Bridgwater Wills, 1310-1497.

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THE last will and testament has an important place among the documents from which we derive a sure though imperfect knowledge of medieval life. From it additions are made to our understanding, at one time of local topography, at another of local genealogies. Here, we find welcome information regarding a chantry whereof we already know, or an altar which is new to us ; there, we gain some light on an article of personal or household use. The enquirer into medieval economics is helped in estimating the wealth of the prominent merchant, and in learning the manner in which that wealth was distributed after his death. It is a class of document that the local historian delights to find and cannot afford to neglect.

In this study I propose to examine a score or more of wills from among the vast store of manuscripts which, by the courtesy of the Mayor and Council of Bridgwater, I am at present engaged in transcribing. They belong entirely to the XIV and XV Centuries. The earliest bears the date of the year 1310, the latest that of 1497. All are written in Latin and nearly all are entirely legible. I will try to set forth their chief characteristics, and sift from them what may help us to reconstruct life in Bridgwater as it was between 400 and 600 years ago in the days of the town's greatest prosperity.

In nomine Dei, Amen !

These are the solemn words with which the testator's last wishes with regard to his material possessions are invariably

prefaced. The will was in fact a purely ecclesiastical concern. It belonged not to the State, but to the Canon law. To this day the juxtaposition of Probate and Divorce reminds us that in the centuries that saw these documents written, questions affecting Marriage and questions testamentary were not dealt with in the King's Courts of Law, but in those of the Church. It is one of the benefits which were due to the clergy of the Middle Ages that they encouraged and even compelled men, under threats of ecclesiastical censure, to arrange what disposal of their property should be made after their death.

It may be urged that the churchmen were no losers by this fatherly solicitude, but even if such was the case they deserve credit. The existence of a clearly drawn up instruction, regarded by the survivors as legal and binding, was no doubt the means of warding off many a family quarrel which otherwise would have disturbed the peace of the parish, a constant object of its priest's solicitude.

The clergy do not seem to have advised their parishioners to make their wills in health, as Quakers in a later age counsel each other to do. If they did, there is no evidence of such recommendation having been followed. They appear to have been content to leave the drawing up of a will until they were called to visit the testator in mortal sickness. I gather this from the fact that probate is usually dated very soon after the making of the will, as a rule within a month. We ought not to generalize too hastily from insufficient data, but I think this may stand.

In nomine Dei, Amen. This imprimatur, as it were, of the Church is followed by the date of the document and the formula "I, *A. B.*, make my will in this manner." Sometimes the testator records here the fact of his sickness, qualifying the admission with an assurance that his memory and mind are undimmed. Sometimes the latter circumstance alone is mentioned.

First among his bequests as it would appear—*in primis*—the testator commends his soul to "God Almighty, his Redeemer," or to "God, the Blessed Virgin, and All Saints," and his body to holy sepulture. He rarely fails to indicate the spot in which he desires that burial may take place. If

he names it, it is his own parish churchyard or occasionally the church itself. Mistress Joan Hert wishes to be buried beside a former husband in the parish church ; Mistress Joan Cosyn, in the south porch ; and Mistress Iseult Cave, in the chapel of the Holy Trinity, *coram ymagine Sancte Trinitatis.* That without exception, all these Bridgwater folk, who particularize the place of their burial, name either the parish church or its churchyard, seems to show us that laymen were rarely interred in the burial grounds either of the Grey Friars in Friarn Street or of the Canons of St. John the Baptist at the East Gate. From *Somerset Wills* [Somerset Record Soc., XVI, 61, 66] we learn that Sir Leonard Hakeluyt and his Lady bequeathed their bodies to be buried in the church of the Friars Minor of Bridgwater. These are the only records of the burial of laymen in either of these churches with which I have met.[1]

So is it also with the stranger without our gates. John Baker of Wembdon will be buried in Wembdon churchyard ; Mistress Juliana Barde, who appears to be associated with Cleve, at St. Andrew's in that parish ; John Bulke of Bristol, mariner, at St. Michael's in that city ; and Richard atte Stone, who seems to be connected with Cannington, in the churchyard of that village.

The wills which we have under our observation do not throw much light on the question of the sumptuousness of medieval obsequies. In those among them in which special sums are set apart for this purpose, and these are but few, there is no means of discovering how much goes to actual funeral expenses, how much to candles, how much to services rendered by the clergy. In the last item we are touching on a most important class of bequests which must be treated fully later on. For the present we are looking for " funeral expenses " proper,—money to be laid out on the day of burial. In one or two cases the satisfaction of outstanding debts is grouped with these, and we may note in passing that about a third of

1. I have since met with the will of Wm. Michel (1477), mercer, of Bridgwater, who directed that his body should be buried in the Church of the Friars.

the testators make special mention of such liquidation of liabilities.

