

# Domestic Culture in Early Seventeenth-century Thame

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## SUMMARY

*This article examines domestic furnishings and organisation in dwellings in Thame between 1598 and 1618 using the evidence provided by wills and probate inventories. The number of probate inventories placing furnishings in room settings, which apply particularly to the wealthier agricultural, craftsman and mercantile portion of the population, enable three forms of analysis to be made: the relationship between wealth, status and size of dwelling, the norms of furnishing in dwellings of different sizes, and the domestic culture of individual dwellings. The first analysis indicates the relationship between status, wealth and quality of furnishings, and size and complexity of dwelling. Secondly, analysis of the items listed in the inventories shows the norms of furnishings found in halls, chambers and parlours, illustrating their value and function, the way in which domestic life was organised, and the changing relationship between different parts of houses of varying size and status. Thirdly, an analysis of typical individual dwellings reveals, through the association of particular furnishings, the unique domestic culture and arrangements for the life of that household. In addition, there is a comprehensive description of the various types of furniture listed in the inventories. In sum, this article aims to make a contribution towards an understanding of the domestic culture in Thame at a significant time in the development of domestic life.*

## THE THAME PROBATE DOCUMENTS

The large number of probate inventories which survive for the parish of Thame in Oxfordshire in the 17th century provide an invaluable source of information for domestic organisation in the dwellings of that period. Taken in conjunction with bequests in the wills of the same householders it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the domestic arrangements, social manners and wealth indicated by the distribution and value of furnishings; in effect, the domestic culture of a dwelling. In applying analysis to the furnishing element in the 47 surviving probate inventories with room settings dating between 1598 and 1618, it is hoped that this paper will make a contribution to the study of material culture as a means of understanding the social significance of domestic space. Matthew Johnson, building on the work of James Deetz and Henry Glassie, sees in the house and its artefacts an unspoken statement of cultural values, including at this point in early modern history the changing relationship between public and private space within the dwelling.<sup>1</sup> In this study both statistical and individual case analysis are applied to the data, in order to establish patterns of furnishing in relation to wealth, status and use of space, and to discern any cultural significance.

<sup>1</sup> M. Johnson, *Housing Culture* (1993), 1-7; see also J. Deetz and P.S. Deetz, *The Times of their Lives* (2000), ch. 5; H. Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (1973). I have also found most useful P.S. Deetz and J. Deetz, *A Plymouth Colony Archive Project, Vernacular House Forms in 17th Century Plymouth Colony* (1998), published online at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/users/deetz/Plymouth/folkhouse.htm>

The Thame inventories present a rich resource for these forms of analysis with a relatively large, well spread and consistent number of records for the 17th century. The administration of estates was carried out under legislation substantially unchanged since the division of jurisdiction into civil and ecclesiastical spheres after the Norman Conquest. Through the granting of probate, church courts were charged with the efficient transmission of property, the settling of financial obligations and the resolution of disputes concerning inheritance. Unlike other parishes in the archdeaconry of Oxford served by peripatetic ecclesiastical courts, the process in Thame was the responsibility of a Peculiar Court administered by representatives of the bishop of Lincoln, meeting at regular intervals at the Court House in Thame. This may in large part explain why the records have survived in such numbers. Whilst the early 17th century marks the zenith of the making of probate inventories, in general they were drawn up for estates of a certain value and so represent the assets of the wealthier section of the population.<sup>2</sup> Determining the exact proportion of the male adult population and widows represented in the inventories is complicated by the fact that parish registers do not always contain a complete record of baptisms, marriages and burials, nor identify those whose estates might have warranted an inventory. Tom Arkell reckons the proportion of the eligible population appearing in most inventories to be somewhere in the region of 20 to 30%.<sup>3</sup> However records of baptisms from 1601 suggest that the figure in Thame might be in the region of 15 to 20% of potential males and 8 to 10% of potential females represented (see Appendix 1). Under requirements laid down in Henry VIII's Reformation Parliament the executors were required to find four honest men to 'make a trewe and perfyte inventory of all the goodes catells wares merchaundyses as well moveable as not moveable... and shall cause the same to be indented'.<sup>4</sup> The belongings of the deceased were appraised by various neighbours, presumably men of standing in the community or representing those having an interest in the deceased's estate. John Vickers, a husbandman, made a request in his will in 1613 to 'desire my good neighbours John Page and William West to be overseers to this my last will & testament', both of whom with the village clerk, John Trinder, acted as appraisers of his estate.<sup>5</sup> The distinct role of the overseer was, if necessary, to legally enforce the execution of the will by the executors.<sup>6</sup>

