

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Some Village Families

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being his Presidential Address at the Yeovil Meeting, July 22, 1930

I FEEL somewhat diffident in standing before members of this learned Society when I recall my illustrious predecessors in the Presidency. I have done no excavation of ancient remains. I am no naturalist and it is only lately that I have been able to indulge in the fascinating occupation of delving into documents, digging in the sweet garden of the storied past. It is some of the produce of this garden that I propose to put before you to-day, some flowers from the village of West Coker plucked from the records of its families. I will say at once, it is not of its great families that I intend to speak. On Thursday you will learn of these at Coker Court—of the de Mandevilles and the early Courtenays who held Coker, first as an undivided and later as a divided manor, and of the younger branch of the Courtenays who were at East Coker after 1391 when West Coker remained under the lordship of the Earls of Devon. From that lordship, occasionally intermitted on account of acts held to be treasonable, West Coker passed in Elizabethan times through the hands of some of the queen's new men. Its principal mansion went to John Portman in 1591 and this, with the manor itself, acquired by his daughter Grace whose monument is in the church, remained in the hands of the Portmans and of the Berkeleys who became Portmans in 1828, the house thereafter passing to an unconnected series of smaller people, the last of whom has the honour now to address you.

In studying the history of a manor it is fairly easy to discover the names of its successive lords. But I am not going to tell you about earls and barons, knights or even esquires. I shall confine myself to a few families who never attained even the last of these dignities, and I shall begin with the Middletons who have long ceased to exist at West Coker. I like to think that the family came from one atte Mydlan, bailiff of West Coker, in 1310,¹ who was assessed for a twentieth of the annual value of his goods in the first year of the reign of Edward III,² but I admit that the thought may be fantastic. At any rate one George Middleton was living in the principal house at West Coker on the night of September 1, 1457. It was in the middle of the Wars of the Roses which in the West of England largely took the form of a feud between the Courtenays, Earls of Devon, and the Bonvilles. There had been a raid by the heir of the Courtenays on the house of one of Lord Bonville's retainers,³ and it is quite likely that it was in revenge for that, that certain persons from Devonshire

arrayed in warlike manner and in manner of insurrection on the first day of September about the middle of the night of the same day in the 36th year of the reign of King Henry VI after the Conquest feloniously broke into the home of George Middelton at Westcoker in the County aforesaid and the same house there and then feloniously and traitorously burnt and such and so many threats there imposed upon the same George, and the same George feloniously wished to kill so that his life was despaired of, and feloniously took and carried away a silver bowl, 19 silver drinking cups, a mazer of silver bound with gold, a tablecloth, 3 long towels, 12 short towels, 5 pairs of sheets, a psalter, 2 books of prayer and other goods and chattels to the value of 20*li* of the goods and chattels of the aforesaid George then and there found.⁴

It is evidence of the failure of the law to be effective in those days that one Robert Hilland, the rector of West Coker, who led the Devon men in the raid and was outlawed as a result of

¹ MSS. Bailiff's Account of the Manor of West Coker, 1309-10.

² *Lay Subsidies*, E/179/169/5.

³ *Paston Letters*, edited by Gairdner, 1904; letter 303.

⁴ King's Bench, 9/287, no. 69, *Ancient Indictments*.

the decision of a Court of Oyer and Terminer in the matter,¹ continued in his office nearly three years after the enquiry by this court. Of this particular George Middleton, whose life was despaired of we hear nothing further. Seventy-seven years later another George Middleton appears at the head of the list of persons in West Coker assessed for the subsidy granted to Henry VIII for his expedition to France to help the emperor,² at which expedition Boulogne was taken, and in 1547 he had the honour of being the sole contributor from the village to the benevolence³ levied by that king to eke out the subsidies of the previous years. On two occasions he contributed to the subsidies granted by Parliament to Edward VI.⁴ The next Middleton of whom we hear is William, who in 1570/1 was the queen's farmer of lands in West Coker⁵ and whose brother, John Middleton, was the owner of a considerable estate in the parish. In the muster of 1569,⁶ held in anticipation of hostilities with Spain, John Middleton, gentleman, is down as supplying one corselet furnished. This armour included cuirass, gorget, shoulder and arm pieces, etc. John died before the year of the Armada. Three years later, when the mansion-house at West Coker was sold to John Portman, it is described as that wherein John Middleton, gent., deceased, lately inhabited.⁷ William, the queen's farmer and brother to John, was also dead then but Henry who was brother or cousin to John and William was still living in the village. About this time he sold the bulk of the family property, viz : half a dozen messuages and some 200 acres of land, meadow, etc.,⁸ but in the subsidy of 1593/4⁹ he was still assessed as having 20s. of land in the tithing and was called upon to pay 4s. But from this time on he seems to have been hard up, several judgments being given

¹ K.B., *Controlment Roll*, 87.