John de Mulle's estimate of what was required at the beginning of the XIV Century for honourable burial, *ad corpus meum honorifice sepeliendum*, is twenty shillings. He seems to have been a prosperous cloth-merchant, and so, I judge, was his contemporary, Gilbert Russell, who, however, mixes matters by directing that all his tenements are to be sold in order to realize £20 to meet the costs of his funeral *et pro animabus patris et matris mee atque benefactorum*, and we cannot tell how much of that large sum may have been spent in this filial post-mortem benefaction.

At the approach of the terrible Black Death, a few weeks after the Bishop of Bath and Wells had ordered a prayer "that God may protect the people from the pestilence which had come from the East," William Maiselin left six pounds of wax to burn around his corpse on the day of burial, and ten shillings to be distributed among the poor on the same occasion. Eleven years later, John Knight devoted £4 *pro expensis in die sepulture mee*. In 1361, the year in which the pestilence was renewed, Roger Swopham instructed his executors to use five pounds and five shillings *pro expensis* on the day of his funeral, and on that day to give a penny to each needy person asking alms. Later in the century, William Hooper, in one of his wills, mentions debts and funeral expenses together, Richard Cronle devotes a tenement to the like purposes, and John Baker of Wembdon leaves for the day of his burial 5*s*. in bread to be given to the poor "for my soul's sake," and 10*s*. to be spent "for me," *ut expendatur pro me*.

Gifts to the medieval Church have been the subject of much subsequent comment, some laudatory, some quite otherwise. While one writer praises the meritorious piety of our forefathers in giving large sums for the founding and decoration of ecclesiastical buildings and to the establishment and maintenance of charitable institutions, another condemns a system under which he charges an unscrupulous priesthood with having preyed on the fears of an ignorant laity.

This is no place for anything in the nature of a theological discussion; we are, as historical students, primarily con-

cerned with historical facts. All we need note at present is the reasoning that led to those facts.

The basic belief underlying these ecclesiastical gifts accepted with assurance the efficacy of prayer, not only for the living but also for the dead. The channel for this intercession was the priest. His aid in this direction was sought, and it was deemed right and lawful to reward his service.

There appear to have been between twenty and thirty clergymen in the borough, possibly more. The master of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist probably stood highest in rank among them. He and his brethren were the rectors of the parish church, as well as of St. George's, Wembdon, and served the Lord's Chapel in the Castle. The vicar of St. Mary's was nominated by them, and three clerks served with him at the high altar. There were at least four or five chantry priests, chief among whom was the chaplain of the chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary with a clerk in attendance. Lastly, there were the Friars Minor, or Grey Friars, with their warden.

As the appropriator of the rectorial tithes, the master of the Hospital receives bequests with the explanatory phrase *pro decimis oblitis*, euphemistically suggesting a certain negligence in the regular payment of his greater tithes during the lifetime of the testator. The sums left for this object range from 6*d*. up to 40*s*. Wm. Diste, for his tithes forgotten, leaves to the master four bushels of wheat and four bushels of green peas. Richard atte Stone also left payment in kind ; wheat, barley, beans and oats, a bushel of each ; but this was at Cannington. John Bulke, of Bristol, mariner, names John Harpetre, the rector of the parish church of St. Michael, and leaves him 3*s*. 4*d*., having apparently an easy conscience as to any arrears. And so it is also with four of the Bridgwater testators. Mistress Fote distinguishes between the master and the brethren, and leaves 12*d*. to the master and 12*d*. to the brethren, with a request to the latter to pray for her soul.

It may be observed from an examination of the *Somerset Wills* that the Hospital of St. John the Baptist is rarely mentioned in the wills of testators outside the borough. In this larger field, the master and brethren were far less fortunate than the popular Grey Friars. Yet Robert Hylle, of Spaxton,

left £4 to the brethren in 1423 in order to secure their intercession.

The history of the Bridgwater advowson is typical of that of half the livings in England. When William Briwer founded the Hospital, he gave the brethren a hundred acres of land within the vill, and amplified this gift with that of the church of the parish. The donation, it is true, was saddled with an annual payment of 100*s.* to Bath Abbey, whence the advowson had been diverted by William. In spite of their plea of poverty in 1336, we may suppose the canons of St. John's to have been comfortably well-to-do, for, in addition to St. Mary's, they received the livings of Isle Brewers, Lanteglos, Wembdon, Moorwinstow, Chilton Trinity and Northover, and beside their Bridgwater acres, they held land elsewhere in Somerset as well as in Dorset.