The inventories list the household furnishings and utensils, and the tools of husbandry and crafts presumably generally in the location in which they are found in the dwelling, usually giving values for groups of items. The following information is thus available in the inventory: the identity and occupation of the deceased, the list of rooms within the dwelling, and the contents of each room and their value with, importantly, indications as to the location of hearths for heating and cooking. From this it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the social status of the occupant as reflected in the number of rooms in his or her house and the value of the furnishings, and to the use of the rooms indicated by the association of furnishings serving various purposes, and thus the social organisation of the household. It should be emphasised that however attractive this may seem as a source of information on

<sup>2</sup> An Act of 1529 laid down fees payable to the church courts for the administration of estates; those valued at less than £5 were charged only a fee of 6d. for registration, while a 3s. fee was payable for those valued from £5 to £40, and 5s. for those valued over £40. Church courts therefore encouraged the drawing up of probate inventories for estates worth more than £5: T. Arkell, 'The Probate Process', in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds.), *When Death Do Us Part* (2000), 12.

<sup>3</sup> T. Arkell, 'Interpreting Probate Inventories', in *When Death Do Us Part*, 73.

<sup>4</sup> 21 Henry VIII, c.5, quoted in M.W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (1961), 39.

<sup>5</sup> Will of John Vickers, 1613, Oxfordshire Record Office [hereafter ORO], MS Wills Pec. 53/5/4.

<sup>6</sup> J. and N. Cox, 'Probate 1500-1800: A System in Transition', in *When Death Do Us Part*, 14.

the domestic culture of the period, inventories are not only limited by their partial representation of the total population, but also by the fact that no consistency can be assumed in the recording and valuation of furnishings. Indeed no firm assumptions can be made as to the location of items in certain rooms, or possibly the omission of articles or rooms from the inventory. In addition, the obvious variations in age of death may reflect a different picture of household life, depending on the stage reached in the life-cycle of the domestic unit. Most inventories will represent the domestic life of older people where the children are no longer in the parental home, a few the more youthful households where the head has suffered an early death. This problem of determining age of death is compounded in the case of Thame by the absence of baptismal records prior to 1601. Despite these reservations, however, the inventories do provide the only detailed record of the contents of dwellings at this time, and can provide a useful view of the domestic culture of ordinary people.

#### THAME AND ITS ECONOMY IN THE EARLY 17TH CENTURY

In order to comprehend the nature of domestic life in Thame in the early 17th century, it is first necessary to survey the larger culture of Thame. Located on the River Thame, on the borders of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire some 14 miles from Oxford, and 46 miles from London, Thame's principal economic function at this time was as a market town lying in the midst of rich grazing land. Apart from the ancient wooded deer park of Thame Park, the surrounding countryside was undulating, open and well watered, ideal for the raising and fattening of livestock. Originally clustered around the church, the parish of Thame consisted of Old Thame, New Thame and Priestend, including outlying North Weston, Moreton and Thame Park, with a population in 1600 of approximately 800, rising to 1,500 by the end of the 17th century.<sup>7</sup> As might be expected of a market town Thame was an apex of roads connecting local villages, on the principal route from Aylesbury through Tetsworth to Wallingford.

The important Tuesday market was originally termed a 'wool market' when Lord Norreys obtained his confirmatory grant in 1606, a period when much local land was enclosed for sheep grazing. It was also an important source of 'fat cattle' for London butchers; in 1673 it was noted as 'well frequented by grasiers and butchers from London and other parts, for the buying of cattle, for which it is eminent'.<sup>8</sup> Sections of the market and remaining street names give an indication of the goods sold; Cock Row, The Drapery and Sheep Row were recorded in 1509, Butter Market, Cornmarket and Hog Fair in the 17th century.

