

## CHAPTER 5 [Pages 27 - 46]

### COMBEFIELDS

William (1629 - 1692) and Grace (-1698)

The advent of William at Combefields, sometimes referred to as Combe Lordship, or simply Combe, heralds a period in which more records exist to help us discover something more of the lives of the family.

One of the most important of these is wills. They often mention members of a family and are therefore a useful means of establishing a tree, especially when gaps occur in parish registers, and as a means of checking relationships and places of abode. Though William's own will has not been found, the discovery of his wife Grace's in the Lichfield Diocesan Library is a very useful find. It is dated 14 March 1698, and by it she bequeathed £25 to her son Robert, farmer, of Binley; to her daughter Grace, the wife of Robert Robinson, 5 shillings, and the residue to be equally divided between her sons Jonathan and William. The will is witnessed by William Norton, Thos. Muston and her future daughter-in-law Anne Silvester, who was to marry

her son Jonathan. Being unable to write her name she made her mark. We see too that she was 'of the Lordship of Combe', which establishes her location. Combe, of Combefields, was an extra-parochial area, i. e. outside the boundaries of either an ecclesiastical or civil parish, and thus exempt from poor rates and, sometimes, tithes. Those living in such areas had to be baptised, married and buried in the nearest convenient church,

27

hence William's burial at Binley, a parish immediately west of Combefields. None of William and Grace's children are recorded as being baptised, either at Binley or Brinklow, another adjoining parish, though another son, John, who was not mentioned in the will, was baptised at Binley on 8 September, 1662; this shows how many gaps there were in parish registers at this time. John probably died in infancy or soon afterwards, as is often the case. Neither can the date or place of William's to Grace be traced ,but from the date of the eldest son, John's baptism, it was probably in 1660 or 1659.

An Act of 29 September, 1654, made marriages the responsibility

of Justices of the Peace instead of the clergy, and it was not until the Restoration in 1660 that marriages and their registration were again resumed by the clergy; it is no surprise, therefore that the marriage was not recorded.

When William died in 1692, an inventory of his goods and chattels was made, the original of which has come down to us (see page 23) . This shows him to have been a grazier, and that his household goods and livestock were valued at £231. 19s. 8d.

A statute of Henry VIII in 1529 had decreed that the probate of wills in ecclesiastical courts was authorised subject to the presentation of an inventory or list of the removeable effects of the deceased person. A wife's property was excluded from the list, which was to be drawn up and signed by two reputable neighbours, known as appraisers, because they were also to make a valuation of his possessions. The purpose of the valuation is

28

obscure, but a study of some of these inventories shows fairly

consistent undervaluations, so they may have been thought, at least in the eyes of the appraisers, to have been a basis for some form of future taxation on the deceased's estate

We are fortunate in having not only an inventory of William's goods, but also of his wife, Grace's. This was made seven years after William's and here is a copy.

An Inventorie of the Goods Chattells and Debts of Grace Sodon of Combfields in the County of Warwick Wid lately deceased, taken the 29th day of March 1699 by us whose names are hereunto subscribed

Imprs Seven two year old Heifers valued at	180706
IP five three year old Heifers valued at	22:15:00
IP Six cows in the nearther field at	23 05 00
IP Three cows in the meadow at	17 00 00
IP Six Cows in the Home ground at	34 00 00
IP Five yearlings at	07 10 00
IP Fiftie Ewes 40 Hoggs with 1 Ram )	
2 Weathers at )	82 05 00

IP	ffive Mares & Two yearlings at	32 10 00
IP	Hay at	10 00 00
IP	Three store Swine at	02 07 00
IP	Oats at	14 08 00
IP	Wheat on a hovel & Pease on a Karth at	13 10 00
IP	ffire wood & Hurdles at	03 05 00
IP	Two carts 2 Ploughs 3 Harrows & other Implements for Husbandry at )	07 15 00
IP	A Maltmill & a grindstone	00 16 00
IP	Two Ladders at	
IP	Seavon Hundred & a quarter of cheese	09 09 00
IP	Corn growing upon the ground & pease) with all Tillage valued at )	10 10 00
IP	Five Hives of Bees at	01 00 00
IP	Two Quarters of Malt at	03 12 00
Itm	A strike & half of rye	00 06 08
Itm	Bason valued at	04 05 00
Itm	Manure in the yard at	01 00 00
Itm	Lumber at	01 00 00
Itm	A bedstead wth Curtains vallons & bedding )	
Itm	1 Coffe 1 Chest Chairs & stools in ye parlor	02 10 00
Itm	Two Bedsteads wth bedding in ye father Parl.	02 00 00