Thus the advowson was appropriated to the brethren of the Hospital, and the church was served by a vicar of their appointing. I have not yet gleaned facts enough to speak definitely of this priest's status in the borough. Possibly it varied during 300 years. The vicar of a flourishing town like Bridgwater was probably a much more important personage than the poor parson of a country parish. Yet Richard de Exebrugge, one of the clergy who accepted the position during the terrible year of the Black Death is described as "a poor clerk, acolyte." On the other hand "Master Sir John Colswayn," one of the XV Century vicars, seems to have been a man of more importance and means. We learn from Bishop Ralph's register that the rents and issues of the vicarage in 1340 did not exceed 20 marks, "according to the taxation of the tenth," but possibly the actual was higher than the taxable value. Out of this the vicar would have to board, lodge and pay his clerks, farm his glebe and exercise Christian charity. I am inclined to think he was not so wealthy as some of the chantry priests who were associated with him. None of these, so far as I have been able to discover, ever exchanged his chaplaincy for the vicarage. John Smock became parson of West Baggeborough, where let us hope the glory of Will's Neck was not lost on his medieval mind, and Thomas Wyldemerch accepted the rectory of Chilton.

The bequests to the vicar are small. Generally they appear to be personal, sometimes accompanied by a request for his prayers. Rarely they are stated to be for tithes—the smaller tithes—forgotten. Here and there the sum is not stated, but it is to be enough to pay him for saying a trental, or sequence of thirty masses. Otherwise the largest sum he receives is 5*s*. The vicar of Cleve is granted 6*d*. and a sheep by Mistress Barde.

Yet I am inclined to think that the vicar was closer to the people's thoughts than the rector. I have said that the gifts to him seem more personal, while those to the master are nearly always for tithes forgotten and more perfunctory. The master is never mentioned by name; on three occasions we learn who the vicar was. John Parys appears in a will of 1339, the peasant leader Nicholas Frompton is named in 1383, and Wm. Hurste twice, once in a mutilated will and once in 1400. The definite mention of Frompton's name, notorious in connection with the disturbances of 1381, is specially interesting. He is described in Richard Cronle's will as perpetual vicar of St. Mary's, and thus seems entitled to the place in the list of Bridgwater vicars which has been hitherto denied him.

The three clerks, who assisted the vicar at the high altar, are definitely mentioned as regards number and on two occasions by name. John de Mulle leaves the deacon 2*d*. and the "two other clerks a penny each." Wm. Maiselin leaves them 6*d*. each. Edith Halygan in 1382 names John Smok, Wm. Clerke and Richard Hacche, and leaves them 3*d*. each. The year after, Richard Cronle names the same trio, but leaves them 1*s*., 6*d*. and 3*d*. respectively, a distribution more satisfactory to the future parson of West Baggeborough. A year later Nicholas Feror leaves them 2*d*. each. Roger Slype gives each 3*d*.; Joan Hert, 3*d*. each, if present at her obsequies; Robt. Potter leaves 6*d*. to the three, "to be equally divided among them"; Iseult Cave leaves them 4*d*. each.

As was not unusual in medieval parishes, these clerks probably lived in the vicarage. The house stood opposite the south door of the church, and may have been more or less identical with the dwelling-house still known as the old vicarage. We get a glimpse of the vicar's household in an attesta

tion of a chaplain of North Newton in the XV Century which, for the sake of its quaint English, shall be given in full.

" Be hit knowen to all men to whom this present writyng shall com witnesseth truly as foloweth that William Tredewyn of North Newton wt yn the parishe of Northepederton in the Countie of Somerset Chapleyn saith of his feith and trouth that fro vi yere of age of playne remembrans vnto the tyme that the seid William Tredewyn was xiii or xiiij yere of age was contynually abidyng yn the vicarage of Briggewater wt one Sir John Wheler parishe prest of the seid Towne to lerne reede and syng wt the seid Sir John Wheler at the commaundement of Mr Sir John Colswayne then ther vyker of the seid Towne and dayly and nyghtly for the more party at borde and bedde wt yn the seid vycarage and as y shall awnser to almighty Jesu when so euer hit shall pleyse god that y am well remembered for the tyme of vj or vij yere that one John de Myre of the est Cuntrey cam to the seid Towne of Briggewater to the seid Mr Sir John Colswayne vycar and brought home his Rent yerely and the said William Tredewyn is nowe of age *l* wynter (50 winters) In witnesse here of y haue subscribed my name. *Per me* William Tredewyn *dm. Cappellanum de manu propria.*" (Bridgwater Borough Documents, 115).

I have probably understated the number of the chantry priests, who were an important branch of the parish clergy. Well-endowed chapels and gilds were sometimes served not only by one but by several chaplains. Eventually, it may be possible to draw up a tolerable list of the Bridgwater chaplains by means of other documents than these wills. For the moment we need not go beyond the highest number of them mentioned as contemporaries in a single will.

The most important of them is the chaplain of the chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He lived in a house which stood next to the vicarage on the west side of it, and there probably lived his clerk whom he was to find and maintain at his own charges. Like the vicar he was to be a resident priest, and unless hindered by bodily infirmity he was to celebrate the solemnities of the Mass as frequently as possible, and, duly surpliced, to be present daily in the choir at each canonical hour. His seat there was that nearest the entrance on the north side.