Apart from the yeomen, husbandmen, shepherds and labourers engaged in agriculture, in the town resided a range of traders dependent on its agricultural base; graziers and butchers, salters, tallow chandlers, tanners and curriers, glovers, hemp dressers, clothworkers, dyers and weavers, and millers. Those craftsmen who supported the domestic life of the town included masons and bricklayers, glaziers, carpenters and joiners, blacksmiths and locksmiths, tailors, collarmakers, cordwainers and shoemakers. Traders included mercers and grocers, linendrapers and milliners, and later in the century gunsmiths and a bookseller. Also of service to the community were the scrivener, apothecary and barber surgeon. Perhaps the most significant group of traders profiting from the market were the innholders and victuallers, of whom 20 were noted in the town in 1587, with

<sup>7</sup> P. Motla, 'The Occupational Structure of Thame c.1600-1700', *Oxfordshire Local History*, 4(2) (1993), 62.

<sup>8</sup> R. Blome, *Britannia* (1673).

associated trades of maltster and distiller. A number of inventories relate to inns, omitted from this survey as not representative of domestic life. Occupying more elevated social positions were the clerk, vicars, and schoolmasters of the grammar school (founded 1569), and at the head of the economic hierarchy the merchants with commercial interests in London and abroad, and the gentlemen.

The dwellings in Thame in the early 17th century appear to show improvement in living conditions and greater division and definition of domestic space, topics which have been of such interest to architectural and social historians. Many buildings in the south of England were extended and improved in the late 16th and early 17th century, in the movement described by W.G. Hoskins as the Great Rebuilding.<sup>9</sup> Against a background of rising prices for agricultural produce due to population pressures in the late 16th century,<sup>10</sup> improvements were made to the arrangement of houses, in particular the provision of brick flues which facilitated the insertion of a second floor.

William Harrison, rector of Radwinter, Essex in the 1570s recorded in his *Description of England* that

there are yet old men dwelling in the village where I remain which have noted three things to be marvellously altered in England within their sound remembrance. One is the multitude of chimneys lately erected, whereas in their young days there were not above two or three, if so many... but each one made his fire against his reredos in the hall, where he dined and dressed his meat... the second is the great... amendment of lodging... the third... is the exchange of vessel, as of treen platters into pewter, and wooden spoons into silver or tin.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1 shows the rooms recorded in inventories in the first two decades of the 17th century, with a marked incidence of chambers over other rooms in the decade 1609-1618. Window glass had by this time also become commonplace. In 1609 Robert Yate built a chimney and staircase and inserted a floor into the hall of the Old Manor House in Poffley End, Hailey in Oxfordshire,<sup>12</sup> and in 1618 Robert Loder of Harwell (Berks.) spent £6 10s. 'about my chimney' and 'making my stairs, my window and ceiling'<sup>13</sup> and plastering &c'.<sup>14</sup> Fireplaces were limited generally to one or two rooms per household, and were essential for both heating and cooking.

The novelty of the improvements to the fabric of houses is made clear by their mention in inventories. In 1616 Katherine Benson,<sup>15</sup> a widow, bequeathed 'the glasse in my chamber wyndowes' to her grandson William Benson, and in 1618 'the wainscott [panelling] about the hall' is listed in the inventory of Reynold Graunt, a yeoman.<sup>16</sup> In 1666 Vincent Barry esquire still thought it necessary to specify in his will that 'among which householdstuffe

<sup>9</sup> W.G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England 1570-1640', *Past and Present*, 4 (1953); see also Barley, op. cit. note 4, pp.57-61.

<sup>10</sup> E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins, 'Wage Rates and Prices: Evidence for Population Pressure in the 16th century', *Economica*, xxiv (1957), 289-306.

