

Local history

Editor: Mark Page, 16 Brandon Close, Alton. GU34 2BD

What are Tithe Barns? And a Late Medieval Dispute at East Meon Edward Roberts

The term 'tithe barn' is often applied to any large, old barn (Mercer 1975, 164; Roberts, forthcoming). While this usage has a certain romantic appeal, and indeed is still employed by the National Trust, recent works have shown that it obscures important distinctions (Dyer 1997, 23; Aston 1993, 111). Undoubtedly some barns stored the corn grown on the rector's glebe land, together with the tithe corn due to him as the parish rector, or parson. These were properly tithe barns. There were also manorial barns that stored the corn from the manorial home farm, or demesne. Finally there were numerous barns associated with other agricultural holdings: for example, those of town merchants and rural peasants. It is worth trying to distinguish between surviving medieval barns in this way, if only as an indication of the size and quality of barn that each social grouping could afford or deemed appropriate.

A few old barns have survived behind town houses in Hampshire and beside rural houses that did not belong to the rector or to the manorial lord. These are almost always relatively small buildings of about three bays. They are small for the simple reason that town merchants and rural peasants generally cultivated fairly small areas of arable land. Few tithe barns survive but it is probable that they varied in size according to the wealth of the living. However, the 17th-century barn beside the rectory at Cheriton has only four bays, and Cheriton was one of the richest livings in the diocese of Winchester. Lastly, manorial barns were often large because the arable land on manor farms generally extended to several hundred acres. The manorial barn at Old Burghclere, whose timbers were felled in 1451 (Miles and Worthington 1999), was built in 1451-2 with eight bays (HRO 11M59/B1/188). This magnificent barn survives, as does the manorial barn at Overton built with eight or nine bays in 1496-8 (Roberts 1996, 96-103).

Both Overton and Old Burghclere were manors belonging to the bishop of Winchester. The bishop also had the advowson, or the right to present to the living, in both parishes but he was not the rector there (VCH Hants, iv, 217, 281). Consequently it was necessary to have separate manorial and tithe barns into which the corn of the separate owners could be gathered. The bishopric pipe rolls account for expenditure on the manorial barns but not on the tithe barns, which were not the bishop's property. This need to distinguish

carefully between tithe and manorial barns even applied where the same person was both manorial lord and rector. It might not have mattered if tithe and manorial corn were mixed together during the lifetime of the owner but it mattered greatly after his death.

This point is vividly illustrated at East Meon where not only was the bishop of Winchester lord of the manor but also rector by virtue of the fact that the rectory was appropriated to the bishopric. At a bishop's death the temporalities of the bishopric, including manorial revenues, would fall into the hands of the king. Spiritualities, including rectories, would normally fall to the metropolitan, in this case the archbishop of Canterbury (Wood-Legh 1924, 136). On the death of Peter Courtenay, bishop of Winchester, in 1492, the temporalities of the bishopric apparently passed without dispute to the king so that he would have had the use of the corn grown on the demesne lands of East Meon.

The corn stored in the tithe barn at East Meon was a different matter. In normal circumstances it would have belonged to the archbishop but the prior of St Swithun's in Winchester disputed this right, citing a concession made to the priory by Edward III in 1331 (Harper-Bill 1978, 14-15). Apparently no archbishop had contested the right of the prior to the tithe corn in 1447, on the death of Cardinal Beaufort, or in 1486, on the death of Bishop Waynflete. However, after Peter Courtenay's death, John Morton, the archbishop of Canterbury, was anxious to restore the archiepiscopal rights as they had been before 1331. The prior was equally anxious to retain the rights enjoyed by St Swithun's since that time. Litigation arose between archbishop and prior, and aged local witnesses were called to give evidence (Harper-Bill 1978, 14-15). Their testimonies, recorded in Morton's register, give us a rare glimpse of life in a rural parish in the late fifteenth century (Harper-Bill 1987, 88-100).

At a hearing in Winchester, in October 1497, witnesses were asked how long they had lived in East Meon and which bishops or priors they knew. Richard Hether, husbandman [*agricultor*], aged over eighty, had been born in the parish and had 'known bishops Beaufort, Waynflete and Courtenay, all of whom he had seen at East Meon', presumably at The Court House, the former bishop's residence that still stands (Harper-Bill

1987, 93; Roberts 1993). John Raustowe, husbandman, aged over eighty, said that the bishop was also rector. 'And this he knows because he has been accustomed every year to collect for the bishop the tithe of sheaves from the parishes and farmers of East Meon and Hambledon'. He went on to say that, in the vacancies following the deaths of bishops Beaufort in 1447 and Waynflete in 1486, 'the prior and convent received the tithe of sheaves and other tithes of East Meon' (Harper-Bill 1987, 94-5).

