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OTHAM, PEOPLE AND PLACES

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SUMMARY

A method of tracing ownership and occupancy of the houses and land in one village is described between the years 1654–1851. This involved the study of the parish records and documents mainly in the Centre for Kentish Studies.

INTRODUCTION

Otham is a village lying to the east of Maidstone in Kent. Until recently it had a small population with few houses built in the twentieth century and many dating from the eighteenth century and earlier. It was thought that it might be possible to identify the houses and occupants of the whole village over a period of two hundred years. From 1654–1851 the village was largely divided between the Manor of Otham to the west of Otham Street and the Manor of Stoneacre to the east.

A well-used method of tracing occupancy through the years is to follow the property through the census returns, tithe maps and other specific documents relating to the parish records. By tabulating the various records for the whole village it was easier to follow the changes in all the houses over the years. These formed the basis of a book, *Otham, People and Places*, published in 1989. The author was given great encouragement in this work by Allen Grove who kindly read and commented on the finished manuscript. This paper describes the process underlying the presentation of material in that book.

The main records used were the church warden accounts and assessments which start in 1654 and continue to the present century with two breaks 1689–1716 and 1764–1815.¹ These were supplemented with the land tax assessments 1780–1832² and the

¹ The Centre for Kentish Studies P280/4/1–2 and P280/5/1–2

² CKS Q/RPL/283

census returns for 1851.³ The initial starting point was the tithe map for Otham, 1838.⁴

(1) The church warden was responsible for collecting the church rate usually on an annual basis. This rate was based on the land held and until 1868 was a compulsory payment. The tax-payer was the occupier of the property (Richardson 1986). However, there is a section in many of the records for 'out-dwellers' who did not live in the village. The number of these is small (less than 10 per cent) and the property involved seems to have been land rather than houses. The tax-payers in the church warden accounts number between 30–40 for any one year.

(2) The land tax assessment was collected between 1692 and 1949 by the county authorities. Payment of land tax on freehold property worth £2 or more annually, established a voting qualification (Richardson 1986). The records, 1780–1832, indicate the person paying the tax who was usually the proprietor of the property and may have lived there. The occupier may be named, if different from the proprietor but, to complicate matters, might have sub-let the property.

(3) The census returns of 1851 took place for the night of 30–31st March (Richardson 1986) and record the age of the occupants, the birth place, occupation and relationship to the head of the household.

(4) The Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 resulted in the Otham parish tithe map and accompanying apportionment⁵ being agreed at the White Horse public house in October 1837 and published in 1838.

The manorial court records for Stoneacre, 1659–1730,⁶ contained topographical information and allowed some cross-checking of occupancy. The Hendley family and their successors have owned Otham manor since 1543 and extensive records are available for study together with many documents deposited in the Centre for Kentish Studies. Some documents were available privately from the Betts family who have lived in the village since 1658.

METHOD

The tithe map of 1838 allowed an accurate base-line to be prepared as the apportionment showed the proprietor, occupier, value and content of each holding, whether house or land. This material was laid out in tabular form and by correlating this with the church warden accounts of

³ PRO H0107/1616

⁴ PRO IR30/17/282

⁵ PRO IR29/17/282

⁶ CKS U2035 M15–18

the same year the church tax paid could be ascertained and used as a 'marker'.

It was then possible to trace the individual properties both forwards and backwards in time. Thus, the church warden accounts were listed from 1838-51 and the results compared with the 1851 census. This particular census contained more details about households than that of 1841 and thus made it easier to identify individual houses.

The church warden accounts were then traced backwards until 1654. The major gap of 1764-1815 was, fortunately, partially filled by the land tax assessments of 1780-1832. Because there was an overlap of these two types of record from 1815-32, it was possible to correlate the tax payments in the two types of taxation.

Having produced an apparent succession of house occupation, as many documents as could be found were searched to verify or negate the results. The topographical details from these various documents together with any individual names were entered in the tables.

Further correlation of the different inhabitants of the village was added from the hearth tax return of 1671⁷ and the window tax⁸ return of 1783.

RESULTS

The results were plotted in the following sequential tables. Only two of the houses and their occupants are shown for reasons of space. The two properties are shown by their present names, which are of recent origin and no help in tracing their earlier history, but allow readier identification in the tables.

The numerical units shown in the tables are pounds.

CHURCH WARDEN ACCOUNTS (CKS P280/5/1) CHURCH RATES starting 1654

Place	BISHOPS	TUDOR COTTAGE/ ELIZABETHAN LODGE
Proprietor	Ellis	Ellis
Tax Payer	Farnham Aldersley	Peter Wilmot
Tax	46 (inc. Stoneacre)	5
Year		
1654?	do.	do.
1655	John Nicholson, tax 6	do.
1656	do.	do.
1657?	do.	do.

