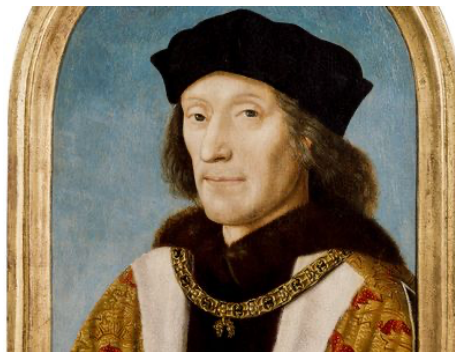


The Will of John Jenes, 1496

Research into this very old will – of which we have seen three versions - raised some interesting questions. Why the multiple versions? Most wills at this time were written in Latin (sometimes in French) so these three versions are all translations, two of them including some of the original Latin vocabulary in parenthesis; the fact that they are all translations accounts for the differences. (We cannot know whether John Jenes knew Latin himself but it is not impossible if he had been born into a family that could afford to educate him.)

So, some context for the times in which John Jenes lived...

- He would have known about the Wars of the Roses, which ended in 1487, although probably would not have been directly affected by them.
- Christopher Columbus was busy exploring.
- In 1496, Henry VII was on the throne, having defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 (Henry VIII was five years old). John Jenes would also have lived through the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV and Edward V (although not much of a reign at all as he was one of the princes believed to have been murdered in the Tower of London by the agents of their uncle, Richard III).



Henry VII

- The printer William Caxton had set up his press in 1476 to publish English works for the growing reading public.

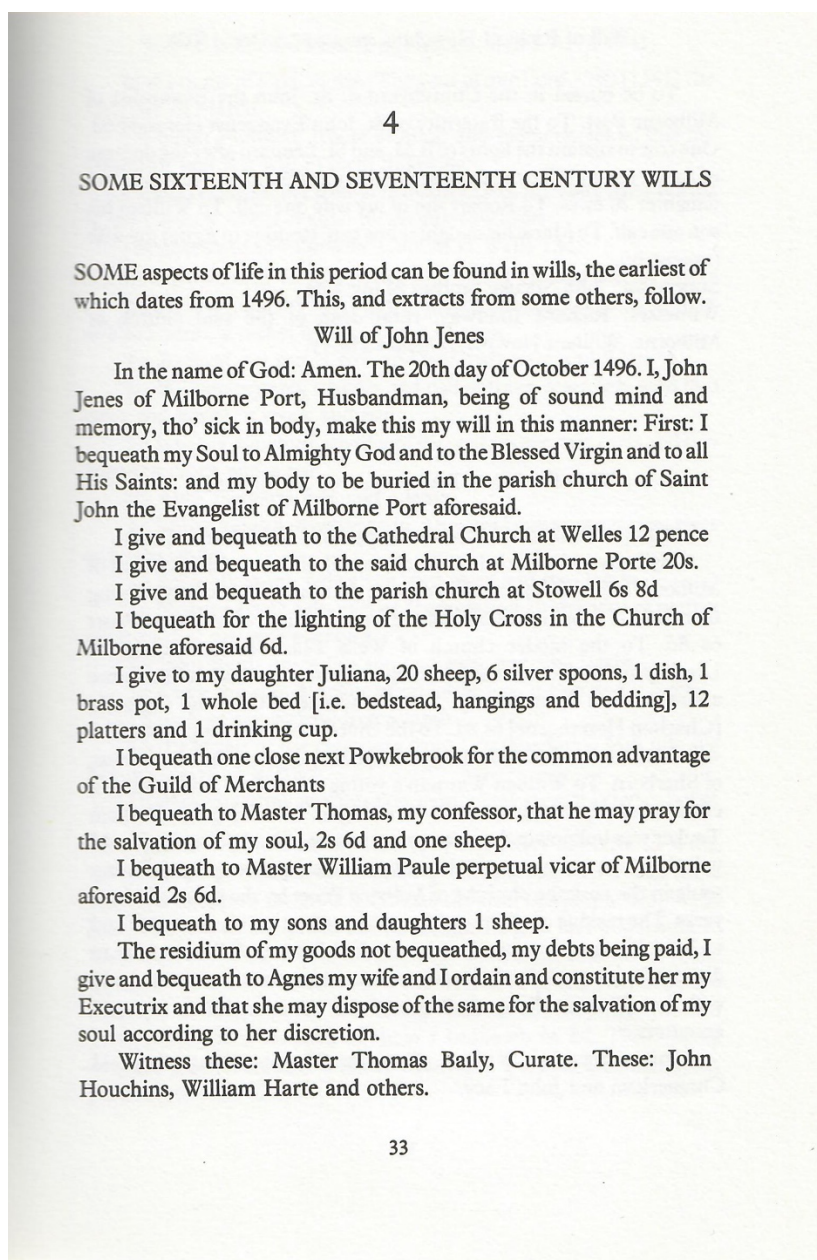


William Caxton

- The influence of the Italian Renaissance in learning and culture was beginning to reach England.
- English architecture and sculpture were thriving.
- James IV of Scotland invaded Northumberland in 1496.