² *Lay Subsidies*, E 179/170/204.

³ *Benevolence*, 179/170/230.

⁴ *Lay Subsidies*, E 179/170/250 and E 179/170/247.

⁵ *Exchequer Orders and Decrees*, Hil. 13 Eliz., Ser. I, Book 4, p. 140.

⁶ *Som. Record Soc.* xx, 109.

⁷ Head deeds enrolled by the Clerk of the Peace, Eliz., Roll 13, no. 228.

⁸ *Feet of Fines, Som.*, Mich., 31 and 32 Eliz., and Trin., 33 Eliz.

⁹ *Lay Subsidies*, E 179/256/4.

against him in the Court of Common Pleas.¹ He died on November 20, 1605, his brothers William and John having, as we have seen, long predeceased him. Another John, son of one of the three, died within a month of Henry on November 16, 1605. Alice the widow of the elder John was still living in the village seven years later.² She had married a second time one John Gaye the only man in West Coker we know to have been a recusant, that is to have obstinately refused to attend public worship, but he also was dead. One more Middleton flits adventurously across the scene. What relation Bridget was to these others it is not possible to say in the absence of parish records or of any transcript of them before 1603. The birth of her daughter Eliza in May of the year of the great Elizabeth's death is implicitly but vigorously reprobated in the register. The child died in July. Rather more than four years later Bridget Middleton was married in West Coker Church to Walter Sadler of the village. On July 14, 1612, administration of Walter Sadler's goods, etc.,³ was granted to Bridget Sadler *alias* Moore, Robert Moore of West Coker (tailor), and two others being bondmen. On October 5, 1629, was celebrated the wedding of Bridget Moore and Stephen Randall.⁴

I have not traced that any member of the next family of which I will tell you ever claimed the title of gentleman, though they became yeomen in the seventeenth century when this class was so great an element in the strength of England. Richard atte Slade was witness in 1351 to a deed referring to cottages in West Chinnock and the family may have come from that place. The first definite reference to them in West Coker dates, however, from the beginning of the sixteenth century when, according to a survey made in 1503 of the property of Glastonbury Abbey by Richard Bere, the last abbot but one,⁵ Walter Slade was one of three tenants who held land of the abbey in the parish. He had a house with yard and orchard

¹ Plea Rolls, C.P. 40, 1579 m., 1971, Mich., 38-39 Eliz. and 1592 m., 1568, Trin., 39 Eliz.

² *Inquis. Post Mortem*, Chancery, Ser. II, Vol. 334, no. 62.

³ Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Administration Bonds*, S. 108.

⁴ Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Transcripts from West Coker Register*.

⁵ Harleian 3961.

there of which the position cannot now be located. His holding amounted to 21 acres ; of this a small part was in East Coker, but most of it in half-acre strips in the open fields of West Coker. The holding is in fact, a virgate in the open fields and Walter Slade will have had a long villein ancestry. It is not possible to say that Thomas Slade who was appointed on January 7, 1523, by Dame Katherine Courtenay (who, by the bye, is described in another document that refers to West Coker as the daughter, sister and aunt of kings) to the rectorship of the church at West Coker,¹ was a son of Walter, but there is no doubt that of the same family were three Slades—Stephen, John and Henry, whose goods were assessed at *8li*, *6li* and *2li* for the subsidy towards that extravagant Boulogne Expedition in 1544 to which we have seen George Middleton also contributed.² For the subsidy of two years later, which was levied in two parts, Stephen Slade and John Slade were assessed at *8li* and *5li* respectively,³ and again in 1550 and in 1553 John Slade appears in Subsidy lists.⁴ In 1569 in the military preparations against Spain, Roger Slade (then thirty years of age and probably a son of Stephen) not being sufficiently endowed with goods to provide complete armour, joined with John Smeythe and others to furnish billes, swords and daggers.⁵ In 1571, Richard, son of John, was the only Slade assessed for subsidy.⁶ Fifteen years later he was a 'pykeman' of the hundred of Coker in the band of Sir John Clyfton in which Thomas Slade was a 'shotte'.⁷ There were also Slades in the levies from the hundreds of Houndsborough, Somerton, Crewkerne and 'Stone with the borough of Evill', but none in those from other parts of Somerset. In the year of the Armada lands at West Coker and Hardington were left to 'my brother' Richard Slade and to John Slade, son of Richard Slade and Ursula his wife in the will of William Middleton to whom reference has already been made. It would appear from this as if the wife of Richard Slade had been a sister of William Middleton. John Slade then twenty-eight years of age is de-