⁷ PRO E179 129/746

⁸ CKS Q/CTw Otham

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1660	do.	do.
1663	do.	do.
1664	do.	do.
1665	do.	do.
1666	do.	do.
1667	do. tax 4-10	do. tax 3
1668	do.	do.
1669	do.	do.
1671	Mrs Nicholson, widow	do.
1671	do.	do.
1672	William Fullager, tax 4	do.
1673	do.	do.
1674	do.	do.
1675	do.	do.
1676	do.	do.
1677	do.	Edward Gekers
1678	do.	do.
1679	do.	do.
1680	do.	Edmund Ellis
1681	do.	Henry Collison
1682	do.	do.
1683	do.	do.
1684	do.	Mrs Ellis
1685	do.	Goodman Millar
1686	do.	Goodman Hills
1687	do.	do.
1688	William Fullager	Goodman Hills

OTHER DOCUMENTATION

1659	Stoneacre manor court roll (CKS U2035 M15-18) John Nicholson prev. Thomas Woodgate	
1676	William Fullager	
1702	William Fullager	
1730	Hulse tenant of Edward Beesom	
1773	(CKS U854 T7) tenant formerly Ed. Beesom late - Austen	(CKS U2035 T58) 1792 lease by William Baldwin to John Ellis

CHURCH WARDEN ACCOUNTS (CKS P280/5/2) CHURCH RATES starting 1717.
N.B. Some years are missing. In some years there was more than one assessment.

Place	BISHOPS	TUDOR COTTAGE/ ELIZABETHAN LODGE
Tax Payer	Jonathon Fullager	included in Ellis (Stoneacre)
Tax	4	?
Year		
1718	do.	do.
1719	do.	do.

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1720	Beesom (tenant	do.
1721	do.	do.
1723 April	do.	do.
1723 Sept.	do.	do.
1723 March	do.	do.
1724	do.	do.
1725	do.	do.
1726	do.	do.
1727	do.	do.
1728	do.	do.
1729	do.	do.
1730	do.	do.
1732	do.	do.
1734	do.	do.
1735	do.	do.
1737	do.	do.
1738	do.	Edward Jordan
1739	do.	do.
1740	Beeson, tax 8	do.
1741	James Dabs	do.
1742	do.	do.
1743	do.	John Downe
1743	do.	do.
1744	John Cooke	do.
1746	do.	do.
1746	do.	do.
1747	do.	do.
1748	do.	do.
1749	do.	do.
1750	do.	do.
1751	do. tax 7	do.
1752	do.	do.
1753	do.	do.
1754	do.	do.
1755	do.	do.
1756	do.	do.
1757	do.	do.
1759	do.	do.
1760	do.	do.
1761	do.	do.
1762	do.	do.
1763	John Cooke	John Downe
LAND TAX ASSESSMENTS (CKS Q/RPL 283) starting 1780.		
Plate	BISHOPS	TUDOR COTTAGE/ ELIZABETHAN LODGE
Tax	11	4
Proprietor	Mrs. Austen	Mrs. Turner
Occupier	John Moorlan	Thomas Botten
Year	do.	do.
1781	do.	do.
1782	do.	do.

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1783	White	do. Booth, proprietor
1784	do.	do.
1785	do.	do.
1787	do.	do.
1788	do.	do.
1789	do.	do.
1790	do.	do.
1791	do.	do.
1792	do.	do.
1793	do.	do.
1794	Edward Bishop, proprietor	do.
1795	do. and occupier	do. Sir Charles Booth,
1796	do.	do. proprietor
1797	do.	do.
1798	do. part to Mrs. Swinyard	do.
1799	do. occupation herself	do.
1800	do.	do.
1801	do.	do. William Baldwin,
1802	do.	do. proprietor
1803	do.	do.
1810	all to Edward Bishop	Thomas Botten
1811	do.	do.
1812	do.	do.
1813	do.	do.
1814	do.	John Ellis
1815	do.	do.
1816	do.	do.
1817	do.	do.
1818	do.	do.
1819	do.	do.
1820	do.	do.
1821	do.	do.
1822	do.	do.
1823	do.	do.
1824	do.	do.
1825	do.	do.
1826	do.	do.
1827	do.	do.
1828	do.	do.
1829	do.	do.
1830	do.	do.
1831	do.	do.
1832	Edward Bishop	John Ellis

CHURCH WARDEN ACCOUNTS (CKS P280/4/1) CHURCH RATES starting 1815

Place	BISHOPS	TUDOR COTTAGE/ ELIZABETHAN LODGE
Tax Payer	Edward Bishop	John Ellis
Tax	20	19
Year		
1816	do.	do.
1818	do.	do.

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1820	do.	do.
1821	do.	do.
1822	do.	do.
1823	do.	do.
1824	do.	do.
1825	do.	do.
1826	do.	do.
1827	Edward Bishop and	do.
1828	do. William Bishop	do.
1829	do. (property divided)	do.
1830	do.	do.
1831	do.	do.
1832	do.	do.
1833	do.	do.
1834	do.	do.
1835	do.	do.
1836	do.	do.
1837	Edward and William Bishop	John Ellis

TITHE MAP finalised at a meeting at the White Horse Oct. 1837

Name	BISHOPS	TUDOR COTTAGE/ ELIZABETHAN LODGE
Owner	Edward Bishop Snr	William Baldwin
Occupier	1) William Bishop 2) Ed. Bishop Snr	John Ellis
Payment	£11-2-6	£3-8-3
Acres	11	4
	£0-18-6	
	2	

