

THE LANCASHIRE PROBATE RECORDS⁽¹⁾

BY B. C. JONES, M.A.

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SHORTLY after the end of the 1939-45 war Lord Merriman, the president of the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court of Justice, with the approval of the lord chancellor, agreed to transfer the older probate records from the District Probate Registry at Chester to the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth, where a division of the whole collection into three groups was begun. The records applicable to the Welsh counties of Flint and Denbigh were retained by the National Library, and those relating to Cheshire and Lancashire were sent to the Lancashire Record Office at Preston. The Lancashire records were then extracted, and the remainder dispatched to the Cheshire Record Office at The Castle, Chester. Since the Lancashire portion is larger than the other two together, the act books, the registers and the manuscript indexes, which could not be divided, remain at Preston. This separation of the modern from the ancient records is not an arbitrary one. Before 1858 probate jurisdiction had belonged to the church; there were lay courts with special privileges, such as the London Court of Husting, and in Lancashire the manorial courts of Halton, Slyne and Nether Kellet, but these were exceptional. For the most part the business which is now carried out by the officers of the probate division of the High Court was then the concern of the metropolitan courts of the archbishops of Canterbury and York, the courts of the bishops in their dioceses and those of the archdeacons, deans, rural deans and various other lower ecclesiastical dignitaries within their jurisdictions. When the civil court of probate was established under the act of 1857, the probate records of these ancient courts were transferred to the new district probate registries. Thus the officials of the registry at Chester in 1861 took into their custody the probate records of the consistory court of the diocese of Chester. The result of the recent change of custody and distribution of these older records between the three record repositories at Aberystwyth, Chester and Preston is not only that they will receive the special care and attention which the officials of the registry with all their other duties had neither the opportunity nor the training to give, but also that, for the first time in their history, they have become separate from the current records and in consequence more readily available to the historian. There is no cause to argue, however, as an apology for this paper, that here is a class of historical record

⁽¹⁾ Originally read under the title, "The Historical interest of wills and inventories".

hitherto entirely overlooked and neglected. As early as 1857 Piccope published in Vol. XXXIII of the Chetham Society the first portion of the Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories which his father, the Rev. John Piccope, in his lifetime had transcribed, and in 1879 there appeared as the second volume of the publications of the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire the first of a series of printed indexes. Nonetheless it is true to say that these records have not had the recognition which they deserve as social and economic documents of great interest and importance. Exploitation of them has proceeded in a piecemeal fashion. There is no general account of them apart from Earwaker's introduction to the first printed index, and since his time there has occurred a change of direction in the writing of local history. The miscellaneous and fragmentary details recorded in the old histories with their emphasis upon the church, the school, the almshouse and manor, have found their proper place and proportion in an analysis of the social and economic development of the town, the parish or the district under review. The probate records were consulted in the writing of the older histories, but it is not widely realised how much they are able to assist in the writing of histories of this modern kind. There is another reason of no less importance than the first why some further account of them seems necessary at this time. Whilst they were in ecclesiastical custody they suffered very badly as a result of the conditions under which they were stored. Their removal from the Abbey Gateway to the house of the headmaster of the King's School in 1847, and again in 1861 to the newly established district probate registry in Whitefriars, has meant that their present arrangement is far from the original one. There exist many anomalies.

I

The ecclesiastical history of Lancashire is complicated by the ancient division of the county between the dioceses of York and Lichfield and by the delegation of episcopal authority in each diocese to the archdeacons of Richmond and Chester respectively. The Ribble was the boundary of diocese and archdeaconry alike until by letters patent of 4 August 1541 King Henry VIII separated the two archdeaconries of Richmond and Chester from the dioceses of York and Lichfield and united them to form the new diocese of Chester. In the same year he abolished the office of the archdeacon of Richmond, but a commissary appointed by the bishop of Chester continued to exercise many of the powers formerly enjoyed by the archdeacon. His authority amounted to an *imperium in imperio* which only lapsed during episcopal visitations. In his own name and under the seal of his office he granted probate and issued letters of administration. He determined testamentary causes in his own court and he kept his own records. Since his jurisdiction in Lancashire extended over the whole of the deaneries of

Amounderness and Furness and parts of the deaneries of Lonsdale and Kendal, the Lancashire records which accumulated in the archives of the bishops of Chester were drawn from the four southern deaneries of Blackburn, Leyland, Manchester and Warrington. It is the probate records of the bishop and not the records of his commissary which have been transferred to the Lancashire Record Office. The commissary's probate records remain, some in the district probate office at Lancaster, and some at Somerset House in London.