¹ Bishop Clark's *Register*.

² *L.S.*, E 179/170/204.

³ *L.S.*, E 179/170/228.

⁴ *L.S.*, E 179/170/250.

⁵ *Som. Record Soc.*, xx, 109.

⁶ *L.S.*, E 179/171/284.

⁷ Emanuel Green, *Somerset and the Spanish Armada*, 96.

scribed in a deposition made on October 31, 1592, relating to Somerton matters¹ as ' of West Coker, yeoman, where he has lived for one year and a half, and before of Butlye for one year and half and before at Coker aforesaid where he was born '. Roger Slade, the ill-provided with worlds goods, uncle of John Slade, is described in a case which came before the bishop's court at Wells on February 20, 1593-4,² as ' of West Coker, husbandman, where he was born, aged 54 '. The case was one of slander brought by ' John Harvie of West Coker against John Leaves senior of the same '. This Leaves had been a ' shotte ' in the 1586 array. The deposition of Roger Slade was as follows :

To the second and third articles he saith that on a certain day hapning about St. James tide last past, this witness with Grace Harvye and others, going along in a highway near West Coker towards haymaking overtook John Leaves in the same highway, when the said Grace having heard say as it seemed that the said Leaves had reported " sclauderouse " speeches against her, demanded (what reason he had for a certain statement), who answering unto her in angry and malicious speeches as then seemed, ' whie Jakes, thowe needeste not to houlde thie nose soe highe, for that is stale nues, and it was knowne in the countrie for a greate whiles agon ' and thereupon called her ' baggadge '. Present then and there besides this witness, Richard Rendall, Elen Rendall, Avice Edmund and others.

To the fourth article he saith that he believeth the said Grace is discredited by speaking of the said words, because they were spoken before so many persons.

Elenora Rendall ' of West Coker, spinster, where she was born, aged 20 ', gave corroborative evidence adding the names of Agnes Hollwaye and George Middleton and others to those of the persons present. So did ' Richard Rendall of East Coker, husbandman, where he had lived since before the feast of St. Michael last, and before of West Coker for one year where he was born, aged 26 '. This witness gave a slightly different version of Grace Harvie's remark and John Leaves' rejoinder

¹ Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Depositions*, Vol. 23.

² Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Depositions*, Vol. 23.

adding to the latter 'and it thowe willte followe the matter, heare are witnesses enough hearing it, calle them to beare witness to my wordes'.

The case evidently lingered on for some time as on July 10, 1594, a deposition¹ was taken which was apparently intended to depreciate the value of the evidence above quoted. It was made 'by William Miller of West Coker, husbandman for 50 years, born at Yattminster, co. Dorset, aged 66' and was to the following effect :

That Roger Slade and Richard Slade, father of Grace Harvye, are brothers children, and this witness being of a long time a near neighbour unto them, did well know the father of the said Richard and Roger, and also the said Roger Slade, Richard Slade and Grace Harvye, who have usually called one another brother, for the old folks and the young folk have called one another cousin. That Roger Slade hath for a very long time been a very poor man, having nothing to live on, and by reason thereof is of very small credit among his neighbours. That Ellinor Rendall is of kin to Grace Harvye, but in what degree he knoweth not, but he knoweth the parties well, hath heard them call one another cousin. That for one year last past or thereabouts Ellinor Rendall hath been and is a servant in the house with Richard Slade, father of Grace Harvye, where she, the said Grace doth also dwell, and hath behaved herself as a servant. That Richard Rendall until about three quarters of a year ago did dwell in house with the said Grace Harvye and Richard Slade as a 'covennte hine', but whether he were a 'hynde' to the said Richard Slade or Grace Harvye he doth not know.