Itm 1 Bedstead with Curtains Valons & other  
 bedding 2 Chairs & 2 Coffers in the best  
 Chamber at 02 00 00

30

Sheets & Table linnon  
 with other Linnons 03:00:00  
 7 Pewter Platters 2 Basons 1 pewter 00:14:00  
 Candlesticks & 1 fflagon at  
 5 Brass Kettles 3 Brass panns one  
 warmingpan & 2 Brass potts at 03:10:00  
 Barrells Tubbs & Churns in ye Buttery 02:00:00  
 A Cupboard & a falling Table Chairs & )  
 stools a fire shovell & Tongs in ye )  
 Ki tchen )  
 Saddles & Bridles & other furniture for )  
 saddle Horses ) 00:10:00  
 Readie money 23:02:03  
 Good Debts 38:09:10

Desperate Debts	03:00:00
Wearing Apparell	03:00:00
	—————
	405:07:11

Robert Steele

William Norton

The inventory is well worth studying in detail, for it an illuminating picture of a Warwickshire farm at the turn of the seventeenth century. The first thing which strikes one on looking at the original is that the writing is in a far better script than William's inventory of a few years earlier, and so perhaps written by a person of some education. William Norton was one of the appraisers in both cases, but his signature is not quite similar; Grace's inventory may well be a fair copy of the original made by another hand. Can it be that none of the appraisers could write and so found someone else to write down what they dicrated?

The most striking feature of the two inventories is that in Grace's case the value of her goods was assessed at nearly twice that of William's. What accounts for this difference? Not their

household goods, for in each case they were valued at £16 4s 8d.

Neither can the difference be accounted for by the time of year at which the valuations were made. William's took place in

31

September, a time of year when crops would have been harvested and livestock not yet slaughtered or sold in preparation for the winter shortage of grazing and animal feed. On the other hand Grace's valuation was made at the end of March, when livestock numbers and fodder would be at their lowest. We do in fact find that the farm was carrying less livestock in March 1699 than it was in September 1692, but the outstanding difference between the two inventories is that Grace, following her husband's death, had been adopting an improved farming system by ploughing up some of the pasture land and converting it to arable, growing such crops as wheat, rye and peas, and acquiring the implements and horses to do this, as well as keeping pigs and bees and making cheese.

Another interesting feature of the Inventory is that it gives us a good picture of the farmhouse. It consisted of five rooms:

(1) the parlour, also used as a bedroom, (2) a second living room or par1our, used too for sleeping (3), a kitchen where cooking would be done on an open fire, and (4) the buttery, used for a1e brewing and butter and cheesemaking. Upstairs was (5) the 'best chamber' or bedroom, which would also be used for storage and, probably, a second room (though not specifically mentioned) which was mainly used for storage. As for the house,s construction, it was almost certainly of timber framing with brick infilling between the timbers, and a thatched roof, later to be replaced by tiles, like so many of the houses of the period which still exist in the district.

Altogether one gains the impression of a prosperous yeoman and

32

his wife, some two or three times as wealthy as the average farmer, occupying a large farm, who were a great deal better off than the village labourers worth £4 or £ 5. At the time the inventory was made wheat was worth 42s. a quarter, a high price, but labourers' wages were low and working hours long. They were paid e mere 8Bd. a day, though when mowing hay and corn this was

increased to 1s. a day. From March to September they were expected to work from 5 a.m. to 7 or 8. p.m., with two and a half hours for meals, and from mid-September to mid-March the working day was from daybreak to dark. Farmers were discouraged from paying higher wages than those quoted on pain of ten day's imprisonment or a £10 fine.

Some of the terms used in the inventory have gone quite out of use, and the spelling of others may be puzzling so an explanation of some of them may help the reader:

IMPRIMIS: (abbreviated to Impr. or jur JP) Latin for firstly or in the first place.

