

Historians' meeting 30 September 2022

Mary Bodfish: A House through Time

The meeting began with remembering Mavis Crockett, whose funeral was the previous Friday, September 23rd. She was a founder member of the Historians and, until a few years ago, the Historians' meetings were held in David and Mavis' home. She was a vital part of the Historians and will be missed.

Mary Bodfish, having accessed the probate inventory dated 15th June 1700 of Richard Shelton, was able to deduce that he was a comparatively affluent yeoman. He owned a 10 roomed house (5 up 5 down).

Through the entrance door into the hall, which was also the dining room and main room of the house, family and guests would dine off pewter plates using their own knives to spear the food and a horn spoon to eat it with. The table was a board table on framed legs and the chairs were rush. Joined stools and a long case clock completed the furniture. Afterwards, they retired to the parlour where matters of business were discussed.

The servants ate in the kitchen from square wooden platters (giving us the phrase square meal). The cooking was over an open-hearth fire with a spit to turn and roast the meat and a cast iron 'kettle' for the broth. The other two downstairs rooms were the dairy and the pantry.

Upstairs the master bedroom boasted two feather mattresses on the curtained bed, with a press for the clothes. The spinning wheels were used upstairs, a larger one for wool and a smaller one for linen.

When Richard died, he left most of his wealth 'to his beloved wife' Hannah.

Inventories were first commissioned by Thomas Cromwell in 1529, when it was specified that if an estate was valued at over £5, a full inventory had to be made prior to the will being verified. Amazingly, before 1882, a married woman did not own anything, even her clothes. There is a will recorded, in which her kindly husband bequeathed his wife her clothes!

Mary entertained the Historians very well.

Report by Val Price.