In ecclesiastical precedence he owed obedience to the vicar. With him he shared equally the perquisites of all wax which

remained over in the unburnt candles of funeral ceremonies, and which no doubt he needed to meet a portion of the demands which his office made on him to provide tapers and candles and torches for the service of the church. Besides a lamp burning perpetually, it was his duty to furnish for the choir thirteen tapers, *cereos*, weighing 33lbs. of wax, renewable on the eve of the Assumption; two torches or twisted candles, *torticios*, of 16lbs. weight, to be lit and to burn daily at the elevation in the Mass of the Blessed Mary and to be renewable on the same vigil; two tapers at the same daily mass and one wax candle, *candelam cere*, to burn every night "while the antiphon is being sung before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary." The last occasion may be of special interest to students of medieval church ritual.

One other care the Seneschals of the Gild Merchant—and it was they who prescribed the duties of his office—placed upon the shoulders of this chaplain. This was the provision of a caretaker for "la Clock," unless indeed he preferred to wind it up and regulate it himself, and of all the "small essentials of brass and iron," *omnia minora sive minuta necessaria enea et ferrea*, pertaining to its works. This clock in Bridgwater parish church so early as 1393 is worthy of note.

If the chaplain of St. Mary's chantry had duties to perform, he seems to have been well endowed with lands in and about the town. So also was the chantry of Holy Trinity which possessed lands in "Briggewater, Cosyngton, Blakelond, Kerdysbury, Estbower, Bradney, Weyforlond, Chylton More and Wemedon." These were leased to the chaplain of the chantry, who was bound to keep all the property including houses and other buildings in repair like an ordinary tenant. The rents of these were to contribute to his maintenance.

His sacred duties were to celebrate mass and other divine offices at the altar of Holy Trinity in the parish church, either in his own person or by means of a sufficient substitute. He was to be present in the choir of the church with the other priests and clerks, and say masses "for the good estate of our Lord King and his heirs, and for the good estate of the Realm and for the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses, and their successors, and the Community of the town and for the souls of Master

Richard Bruton, Wm. Gascoigne, Wm. Poulet and Alianora his wife, Sir John Poulet and Constance his wife and all their children, Thos. Gascoigne and Wm. Gascoigne, and all benefactors of the Chapel buried during the chaplain's lifetime." He was allowed an annual vacation of 20 days to visit his friends *or* for recreation! so long as he "celebrated and prayed" as usual during such absence. If, however, he were to take French leave to the extent of doubling that period, then woe betide him! We have power in such case to re-enter on our possessions. (Bridgwater Borough Documents, 580).

"Trenyte Chauntre" seems in the end to have outstripped "our lady chauntre," while that of "Sayt gorge" came third, their respective values being £9 13*s*. 8*d*., £8 0*s*. 8*d*. and £6 2*s*. 6*d*. But when those sums represented their incomes, the "Burgages, Tenements and Cotages belonging to every the saide Chauntrie ben sore in Decaye and a great parte of them at the poynt of utter Ruyne." (Documents, 750, 751). These were the three chief chantries;[1] of other altars and gilds more anon. How, meanwhile, did the chaplains fare at the hands of the faithful?

John de Mulle left Master Thomas 12*d*., and to each chaplain in constant service, *assidue celebranti*, in the parish church 2*d*. Wm. Maiselin left them 12*d*. each. John Knight left 12*d*. to each, with special bequests of 20*s*. and 6½ double yards of Seudri [Sudory?] to Master Thos. Wyldemersch and 10*s*. to Master Adam Storie. He also left £4 for a chaplain to celebrate one year *pro anima mea*, as well as £4 for his first year-mind and £4 for the second. Roger Swopham left the chaplains 12*d*. each, and 15*s*. to Master Thos. Wildemersshe, as well as £15 to celebrate for his soul for three whole years. Against this large gift may be placed Robert Castel's penny to each priest celebrating.

Wm. Hoper left a trental to be divided equally among the chaplains, and as a sort of postscript to the will there is an added clause granting them 10*s*. in like manner. Edith

1. Since writing the above I have read five or six wills more, one of which (no. 724) definitely mentions "the chapel of St. Ann, the mother of Mary" in the parish church.

Halygan names John Shepton for 12*d.*, Master Robert Northover, who later became chaplain of St. Mary's chantry, for 4*d.*, and Master Wm. Mareys for 4*d.*, while Richard Cronle leaves the same three 12*d.* each. Nicholas Feror gives 3*d.* to each chaplain ; and John Sopham, to each priest celebrating, which would include the vicar, 2*s.* Roger Slype makes a similarly designed bequest of 6*d.*, but specially mentions the vicar for 12*d.* Joan Hert leaves 6*d.* to each chaplain serving in the church and present at her obsequies, and Robert Potter leaves them 4*d.* each ; Joan Fote names Master Thos. Blache for 6*d.*, John Scleper for 6*d.*, John Hothsnam for 4*d.*, Richard Smyth for 4*d.* and Wm. Toker for 12*d.*, all to celebrate for her soul. Iseult Cave leaves 6*d.* to each priest. Wm. Diste leaves 12*d.* to Master Thos. Blacche, and Stephen Cok 4*d.* to each chaplain celebrating daily.