VALLONS: now spelt valance, is a curtain surrounding a bed.

HOGGET: a one-year-old sheep.

KETTLE: a deep vessel for cooking food.

LUMBER: odds and ends.

QUARTER: a measure of quantity, one quarter equalling eight bushels.

HUNDRED: five quarters, more or less a ton.

TILLAGE: land used for growing crops other than grass.

WETHER: a year-old castrated ram.

STRIKE: a full measure.

Apart from the two inventories we have one further piece of information about the farmhouse. In 1661 a Hearth Tax was introduced, when each hearth had a tax of 2s. levied on it. The returns for Combefields show that William paid on two hearths in 1661, 1670 and 1672. This tax was finally abolished in 1689.

33

Combefields 34 - 48 Part 2

Combefields contained the great Cistercian monastery, Combe Abbey, which in the thirteenth century became the richest in England.

At the Dissolution in 1539 most of the original buildings were demolished and subsequently a new house was built around the cloisters. The extensive abbey lands were granted by Edward VI to the Earl of Warwick, but in 1626 the estate was acquired by Sir William Craven, later to become the Earl of Craven.

He owned all the land in Combefields and adjacent parishes such as Brinklow and Binley, so it is clear that William must have been one of his tenants. The Cravens were Royalists, and so had their lands confiscated during the Commonwealth, though they were later restored to the family by Charles II. It is a pity we do not know the precise location of William's land, but the chances are that it was the same as half a century later in the time of his grandson, William.

It is time now to look at the family tree to follow the story of William and Grace's descendants.

Robert, the eldest son, must either have fallen into disfavour with his parents or he was considered to be already well set up on his farm at Binley, for not only was he deprived of the lease of the Combefields farm, but he received only £25 under his mother's will.

Whatever the reason, it was his brothers, Jonathan and William, who inherited the lease. Nothing can be found about William in the registers of Binley or Brinklow, so he probably sold his share in the farm to Jonathan as it was Jonathan's son, another William, who came to inherit it in due course from Jonathan.

Jonathan (1675 - 1720) and Ann (-1733)

In January 1699, not quite a year after his mother's death, Jonathan married Ann Silvester, of the same parish, at Bulkington, near Bedworth. They decided to be married by license rather than have the banns read at Binley, and Jonathan's brother, Robert, stood surety. (The marriage bond is reproduced on page 30), and it confirms that Jonathan's occupation was 'husbandman of Combe'. He and Ann had fourteen children; at least four died in infancy and another at the age of five. Despite twenty years of bearing children, Ann survived her husband by thirteen years, and was buried at Binley on 8 December, 1733, Jonathan having been buried there himself on 7 June, 1720, aged only 45. If Jonathan made a will it has not survived; Ann died intestate, and her eldest son, William, was granted probate on 26 April, 1734. Ann may have got into some difficulties running the farm, because the Craven Estate accounts show her to have been £43 in arrear with her rent at Ladyday 1728, and a further £16 for a meadow. Clearly she must have had a hard task bringing up so many children, with the added worries attached to farming her land.

When her husband died, William, the eldest of their thirteen children, was only 20 and the youngest, Martha, had not yet been born. The farm could not possibly support so many, and two of the boys, Jonathan and John, had to leave. The former moved to Stoneleigh, where he became a victualler, i.e. an innkeeper, and founded a collateral branch of the family there; John settled in Coventry to become a peruke (or wig) maker and his descendants became successful in such professions as attorney, surgeon and army officer, eventually migrating to Bath.

35

36 MISSING

William (1702-1784) and Hannah (-1762)

Returning to the eldest son, William, he continued to farm at Combe fields, but whether the same land as his father's or another holding on the Craven Estate, is not certain. In about 1736, when he would have been 34, he married Hannah. Neither her maiden name nor the date and place of their wedding have been discovered. We do know from the Craven Estate records that William prospered as a farmer, for in 1744 Lord Craven built him

a complete new farmstead at a cost of £133 1s 7½d, an amount in excess of his expenditure on the whole of the rest of his estate in that year- so well were the house and buildings constructed that they still stand today in much the same condition, and are known as Woodhill Farm, which is situated on the road from Brinklow to Combe Abbey. The farmhouse is illustrated on a later page and we still have the detailed accounts for the building work, as shown here:

