

Note on the deed for land in Kneesworth, Meldreth and Whaddon - 1438

Translation

Know [men] present and future that we William Halle of Bassingbourn [Bassingborne], William Wake clerk, Edmund Chapman and Ralph Becce of Whaddon have demised, conveyed, enfeoffed and by this our present charter confirm to Robert Burton esquire, John Prysot, Thomas Onhand mercer of London and William Mold of Whaddon all those our lands and tenements with all their appurtenances that lie in the vills and fields of Whaddon aforesaid, Kneesworth [Kneseworth] and Meldreth [Melthreth] which recently we had by demise, transfer and feoffment of William Hilton, Matthew Chapman clerk, John Kneseworth and John Aston as is more fully contained in a certain charter of feoffment, to have and to hold the said lands and tenements with all their appurtenances to the said Robert Burton, John Prysot, Thomas Onhand and William Mold, their heirs and assigns of the chief lords of the fee for the due services as by law accustomed. In testimony whereof we have affixed our seals to this our charter. These [being] witnesses: John Chalers, William Wangeworth, Richard Roberd, John Lylye, Warin Chamberleyn, and others. Dated at Whaddon aforesaid on Sunday after the feast of St Hilary in the sixteenth year of King Henry the sixth since the conquest.

Comment

The formula in the deed is the normal one for a feoffment, the most complete form of conveyance,



of this date. The purchasers (Burton et al.) are to hold the land directly from whoever the vendors (Halle et al.) held it from. It is virtually impossible to deduce what the estate in question was, but as it spread across three parishes it was evidently a substantial one. As the deed was executed at Whaddon and this is the only place mentioned in a quitclaim (i.e. a legal giving up of all claims) of only a few months later by one William Cattell to the purchasers and one other (also a London citizen) it is likely the major part of the land lay in Whaddon.

The interest in the deed is mainly for its early date, showing some of those who must have been important in the parish in the fifteenth century. Robert Burton must be a man of some means to be

termed esquire, of superior status to 'gentleman'. There is no reference to anyone of this name in the Victoria County History: Cambs for any of the three parishes and it is not distinctive enough to start ploughing through published national records of the same period. One would expect that some day individual researchers will make the connections. It is interesting to find a London mercer [merchant] with property interests – he is potentially more significant and provides a possible link to life in the capital.

The 'clerks' are of course clerks in holy orders, clergymen – more numerous in the Middle Ages, often landowners and of course involved as here in the creation of documents, hence the modern sense of clerk. Possibly they are local incumbents; it would need further research to establish this.

In an illiterate age documents were authenticated by wax seals impressed with devices particular to their owner. Signatures did not arrive for another hundred years.

Dating is by the Christian calendar and regnal year of the king. Kings of the same name were counted since the Conquest, as they still are. The sixteenth year of Henry VI was 1 Sept 1437-31 Aug 1438 and Hilary [13 Jan] fell on a Monday, so this is Sunday 18 January 1438 by modern computation.

Philip Saunders
Principal Archivist
Cambridgeshire Archives 28 May 2009