William Bulbeck, husbandman, aged over sixty, said that in the autumn following Waynflete's death 'a monk ... came from Winchester and ... admonished the parishioners of East Meon to divide the tithed sheaves from their own, since the tithes now belonged to the prior and convent' (Harper-Bill 1987, 97). Similarly, William Weston, a butcher of East Meon, said that after the death of Waynflete, 'the tithe of sheaves from East Meon was placed in a barn there, as it was before the bishop's death. A monk ... came from Winchester and, in the name of the prior and convent, sealed the doors of the barns of East Meon, Froxfield and Steep in which the tithes were stored; this he saw himself' (Harper-Bill 1987, 96-7).

The archbishop challenged the prior's right to the tithes, sending a Mr Shirborne to administer the see. Richard Stympe, husbandman, testified that 'after Courtenay's death, the subprior held a court and warned the farmers that they should pay money to no persons save the prior and convent. Afterwards there arrived John Gossage, Mr Shirborne's servant ... and held court in the archbishop's name. And here Gossage exhibited a citation and warned Richard Cager, the rent collector for the rectory tenants, to appear in person before the archbishop because he would not pay Gossage what he had collected. Frightened by this citation, Cager followed Gossage to Alton, a distance of eight miles, and there made payment to him' (Harper-Bill 1987, 99).

It is clear that the dispute between the archbishop and prior spread uncertainty and alarm among the peasantry of East Meon, of its dependent tithings of Froxfield and Steep, and of the neighbouring manor of Hambledon, where the bishop was also both manorial lord and rector. The importance of storing manorial and tithe corn in separate barns is emphasised by this litigation and re-emphasised by the manner in which the bishop's accounts for East Meon and Hambledon were kept. The pipe roll entries for both manors account separately for the manor and rectory, even though the bishop

enjoyed the fruits of both in his lifetime. For example, the pipe roll accounts always distinguish between East Meon manor (*Meon manerium*) and East Meon rectory (*Meon ecclesia*). By the same token, they distinguish between the manorial barn or demesne barn (*grangia dominica*) belonging to the bishop as lord of the manor, and the tithe barn (*grangia decimalis*) belonging to the bishop as rector (HRO 11M59/B1/198; 11M59/B1/177). Historians should be careful to do the same.

Notes

The hypothesis that manorial barns were generally larger than tithe barns is supported by the fact that the demesne barn at East Meon is often called 'the great barn' (*magna grangia*) in the bishopric pipe rolls (eg. 11M59/B1/36) whereas the tithe barn was apparently never so described. John Raustowe (and probably others) collected tithe corn from all the parishioners of East Meon. In contrast, Richard Cager's task was to collect rent only from those who occupied the rector's glebe land.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Rev. Peter Wadsworth who kindly introduced me to some relevant documents and to Dr John Hare who read this article in draft form and made helpful comments.

References

- Hampshire Record Office, Bishopric of Winchester pipe rolls: 11M59/B1/177 (1433-4); 11M59/B1/188 (1451-2); 11M59/B1/198 (1465-6)
- Aston, M 1993 *Monasteries*, London
- Dyer, C 1997 'Bredon barns in history' in F W B Charles, *The Great Barn of Bredon: its Fire and Rebuilding*, Oxbow Monograph 76, Oxford
- Harper-Bill, C 1978 'Archbishop John Morton and Canterbury', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 29
- Harper-Bill, C (ed.) 1987 *The Register of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, i, 1486-1500*, Canterbury and York Society 75
- Mercer, E 1975 *English Vernacular Houses*, HMSO London
- Miles, D and Worthington, M 1999 'Hampshire Dendrochronology Project - phase five', *Vernacular Architecture* 30
- Roberts, E 1993 'William of Wykeham's house at East Meon, Hants', *Archaeological Journal* 150
- Roberts, E 1996 'Overton Court Farm and the late medieval farmhouses of demesne lessees', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society* 5
- Roberts, E (forthcoming) 'Two dated monastic buildings at Titchfield', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society* 55
- The Victoria County History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, 5 vols (1900-14), London
- Wood-Legh, K L 1924 *Studies in Church Life in England under Edward III*, Cambridge