<sup>11</sup> William Harrison, *Description of England* (1577), quoted in L. Withington (ed.), *Elizabethan England* (1890), 118.

<sup>12</sup> D. Sturdy, 'The Old Manor House, Poffley End, Hailey, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, xxvi/xxvii (1961/2), 321-2.

<sup>13</sup> 'Ceiling' would probably refer at this time to the oak or 'wainscot' panelling.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in M.W. Barley, op.cit. note 4, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> Will of Katherine Benson, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 32/4/61.

<sup>16</sup> Inventory of Reynold Graunt, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 39/3/26.

TABLE 1. INCIDENCE OF ROOM TYPES

	1598-1608	1609-18
Hall	20	22
Further hall	2	
Inner hall	2	
Inner room	1	1
Parlour	8	8
Dining chamber	1	
Chamber	11	7
High chamber		1
Great chamber	1	
Lodging chamber	3	
Inner chamber	1	
Privy chamber	2	
Chamber within hall		1
Chamber next hall	3	4
Chamber over entry	2	
Chamber over hall	4	10
Chamber over inner room		1
Chamber over kitchen		2
Chamber over parlour	3	8
Chamber over shop	2	2
Chamber over stairhead		2
Maid's chamber	1	
Servant's chamber	4	
Scholar's chamber	2	
Loft	3	
Kitchen	5	3
Shop	4	
Total households	23	24

I doe not account waynscott or glasse or doores or lockes or keyes or dressers that are fixed to the lords tymbre to be myne but that they ought to remaine to those that have the next ymmEDIATE interest in that house'.<sup>17</sup>

Some housing of the 17th century in Thame exists to this day in modified form, notably in the Aylesbury Road, Bell Lane, Buttermarket, Cornmarket, the High Street and Upper High Street. The evidence<sup>18</sup> suggests that the majority of buildings were constructed of large timber framing on a rubble plinth with wattle and daub in-fill under a thatched roof, with some early examples of tiled roofs. Chimney stacks were located most commonly centrally, also off-centre issuing in the roof ridge, or at the ends or rear of the dwelling. Most existing houses of the period are of two storeys with two to four windowed ranges parallel to the street, sometimes featuring a cross wing, as in the building in the High Street well documented by Malcolm Airs and John Rhodes.<sup>19</sup> Some buildings were arranged at right angles to the street, and a few, notably inns in the centre of the town, rise to three floors. Inns were unsurprisingly amongst the largest listed buildings. Alterations to enlarge existing buildings are well illustrated in Cruck Cottage in the High Street, where a second floor has been built over the original timber frame. The timber framed and lath and plaster construction of earlier centuries was modified to include brick fireplaces and chimney stacks, and fillings of rubble and brick. Newer buildings appear to have employed more constructional brickwork to the ground floor with timber framing on the second floor. The new grammar school of 1569 was constructed entirely of stone, whilst the nearby almshouses of the same date show a persistence of the more traditional timber framed construction. The outlying hamlet of Moreton features several examples of single-storied two-windowed ranges with an attic, perhaps suggesting the form of humbler dwellings.

#### STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF STATUS, FURNISHING VALUE AND ROOM DISTRIBUTION

Whilst analysis of individual inventories can yield much information on the particular arrangements of a single household, and seems to bring us close to the domestic culture of the inhabitants, statistical analysis is essential to establish as far as possible the norms of furnishing and room use. (Values are given in decimal form in this section in order to facilitate statistical calculations.) Table 2 shows the association between the number of rooms and room identity, value of furnishings and the status or occupation of the deceased in the period 1598 to 1618. The data is ranked according to the number of rooms in a dwelling in order to discern more specific function of rooms as house size increases. Broadly speaking, the value of furnishings tends to increase in line with the number of rooms per dwelling, but in order to take account of variations within groups, the highest and lowest value is given as well as the average. The average value of furnishing per room has been calculated in order to compare the value of furnishing in the individual rooms of houses of differing size.