That since the said Richard Rendall went forth of the said house to dwell he hath and is at present much using and coming and going to the said house, to work for meat, drink and wages. That Roger Slade, Richard Rendall and Ellinor Rendall of a long time have been and are very poor folk, little or nothing at all worth.

The old man's account of the parties' relationship is not very clear as to who the young folks were who called one another cousin though that would be the relationship in which John Slade and Grace Harvie (born a Slade) stood.

The closeness with which the different grades of the little

¹ Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Depositions*, Vol. 25.

village society were associated is illustrated by this evidence, mostly relating to a single family. The yeoman, the husbandman 'of very small credit' and the 'covennte hine' were related, the last being 'little or nothing at all worth', but being saved from absolute poverty by his permanent employment for a few pounds a year in his cousin's house. Absolute poverty among a large part of the population was a new feature in England that had arisen since the middle of the century.

Richard Slade was the head of the house. He was assessed at 4*li* in goods for the subsidy of 1593¹ and again in the same amount for that of 1597.² Two years later he and his son John were selling lands to John Portman who had recently come to the village,³ and in 1601 a further sale to the same buyer was effected by John, then thirty-seven years of age. In 1605 this John was churchwarden, and in July of that year was born to him a son Richard; it lived only fourteen months and others of his children died, but some daughters and a son George survived and by 1613 a collateral John had grown up. Towards the subsidy of 1621⁴ John, senior, paid 3*s.* on account of 3*li* for goods while John, junior, was mulcted 1*s.* 4*d.* on account of land valued at 20*s.* per annum. These were evidently first instalments at the usual rates (2*s.* in the *li* for goods and 2*s.* 8*d.* for land). The registry entries at this time showed that John Slade lived to see the family established in various branches. He died at the age of sixty-two in 1626 and left this will:⁵

My body to the Cristian Buriall.

Itē I give unto the poore of West Coker vjs. viij*d.*, and to the Church vjs. viij*d.*

Itē I give unto Elinor my daughter Two Closes Called Pennyes and all my estate and Rights of in and to the same and also one blake heifer.

Itē I give unto Margaret my wief and Elnor my daughter all my household stouf and ymplement of household stouf to be equally divided.

Itē my will is that Lyonell Combe shall have my mare and two steares in leu of the debt that I am bound to him for.

¹ *L.S.*, E 179/256/4.

² *L.S.*, E 179/171/321.

³ Documents enrolled by Clerk of the Peace, 41 Eliz.

⁴ *L.S.*, E 179/171/353.

⁵ Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Original Will*.

Itm̄ I give to my sonnes wief one sheep and unto the [ir]
Fower Children to be divided to twine them Two Cupples.

Itm̄ I give unto my daughter Ursula one sheep.

Itm̄ I give unto Thomas Come one sheepe.

All the Residew of my good and chattels my debt and funeralles
being paid I give and bequeath unto George my sonne whome
I make my whole and sole Executor.

Witness—John Slad, junior, Thomas Sampford.

Half his 'household stouf and ymplement of household
stouf' was apparently not enough for Margaret his widow to
live on for we find her applying to Quarter Sessions in January
1630, and receiving a license 'to make twelve bushells of malte
weekly and to sell the same againe'.¹

For the subsidy of 1628, granted for an unnecessary war
with France, two Slades appear—John Slade, junior, and George
Slade in place of his recently deceased father. George Slade is
also on the list for the subsidy of 1641.² From a record in the
Wells Diocesan Registry³ we know that there was a Henry
Slade at this time who was a 'girseweaver', whatever that
may mean—possibly a weaver of grass. The fortunes of the
Slades seemed to have declined in the years that followed for
no Slade contributed to the subsidies of 1661 and 1663, and
when it came to the hearth money raised under a statute of
1662,⁴ of which we have an account for West Coker for three
half years, it is recorded that John Slade paid for two chimneys
in the first two but only for one in the last for 'one has fallen
since Lady Day, 1665'. Nevertheless he had, on October 6,
1663, been associated with two other leading villagers in the
purchase for the sum of £266 of the advowson of the church of
West Coker; when, however, there was a presentation in 1692,
no Slade appears among those making it. At the beginning of
the following century they seem to have owned little land and
were probably in the flax business, with which we know them
to be subsequently connected, either as dressers or weavers.