It is convenient here to speak of the Grey Friars, though for that purpose we must temporarily leave the parish church. They appear as a body in eleven of these wills. Richard Cronle left them two trentals. Wm. Diste, who had been admitted to their confraternity in 1409, left them four bushels of green peas. Joan Fote left them two bushels of wheat and two bushels of beans. In money they received legacies of 40*s.*, 2*s.* 6*d.*, 20*s.*, 20*s.*, 2*s.* 6*d.*, 2*s.* 6*d.*, 20*d.* and 2*s.* 6*d.* At the end they complained of a great falling off in charitable gifts, and that they had little beyond what they derived from the service of the chapel on the bridge. Special mention is made in Gilbert Russell's will of Friar Peter of Bokelond. He is to receive 20*s.* to mend his habit yearly so long as it shall last, *ad habitum suum corigendum annuatim dum duret.* The wealthy John Knight leaves Friar Wm. Chilton half a mark.

The upkeep of the walls, woodwork and windows of St. Mary's devolved on all the burgesses of the borough. They were all of one religion ; they were all responsible for the one parish church. Tallages were granted from time to time by the parishioners *ad reparationes et emendationem ecclesie*, and £7 or £8 would be collected in this manner. (Documents, 806, 807, 808, 809, 811). The fabric was not forgotten by the testator, and legacies for its maintenance were generally in the form of money. In the wills which we are considering are

to be found bequests *ad opus ecclesie* or *ad fabricam ecclesie*—12*d*., 20*s*., £3, 12*d*., 12*d*., 2*s*., 3*s*. 4*d*. and 3*s*. 4*d*. Joan Cosyn leaves for this end 4*s*. 6*d*. "which are in the hands of John Deysham, the butcher," and whose recovery by the wardens may be therefore problematical! Wm. Maiselin dedicates to the same purpose "one best brass pot," 1 *ollam Eneam optimam*, the great cooking-pot which was an important possession of every good household.

The poor were not forgotten. Gilbert Russell leaves to the poor of the infirmary of St. John 13*s*. 4*d*.; Julian Barde to the poor on the day of sepulture a quarter of barley and wheat; Wm. Maiselin 10*s*. to be distributed to the poor on the day of his funeral; Roger Swopham a penny to each seeker of alms *in die sepulture*; John Baker 5*s*. in bread to the poor on his funeral-day for his soul's sake; Joan Hert 3*s*. 4*d*. to be shared among the poor "to pray for my soul and the souls of all the faithful departed in the vill of Bridgwater."

Alone among these Bridgwater folk Gilbert Russell left money for vicarious pilgrimages to be made, for his soul's sake, *pro me*; 40*s*. for the man who would fare to the shrine of St. James [of Compostella] in Spain and to that of our Lady of Rocamadour in Guyenne; and 10*s*. for the man who would make the English tour of the shrines of Bromholm, Walsingham and Canterbury. Two pounds does not seem an excessive amount to cover the journey to south-west France and Spain, but as it cost a pilgrim only 6*d*. to cross the Channel or, if he had a horse, 2*s*., two pounds might be made to go a long way, especially if Master Russell's pilgrim voyaged direct from Bridgwater to Bordeaux in a wine or woad ship. Our Lady's of Walsingham and the Holy Cross of Bromholm were well known Norfolk shrines, and Thomas à Becket's tomb became the most famous in Europe.

Closely associated with pilgrimages was the maintenance of bridges and roads for travellers' feet, and this was regarded as a truly pious duty. Thus we find the same Gilbert Russell leaving 10*s*. for the purchase of stones for mending the road between the hospital and the bridge; and Roger Swopham 20*s*. for the causeway between Brigg' and Horsy, which continued the road between the bridge and the hospital.

Godsons are remembered in two cases, John de Mulle leaving them each a penny and Joan Hert 6*d.* each.

Definite money gifts to relatives and friends are not numerous. John Knight divided £4 16*s.* 8*d.* among seven legatees, and Roger Swopham £18 among twelve. These were two wealthy men ; the former left at least £17 to religious uses in money alone, and the latter not less than £22. These were large sums for the middle of the XIV Century. John de Mulle and Gilbert Russell appear to have been well-to-do cloth merchants who died in the early years of the same century, and cloth appears in their wills as well as money.

John de Mulle leaves 32yds. of cloth, most of which is described as new and of " mixed " colour, *de novo panno mixto.* His daughter Iseult receives 7yds. of this, his sister Lucy 3yds., and three men 3½yds., 3yds. and 2½yds. respectively. He gives his wife 7yds. of light blue cloth, *de albo blueto*, and to his nurse and John le Palmer 3yds. each of russet, *de russeto.* Gilbert Russell leaves to Walter le Large 5yds. of the best cloth " which the same Walter has in his keeping " and 5yds. of the same cloth to Robert le Porter. These were executors.