Approximately one-third of the dwellings represented are of two rooms, respectively one-fifth of three and one-fifth of four rooms, and one-seventh of one and one-seventh of five or more rooms. Total values of furnishings range from less than £1 in the poorest dwelling to over £40 in the wealthiest, and the average value of furnishings ranges from £2.47 in the

<sup>17</sup> Will of Vincent Barry, PRO, PROB 11/323 (PCC 2 Carr).

<sup>18</sup> H.M. Dept. of Environment, List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, District of South Oxfordshire (1988), Town of Thame.

<sup>19</sup> M.R. Airs and J.G. Rhodes, 'Wall Paintings in a House in Upper High Street, Thame', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1980), 235.

TABLE 2. FURNISHING VALUE, ROOM DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS ANALYSIS (BY FURNISHED ROOMS PER HOUSEHOLD) 1598-1618

Rooms per household Number of households % of households	Furnishings value £			Average room value £			% households with ...							Occupations									
	Low	High	Average	Low	High	Average	Hall	Parlour	Chambers	Inner chambers	Dining chambers	Servant's chambers	Furnished kitchen	Other	Gentlemen	Clerics	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Agricultural labourers	Tradesmen	Artisans	Widows	Unspecified
1 7 14	0.82	4.19	<b>2.47</b>	0.82	4.19	<b>2.47</b>	88							12				1	2		1	3	
2 15 31	1.05	7.62	<b>4.52</b>	0.52	3.81	<b>2.26</b>	93	7	86		7			14		1	2	3		2	4	2	1
3 8 17	3.02	11.21	<b>6.25</b>	1.00	3.73	<b>2.23</b>	100	35	88	25							2	1		1	2	2	
4 10 21	2.28	22.83	<b>9.07</b>	0.57	5.70	<b>2.26</b>	100	50	100	33			20	10	1		2	2		2	2	1	
5+ 7 14	8.71	43.91	<b>23.85</b>	1.09	9.32	<b>4.57</b>	100	71	100	42		42	71				2			4		1	

smallest dwellings to £23.85 in the largest. Interestingly, though, when an average is taken of the average room values little variation is seen in dwellings of varying sizes, from £2.47 in one-roomed dwellings to £2.26 in dwellings of four rooms, only rising to £4.57 in dwellings of five rooms or more. This is explained by the wide variation in the value of furnishings in wealthier houses, from the lavishly furnished parlour or chamber, to virtually unfurnished and servants' chambers, and suggests that those represented by the inventories, despite substantial individual variations, can all be seen as the propertied section of the community.

The distribution of occupations or status by house size shows yeomen (strictly those possessing at least 40s. worth of freehold land) occupying dwellings of two rooms or more and husbandmen represented across the entire range, suggesting that the traditional distinction between the two categories was being eroded. (The case of William Snow in 1621, who described himself in his will as a labourer but who was described in the inventory of his two-roomed dwelling as a yeoman, manifests both the fluctuations in economic circumstance and persistence of traditional titles of status at this time.)<sup>20</sup> Agricultural labourers had only one-roomed dwellings. Traders - those engaged in some form of trade, either as producers or middlemen - like the yeomen, tended to occupy larger dwellings, while craftsmen - those engaged in some form of skilled manual occupation such as joiner or builder - were again represented across the range but more were found in the two-roomed dwellings. The only gentleman listed was in a four-roomed dwelling.

Widows form a substantial section (19%) of the inventories, from some of the poorest listed to the moderately wealthy (£1.16 to £8.71 furnished value). As Mary Hodges points out in her study based on Thame and Woodstock in the 17th century, widows played a significant role in town life, both socially and economically.<sup>21</sup> With marriage lasting on average some 20 years and widowhood some 10 years, and with the majority of men bequeathing the bulk of their estates to their wives, widows had a significant role as a source for finance for family and neighbours, as is evidenced by credits mentioned in inventories. A few widows appeared to be carrying on their husband's businesses.