¹ Somerset Quarter Sessions Records, Charles I, *Som. Record Soc.*, Vol. xxiv, 108.

² *L.S.*, E 179/172/400.

³ Diocesan Registry, Wells, *Administration Bonds*, Roll 24.

⁴ Dwelly's *National Records*, Vol. i.

There were then two leading Slade families—that of John, who was clerk of the parish and had a daughter who at nineteen married in 1716 John Goodden. John's son-in-law succeeded him as parish clerk. The other family was that of William and consisted of two sons and four daughters. The eldest son William married in 1731 Elizabeth Hawkins of the village and carried on the family in the next generation. His sister Mary was wedded in 1733 to William Barter and their house with their names and this date over the door, still pleasantly decorates East Street in our village. And here some two hundred years ago we will leave the Slade family which, however, has continued to the present time, though as far as I am aware there are none that bear the name now actually living in West Coker.

The next family of which I will tell you is one of the not unusual name of Smyth but with the unusual addition of '*alias Thorne*'. Thomas Smyth was another of the three tenants mentioned in Abbot Bere's Survey made about the end of the fifteenth century.¹ His holding appears to have consisted of two virgates of which one consisted of 34½ acres of arable land in various places mostly in West Coker and probably, like the virgate of Walter Slade, in its open fields and the other was two lots of enclosed contiguous lands of 13 and 17 acres, respectively. The former was situated not far from the church and included a substantial building and holding then called Penny's tenement, some part of which remains in what is now known as Barton's farm. The other consisted of two closes of pasture in the south-west corner of the parish then called Frontelles Wood and still so designated in the Tithe Apportionment of 1838. Here is an abstract of some undated proceedings² with regard to this wood taken by Richard Hodges and Joan his wife, late the wife of John (*sic*) Smyth *alias* Thorne against John Inne (or June) *alias* Rendell of West Coker :

The late Abbot and Convent of the Monastery of Our Lady of Glastonbury were seized of a messuage called 'Penneys' and an orchard and dove house with a curtilage containing

¹ Harleian 3961

² *Court of Augmentations*, Proceedings, 29/3.

altogether 2 acres and 17 acres of pasture at Frontelles Wood in West Coker which they let by a deed dated 3 June, 28 Henry VIII to Thomas Smythe *alias* Thorne and Joan his wife for term of their lives and the longest liver of them.

Thomas Smythe died and his wife survived him and was seized of the premises during her widowhood and after married Richard Hodges, by force of which he was seized of the premises in right of his wife. About Michaelmas last past the defendant being a 'yeary lewde person neelected all honestie and observacion of Lawes' entered into and broke down and carried away the hedges 'surmysing the same to be his own proper inherytaunce' and would not allow the plaintiffs to occupy the same two acres 'to the yll example of all such lewde persons'.

They ask for a writ of Privy Seal.

The name of Richard Hodges appears as that of a yeoman and owner of goods in a West Coker list of 1550.¹ We have no previous or subsequent acquaintance with the lewd person Inne or June and his *alias*—Rendall—is the first appearance of that name in West Coker. Of the Rendalls I will presently tell you.

Thomas and John the two sons or two of the sons of the former tenant of Glastonbury Abbey were both in easy circumstances. The former's goods were variously assessed at from 9*li* to 20*li* for the several subsidies granted to the most extravagant of England's kings between 1541 and 1547 and John's at 4*li* for that of 1543-44. Their names do not, however, appear in the subsidy lists of the next reign. In 1555 the land they occupied was put up for sale by Queen Mary and was described as 'now or late in the tenure or occupation of Joan Smith *alias* Thorne now the wife of Richard Hodges and Walter Smith *alias* Thorne'.² If any sale took place it does not appear to have interfered with the tenancy of the property by the Smyths *alias* Thorne.

Some years later, in 1569, the same lands became the subject of what appears to have been an ill-grounded bill of complaint to the lord keeper by John Smythe *alias* Thorne.³ He claimed that the deed of June 3, 1537, with regard to about 60 acres of

¹ *L.S.*, E 179/170/250.

² *Office of Augmentations*, Particulars for Grants, 2144.