John de Mulle leaves also a best brass dish, *patellam*, two second-best dishes, a gown of coarse brown cloth, *robam de burello*, a tunic of light blue cloth, *de albo blueto*, a tunic of dark blue cloth, *de nigro blueto*, a moiety of his share of the frodger (that is inferior corn), a best brass pot, a second best brass pot and a brass cup, *pocenetum.*

Gilbert Russell's personal effects include a second best gown, a green supertunic with hood, a russet supertunic with hood, two rochettes, *rocheta*, which he leaves to Agnes Doyssyel and her daughter, and a best gown.

We are able to get some idea of the value of these cloths from a parchment which provides a list of Gilbert Russell's goods remaining in the hands of certain men who are named. (Documents, 404). These consist of 25 pieces of cloth of various colours worth £18, three pieces of cloth of various colours worth £3 0*s.* 10*d.*, three old cloth lengths worth 3*s.*, 2½yds. of *bluetum* worth 4*s.* 2*d.* (*i.e.* 1*s.* 8*d.* per yd.), a piece of cloth of Flanders worth £12, a basin, *pelvis cum lavator'*, worth 10*s.*, a towel, *mappa*, worth 17*d.*, five seats, *sedilia*,

worth 2*s.* 6*d.*, a silver cup, *ciffus argenteus*, worth 13*s.* 4*d.*, another cup worth 8*s.*, a lamp, *lampada*, worth 2*s.*, and in addition to these goods £26 in the hands of his journeyman and £10 in those of Robert le Porter. Truly a wealthy merchant was Gilbert Russell!

Julian Barde leaves carts, *caretos*, and sheep, *multones*, *bidentes*, and wheat and barley besides a tunic *de blueto*, a hood of medley, *caputium de melle*, a supertunic of green and one of blue. Wm. Maiselin particularizes silver spoons, *coclearia argentea*, and a best gown. John Knight, who appears to have been a tanner, leaves to his brother Andrew all undressed skins with all his instruments for that craft, and to Robert Mostard his best gown. A gown of *bluetum* appears in Rd. atte Stone's will. Rd. Cronle leaves to his executors *unum plumbum et ferrum servient' dicto plumbo.*

Nicholas Feror grants his daughter Joan a brass pot containing a gallon and a half; John Sopham a brass pot and a pelisse *cum lanatore* to his son Roger; John Baker a cape, *armilausam*, and best tunic to his son Henry, a red gown to his son John, and a blanket and a sheet to his daughter, Magota. Joan Hert leaves a best veil, *velamen*, and a best gown; Joan Fote a best hood, *capitium*, two best veils and a best brass pot; Stephen Cok, a cup called Macer, *ciphum vocatum Macer*, six silver spoons, a brass pot, a small posnet or saucepan, *posnetam*, two brass platters, a basin, *pelvim cum lavator'*, a table cloth, *mappam mensalem*, a hand towel, *manutergium*, a coverlet, *coopertorium*, a pair of blankets, *unum par lodicum*, a pair of sheets, *unum par linthiaminum*, a box or basket, *cistam*, containing 8 bushels, a black coffer, *cofram*, containing 2 bushels, two platters of tin, *perapsides stangneos*, two dishes, *discos*, two saucers, *sausarios*, and one charger, all of the same metal. Finally, John Myllward leaves to his daughter Isabel a platter, a dish and a candlestick.

So much for personal property. When we come to real estate, lands and houses, we approach a more important subject, the pith and marrow of the whole matter.

Why are there hundreds upon hundreds of deeds of gift, leases, sales, quitclaims and so forth, dealing with the transfer of tenements, among the borough archives? It has been

suggested that they were placed in the municipal chest for safety only, but the more of them I read, the more I am inclined to think that, when all have been placed in order of sequence, thoroughly examined and tabulated, it will be found that at least a large proportion of them are the title-deeds of lands and tenements which have been given to the church itself or to one of the religious gilds. Such property thus became common property, the property of the commonalty, and the deeds were kept in the common chest. There are leases by "all the burgesses" of tenements, which are stated to have been given or devised to the upkeep of the Mass of the B.V.M. or to the lights before the Holy Cross. There are deeds of gift to a trust evidently acting for some gild or fraternity. There are deeds of transfer whose presence is explained by the discovery of another deed finally conveying the property to the church. It is the same with the majority of these testaments.

The law of England did not allow the landowner to bequeath real estate. It passed to the heir. But there was an exception. It was one of the privileges which a free borough might hold, that a burgess might devise a burgage to some one other than the heir. It did not prevail in all boroughs, and in some it was limited to burgage property which had not been inherited but acquired by purchase or otherwise. In Bridgwater we find among the wills examples of the borough custom. Incidentally we shall meet other facts of interest.