To William Soden's buildings

1744	Oct ' 3	Robert Irons, brickmaker's bill	10 4 6
		Samuel Jacob sinking the well	1 2 0
	Oct 17	John Dadley, sawyer	6 16 6
	Nov 19	Edward Harris, tiles to finish barn	1 0 1
		William Hutt 4 close hurdles	6 0
	29	Francis Garner & comp. carpenters	10 6 6
		William Goodman, mason	9 11 21/2
	Apr 30	Mr Keen, wood for windows	2 5 10
	May 16	Robert Irons, brickmaking 12,000	4 18 0
		brickmaking 14,000	4 18 0
	July 5	Wm. underwood for shooting	81

	bunch of lath	1 3 7
July 25	Robert Irons, brlckmaking 13,750	4 16 3
Aug 30	Dadley, sawyer	6 18 0
	Mr Hudson, wood for doorcases	2 0 6

37

Sep 23

John Hayes, glazier	3 17 6
James Davis, his bill	9 16 1
William Trevis for boards	4 0 0
Robert Irons 14,100	4 18 0

F Garner carpenter bill

6 windows at 4s 7 at 3s 2 at 2s	1 18 6
10,5 sq. flooring at 6s	3 3 0
21 sq. roofing	5 5 0
12 doors and frames finishing at	
5/6	3 6 0
The outward door	8 0
The stairs	10 0

6,85 sq ceiling joist ar 2s	13 6
window boards, shelves, door stairs,etc...	9 0
Wm. Goodman, mason, bill	
, 29.7 yds. brickwork at 9d	1 2 3
3333.2 " 6d	8 6 7
22 sq tiling at 2/6	2 15 0
51 yds. brickwork at 3s	12 9
182,6 ceiling at 2 1/2	1 18 4
486 rendering	4 1 0
125 raving	1 0 10
chimneys, oven etc, as per agreement.	3 3 9
To Dadley, sawyer, his bill	3 16 0
Mr Barnes for 8qr hair	2 2 8

But William's rise to prosperity was gradual. He was frequently behindhand with his rent: £128 at Ladyday 1740; the same at Ladyday 1741 and 1742; £123 in 1743, and the same again in 1744, 1748, 1749 and 1750. He seems to have obtained a

rebate or reduction of rent later on, for we find he was paying £89 in 1753-4, £103 in 1754-5 and £108 in 1755-6. In spite of this the accounts for 1756-7 show 'arrears of £88 still standing'.

By 1778 the farm comprised 255 acres o roods 11 perches, and was let to William at a yearly rent of £186 12s. 10 1/4d. It is shown on the contemporary map on page 33. William was therefore farming on a large scale, but far from being alone in the county in doing so. William Marshall, writing in 1796, mentioned that 'in

38

39 MISSING

yeomanry of the higher class, men cultivating their own estates of £200 to £500 a year are thickly scattered'. Almost throughout Warwickshire towards the close of the eighteenth century, the main system of farming was dairying with some livestock rearing and fattening; doubtless Woodhill Farm was no exception, producing butter, cheese and meat for sale in Coventry and the neighbourhood. Lord Craven's accounts contain several entries relating to purchases of butter, cheese and other produce from William:

1741 Sept 24	William Sodin, butter	£2 3 6
1742 March 13	William Sodin, for carriage of tanners muck	1 17 6
1743 July 29	William Soden, butter	2 6 3
1744 July 20	William Sodin, butter	1 17 6
1746 Mar 30	William Sodin, 11 strike of crabs	3 0
1747 Mar 25	William Sodin, oats and straw	4 4 0
1747 July 27	William Sodin, butter and cheese	11 9
1748 Sept 23	William Sodin 20 sheep	14 15 0
1749 Sept 29	William Sodin, 3lb. honey	1 6
1757 Sept 29	William Sodin, butter and cheese	1 2 3

William's wife, Hannah, died in 1762, and was buried, as was usual, at Binley. She had borne him eight children, four of whom died in infancy. William himself survived Hannah by twenty-two years, being buried at Binley on 30 December, 1784, aged 82. In his will made on 19 January, 1781, he left legacies of £20 to his son, John, £5 to his son William Watts, 5 shillings each to his

daughter Ann Nichols and her husband William Nichols, and 10/6d to each grandchild not named. The residue of his estate, including the lease of Woodhill Farm, was left to his eldest surviving son, Jonathan.