³ *Chancery Proceedings*, Ser. II, Bundle 160, no. 45.

land, meadow and pasture in West Coker, East Coker and Hardington had by 'casuall meanes' come into the possession of one John Palmer the elder of West Coker and though the said John Palmer had been 'dyvers and sondrie tymes moste gentelly desired' to give the deed to the plaintiff that he might 'quietly enyoe' the premises to which he was entitled, the said defendand had always refused. John Palmer the elder in reply to the bill of complaint, said that it, the bill, was untrue and insufficient in the law, and was only brought to annoy him 'beinge a verie aged and weak man'. He also denied that he had ever had the deed of lease in his possession or made any secret conveyances of the premises or that he did ever 'interupte the saied complainant in the quiet occupacion or enjoyinge of the same premisses'. The truth of which he was willing to prove.

In the meantime John Smyth was doing his duty by his country. He was one of the seven men mustered from East and West Coker in 1567/68,¹ and appeared (as Jno. Smythe) with Roger Slade and others in the following year as providing four billes, two swords and two daggers.² Both John Smyth and John Palmer (son of the very aged and weak man) were assessed for the subsidy of 1571.³ Neither of them can be traced among the pykemen and shotte in the return of the band of Sir John Clifton in October of 1586. For the subsidies of 1593 and 1597 John Smythe was assessed for 3*li* of goods as he had been for that of 1571.⁴ In 1597 John Smythe *alias* Thorne appears as tenant of thirty acres of land, seven of meadow and thirty of pasture in East and West Coker of which William Symes, lord of the manor, was at his death seized in his demesne as of fee.⁵ The will of Gyles Mallet,⁶ who died in 1619, left to the children of Thomas Smythe *alias* Thorne 12*d.* each, to James Smyth a pair of sleeves of 'Wembren Canvas' (whatever that may be), and to Thomas Smyth a bond of Richard Palmer's

¹ *Exchequer Accounts*, 66/9, Muster, 9 Eliz.

² Certificate of Muster, 1569, *Som. Record Soc.*, Vol. xx, 109.

³ *L.S.*, E 179/171/284.

⁴ *L.S.*, E 179/256/4 and E 179/171/321.

⁵ *Inquis. Post Mortem*, Chancery, Ser. II, Vol. 152, no. 268.

⁶ *P.C.C.*, Soame 27.

debt. Thomas Smyth was one of those who paid 1s. 4d. on account of land valued at 20s. for the first half of the subsidy of 1621.¹ John Smyth was churchwarden in 1640 and again in 1662. For the subsidies of 1661 and 1663, he was assessed in lands at 1*li* and had to pay 8s., that is, for two subsidies on each occasion.² He gave evidence of his loyalty by contributing to the free and voluntary present to Charles II in pursuance of an Act of Parliament.³ He paid for two out of the forty-eight chimneys in the village to the hearth tax due at Michaelmas 1664 and Lady Day 1665.⁴ He had sons Thomas and George and there were several collateral families. Unfortunately from 1667 onwards we have not even the occasional transcripts from the register that exist from 1603 to that year, and the indifferently kept register itself does not become available till 1697. So the records of a generation are lost. A new chapter commences when a new Thomas Smyth *alias* Thorne is married to the daughter of Malachi Baker of West Leigh in the county of Dorset in 1706. A considerable property in West Coker, including, I believe, part of that which the family held as tenants of Glastonbury Abbey, was at that date in the hands of Thomas and of his mother, Mary Smith *alias* Thorne *née* Virgin.⁵ She had another son John who in 1710 was in the city of New York in the province of New York in America. By various complicated processes which the law loved more in that time than it does in this, it would seem that the West Coker property belonging to the two brothers was put into the marriage settlement of Thomas in which 'John Smyth *alias* Thorn' his son was joined. This John when he grew up apparently followed Uncle John to New York. In 1769 John Smyth *alias* Thorne and Abigail his wife of the town of Greenwich in Fairfield county in the colony of Connecticut of North America, schoolmaster, Somerset, sold the West Coker lands to Thomas Capper, of the Temple, London, with the consent of John Newman of Barwick, Somerset, who had a claim to a part of it. In the registry of Barwick Church is an entry to the

¹ *L.S.*, E 179/171/353.

² *L.S.*, E 179/172/423 and 426.

³ *L.S.*, E 179/172/424.

⁴ Dwelley's *National Records*, Vol. i.