The church courts of probate in England generally fulfilled two functions: they acted as registries of wills, and they determined the disputes arising therefrom. The greater part of the records with which we are concerned accumulated in the episcopal archives as a result of the ordinary and day to day business of registration. There are, however, some hundreds of miscellaneous papers relating to the contentious jurisdiction of the bishop, which remained in the old registry over the Abbey Gateway when the bulk of the probate records was removed from there in 1847 to the house of the headmaster of the King's School. These strays make up an artificial or apparently haphazard collection of wills, inventories of goods and chattels, administration bonds, executors' and administrators' accounts, and various other papers drawn up in cases of disputed wills and inventories. A few are earlier in date than the founding of the diocese in 1541 and, especially as few Lancashire probate records have survived at Lichfield, they are of incidental interest for the information which they afford of the Pre-Reformation activities of the archdeacon of Chester and the probate jurisdiction which he then exercised. This miscellaneous series ends abruptly in 1800. With the consent of the diocesan authorities, these records were removed from the Gateway and brought to Preston early in 1951. They, like the main collection, were then sorted into three groups, the Lancashire records for retention, and the Cheshire and Welsh records for dispatch to the Cheshire Record Office and the National Library of Wales respectively.⁽²⁾ The supposition that these documents had been set apart from the main series pending judgment in the Court does not seem to fit the case, since amongst them are not only records of testamentary suits including all the necessary papers from the original citation to the final sentence, but also single items—a citation, an account, an inventory, an interrogatory or a will.⁽³⁾ The provenance of these records cannot be doubted since they belong properly to the records of the consistory court. Whether the records of probate causes were at one time filed separately and kept distinct from those of other causes is a question which may not be finally answered until a thorough examination of all the papers in the diocesan registry

⁽²⁾ There are printed indexes in the Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, Vols. 33, 43 and 52.

⁽³⁾ Here are to be found some of those wills which Piccope examined and are listed as missing in Earwaker's introduction to the first index of Chester Wills. Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, Vol. 2.

has been made. There are instances after 1800 of interrogatories and depositions being enclosed with the original will or with the administration bond, and in this way they have come into the main series. Furthermore it was a practice in earlier centuries when a will was proved in solemn form and interrogatories were administered and depositions taken, to enclose these with the original will. This was also true in cases of nuncupative wills or wills uttered *in extremis* where the witnesses were required to answer questions concerning the precise manner and circumstances of the testator's last utterance; but with these exceptions no other cause papers are to be found in the main series. The accumulation of these records from the Abbey Gateway has some other explanation.

It is perhaps a matter of surprise to us today that the ecclesiastical courts continued so long to exercise their authority, or that so many people bothered to fulfil all the formalities of probate when these were so frequently denied validity by chancery and the courts of common law. Until the Statute of Distributions in 1670 the bond entered into by the executor or administrator "to save the ordinary harmless" to produce an inventory and account, and faithfully to carry out all their duties without fraud, was regarded by the chancery and common law lawyers as a dead letter and without legal force; yet bonds were regularly taken and carefully kept by the ecclesiastical courts. Thus we observe in the act book that, in granting letters of tuition of Edmund Travis of Eccles to Edmund Golden his nearest relative in 1596, the provision was made "that the same should be of no efficacie in the law untill the bonde weare sealed and delivered and safelie returned for Mr. Chancellor's securitie". This was duly done and a further memorandum added to that effect. It is fortunate that the earlier practice of the consistory court at Chester was to keep together all the documents, wills, inventories, accounts and bonds on the same file, but for the greater part of the seventeenth century in the case of bonds the contrary was true, and this practice of filing them separately has resulted in the loss of a large number of them. Generally only those filed in the main series with letters of commission and accounts have survived. The inventory had better standing in the law than the bond, although chancery generally ignored an inventory exhibited in a church court and would not admit a plea of *plene administravit* on the evidence of that alone. In the diocese of Chester the practice of requiring an inventory gives place by about 1750 to that of taking a sworn valuation of the whole estate. In consequence this class of record disappears and only very occasionally is there a full and perfect inventory among the records after the middle years of the eighteenth century. Whatever they may have thought of the bond and the inventory, the courts of chancery and common law did uphold the act of probate. Although there are many instances among family muniments of wills which had been acted upon but never proved, these are exceptional. The dangers of intermeddling with the deceased's property and the