40

It may be noted here that William (1629-1692), Jonathan (1675-1720) and William (1702-1784) all left the leases of their farm to their eldest surviving sons, except in the case of Robert (c.1668-1710), who was already provided for, having a farm of his own at Binley, where he was another Craven Estate tenant.

Throughout this period leasehold was the usual form of land tenure, as it was not until the next century that annual tenancies from year to year began to be introduced so as to restrict a tenant's occupation to his lifetime. Leasehold tenure could be for a term of years, for life, or for up to three lives, and it seems likely that the William who came from Bourton-on-Dunsmore was granted a lease for three lives. This kind of lease was then usually granted on demesne land, or land reclaimed from the waste, so it is interesting to discover that Lord Craven obtained a license in 1634 to enclose 650 acres of his demesne

land of the manor of Combe and Smite. It was part of this land, therefore, that was leased to the Sodens.

The Craven Estate accounts refer not only to William, but also to his brother Thomas (1774-84), his widowed mother, Ann, and to John Soden and Mary Soden. His mother is mentioned but once, in 1728, Mary was William's cousin, the daughter of Robert and Mary who farmed at Binley; she too was often in arrears with her rent, owing as much as £128 in 1745. She must have been in decline and have given up the farm shortly before this date, for in 1741 her rent was reduced to a mere £4 a year, probably for a cottage and meadow she had moved to. She died unmarried a few years later in 1750, aged 62. John was the last of William Soden's children,

41

and the only reference to him in the estate accounts is in 1741 when, on 28 September, he received £15. 2s. 0d. for 'his board wages bill, 10 mnths' and a further sum of £1 3s. 6d. on 15 October for a similar bill. This would seem to indicate that John was some kind of employee of Lord Craven at Combe Abbey.

Much more is known of William's other brother, Thomas. Born in

1714, he lived to be 70 when he died a bachelor. The first we hear of him is in 1747, at the age of 27, when he was paid £7. 5s. 5d. by the estate for 'his board wages bill ending Mchms', and a further 12s. 10d. a month later for the same thing. A year later he received £29.16s. 11d. for 'his board wages bill and travelling charges' . Payments for similar items were made to him in 1743, 1744, 1746 and 1747, and in 1748 he was paid £11 7s.11d. in payment of 'a bill per my lord's order'. The payments made by the estate increased considerably in 1750, and are recorded as follows:

Oct. 23	Thomas Sodin,	flesh	£41 18 1
Sept. 29	"	his board wages	8 7 0
		hls horse covering	
		the pack mare	11 6
		his flesh bill	21 13 6
		expenses	5 18 6
		board wages bill	9 1 0

The last entry is in 1756-7 (29 September) for:

flesh bill	42 19 3
board wages	8 4 0
contingents	11 10 10

It is clear from these accounts that Thomas, like his brother, was a farmer, and this is confirmed by an Indenture dated 12 September, 1751, whereby Thomas and a William Goodman of Brinklow

42

(the mason employed in building William's farmhouse in 1744?) sold a cottage and land in Brinklow to Samuel Garrett, silkman, in Coventry. In this deed Thomas is described as yeoman, of

'Comb Abby'. He was therefore a man of substance, so it is all the more puzzling that he was living in at the Abbey and receiving wages. Could it be that as well 'as farming on his own account he was also managing Lord Craven's home farm? If an Inventory of his goods and chattels was made at his death, it has

not survived so it is impossible to know his worth. In his will dated 3 September, 1777 (and a codicil dated 19 June, 1784) he left legacies of £20 to his brother William's son, Jonathan; £100 to William, the son of his nephew Jonathan; and £100 to Mary Green, spinster, of Binley. The residue was divided among the children of his brother Jonathan; the children of his late sister, Grace Riley; his sister Martha Neale, Ann Leader (widow) and Eleanor Green, and his brother William, and John Neale's son of his sister Martha, wife of James Neale.