⁵ Documents in possession of Mr. W. H. Yeatman-Biggs of Long Hall, Stockton, Codford St. Mary, Wilts.

effect that Joseph son of John and Josnan Smith was christened on June 20, 1770. In West Coker the family had practically died out. The Thomas who had married Elizabeth Baker had had between 1707 and 1722 an enormous family—at least ten, but most of them died in early youth. He himself was churchwarden of West Coker in 1733, his collateral Peter Smith in 1725 and 1734 and William Smith in 1748 and 1756. In the assessment for church rates of 1770 and 1773 a Francis Smith is assessed for 9*d.* ; in the earlier year William paid 2*d.* and in the latter this payment was made by his widow. The name of Smith *alias* Thorne thus peters out from the records of West Coker in which it had figured for 270 years.

You will remember the lewd person John Inne or June who neglected all honesty and observation of laws and who bore the *alias* of Rendall. This person, probably very unfairly described, may have been the John Rendell who was taxed 2*s.* on an assessment of 20*s.* in goods for the Boulogne Expedition of Henry VIII, for which squandering of the public funds many of our West Coker friends were called upon to pay up. In the following generation the family of Rendells was already a large one. Simeon Rendall was one of the seven men mustered from East and West Coker in connection with the war preparations of 1567/68. He carried a musket—a form of hand-gun longer and with bigger bore than the arquebus, heavy and clumsy, requiring that the musketeer should be strong, square and of good solid build. Next year Edward Randoll was a billeman and in 1584 John Randall appears as a pykeman. This last may be assumed to have been of commanding height as this was necessary for one who carried a 15-ft. pike of stiff ash. Evidently the family was sturdy and strong. It was many generations, however, before even moderate wealth came their way. We know from the evidence given in that slander case that Richard Rendell and Ellinor for a long time had been and were poor folk, little or nothing worth. But there was no lack of vitality about the Rendells. At the beginning of the seventeenth century there were a senior and a junior John, a Thomas and one or two Henries, all begetting children. Rendells married and were married into the Slade, Combe, Apsey, Salmon and other village families, or brought their brides from

outside the parish boundaries. One of the Johns was churchwarden in 1613, and again in 1630. Bartholomew Rendell furnishes the single known instance of payment of direct taxation by one of his family in this century ; in 1664 and 1665 he paid the half yearly tax of 2*s.* on account of one chimney, a fact from which, however, no great affluence can be inferred. Towards the end of this century—in 1697—we have the record of the death of Mary Rendell, who is described as one of the poor of the parish. It is from this year onward that the parish register becomes continuously available, and in this year was born a Thomas Rendell who between 1720 and 1729 was the village smith and had six children, of whom three died at birth. The register records not only excessive infant but also terrible maternal mortality, and as a result we find several Rendells with a succession of wives and numerous births making up for the large proportion of deaths. So the landless family held their own. A John Rendell was churchwarden in 1735 and 1750 and on various occasions supervisor for the repair of highways and another John is described as a flax-dresser in a deed of 1772. Lazarus Rendell was churchwarden in 1747 and 1755. By that time a change had come over the village. In the old days sackcloth had been manufactured there, but there is little to indicate any extensive outside sale ; gradually, however, since the home manufacture of canvas had been encouraged by the government in the seventeenth century, the looms in East Coker and West Coker had become busy with the making of sailcloth. This was already going on in 1770. For a time, for political reasons, the manufacture was taken to the north of England, but in 1810 it was again in full swing in our village and we find Coaker canvas wanted at Chatham, Sheerness and Portsmouth Dockyards to the extent of 606 bolts—pieces 40 yds. long and from 18 in. to 24 in. wide, weighing from 25 to 48 lbs. Later in the same year it was proposed by the Committee of Naval Stores ‘ that 5,000 bolts in part of the supply of canvas for the ensuing three months, may be of the Coaker kind ’. In 1813 Mr. Joseph Rendall of West Coker offered 344 pieces of various qualities and the inspector to the commissioners minuted on the offer ‘ I can only add that they are esteemed excellent manufacturing ’. A month later Joseph