impossibility of suing for debts without the authority of a grant of probate, would be arguments strong enough to compel the executor to prove the will, or the administrator to take out letters of administration. Normally, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries before the system of surrogates had fully developed in the diocese of Chester, two courses were open to them; either they would make a personal appearance at Chester, despite the hazards and inconveniences of the long journey, or they would request a letter of commission to be sent to one or more of the local clergy who would administer the oath, take a copy of the will and inventory if any were exhibited, see that the bond was duly entered into, and then return all these documents to the court. The officials there would draw up the act of probate, seal and attach it to the will, and send it back. The earlier practice was to attach the probate act to the original will and to keep the copy in the records, but from about 1630 the modern practice of keeping the original and proving the copy was followed. So far as the court was concerned the business was not complete until the act had been entered in the act book: these records survive in a series of forty-eight volumes from 1596 to 1858. If desired a copy of the will could be entered in the bishop's register on payment of a fee. Prior to 1838 these registrations were made in the enrolment books of the court, books containing a miscellaneous collection of documents and not set apart for probate registrations. These remain in the custody of the diocesan authorities. After 1838, however, it would appear that every will and administration was laboriously entered in full in a register set apart for that purpose. There are sixty-two of these large and clumsy volumes in a series from 1838 to 1851.

From 1653 to 1660 the business of the church courts all over the country was in abeyance. A civil court of probate acting in London took over the administration. In the diocese of Chester the church courts continued to function until 1651, in spite of the abolition of the episcopal office in 1646, and the offices of lesser authorities, such as deans, canons and prebends, in 1649. The entries in the act book end in 1644, and thereafter until the Restoration there is only a single entry, that for 1649, but the records themselves continue, diminishing in number during the years of trouble and fighting from 1643 to 1645, attaining fairly normal proportions from 1646 to 1649, and falling off again in 1650. After 1646 the style of the bishop was omitted, and business was carried on under the name of the chancellor, Edward Mainwaring. In one respect the Interregnum had a permanent result. The rural deaneries ceased to exist as separate courts; their organisation for probate purposes was thenceforward more closely associated with that of the consistory court. Hitherto where the personal estate of the deceased did not amount to more than £40, the rural deans had had the privilege of granting probate and in cases of intestacy issuing letters of administration. Their only obligation had been to make a return of their records to the consistory court. They had had

their own registrars to record their acts, and had issued under their own names and seals the probate act itself and letters of administration. None of their business was recorded in the act books of the consistory court, although the original documents were lodged there. From these for the years 1649 to 1651 it appears that Henry Bridgeman was in control of most if not all of the rural deaneries, and after the Restoration he continued to hold them in plurality.⁽⁴⁾ Except for a short period in the eighteenth century when Samuel Peploe held them jointly with Thomas Whittakers, the rural deaneries were never again under the control of more than one person. This change of organisation has meant that whereas before the Restoration the majority of the records from the rural deaneries, the *infra* as they were called at a later date, were filed with the consistory court records, after 1660 they were permanently kept apart in a separate series, and spasmodically until the eighteenth century and thereafter regularly, a proper account of probate acts was kept in a series of *infra* act books. Under the control of one person the rural deaneries had become a department of the consistory court.⁽⁵⁾

Of the physical conditions of the records themselves it may be said generally that they reflect the confusion and disorder which must have prevailed from time to time in the diocesan registry. In a law case reported in the *Liverpool Mercury* on 2 May 1817 Mr. Ward, the deputy registrar, deposed "that he had searched the records of the court in order to discover if any certificates of registration could be found [*i.e.* of a non-conformist meeting house] but that he had searched in vain. Mr. Ward however admitted that previously to the time when he entered upon his present office, which was in 1809, the papers relating to this department were in a very irregular state, and that he did not imagine that more than one-fifth, probably not more than one-tenth of them, were now in existence". No one was really held responsible for the close and careful custody of the records. The general apparitor or his assistants for a fee would search the records if required, but the other officials of the court, and especially the proctors, had unrestricted access to the files. In 1784 a great number of wills relating to the Hardman family were accidentally found, "having never been placed again upon the files through Mr. Dennil's negligence since his return with them from Lancaster Assizes some years before". In these circumstances it is more surprising that so many have survived than that some have been lost. Very many are damaged by damp, and in particular those for the years 1603, 1670, 1679 and 1691, and there are several hundred fragments

⁽⁴⁾ Third son of Bishop Bridgeman, chaplain to Lord Derby, present at his execution 1651, Bishop of Sodor and Man 1671-1682. *History of the Church and Manor of Wigan*, Part II, pp. 422-3 n. 2. Chetham Society, Vol. XVI, N.S.

