than one (No. 2), but as the custom of dining in hall gave way to the use of the parlour, it may often have occurred that the cooking was then done in the *aula*.

I append the extracts themselves in chronological order :—

1. Godeman Shurbarne of St. Mary in Romney Marsh. 1461. Archdeaconry I., section 11.

Wife Petronille have one half part of all my message, lands, and tenements for her life, and a *camera cum carminis* [stove or fire place], also all my *utensilia et hustamentalia* [? fuel] pertaining to the said *camera*, on condition she provide in the church of St. Mary during her life a yearly anniversary for my soul and my parents.

Here the widow seems to get more than half, and as chimneys were rare (at any rate in brick or stone), the *camera cum carminis* may allude to some other sort of hearth.

2. Simon Alewey of Lydd. 1463. Consistory 2, folio 129.

That wife Joan have for her life in my chief house the *aula* with two *cameras* annexed to the head of the same on the north-east, with a kitchen.

This would seem to indicate about two-thirds of the house.

3. John Davy of Tenterden. 1467. P.C.C., 25, Godyn.

That Joan my wife have her dwelling (*mansione*) reserved to her in the south part of my chief message, viz., le p'lour, botrye, and solar.

The "botrye" is not usually included in the widow's accommodation.

4. Stephen Smyth, senior, of Tenterden. 1482. Archdeaconry 3, section 24.

Wife Alice have 10s. yearly for life, also a soler at the parlour end of my message, and the parlour under the same soler with fyr and flete [fire and water] in the hall, and her aisement in the kitchen, garden, and other places to her necessary, with free

incoming and outgoing. What time she liketh to dwell and abide in another place, then she shall leave the parlor to Thomas my son.

As she was to have an easement in the kitchen, it is doubtful if "flete" signifies water here. "Fleet" appears to have sometimes signified water, but there is also Flet =: a floor or chamber (see Halliwell's *Dictionary*). Most probably, therefore, "fyr and flete" means room to sit by the fire. (See Editor's note.)

5. John Carlis of Birchington. 1495. Consistory Court 4, folio 40.

Wife Cecilie have all the *utensilia* in my *camere*, *aule*, and kitchen, except my best bed with all its apparel, one folding-table, one chair, a copper mill, best brass pot, and a bucket (*scitula*) with cord.

Only a bequest of effects.

6. William Presten of Tenterden. 1498. Archdeaconry 7, section 3.

Wife Joan have the upper room (*alta camere*) in the east part of my messuage, with the rooms (*cameris*) under; with right of use (*aisamento*) in *aule*, kitchen, and garden, and for water there, and place for fuel, with free coming and going.

Apparently includes the parlour and chief bedroom.

7. Thomas Carpenter of Tenterden. 1498. Archdeaconry 7, section 2.

Wife Katherine have the chamber above and beneath the west part of my messuage, with easement to fetch and have water, also in the gardens and closes for fuel, and sufficient fuel for her life.

8. John Penyale of Warehorne. 1498. Archdeaconry 7, section 2.

Margaret my wife have for life all the *cameras* built on the north side of my messuage in which I live, with easement to the *aule* and *coquine*, the garden and the water there, also room to store fuel.

These two are much the same as No. 6.

9. Thomas Bishopenden of Tenterden. 1512. Archdeaconry 12, section 8.

Wife Joan have and occupy for her life my new kitchen standing on the north side of my messuage that I dwell in, with the chamber over the said kitchen and the p'lour, with free coming and going at all times necessary, with ajsment in the garden there to lay her wood and fuel, to fetch water, also the fourth part of all fruit growing every year upon my lands.

This is interesting, as it refers to a new kitchen with a room over, and apparently to a newly-erected wing. It was in the sixteenth century that floors were so often inserted in the open halls, and other premises added at same time.

10. William Godfrey of Newington next Sittingbourne. 1514. Archdeaconry 12, section 11.

That son John have that tenement in Newington Street in which I dwell, and to his heirs for ever; but my wife Juliana have a chamber or a place in the same with free entry and issue at all times; but if my wife like not the chamber or parlor then she hire an house of 4s. or 5s. by year, or of 6s. 8d. at the most, and son John pay the rent of the same house during her life.

The accommodation reserved here is very limited.

11. William Beche of Smallhithe in Tenterden. 1519. Archdeaconry 14, section 2.

That wife Agnes have yearly 53s. 4d. during her life out of all my lands and tenements; also to occupy the south part of my house, viz., from the hall of the house southwards, both above and beneath, also in the kitchen necessary water, half the garden and half the fruit of the same, with free incoming and outgoing and all other necessaries during her life.

The same as No. 6.

12. William Gerves of Tenterden. 1525. Archdeaconry 16, section 12.

That Joane my servant have and occupy the two nether chambers and the lought [loft] at the west end of the haule in the

house that I dwell in, with easement of the hall to make fire, and all things necessary, and room in the garden to lay her firewood and to fetch water at all times at her pleasure during her life; also to have four lode of loggs and two lode of faggotts.

This is the only one of the series in which the accommodation is reserved for a servant.

13. Stephen Couper, senior, of Tenterden. 1527. Archdeaconry 17, section 12.

Wife Joane have yearly 20s. from out of my messuage and lands during her life; also to occupy the lowe chamber and loughte in the east side of my messuage, and have easement of the haule to make her fire and other necessaries, with easements of the garden, and half the fruit of the garden.

The low chamber and loft may mean the parlour and attic, excluding the chamber on the first floor.

[*Hustamentalia*. Doubtless a variant of *hustilimenta*. *Hustilimentum* = *supellex domestica* (Maigne d'Arnis, s.v.). The word "hustlements" (*ostelementus*), meaning household goods, articles of furniture, occurs in Chaucer, c. 1374. Cf. "Alle the hustilmentis of Beddyng" in *E. E. Wills*, under 1418. (*New Eng. Dict.*)

Flete. The O.E. word *flet* was used as = (1) the ground under one's feet, and (2) a house, "hall," and so, also, the inner part of a house. *Fire and flet* = "fire and house room," an expression often occurring in wills. Cf. "Fire and flet and candle light, And X' receive thy Sawle" [soul] in an old northern song over a dead corpse. (*New Eng. Dict.*) A different word, O.E. *flēt*, *fleet* = (1) an arm of the sea, a creek, and (2) a drain or sewer; but never simply "water."—Ed.]

