
A SLAUGHTERFORD HOUSE HISTORY

The histories of old houses, if every possible avenue is explored, are never quick to do. Each one follows an individual path and this is what makes them so fascinating. Occasionally you get back to the development of a plot of land but more often you end up mired by a lack of documents, perhaps in the late 18th century or, for a medieval house, in the early 16th century when wills run out. Manor houses are usually the most traceable in records and after them the next easiest are often copyholds, especially those with a name which persists for a long period of time.

The Old Brewery at Slaughterford in Biddestone parish was recorded by members of the Wiltshire Buildings Record in May 2008 and as a follow-up its history was attempted. The property itself is a stone farmhouse in appearance with a few very thick walls suggesting a medieval origin, but with beams and mullioned windows indicating a high quality house of around 1600. The roof was reconstructed in the 18th century. An adjoining converted malthouse has some walls of the 17th century or earlier but is mostly later and the brewery building is also later.

As a preliminary, the title map and schedule of 1840 were consulted giving the name Frederick Skeate. Censuses and other 19th and early 20th century sources were looked at. Land Tax records took the Skeate surname back until 1780 when William Skeate was the person named with tenant Ann Alborne. This being apparently a dead end, the A2A website was interrogated for Skeate, Slaughterford, and a bundle of deeds, including a will of William Skeate, proved in 1804, and an abstract of title to a property in Slaughterford, came to light. This sounded promising. At the WSHC, Chippenham, the abstract of title proved to concern a copyhold with 8 acres called Clouds. It went back to the will of a fuller, proved in 1690, with mortgages from maltsters in the 18th century. This seemed just right but turned out to be a false lead. Another document in the same bundle referred to another copyhold with a half yardland called 'late Cullimores' which was surrendered to the new lord of the manor, Joseph Neeld of Grittleton, in 1842 by Frederick Skeate of North Wraxall. The descent of this was recited as starting with Daniel Cullimore, then Ralph Skeate, then John Skeate and then another John Skeate before Frederick. The list of fields and the plot size confirmed the identity.

According to Aubrey & Jackson's *Wiltshire Collections* Slaughterford belonged to Monkton Farleigh Priory in the middle ages and after the Dissolution was one of the many manors acquired by Sir Thomas Seymour. A2A again helped and listed some Slaughterford court rolls of the Seymours dating from the beginning of the 17th century. When these were produced in the search room, some were so fragile it would have been dangerous to unroll them and they were withdrawn for repair. However, a roll of 1618 was in reasonable condition and the first name on the list of customary tenants was Thomas Cullimore. This was no proof, of course, that he lived in the Old Brewery but it was again promising. Who was he? A2A again helped, listing a document of 1608, a lease of three mills on one site (one an ancient fulling mill and one a recently built fulling mill) and a house at Slaughterford to Samuel, son of Henry White of Langley Burrell and Thomas Cullimore, clothier, and his wife, Anne. It refers to a 1595 lease in Henry's name, when the site was already occupied by Samuel and Thomas. Another document, listed in A2A at the Bristol Record Office, confirmed a link, probably by marriage, between the Whites and Thomas Cullimore. The Old Brewery being a copyhold could not be the leasehold house of the mill deed, which may have been the mill house, but as Thomas was a customary tenant in 1618, he clearly had property in Slaughterford. Another document mentioned a Henry Cullimore, gentleman, of

Slaughterford, in 1652.

Next, Cullimore wills were searched on the WSHC site and a number of them came up. The best was that of Thomas Cullimore, proved in 1704. Interestingly, he was a maltster and an inventory listing rooms had survived. Could his death in 1704 be linked back to 1618 and forward to Daniel Cullimore?

The parish registers covering Slaughterford do not survive for the 17th century. If they did, or there were later court rolls, a link might be made giving a continuous descent. Nevertheless the 18th century registers were useful. Ralph Skeate's tenure was pinpointed by the record of his death in 1764. Returning to the Land Tax 'tenant' Ann Alborne, her surname was searched in the Wiltshire wills to see whose widow she might be. The will of Paul Alborne, maltster and baker, proved in 1787, was there and showed that she was not a widow but his wife and crucially it revealed that she was a sister of John and William Skeate. Her brother John was therefore the copyholder under the lord of the manor, her brother William paid the land tax (and perhaps lived in the house as John lived elsewhere) and she was the 'tenant' on the land tax record with her husband Paul, running the malting business and also living elsewhere. This is a salutary lesson about sub-letting which was rife for centuries and that the 'owner' and 'tenant' on land tax records can conceal a multi-layered situation.

Finally, standing by the cabinet at the History Centre waiting for someone and seeing the map index, I thought I would just check Slaughterford. Lo and behold there was an estate map of 1779. This was a survey of the manor accompanied by a list of tenants made when the Wyndham family acquired the manor.



The Old Brewery, Slaughterford

To sum up, a rundown copyhold which had already lost half its land, may have been acquired just before 1600 by the clothier Thomas Cullimore when he came to Slaughterford and the house much improved. The family rose in status; then, in the second half of the 17th century, those left at Slaughterford were reduced to yeomen and the copyholder then became a maltster. Certainly when Daniel Cullimore died the copyhold was taken over by Ralph Skeate, who died childless and it passed down through his family via John Skeate (who is likely to have been his brother) until Frederick Skeate surrendered it in 1842. A brewery was then set up on the premises and was run by the Little family until around World War I. So the history of the Old Brewery went back firmly to the early 18th century and tentatively back to the late 16th century. As a copyhold the site itself was medieval.

This has been an abbreviated account of the main processes involved. It illustrates the value of being able to maximise use of time at a Record Office by trying out different avenues ahead on A2A and the inevitable serendipity