⁽⁵⁾ The existence of some *infra* records of an earlier date than the Restoration in a separate series suggests that the practice of keeping them all together in one series was not invariably followed. On the discovery of these stray *infra* records by accident in 1906, their indexer gave them the rather unsatisfactory name of New *Infra*, and his list of them appears in Vol. 52. of the Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.

urgently in need of repair. Among the infra records also there are many anomalies; for some years there are no records at all, for others only those of a single deanery. It would appear that as they came in they were grouped according to their deaneries, but having broken loose from their groups, they were eventually tied up in yearly bundles without regard to their original arrangement.

II

In substance the last will and testament is the least formal and the most personal of legal documents. Any scrap of paper which would reveal the intention of a will, instructions to friends or solicitors, a letter or even notes added at the end of a personal account book, could be and were proved as such in the absence of any other more formal document. The only requirements were that this could be shown on oath to represent the deceased's last will, that there were no other and later documents to guide those who had survived him in the distribution of his estates, and that at the time of writing he was of perfect memory and not subject to any kind of interested over-persuasion by threats or cajolence. In the nineteenth century, however, there was a tendency to a greater formality than in earlier times, and a more frequent use of general phrases such as "all my real and personal estate of whatsoever nature or kind and wheresoever it may be I give and bequeath etc.". In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries similar omnibus phrases occurred in wills of Roman Catholics when it was deliberately intended to obscure the real purpose of the bequests made in the will, by privately instructing trustees to carry out provisions specifically written down in some other document. Especially was this the case if the testator had intended to benefit his church either in this country or abroad. Wills such as these were however exceptional. For the most part the wills of these earlier centuries were pious in sentiment and open to expressions of opinion. Biblical quotations were frequent and there were sometimes long confessions of faith or dissertations upon the snares of the world, the flesh, and the devil. First and principally the testator bequeathed his soul to God, and then his body to Christian burial. The concern of our forefathers to be "brought home decently", sometimes appeared in the funeral instructions which followed. There is one instance among the Lancashire probate records of the testator requiring his wife to enter into a bond with his executors to give him a Christian burial. The anxiety lest too much should be frittered away in drinking and doles to the poor prompted some to instruct that their funeral should be "without pompe or unnecessary charge of wine, biskets, macroons scutcheons etc". Indeed from items listed in executors' accounts it is certain that a funeral in the old style could become a serious charge upon the estate. At the funeral of Luce Taylor of Little Sankey, widow, in 1665 for example some of the expenses incurred were:—

	£	s.	d.
"Item paid to Mrs. Ellen Barker for ale and beere	2	14	0
Item paid to William Ellom for beere and ale	7	18	0
Item paid to Richard Worrall for Mackerroons and for spices to burne ale with	1	12	0
Item paid to Mary Platt for 20 dozen of cakes and bread	1	0	0
Item dealt to the Poor	7	8	0
Item paid 500 li weight of cheese	5	12	6
Item paid to Catherine Catherall for beere and windinge the decedent	1	0	0"