CHURCH WARDENS ACCOUNTS continued (CKS P280/4/2 from 1846)

1838	William and Edward Bishop	John Ellis
1839	do.	do.
1840	do.	do.
1841	do.	do.
1842	do.	do.
1843	do.	do.
1844	do.	do.
1845	do.	do.
1846	do.	Mrs Reeves and Pack
1847	do.	do. (property divided)
1848	do.	do.
1849	do.	James Pack
1850	do.	do. James Watts, proprietor
1851	William and Edward Bishop	William Robinson and George Mark

CENSUS REPORT 1851 (PRO IR29/17/282)

Place BISHOPS

(1)

William Bishop, head, married, age 24, Freehold Farmer employing 1 man

Sally Bishop, wife, married, age 24

William James, son, age 2

Amelia Sarah, daughter, age 4 months
William Nye, servant, unmarried, age 30, Agricultural Labourer
Mary Ann Frid, daughter, age 15, Indoor Servant

(2)

Edward Bishop, married, age 30, Annuity from Houses
Elizabeth Bishop, wife, age 28
Elizabeth, daughter, age 11
Edward Charles, son, age 4

Place TUDOR COTTAGE/ELIZABETHAN LODGE

(1)

George William Marks, head, married, age 25, Cordwainer
Sarah Marks, wife, married, age 25
Arthur William, son, age 4

(2)

This appears to have been unoccupied on the date of the census

DISCUSSION

Otham parish has well-defined boundaries with a small number of houses and people which made the completion of the tables relatively easy. The population in 1811 was 307.⁹ In some years the total number of rents increases. This seems to have been due to leasing of extra land by the principal landlords, the change of use, e.g. new pub, or the building of new houses. There seems to have been quite a steady turnover of properties, particularly the very small ones.

There are no maps of the parish prior to 1800 and reliance had to be placed on topographical descriptions found in other documents. Thus people and places had to be considered together as a three dimensional 'jig-saw', with time forming the third dimension.

Bishops was chosen because it is a Wealden hall-house (one of nine within the parish) dating from the mid fifteenth century and thus was easier to identify than some houses. Tudor Cottage/Elizabethan Lodge which is a sixteenth-century building, was chosen because it was difficult to identify in the records and thus raised problems.

Both buildings were part of Stoneacre manor. Bishops showed as a separate property in the court baron records between 1659 and 1730 and was probably sold to the Austen family of Canterbury between 1771 and 1780. Tudor Cottage/Elizabethan Lodge did not show as a separate item possibly because it was small and within 400 yards of

⁹ Population Tables, 1851 Census, South Eastern Division. CKS XK 312 Reg

Stoneacre and thus part of the immediate estate. It remained in the estate until 1851 when it was sold to James Watts.

It was found that it was easier to decipher the various relationships by considering the village as a whole, rather than trying to trace each property as an individual item. Inevitably there had to be some 'best-guess' solutions on occasion. The use of the 'jig-saw' analogy is helpful because by chancing one piece at a given period in time others then fell into place in succession at another point.

An example of this related to Tudor Cottage/Elizabethan Lodge. This house was occupied by tenants of the Ellis family and their successors at Stoneacre. Using the method detailed the occupiers were listed. However, a deed of 1792¹⁰ stated that the building was leased by John Ellis of Langley from William Baldwin of Stoneacre, 'now a private building formerly a public house known as the Five Bells', occupied by Thomas Botten the younger. As Otham church has only three bells and in the church warden accounts there is never mention of more than that, this raised doubts about the correctness of the identification of the building. It was, however, chanced. Fortunately, in 1992, examination of the quarter session records of the register of ale-house keepers¹¹ showed that in fact the name of the pub was the Five Bells and that Thomas Botten was the publican.

It is possible to get some idea as to whether there is any major discrepancy in the tables from the hearth tax returns. While Otham is shown with Langley in some of these, the return of 1671 shows Otham separately and lists the parishioners discharged from paying the tax. If this is compared with the church warden accounts for that year the two lists correlate for those paying the tax but of those discharged, only 3 out of 13 paid the church tax. This seems to suggest that it was the smaller, humbler homes that have disappeared while the main houses have remained where many of them still stand today. During the period 1654–1851 houses must have been pulled down or rebuilt. Of the few that have been built in the last 150 years, it is apparent from examining the Ordnance Survey maps that some have been built on the site of older houses. Some of the larger houses were subdivided into tenements in the early nineteenth century and this is particularly apparent in the 1851 census.

Similarly, although not listing discharged persons, the window tax of 1783 did not suggest there were any major discrepancies. The window tax listed names for a year in which there was a gap in the sequence of church warden accounts and was thus doubly helpful.

¹⁰ CKS U2035 T58

¹¹ CKS Q/RLV 4/1–6

CONCLUSION

By considering a small compact village, Otham, it has been possible to relate houses and their occupants over a two hundred year period from 1654–1851.

REFERENCE

John Richardson, 1986, *The Local Historian's Eycyclopedia*. New Barnet, Historical Publications.