Table 2 also indicates the distribution of rooms. The division of the inventories into groups based on number of rooms in the dwelling allows examination of the changing relationship between the essential components in the dwellings of this period, namely the hall, parlour and chambers. The data shows a variety of patterns of room use, with domestic life organised in some dwellings along almost late medieval lines, in others showing new domestic arrangements. The fascinating potential of inventories at this time is to ascertain, from the listing of rooms and the description of furnishings, how domestic culture was changing, and in what direction.

The table shows that the hall remained a near universal feature of every dwelling, only being replaced in one-roomed dwellings by furnished kitchens serving the same purpose. In dwellings with more than one room, chambers were found in conjunction with the hall, and with increasing size and wealth, also parlours and inner chambers beside the hall. The term 'chamber' was given to any room for more private use than the hall, whether on the ground or first floor, and usually, but not necessarily associated with sleeping. As might be expected the wealthier households also have a higher incidence of servants' or apprentices' chambers.

The occurrence and use of kitchens is one of the important indicators of domestic arrangements. The place where cooking takes place can be ascertained by the listing of such items as spits, pothangers and pothooks in the inventories. There are dwellings such as that of

<sup>20</sup> Inventory of William Snow, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 51/1/35.

<sup>21</sup> M. Hodges, 'Widows of the Middling Sort and their Assets in Two Seventeenth-century Towns', in *When Death Do Us Part*, 308.

James Norris, a husbandman whose inventory lists 'four platters two kittles & a pott' in the hall, but no hearth irons, suggesting that he either had access to another hearth, possibly in adjoining or conjoined property, or else there was a simple omission of these items.<sup>22</sup> In the case of John Vickers, another husbandman, and several other smaller dwellings where the only hearth was located in the hall, the kitchen was used for the storage of his cooking vessels, 'one brasse pott a kittle & a great brewing pan & a brass pan a warming pan a skillet a ladle skimmer & dishes', whilst the fire irons, 'a racke & andyrans two spitts', were listed in the hall.<sup>23</sup> As Table 3 illustrates, with one exception all cooking took place in the hall in one-roomed dwellings. The use of kitchens for cooking increases with the size of house, the tendency increasing from 14% in two-roomed dwellings to 72% in dwellings of five rooms or more, although the hall still predominates as the cooking location in four-roomed houses, possibly because these were simple hall and chamber houses converted to four-roomed dwellings by the insertion of a second floor. Kitchens and butteries were used in approximately one-third of houses of two to four rooms for the storage of cooking utensils, the cooking taking place in the hall.

TABLE 3. COOKING LOCATION 1598-1618

No. of rooms	Hall	%	Kitchen	%	Chamber	%	None given	%
1	6	(85)	-	-	-	-	1	(15)
2	10	(67)	2	(14)	1	(7)	2	(14)
3	3	(37)	3	(37)	-	-	2	(26)
4	9	(90)	1	(10)	-	-	-	-
5+	2*	(28)	5	(72)	-	-	-	-

\* includes one inner chamber

% of total of all households

It is difficult to determine from the rooms listed in the inventories exactly what form the house would have taken. It is tempting but not safe to assume that the rooms were listed in order. However, the terminology used, such as 'chamber over the hall', often helps to build a picture of the layout. With the presence of the hall as a near universal feature it might be assumed that the older buildings would still be based on a late medieval pattern consisting of a hall originally rising to the roof level with adjacent parlour (or chamber) on the ground level, either with a chamber over the parlour forming a more private wing, or in the case of 'improved' buildings chambers inserted over both the hall and parlour. In Table 1 the decade 1609-18 shows a chamber over these two rooms in nearly half the dwellings listed. The mention of chambers over the stairhead also marks the existence of a stairway, and over the entry of the introduction of the lobby entry.

#### DESCRIPTION OF FURNISHING

In order to use furnishing as a tool for analysing the domestic culture of the period, it is essential to understand the function of items listed in the inventories. They should be assessed not with a subjective view of the past, nor as the same articles would be utilised in the homes of today, but as far as possible in the way that they were used and perceived at the time. Every article of furnishing represents both immediate functional purposes and wider

<sup>22</sup> Inventory of James Norris, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 47/1/8.