Some of the names mentioned in this will also crop up in the Brinklon Churchwardens' accounts between 1766 and 1770:

A levy made September 20 1766 for relief of the poor in Brinklow

Thomas Neal	004d
Widow Bird	013d
John Bird	030d
Richard Leader	004d
Widow Riley	022d
Do. for Crofts land	014d

Levy January 26 1767

Richard Leader	004d
Mrs Riley	022d
Do. of Crofts land	014d
Mr Sodin	015d
Thomas Neale	004d
Widow Bird	013d
John Bird	030d

43

The entries for levy of poor rates continued as above on the following dates:

15 August 1767

9 April 1767

8 November 1767

22 May 1768 (spelling this time is Soden)

24 July 1768

20 May 1769 (Thomas Riley instead of Mrs Riley,

and spelling of Sodin resumed)

June 1770

September 1770 (spelling Mr Sodeng)

From 3 November, 1770, there are no more entries for Soden; instead there is a Mr King paying the same amount. Was he a new occupant of the house or is King a transposition of Sodeng? It continues as Mr King until the end of the accounts in 1774.

Jonathan (1741 - 1799) and Sarah

The next in line to William was his son Jonathan. Born in 1741, Jonathan it will be remembered, inherited the lease of his father's farm in 1784. He had married Sarah Bird of Brinklow in 1766, and by the time he took over the farm they had already had nine children; two more were to be born subsequently, the last in 1789- seven of them were to survive him, sons Jonathan, William, Thomas and John, and daughters Sarah, Hannah and Mary. We know that his wife, Sarah, survived him on his death in 1799, for in his will of 10 July in that year he left her £20 a year for 11 years, a small sum, but no doubt she continued to live with her son Jonathan and to be supported by him. To the latter he left the lease of his farm and the residue of his estate after making bequests of £40 to his son William, £50 each to his sons William and John, and daughters Sarah and Hannah, and £60 to his daughter Mary. He appointed two trustees, Michael Bray, a butcher of

Brinklow, and William Pridmore of Combe. His total property did not exceed £1,000 in value. We know he was an employer of labour, for Richard Iliff of Brinklow testified at his settlement examination there on 11 January, 1796, that he had lived as a hired servant by the year, and that the last place he served was with Jonathan Soden of Combe.

Jonathan (1769-?)

Jonathan and Sarah, as if to confuse us, had two sons who were each named Jonathan. The first, baptised at Brinklow on 25 April, 1766, apparently died in infancy, though his burial is not recorded there or at Binley. As was common practise at the time, and in order to facilitate succession to a farm lease, the next son to be born following the death of the first was similarly named; the second Jonathan was baptised at Brinklow on 10 December, 1769. We know from his father's will that this son was left the lease of Woodhill Farm at Combefields and the residue of

his father's estate, but no record. can be found of either his marriage or the date of his death. If he ever did marry the wedding would customarily have been registered in his wife's parish, and without knowing her maiden name, this might have been anywhere.

Their children would have been baptised in an adjoining parish to their home in Combe fields, either Binley or Brinklow, as was usual in the family, but by 1806, when Jonathan would have been 37, no births of children had been recorded in either parish, so it seems fairly safe to assume that he never married. Neither does his will, if he made one, exist today.

45

Apart from such family events as births, marriages and deaths, probably the biggest impact on Jonathan's life was the construction of the Coventry to Oxford canal around 1777. It passed a mere two fields away from the boundary of Woodhill Farm, but the influx of hundreds of navvies to Brinklow can only have resulted in a disturbing disruption in the life of the community. The completion of the canal made the village alehouses a mecca

for bargemen and their families, and was eventually to bring new industries such as candle-making and boat-building.

For any recorded references to Jonathan himself we must turn to the Land Tax records. First imposed in 1697, the Returns were altered in 1772 to incorporate a list of all the occupiers of land in each parish. Thus the returns for Combefields record that from 1790 to 1803 Lord Craven was the sole taxable landholder, and that Jonathan Soden was the assessor and collector for the area. Lord Craven's tenants are all listed, and among them is Jonathan's name. From 1803 his name disappears from the record, and he seems to have been the last of a long line of the family farming through five generations at Combefields, and also the last of the family to survive there.