After arranging for his funeral and for the payment of his debts and expenses incurred in the probate of his will the testator proceeded to the distribution of his real and personal estate. Prior to the Statute of Wills in 1540 the distribution of real estate by testament was not lawful except in boroughs where the custom expressly allowed it. The development of the law of uses did mean nevertheless that wills concerning land were made and acted upon, although these could not have the sanction of probate in a church court. The effect of the Statute of Wills was to concede the devisability of real estate and to do away with the older distinction between testament and wills. Where personal and real estate were devised the church court had power of probate. The phrase "I make this my present testament containing herein my last will" has become in more modern times "This is the last will and testament of me, etc."⁽⁶⁾ Although the law laid down no rules whatever as to the form or manner of the distribution of the estate, there was a strong feeling throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the testator should provide for all his family. This was in origin the ancient custom of tripartite division, or as it was more frequently called by the lawyers *legitim*, that is a division of the estate into three parts, wife's part, child's part and soul's part. In a deposition of a witness to the will of William Thomason, *alias* Edwardson, of Whiston in 1617 there is an account of how the testator had sent for one Henry Lathom a clerk to write his will. In the course of writing it Lathom objected to its form. "Good Will Edwardson," he said, "this will cannot stand by law for I would wish you to give your goods according to the law and custom of the country, that is one part to yourself a second for your wife and a third for your children." Much of the value of wills to the social historian is in this kind of incidental information, but where they inform us of the distribution and employment of wealth from one generation to the next, they are of greater value still to the economic historian, who for the earlier centuries at least can rely upon so few other original sources. By using the methods of the genealogist he may follow the tangled skein of business and social relationships, observing the names and occupations of the executors or administrators of the deceased, and paying special attention to the list of

⁽⁶⁾ "Testament and will, strictly speaking, are not synonymous. A will is properly limited to land and a testament only to chattels requiring executors, which a will only for land doth not require." R. Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*. Vol. 4 (1842), p. 53.

debts so frequently added at the foot of a will. It is important to bear in mind, however, that there is a danger of placing too much reliance upon descriptions of status such as gentleman, yeoman or husbandman. These may be no guide to the actual occupation of the deceased. In his will and inventory of 1590 John Cocke of Ashton-under-Lyne is described as a husbandman, and yet it is certain from the list of debts at the foot of his will and from items listed in the inventory that he was principally concerned with the wool trade and not farming. He had debts owing to him from Norwich and Walsingham in Norfolk, Spalding in Lincolnshire, Rowell and Buckstones in Gloucester, Dunstable in Bedfordshire, Harborough and Lutterworth in Leicester, Newport Pagnell in Buckinghamshire and Kettering in Northamptonshire. He had nine pack horses and one mare with their saddles and overlays, packcloths and cords, £48 worth of yarn, sixty pieces of sacking, and £33 worth of ware to be sent into the country.

There were few limitations upon the sort of person who could make a will. Blackstone distinguished three kinds of disability: want of sufficient discretion, want of sufficient liberty and criminal conduct. Thus infants under fourteen if males, under twelve if females, madmen or otherwise noncompotes, married women and suicides; all these categories of person were unable to make a will, but for most people there was no prohibition. Indeed there was a strong belief that to die intestate was a shame and a disgrace, and this caused many to make their wills even if they had little to bequeath. If a man was a pauper the court granted probate without a fee as many marginal notes in the act books of the sixteenth century and early seventeenth century will testify. Even when probate fees were charged they were not excessive. The total sum of the personal estate of Luce Taylor of Little Sankey was £241 . 16 . 0, and of this only 19/8d. was taken for proving and engrossing the will and 5/- for taking and engrossing the inventory. The printed indexes will show at a glance that the probate records were drawn from both the richer and the poorer sort of society. Besides the gentry, clergy, doctors and apothecaries there are drapers, mercers, badgers, drovers and chapmen, masters and workers in the linen and wool trade, tanners and shoemakers, craftsmen and workers in minerals. In an age when specialization had not advanced as far as it has today, even specific descriptions of occupation can be deceptive. There are examples of a clerk who was really a physician, of a cabinet maker who had invested in coalmines, and of a joiner like Thomas Sandes of Preston, who as late as 1638 bequeathed his "shewe called the Chaos the waggon the stage and all the joyners tooles and other ymplementes and appurtenances to the said showe belonging" to his son John Sandes. These are a reminder that society does not always fall into the neat classification which we would impose upon it. Production and marketing often go hand in hand and new pursuits develop from older and more established crafts. Thus it is possible for

one man to be both "linen byar and webster" or "joiner and mechanic". The story of industrial enterprise in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century is partly the story of the vigorous and inventive spirit of odd-job men, whose mastery of one trade or occupation did not preclude them from a mastery of several. Finally, it would not be wise to rely too much upon the occupations given in printed indexes; some are wrongly ascribed, some are ambiguous and some are omitted altogether. On an examination of the original records an Ashton-under-Lyne watchmaker turns out to be a clothmaker⁽⁷⁾ and a clerk in holy orders to be a parish clerk.⁽⁸⁾ As the records are sorted and arranged a new and a more accurate and complete list will be compiled. Until then it is important to bear in mind the errors and shortcomings of the present one.

