

LIFE IN FEOCK PARISH IN THE LATE 17TH AND EARLY 18TH CENTURIES

The County Record Office at Truro has a collection of the wills and inventories of some of the people who lived in Feock parish between 1661 and 1745 which gives us an idea of their possessions and occupations during that period. Everyone was partly dependent on the land even though he had another occupation as a carpenter, blacksmith, miner, etc.

When anyone died, his goods were valued by two responsible people living in the neighbourhood; as there was no question of death duties the valuations should be reasonably unbiassed. Houses and land were usually held on lease, the value of which is included in the inventory. Most of the land belonged to the Falmouth, Carclew and Lanhydrock estates and was let on leases for 99 years or on three named lives. The value varies between £2 for a cottage and garden to £20 or £25 for a farm.

All the inventories begin with the words "His purse and wearing apparel", the value in the case of an aged widower being 10/-; the highest value is £7 for a prosperous farmer. Only one man is given as having two suits of clothing. In the wills of this period clothes were often left to a son or daughter.

The last line of the inventory reads "Debts Sparate and Desparate". Sparate (or sperate) debts were likely to be paid and the doubtful ones were termed desparate. Thirteen out of the twenty three inventories show people with money out on loan. One elderly widow had lent £88 out of her total of £101. This throws an interesting light on the network of borrowing and lending which seems to have been a feature of local life in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Thomas Lawrence, who died in 1734, had been running the King Harry Ferry, having a lease on the "Passage Tenement and Boat worth £40 and on two cottages worth £30; one of these was a public house containing "brewing pans, tubs and cider". Both cottages were furnished with beds, so he appears to have provided accommodation for travellers. These cottages were near the ferry on the old road to Trelissick. His inventory is the only one in which "knives and forks" are mentioned. His total estate was £143, so that, deducting the value of the leases and the £40 owing to him, there are £33 to cover his clothing, furnishings and livestock. He kept a mare, a cow and had a stock of hay. This indicates that, like most tradesmen at that time, he had a plot of land.

LIVESTOCK With the exception of those of two old men

and three widows, all the inventories list livestock of some sort, but only in small numbers. Sheep are mentioned in twelve of the inventories, varying from three on a small farm in 1661 to thirty-five belonging to a well-to-do farmer, John Dinnis, in 1722. On Martin's map of 1748 the farm which is now called Higher Devoran is called Dinnis's. There is a definite increase in the number of sheep kept during this period and also in their value, which ranges from 2/- to 3/- a head in the 1600s to 5/- in the 1700s. Sheep's milk was used to make butter and cheese; as shown in a document dealing with the payment of tithes to the Vicar of Feock.

There is only one mention of a cow in the early inventories and during the whole period, only ten households kept a cow, excepting that of John Dinnis which had two cows and a yearling. The value was between £2 and £3 per beast, probably depending upon whether they were in calf; compared with the prices of other stock this value is quite high. A bullock is only mentioned on three farms.

Swine are mentioned on seven farm inventories, but never more than two per farm. The blacksmith was also a pig breeder and owned sixty-nine which were valued at £6. 16. 0 in 1725.

Poultry are not mentioned until 1722 when three geese, four ducks and four pullets are stated as being worth 4/-. In 1747 a goose and three goslings are valued at 4/-.

Of the twenty-three families studied, twelve had a horse or mare; two belonged to tanners and the rest to farmers, one of whom had a nag and mare. Several are described as small or poor and values vary between 15/- and £3. Horse gear is seldom specified except saddles; in one case a saddle with pillion is mentioned.

Only two of the farms have implements listed in any detail; these include the harrow, plough and chains, dray, slide, a pair of wheels and butt, yoke and chains, barn boards, a barn floor, and mattocks and hooks.

CROPS These are not given in great detail; the early inventories list barley and pease at 3/- and 8/- a bushel. Corn and hay appear in the later inventories, but two inventories of small farmers taken in January and March show no stocks of fodder.