was supplying a further quantity of 619 bolts. In this year we find him churchwarden for a second time—he had occupied this position in 1798—so that his private business with the state did not prevent him undertaking public duty to the parish. Another Rendell, Joshua, had filled the same office in 1803, 1804 and 1805. There are two little stone houses in the village inscribed J.R., one dated 1796 and the other 1799, and one at Coker Hill similarly inscribed and dated 1802. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century the Rendells were numerous in the village. There were probably several and we certainly know of one—John Rendell *alias* Bishop—who fought at Waterloo. Of the new generation Israel was the most notable. A regular sailcloth factory had been established at Coker Hill and with the working of this he was long associated. He became fairly well-to-do, and we find him with James, William and Bartholomew entered as freeholders on the register of voters for the western division of Somerset in 1832-3. As there were then only twenty-two freeholders in the parish, it will be seen that the relative importance of the family there had vastly increased since the earlier Bartholomew paid for one chimney out of forty-eight in the village 170 years before. In a deed of 1836 Charles son of Joseph is described as a glove-cutter which shows that the gloving industry, which still flourishes in the village, was already established there at any rate a hundred years ago. The tithe apportionment agreement of 1838 gives the names of eight Rendalls or Rendells in the parish, and in five cases these included cottages, etc., other than those in which their possessors lived. It was only Israel Rendell, however, who can be classed as a landowner, as he possessed and occupied 21a. 1r. 25p. as well as two other small properties. In a deed of 1860 acquiring a further property, Israel Rendell is described as of West Coker, sailcloth manufacturer; it stated that he had been married since 1830 and declared that his widow, if he shall happen to die leaving one, shall not be entitled to dower out of the property. While the factory he managed produced the bulk of the sailcloth made in the village, the manufacture still went on in the cottages. There was a workshop with four or five pairs of looms in Duck Lane opposite the property

acquired by Israel Rendell, and a pair of looms was to be found in many other cottages in West Coker. Mrs. Mary Rendell, who died in 1929 aged ninety, claimed to have woven part of the sails for a yacht of Queen Victoria and to have been paid at the rate of 5s. or 5s. 6d. a piece out of which starch and grease for dressing had to be provided. She also claimed to have as a girl corresponded with four young men fighting in the Russian War (1854-5); no doubt George Rendell in the Royal Field Artillery was one of these. A James Rendell was in the Indian Mutiny (1857), and a Thomas in the Zulu War (1879). Another Thomas fought in Egypt in 1882, and an Arthur was in South Africa in 1899. And so the story works up to a climax with seventeen Rendalls and Rendells among the 127 names of those on the Roll of Honour as having gone from the village to the Great War (1914-18). Three were killed and several others permanently disabled. Fortunately the family, on the whole in better circumstances than in previous centuries though still without wealthy men among them, goes on in West Coker, and I am sure will make history for it in the future. The last record that I shall mention with regard to them is that on the register of electors in the Yeovil parliamentary division of the county of Somerset there are in the parish of West Coker forty-seven Rendells of whom twenty-six, or the majority, are women.

I have not the time to relate, nor could I expect from you the patience to listen to the history at length of other West Coker families, so I shall only mention briefly a few of some special interest. Such were the Palmers who doubtless in early days sought strange strands and distant saints known in sundry lands, who were assessed for the twentieth levied in the first year of Edward III and for many subsequent fifteenths, of whom one member sold in 1358 a lb. of yarn made from West Coker hemp to the sheriff of Somerset and Dorset to be sent to Bridport for the Navy, and of whom another was reeve of the manor of West Coker when it was in the hands of Henry V during a Courtenay minority; they were in easy circumstances, but in the reign of Elizabeth had the love of the time for litigation, and they came to an end in the village on the verge of the seventeenth century.

It is then we come across the Apseys and the Taylors connected with each other on more than one occasion, well-to-do yeomen, who, however, fell foul of the commissioners of charitable uses in the time of the Commonwealth, when they were charged and found guilty of misappropriating the proceeds of the sale, fifty years previously, of an old cow given for the poor. They were churchwardens at the time and held a good position in the village, and I was at first inclined to believe that they were unjustly condemned for political reasons. But as I got to know Thomas Taylor better, a great lender of money, I came to the conclusion that he, at any rate, deserved all the punishment he received.

There were also—or rather I should say there are also, for they are still in Yeovil—the Moores of West Coker who, of yeomen origin, became, I think, owing to the management of their affairs by a clever widow in the seventeenth century, the principal landlords in the parish next to the owners of Brympton. They certainly held this position from a hundred to less than fifty years ago, and it was to the disposal of their last interest in the village in 1907 that is due my residence there and the interest in some village families that I have tried to communicate to you this afternoon.