Much more of local and general interest is afforded by the wills. Sometimes they are in effect the foundation deeds of charities, schools and almshouses, and, especially in the earlier centuries, they provide information as to the building of chapels in the parish church, or the glazing of the windows, or the repairing of the roof. By the last decade of the eighteenth century it was a common feature of wills that testators instructed their executors to make a sale of their personal and real estate and provide for their children out of the income derived from the investment of the capital sum. This is a reminder that the money which made industrial and commercial enterprise possible in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and in this country determined the change from a predominantly agricultural to a predominantly industrial community came not only from the richer and larger estates, but also from the many poorer and smaller ones.

III

Like the wills, the inventories are a record of both rich and poor; they are also a record of intestates' estates, since the court required the administrator as well as the executor to exhibit an inventory. This was a necessity so generally accepted that an inventory was usually exhibited straight away. There are instances of testators appointing their own valuers, and in their wills leaving them some small legacy as a reward. If however no inventory was exhibited at the time of probate or issue of letters of administration, then the court decreed a day upon which this was to be done and there is little doubt that upon the day appointed the executor or the administrators did in fact fulfil his obligation. A suit against him in an ecclesiastical court could be expensive and tiresome, and to exhibit a full and perfect inventory was probably his safest and least troublesome course.

An inventory listed and valued household furniture, articles of

⁽⁷⁾ John Harrop of Knott Hill, *infra*, 1682.

⁽⁸⁾ Edmund Langley of Oldham, 1592/3.

clothing and household use, the quantity of corn and hay in the garners and barns, crops growing on the ground, felled timber, cattle, swine and poultry, implements of husbandry and trade, stock in the shop and warehouse, ready money and debts owing. For this purpose there is little evidence of employment of professional valuers, although in one instance an inventory was "prized by the sworn prizers of the Towne",⁽⁹⁾ and in some districts the same names appear again and again at the head of different inventories. On occasions when there was a need to value stock in trade, the price of which might not be of general knowledge, such as books or drugs, other practitioners of the trade might be called in to make a list and a valuation. More usually, however, the valuers were neighbours and friends, sometimes those who had witnessed the will, and sometimes relatives of the deceased. It was supposed in law that they were men well acquainted with the current market value, but since the court used the inventories as a guide in assessing the fee for probate or for issuing letters of administration, there was a tendency to keep the total as low as possible, and particular valuations are frequently untrustworthy. There are also singular omissions because either at some time before his death the deceased had made a deed of gift, or after his death his relatives had come in advance of the valuers and had purloined some of the goods and chattels, or the valuers themselves had overlooked or forgotten them. "Things unseen or forgotten - 1/-" is a phrase which occurred in one inventory, and there are certainly many others in which the valuers overlooked obvious assets. For example, in an otherwise reasonably furnished house there may be nothing in the inventory to indicate a fireplace, not even so much as a gridiron or fire-tongs as evidence that there was one at all. Methods of valuation varied considerably. There are omnibus phrases such as "all the goods in the house" or "all the goods in the shop", and these are particularly frequent in the inventories of the larger households in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Articles of household furniture and use might be listed, each item separately under the heading of a room, or, alternatively, collected together like with like with no indication of their distribution within the house. Pewter, brass, plate, bedding and napery ware were frequently valued in this way. Even in the case of the dwellings of the middle sort of person until the last decade or so of the seventeenth century, articles were not usually assigned to different rooms, and in consequence the size of the house and the furnishings in each room cannot be ascertained. In this respect the wills occasionally are more informative than the inventories, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when glass, chimneys and panelling were regarded as additions to the freehold. They were a chattel interest and could be devised by will and allocated as heirlooms. In 1585 for example Richard Moody, the rector of Standish, bequeathed to his young master, Mr. Alexander Standish,

⁽⁹⁾ The inventory of Dr. John Vaughan of Rochdale, *infra*, 1676.

the iron chimneys in the kitchen and all the bedstocks in the hall, the parlour, the buttery, the kitchen, the brewhouse, and the larder. These rooms in the rectory were not mentioned in the inventory of his goods and chattels.