These inventories not only throw light on local farming and occupations, but also take us inside Feock homes. John Martyn, who died in 1735, was a small farmer and bargeman having "a half share in a Barge and Boat belonging and a third share in a Boat and Bottom against the cliff". His was a

four-roomed house, and, according to the parish register, there had been at least five children.

At his death the contents of the house were:

In the kitchen a table and form, a cage of shelves, a tray, a tub, a bucket, a lantern, a stone jug and some earthenware. His plates, dishes, mugs and candlesticks were of pewter, as they were in all the houses. There were several pewterers working in Cornwall at this time, as tin and lead were readily available. The open hearth and cooking utensils are dealt with in another article in this book. The 'tray' was probably a rectangular wooden box with sloping sides. As late as 1929, I saw one in use as a washtub; it was still called a 'tray'.

In the chamber over the kitchen . . . a feather bed, a dust bed, two feather bolsters, two pillows and two boxes. Bed coverings are usually included in the value of the bed.

In the middle chamber one dust bed, a table and wool. The dust beds were mattresses filled with chaff from the thrashing; the local pronunciation is 'doust'.

In the small chamber one table and form, two boxes, and two spinning wheels.

He also had a cider wring and cask, four sheep, six lambs, two poor horses, two pigs, a cow and calf. This family could have been practically self-supporting. There is no mention of a lease and his total assets, including £12 for the boats, were £33.

FURNISHINGS Beds were the most valuable items in the house; in most cases they were worth more than all the rest of the household goods. Only in two of the better furnished houses does the value of the rest of the goods exceed the value of the beds by as much as £3.

Beds are often given as 'bed furnished' which, judging by the value accorded them, would be a term to denote four-poster beds with curtains, mattress, pillows and coverings. There were also trestle beds which were low and could be pushed under the higher beds during the day. One house had a 'half-headedstead bed'. This had posts and rails at the head end and curtains that could be drawn far enough to protect the head and shoulders; it was later called a half tester.

Some houses had beds in every room except the kitchen. In the poorer homes, mattresses were filled with dust or flock (sheep's wool), which became lumpy and uncomfortable. The mattress was then emptied out, the wool teased and put back into the cover. One house with five 'beds furnished', also lists two pairs of linen sheets.

The tables were boards resting in a frame and there was also a long wooden form. Chairs only occur in the better houses and then often only one. In 1690 the inventory of John Trenhaile, tinner and farmer, lists 'six joint stools'; stools made by a carpenter and properly jointed. He also had two chairs with cushions and a hanging press. Chests or boxes are mentioned in all the houses and were used for storage.

Every inventory lists pewter table ware; plates, dishes, saucers (small dishes), candlesticks, tankards, and pint and half-pint measures in the houses which had brewing equipment. Brass candlesticks occur, but otherwise brass is only found in the larger houses as cooking utensils. When not in use these things were kept on the cupboard, which was simply a wooden shelf. One house had a frame of shelves and another a cage of shelves; two had Court Cupboards, which were enclosed cupboards standing on the floor with a similar cupboard or open shelves standing on the top.

The kitchen, with its open hearth, was often the only heated room. Here the family cooked, ate and spent any spare time they might have. The lighting was by candles. There is only one mention of a grate with 'fireshovel, sifter and tongs'. These belonged to a widow who died in 1734 and had been the wife of a prosperous farmer. She was then living in two rooms furnished with the bare essentials, a bed, table board and form, a little pewter and a few cooking pots. She also had two spinning wheels and the only looking glass mentioned in the inventories.

A few of these people can be traced in the parish registers; they appear to have married in their middle twenties, had an average of five children and died in their late 50s or early 60s.

TRADESMEN Among the inventories studied are those of three tanners, a carpenter, a bargeman and a blacksmith.

