

Self-Sufficient Communities like Thelwall

Apart from the Lord of the Manor and a wealthy freeholder, the only people in Thelwall who needed to write a Will were farmers and labourers. When one died, an order of probate needed to be granted so that the wishes of the deceased could be executed. This meant that an inventory of their possessions had to be made. The house and buildings were not valued. The valuers often began with a walk through the house followed by the outbuildings and finally looking at any other assets. For instance, when John Leigh died in March 1706, they walked into the **house** noting tables, chairs, stools, pewter dishes, bellows etc. in the entrance room. Then to the **Parlour** where they valued a table, drawers and stools then to **Parlour Chamber** where bed, bedding, cupboard, stools and chairs **Room over the House** where a bedstead, bedding and hangings then to **Buttery** pan, skillet, goblets, ironware, mugs **Lower Chamber** bed, bedding, hangings, table and more chairs **Kitchen** cheese press, pots, 'odd ware' **Cart House** 2 carts, 2 pair wheels, a harrow, timber **Barn** corn, hay, sieves **Stables** 2 horses, a colt, 2 cows plus 'horse gear.

We can picture the progression of the valuers as they wandered around. John Leigh's total estate that was valued at £63.

Many inventories survive and we have to be careful about how we interpret them. We should note the date of the inventory; 'no hay' in an inventory taken in May does not necessarily mean that the person did not keep animals since they would be on grass. Crops taken in September might have been sold before winter. Here are extracts from some Thelwall Wills all taken in the 1600s.

At the low-value end for Thelwall estates is the inventory of John Ratcliffe, a husbandman, who died in May 1694.

	£	s	d
primed one cow & a heifer	05	00	00
hay in the barn & corn upon the ground	01	10	00
Poplar boards & joynes	00	06	00
In windowed corn	00	06	00
window sheet & sacks	00	03	00
In flax	00	02	06
2 Spinninge wheelles	00	03	00

It shows that John at his demise was a small-time farmer who left an estate valued at £34. There are few mentions of animals in his inventory, just one cow and a heifer; maybe John had run down his farm in his old age. He probably milked the cow because there is cheese making equipment in the list. As for arable crops, there is hay in the barn, corn and a winnowing sheet. Interestingly, there is also flax and two spinning wheels suggesting that someone at home was spinning and weaving linen cloth as a good time-filler during bad weather. This was common in Thelwall at the time and the name Gigg Lane ('gigg' meaning flax) is a reminder of that.

Item 1	15-00-00
Item 2	8-10-00
Item 3	00-00-00
Item 4	00-00-00
Item 5	05-00-00

Higher in value, is the estate of John Whitlow of Thelwall, a yeoman, who died in 1663 and left an estate worth over £120. Amongst other items, he left

One old cow, 2 heifers, 4 stirks and 3 calves, 1 fat calf

2 horses and a colt and (elsewhere) carts, harrows and ploughs, harness tackle etc.

2 pigs and a stock of bacon (not in this image)

There were oats, barley and beans growing in the field plus hemp and flax.

In the barn there was a hundredweight of cheese plus a press and other equipment.

What we are dealing with here is a good sized mixed farm producing beef, milk and pork some of which he was curing to make bacon. Salt and smoke were the normal preservatives for meat at this time.

As to wealthy inhabitants, we can turn to only two and this is part of the inventory for one of them, Peter Drinkwater who died in 1664. It is complicated because his wife seems to have died not long before and they left two under-age children. The court was involved to see that assets of the house were equally divided between the children.

Item 1	01-00-00
Item 2	01-00-00
Item 3	00-15-00
Item 4	20-00-00
Item 5	644-01-10
Item 6	
Item 7	50-00-00

The Drinkwaters lived at Massey Green; they were farmers but also acted as bankers and lent money to other villagers-notice the silver spoons, for instance. However, the big items were money lent out (£644/1/10) and the value a piece of land called Holt and Eye. Remember each of the children would receive this.