Although particular valuations are not reliable, comparative valuations between one kind of article and another and the calculation of the exact proportion of stock-in-trade to household or farming stock and equipment will contribute considerably to any study of the economy of a town or district, especially where there was a mixed economy. With the exception of the inventories, there is no other source of information of so wide a range, and in the absence of estate rentals, surveys or leases they are usually the only source.

Of the materials of which houses were built there is little indication except that stocks of timber, bricks, flagstones and slate give some idea of how far these materials were used in keeping them in repair. The shape and height of the house may be revealed by the names given to the rooms such as "the south parlour", "the west chamber", or "the loft over the west chamber". In the inventory of Adam Oldham in 1588 the arrangement of the rooms in his burgage at Manchester is of special interest since it is typical of the large mediaeval house, and one which seems rare even in the sixteenth century; there are two chambers, two parlours and a buttery beneath the hall, so that the principal living-room is not at ground level but on the first floor. A feature common to both the richer and the poorer household in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries is the number of rooms set apart for poor relations and servants. In some measure this accounts for the extraordinary number of beds, sometimes as many as two or three in a room, and everywhere in the house including the hall. These people generally slept where they worked. Provision of proper accommodation for the widow or for the children of the deceased occurs fairly frequently as a precise instruction in the will. In 1592 Thomas Cheetham of Hindley, a husbandman, directed that his five youngest children should have a liberty to the lower chamber on the south side of the house to use when and as often as they pleased, keeping themselves unmarried.

It is a striking reflection of the economic conditions of the sixteenth century that a man was judged by how comfortably he slept. Possession of a featherbed or a ceiled bed and tester was then as much a mark of social standing as the enjoyment of a well-furnished parlour in the eighteenth century. The particular items listed in the inventories illustrate the development of trade and industry. Whereas in the seventeenth century a clock in the house was extremely rare, even among the gentry, by the beginning of the eighteenth century this was a common article in the houses of the very poor and humble people. It had replaced the bed and bedding as the most expensive item, sometimes amounting in value to more than a tenth of the whole inventory.

In drawing up the list of debts owing to the deceased the valuers sometimes recorded information of the household archives of all sorts and conditions of men. Here will be found the amount of money owing by speciality, by bond or will, and of money out on mortgage or loan. The valuers might also refer to the debt book and frequently copy out the entries of debts owing by note of hand or word of mouth. These reveal something of the terms upon which the domestic industries worked, referring for example to the weavers who had material to turn into cloth, the quantity held and the amount owing for it, or to the extent of a tradesman's business and his business connexions within and without the county, to the parsons' financial speculations and his difficulties in collecting the tithes, to the labourer's hire money, or the lawyer's fees. Thus in the inventory of the goods of Thomas Lydyat, curate of the very poor chapelry of Hale, which was taken and valued on 9 March 1630/1, there were debts owing to him to the value of over £200. Of these £37 were owing by two bonds for the delivery of coals, and in addition there were debts "without speciality", for coal as follows:

	£	s.	d.
"Imprimis William Edwardson 24 worck of coale valued at	6	12	0
Item due from the said William Rathbone for coales the some of	1	12	0
Item John Raynford for two worck of coale he wrongfully tooke from the dec[edent]		12	0
Item the said William Edwardson for a worck of coale		6	0
Item fouerteene worck of coale lyinge at the coale pittes valued at	3	10	0
Item John Molineux for coale	6	0	0 ⁽¹⁰⁾

Besides the lists of debts, there are contained in the inventories other lists of special interest, those for example of the farmer's stock and implements of husbandry, the stock-in-trade of all kinds of tradesmen or the libraries of the gentry and clergy. Each of these offers a separate field of research. Although original records were not made in the first instance to answer the questions which historians at a later date might ask, in the case of the wills and inventories alike, there is a degree of compatibility between the original purpose for which they were made and the sort of question for which the social or economic historian requires an answer. The probate records are not simply a record of the deceased, his household, his personal possessions and means of livelihood, they are equally a record of the clerk who wrote the will, the executors who were responsible for carrying out its provisions, the doctors and apothecaries who attended the testator in his last sickness, the suppliers of bread and ale, cakes and wine and other necessities for the funeral, the proctors and scriveners of the court, and the servants, neighbours and friends who were called to bear witness.

⁽¹⁰⁾ There is no direct evidence of the precise whereabouts of Thomas Lydyat's coal workings either in the will or elsewhere in the inventory.