The wealthiest of the tanners was John Trenhaile, who has already been mentioned. He left an estate worth £96.4.6., of which £44 was due 'upon stocks and bonds'. He shared his tinbounds with a fellow adventurer who valued the 'tinstuff broken and lying on the grass with tools and other tackling' at £1.5.0. In addition he had a ladder, wheelbarrow, adze, hatchet, borer, handsaw and a fowling gun. Like many others he brewed his own beer, having 'two hogsheads, three half hogsheads, two barrels, three tubs, a brewing pan and three small pans'. Among his personal possessions were a gold ring, a silver seal and four old books; this is the only inventory in which books are mentioned. He had a mare and heifer, five small rearing pigs and a stock of pease and barley.

Another tinner, Robert Reynolds, who died in 1663, left £64 including £20 owing to him and bounds and tinworks worth £12. His home is very simply furnished and there is no mention of a lease. He kept five kine, a nag and a mare, so he must have rented a few acres. In his will he left 10/- to the repair of Kenwyn church, 5/- to the poor of Kea and 3/- to the poor of Feock.

The third tinner was a poor man who died in 1713, leaving a widow and five children. He may have died in a mine accident, as the inventory taken in July of the following year describes him as "a tinner who died about the beginning of December last 1713". Of his total estate of £8.14.8., the lease on his house, garden and croft of downs was worth £4, and his tools were a shovel and hacking axe. He also kept "half a dozen small sheep" and a mare. The total value of his household goods was 38/-.

A carpenter, Walter Clarke, who died in 1690, had "two deals (planks) and other goods to timber, his shop and tools belonging to his trade, small pieces of timber and frames and a bench for his work" worth £4.17.8. He also had a pump gouger and a grindstone. The gouger was a tool used to hollow out the centre of a long thick piece of wood to make a pipe. He also had "a little old boat with mast and sails" and kept seven sheep, a nag and a mare. Of his total assets of £27, there was £2.10.0. for the lease and £7 owing to him.

Henry Lawrance, the blacksmith already cited as a pig breeder, was a wealthy man having leases on a number of estates in Feock worth £151, as well as land inherited from the family who owned Trelistick estate (see the Lawrance wills at the County Record Office) and money out on loan. The inventory has been included to show even the wealthier men could have a trade.

His trade as a blacksmith is only referred to as "small tools and new cold iron", value £7.10.0. He also farmed, growing corn and hay for the pigs, brewed his own cider and had a boat with sails. His household goods were worth £17 and included ten chairs, a court cupboard, two dressers and a clock. This is the only mention of a clock. The total value of the goods was £384.

Peter Woolcock who died in September 1691, was also farming. He had "a third share in an old boat and net and one half of a sand barge" worth £17. On the farm he kept "two milch kine, two and twenty sheep, two pigs and a nag" and had a very good store of wheat, barley and pease for the coming winter. This the only inventory that mentions wheat.

With one exception the inventories chosen do not include

the large farms or the people who were wealthy enough to lease several properties which they sublet. Neither does it include the poorest people whose possessions would have been so slight that they would not have had anything worth valuing.

REFERENCES

- Wills and Inventories. Cornwall County Record Office, Truro
- Feock Parish Registers. By kind permission of the Vicar of Feock
- Douch, H. L. 'Cornish Pewterers', Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, Volume IV, 1969
- Martin's Map of Cornwall, 1748. Cornwall County Record Office, Truro

Cover Picture

This shows the back of Tregoose farm which is one of the older houses in the parish; it is on the left of the road from Carnon Downs to Point.

Tregoose occurs in early documents; in the Lay Subsidy Rolls of 1327, it was held by John Tregoose who paid sixpence as compared with the large farm of Tregew which paid three shillings. It is mentioned in the time of Henry VIII in a list of "Tenentes in Milicia", suggesting that the occupier was liable for military service. In 1538 it comes under a list of properties held by "Socage", that is, held on free tenure without obligation for military service.

On Martin's map of 1748, it is marked with the symbol which indicates an important farm and continued as a farm until quite recently. In 1851 the farmer exhibited corn at the Great Exhibition.

If it were possible to examine the roof timbers we might get an idea of the date of the present house. A large chimney has been removed from the right-hand end and the centre window is opposite the front door, so it may have started as a 'passage house'; the outshut at the back could have housed a turret stair.