John de Mulle left for ever 12*d.*, proceeding from a tenement next the churchyard, for the upkeep of a taper before the Blessed Mary at the altar in the parish church next the altar of All Saints. This altar of All Saints has not yet appeared in any list of the altars in St. Mary's within my knowledge. For the same object John left 8*d.* proceeding from another tenement; and a third tenement outside the West Gate he left to his wife Iseult for her lifetime, but on her death the rent is to be devoted to a year-mind for himself, his wife Joan, and his wife Iseult for ever. Further he directed 12*d.* to be devoted to the mass before the cross.

As we have noted already, Gilbert Russell left all his tenements to be sold, not only to cover his funeral expenses, but

for the souls of his father and mother and his benefactors, anticipating that the sale would realize £20. This was in addition to 40*s*. for the upkeep of his year-mind.

Wm. Maiselin left a half burgage outside the West Gate to the wardens of the light of the chantry of St. Mary in the chancel.

John Knight leaves a tenement in High Street to Wm. atte Mulle and his wife Joan, their heirs and assigns, after the death of the testator's wife, on condition that they are "to find and maintain a priest to celebrate for the souls of me and Agnes my wife for four years and are to render thence yearly to the light of St. Mary a certain render which render formerly belonged to St. Mary from the same tenement and is 2*s*." He also leaves a garden to his wife and her assigns.

Roger Swopham leaves all his tenements and burgages in the vill to his wife. After her death his executors are to realize the property, and masses are to be celebrated and other pious works performed "for the souls of me and of the aforesaid Agnes and of our children as well as for the souls of all faithful departed."

Richard atte Stone, apparently of Cannington, leaves to the wardens of the light of the chantry of the B.V.M. of the parish church of Bridgwater a half burgage outside the West Gate as you go towards Kerdesbury, for the souls of certain relatives.

Robert Castel leaves a half burgage outside the West Gate in West Street to his wife with remainder to his children. After their decease the property is to be sold, and the money realized to be distributed by his executors for his soul and those of his antecessors.

Wm. Hoper leaves a tenement *in via Cocorum* (Cooks' Row was in High Street) and a tenement in St. Mary Street to his wife, and after her death to his daughters. If they die childless, the two tenements are to go to the church of St. Mary. In his second will, made seven months later, he describes the High Street tenement as next to the old Tolsey or Toll-booth, *veterem Tolseldam*, a point of topographical interest. Remainder is here given to the wardens of St. Mary's Church.

Richard Cronle devises two tenements without the West Gate towards La Parke, one for the payment of his debts and

funeral expenses, the other for his soul and the discharge of debts. A third tenement in the same situation is to go to his wife for her lifetime, and after her death is to be sold and the money disposed of "for our souls and the souls of the faithful departed."

The two burgesses named by Nicholas Feror as the legatees of two half burgages lying outside the West Gate and in Orloue Street respectively are probably wardens. A third half burgage is devised to his wife for life and after her death to be sold *pro anima mea.*

John Sopham bequeaths to his wife Alice Wydecomb a tenement in High Street, another outside the South Gate known as "Pekesplace," and an acre of arable in the field called "Weyforlong." After her death the property is to go to his son Roger for the term of his life. The reversionary interest is to be sold for the discharge of his debts. Anything over goes to his wife and her executors. A house and courtyard in Eastover are to be sold by his wife and the money devoted to the same object, the residue remaining with her. A vacant piece of ground in St. Mary Street is to be dealt with similarly. To his son Roger he leaves a house and courtyard in Penel Street, and to his daughter Alice a half burgage near North Gate with a tenement of our friend, John Smok, on one side of it. Lastly, for a perpetual year-mind for himself and his three wives, Joan, Florence and Alice, he leaves the moiety of his burgage, wherein dwells one known as Alpho, *quidam Alpho nuncupatus*, to the wardens of the fraternity of the Holy Cross.

A somewhat indefinite direction is made by Roger Slype that one tenement be sold and distributed for his soul and his wife's.

The wills of the two ladies Joan Hert and Joan Fote are linked together by a tenement in Penel Street, which was in the occupancy of the Vesey family when Joan Hert bequeathed it to Joan Fote. "Reversion of that said tenement shall be ordained for ever," runs Joan Hert's will, "after the death of the same Joan Fote by the executors of the same Joan Fote or by the same Joan Fote in her lifetime to the brotherhood of the Holy Trinity in the parish church of Bridgwater,"

provided that the law regarding mortmain will allow the gild to enjoy it. Otherwise the tenement is to be sold and the proceeds distributed among the poor and in other pious works " for the souls of me and Thos. Tanhor and Adam Best and of all my benefactors and of all faithful departed." She also desired a hundred masses to be said with all possible speed, *cum omni celeritate !*

Joan Fote, who was the widow of the Adam Best mentioned above, left his best brass pot to the wardens of the goods of the light of the gild of Holy Trinity, and as much linen thread as is needed to make a cloth for the altar of Holy Trinity in the parish church, together with the making of the same. Joan Hert's bequest she passed on to a trust, presumably representing the gild of Holy Trinity for the support of a chaplain celebrating at the altar of Holy Trinity for ever " for my soul and the souls of all faithful departed." The tenement is now described as in Orloue Street, one of the fragments of evidence going to show us that Penel Street was a short street, eventually merged in the longer Orloue Street. The name Penel-Orlieu survives as the name of the Penel Street end. Orloue Street has become Clare Street.