<sup>23</sup> Inventory of John Vickers, *op. cit.* note 5.

cultural values in the way that it facilitates domestic and social life. Intelligent interpretation of inventories is in itself a means of determining the original purpose, both practical and cultural, of the items listed.

One of the main problems of inventories, from the point of view of those wishing to extract social and cultural significance from the data, is that they were compiled primarily with a view to establishing the value of the deceased's estate. Thus details such as the material used in the construction were omitted unless they had an impact on value, such as the distinction between pewter and brass candlesticks. Again furniture construction is not mentioned unless of superior 'joyned' type, presumably bestowing greater value on the item, but inferences of alternative construction methods in other pieces can not be made with confidence. The wills accompanying the inventories can fill in some of these details, but the more specific descriptions, such as the 'lytyll sypres [cypress] chest' belonging to Thomas Striblehill, a butcher, may be a sign of peculiarity and should not be taken as typical.<sup>24</sup> The terminology used in the inventories is sometimes different from that employed today, and closer to its original function. The most notable example is the 'cupboard', used to display vessels, probably more akin to a shelf structure with storage rather than the present day totally enclosed container which itself would have in the 17th century been termed a press.

The term 'table' seems to apply to a rectangular slab top (deriving from the Latin *tabula*), linked in the inventories with a supporting frame or trestles, as for example 'one table & the frame' in the hall of Thomas Stone, a yeoman in 1618.<sup>25</sup> The same original meaning of the word occurs when the word is used to apply to paintings or games boards, as in the 'one paire of playinge tables' in the parlour of Reynold Graunt, another yeoman, in 1618.<sup>26</sup> However, the word appeared *by itself* to be applied at this time also to the smaller tables increasingly in demand for occasional use. The duality of application is indicated by the fact that a room in the house of William Tipping, a shoemaker, containing 'two tables with frames' was termed the 'table chamber' in his inventory of 1604.<sup>27</sup> It unlikely that such a term would be applied by appraisers to a room for playing board games unless in an inn. There is also mention of 'one square folding table' in the hall of Thomas Striblehill<sup>28</sup> in 1598 and 'one little table' in the hall of Thomas Stone.<sup>29</sup> Later 'a little table standing by the hall chimney' was bequeathed in the will of Joan Stone in 1669.<sup>30</sup> The desire for greater degrees of convenience produced small occasional tables, which in turn seem to have created changed meanings in furniture terminology. This may be a case of the vernacular usage preceding educated usage in the changing application of a word.

Furnishing during the early 17th century in the homes of Thame appeared to have evolved little beyond the basic forms for seating, serving and consuming food, sleeping and storage. Types of single seating comprised the chair, a single seat with a back with or without arms, and the stool, a single seat without back (Figs. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3). From the mid 15th century seats with backs were also described as backstools, although there is no use of this term in the Thame inventories.<sup>31</sup> There are few descriptions of construction used in chairs; some are described as joined, such as the 'joyned chaire' of William Feery,<sup>32</sup> others turned as in the

<sup>24</sup> Will of Thomas Striblehill, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 50/5/20.

<sup>25</sup> Inventory of Thomas Stone, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 51/1/22.

<sup>26</sup> Inventory of Reynold Graunt, *op. cit.* note 16.

<sup>27</sup> Inventory of William Tipping, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 52/3/12.

<sup>28</sup> Inventory of Thomas Striblehill, *op. cit.* note 24.

<sup>29</sup> Inventory of Thomas Stone, *op. cit.* note 25.

<sup>30</sup> Will of Joan Stone, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 51/1/24.

<sup>31</sup> V. Chinnery, *Oak Furniture* (Antique Collectors' Club, 1979), 276.

<sup>32</sup> Inventory of William Feery, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 38/3/9.



Fig. 1. English furnishings of the early 17th century (not to scale). Items depicted are from museum and private collections and not specifically related to Thame.

1. Joined chair. 2. Joined back stool. 3. Boarded and joined stools. 4. Form with wedged legs.  
 5. Joined bench. 6. Joined table and frame. 7. Joined side table. 8. Court cupboard.  
 9. Carved livery cupboard. 10. Press cupboard.