John Jenes was clearly very comfortably off; he owned land and probably property, as well as animals and valuable goods and chattels. He was no doubt a regular churchgoer in what would have then been the Roman Catholic church (the Reformation and the creation of the Church of England were still about 40 years away). He was probably a successful farmer or tradesman.

Version 1 is from Stan McKay's 'Milborne Port in Somerset' (p.33).



McKay is absolutely right in telling us that 'Some aspects of life in this period can be found in wills...' but what are they and what else can we glean about John Jenes, the man?

- **Husbandman:** A husbandman in England in the Middle Ages and the early modern period was a free tenant farmer, or a small landowner. The social status of a husbandman was below that of a yeoman. The meaning of 'husband' in this term is 'master of house' rather than 'married man'.
- **'tho sick in body':** He must have known that he was dying when he wrote his will.
- Bequeathing money to the church of **Stowell** suggests that he has a connection with that village.
- Was Juliana the favoured daughter? We prefer to think that perhaps she was an unmarried daughter still living at home and bequeathed various items that her married siblings did not need, including what sounds like what we would now call a four-poster bed **with bedstead, hangings and bedding...**



Could Juliana's inherited bed have looked something like this?

- **Powkebrook** is Pudbrook; 'powke' is an old name for a sty, so perhaps this tells us that this was an area where pigs were kept next to the river.
- The **Guild of Merchants** was the precursor to our Commonalty so he was leaving land to a charitable organisation, which is of course laudable.

Version 2 is a South West Heritage record and has been translated, oddly, into the third person. This record tells us that there were two copies of the original made in the 17th century – why? This translation leaves in snippets of the original Latin - and again, why?

Bequeaths:

His body to be buried in Church of St John Evangelist in Milborne Port. 12d to Wells Cathedral; 20s to Milborne Port Church; 6s 8d to Stowell Church; and 6d for the light Sanctae Crucis in Milborne Port Church.

To daughter Juliana, 20 sheep, 6 silver spoons, a pan or dish (patella), a brass pot (olla enea), a complete bed (lectus integer), 12 platters (parapsides), and a mazer (murra).

To the common use (comodum) of the guild of merchants, a close next Powkebrowke.

To dom. Thomas his confessor to pray for his soul, 2s 6d, and one sheep.

To dom. William Pawle, perpetual vicar of Milborne Port, 2s 6d.

To each of his godsons (filioli) and goddaughters, a sheep.

The residue of his goods to his wife Agnes, ordained his executrix.

Witn: Thomas Bayly, curate there, John Howchyns, William Hart and others.

[One original Will, and two 17th century copies on parchment].

Version 3 is a summary from 'Somerset Medieval Wills' by Frederick William Weaver. The only main difference is that Stowell is called **Stokewell**, which is likely to have been its original name before being shortened by the Dorset/Somerset accent; 'stoc' was the Old English for 'place', so 'place of the well'. The 'maser' here was 'mazer' in Version 2 and is a hardwood drinking bowl (probably of some value) translated as a drinking *cup* in Version 1, with a broad flat foot and a knob or boss in the centre of the inside, known technically as the print or boss.

1496. JOHN JENES.
[6 HORNE.]
20th October, A.D. 1496, I, John Jenes, of Milborne Porte, husbondman, make my will in this manner:—
I bequeath my body to be buried in the parish church of St. John the Evangelist of Milborne aforesaid.
Item, I bequeath to the Cathedral Church of Wells 12*d*.
Item, to the aforesaid church of Milborne Porte, 20*s*.
Item, to Juliana, my daughter, 20 sheep (*oves*), six silver spoons, one dish (*patellam*), one brass pot (*ollam eneam*), one whole bed (*lectum*) 12 platters (*parapsides*), and one maser (*murram*).
Item, I bequeath to the parish church of Stokewell 6*s*. 8*d*.
Item, to the light (*lumini*) of the Holy Cross in the church of Milborne aforesaid, 6*d*.



A mazer from the period

Valerie Jackson and Nathalie Hetherington, September 2022