Robert Potter leaves his dwelling-house to his wife, and a cottage in Friarn Street to his executors, to be disposed of for the discharge of his debts " and other works of piety."

Iseult Cave left a good deal of real estate—a tenement in Damyet on the river bank, two others in Damyet, a cottage in Friarn Street, two tenements in the street now known as Silver Street, a stall in the High Street, a garden at North Gate called " Rome," a tenement containing one burgage and more next to the same gate " on which burgage are being built a granary and a cowhouse." All these on the death of the life-tenants are to remain to the executors *secundum consueta burgi de Briggewater*, and to be disposed of by them *pro salute anime mee*, " and of my husbands, parents, ancestors, friends and all faithful departed." The chapel of Holy Trinity is once more to benefit, " one priest or more " celebrating at its altar.

Stephen Cok's tenement in St. Mary Street is devised to his wife, and after her death to his daughter with remainder to four burgesses who presumably represent either the church

or a gild. His best cup, after his wife's death, was to go to the fraternity of St. Catherine.

The mariner of Bristol, John Bulke, had property in Bridgwater which, after his wife's death, is to be sold by the rector of St. Michael's, and the proceedings devoted to masses and other pious works of charity. Among the witnesses is a holy-water clerk, *aquebajulus*.

Joan Cosyn leaves a half burgage in Friarn Street to the Swengger family on condition of holding an annual obit. In case of there being no heirs, remainder is to be with "the wardens or proctors" of the parish church for the support of the lights before the high cross in the church.

The mutilated parchment of Alice More's will is legible enough to show us that beside 12*d.* for the high altar, *summo altari*, she left the residue of her goods for her soul's sake.

At the close of the XV Century John Myllward left a half burgage in North Street to his wife for her lifetime with remainder to certain trustees, presumably wardens. In another script and added in a corner is a legacy of 4*d.* to Wells Cathedral. John Bulke left the same sum to Worcester Cathedral, *matri ecclesie Wygornie*.

The real estate of Gilbert le Bat, Edith Halygan and Wm. Diste was not devised to the church.

Almost without exception executors are appointed; sometimes one only—wife, husband, son, daughter; generally two, of whom one is either wife or husband and the other a friend—at times a chaplain. Three and even four occur, of whom one is named supervisor. On one occasion an executor declines to serve. Twice the executors are reminded of their responsibility to the Almighty with solemn adjuration.

Probate is added either at the foot or on the dorse in all but three or four cases. The official of the Archdeacon of Taunton usually grants it in a church, either Bridgwater or Taunton (mentioning St. Mary Magdalene) or Pokynton, Godhurst, Wembdon, Holford or Otterhampton. The Bristol will is proved before Thos. Wheton, rector of St. John the Baptist, in his church.

The will was indeed an ecclesiastical document. Written and often probably suggested by a clerk—John Kedwelly,

the clerk, actually signs one—it was not valid until it had been brought thus before the Archdeacon's official and duly sealed with the seal of the archdeaconry, and usually in a parish church. *In nomine Dei, Amen!*

TESTATORS TO WHOSE WILLS REFERENCE IS MADE.

		B.B.D.			B.B.D.
1310	John de Mulle . .	772	1386	John Sopham . .	782
1317	Gilbert Russell .	890	1387	John Baker (*Wembdon*)	733
1339	Gilbert le Bat . .	773	1389–1400	*Unknown* .	297
1346	Julian Barde (*Cleve*)	742	1400	Roger Slype . .	734
1348	Wm. Maiselin . .	891	1408	Joan Hert . .	735
1359	John Knight . .	736	1410	Robt. Potter . .	435
1361	Roger Swopham .	740	1414	Joan Fote . .	739
1361	Rich. atte Stone (*Cannington*)	749	1415	Iseult Cave . .	745
			1420	Wm. Diste . .	743
1377	Robt. Castel . .	768	1429	Stephen Cok . .	744
1381	Wm. Hoper (i) .	732	1448	John Bulke (*Bristol*)	748
1381	Wm. Hoper (ii) .	836	1459	Joan Cosyn . .	741
1382	Edith Halygan .	726	1488	Alice More . .	813
1383	Rich. Cronle . .	738	1497	John Myllward .	737
1384	Nich. Feror . .	747			