'turn'd chaire' in the chamber of Katherine Benson.<sup>33</sup> Also listed in her chamber was 'a chaire of strawe'; chairs of wicker and straw were recorded, and several with matted seats. In the same inventory 'a litle chaire' was listed in the hall; whether chairs and stools frequently described as 'litle' were for children is not clear.

Multiple seating consisted of the form and the bench (Figs. 1.4, 1.5). The exact distinction between these two items of seating is hard to determine, but the form would probably be of simpler construction, a long board on wedged legs or nailed ends, the bench perhaps of a superior joined construction featuring mortice and tenons. Backs were not found to forms, but could perhaps be fixed to the wall; 'three formes' were listed with 'a backborde' in the table chamber of William Tipping.<sup>34</sup> Benches sometimes appear to have had fixed backs in the manner of a settle; the hall of Leonard Yates featured a 'a bench & a back being of wanscott'.<sup>35</sup> Later vernacular terminology indicated that the bench was seating placed against the wall behind the table, the form being more free standing. Cushions were commonly found with seating in the wealthier homes, frequently matching the number of stools around tables.

The most common type of table was the 'table and frame' (Fig. 1.6) denoting a rectangular planked top board with joined base frame, for example 'one long table & ye frame' in the inventory of Sibell Alnett.<sup>36</sup> A large contemporary example of such a table can still be seen in its original position in the hall of Chastleton House, Oxfordshire. These tables were generally found in conjunction with stools and benches, suggesting use for eating. A few tables on trestle supports were still noted at the beginning of the century (see Fig. 6). As mentioned above in wealthier houses small and folding tables (Fig. 1.7) for occasional use were found, particularly in parlours and chambers.

Cupboards, originally literally boards for cups, were used for both display, the dispensing of food and drink, and possibly for storage. 'One cubborde & a courte cubborde' were both listed in the chamber of William Feery.<sup>37</sup> The simple cupboard might have been a free standing piece of one or more shelves, or a piece with spaces enclosed with doors. The court cupboard (Fig. 1.8) was a smaller or possibly shorter version of cupboard with three shelves, and a simple drawer under the central shelf presumably for table cloths and the elementary cutlery (spoons) of the time. It has been argued that the word derived from the French word 'court' meaning short.<sup>38</sup> As Table 4 shows, the piece was usually found in the best chamber in association with tables and stools for eating and socialising. This room was in effect the 'high great chamber' for entertainment in wealthier houses, so it is possible that the term might also refer to the expression 'to hold court'; in 1590 'court' was defined as 'to pay courteous attention to' a person.<sup>39</sup> Another possible explanation of the name is that it refers to the fact that this was an open cupboard, as opposed to those enclosed with panelling and doors, the 'court' being an open defined space without the house.

Other identities of 'cupboard' are known at this time, but were not specified in these inventories, such as the livery cupboard, with the space between the upper shelves enclosed with doors for the storage of food or drink, and the press cupboard, with both upper and lower portions enclosed with doors but with a 'cup-board' running across the middle

<sup>33</sup> Inventory of Katherine Benson, *op. cit.* note 15.

<sup>34</sup> Inventory of William Tipping, *op. cit.* note 27.

<sup>35</sup> Inventory of Leonard Yates, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 56/4/2.

<sup>36</sup> Inventory of Sibell Alnett, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 32/1/16.

<sup>37</sup> Inventory of William Feery, *op. cit.* note 32.

<sup>38</sup> Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, 227, 315.

<sup>39</sup> *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

(Figs. 1.9, 1.10). It would be this enclosed form of cupboard which would bring about modern association of the name with an enclosed piece of furniture. There is no reference to variations in the large number of cupboards listed in these inventories, apart from the one reference to construction in 1606 in the 'one wainscott cubbord and the wainscott about the hall' of Robert Springall.<sup>40</sup> In 1626 in the hall of Cecilie Benson there is mention both of 'one dresser cubbard' and 'one courte cubberd', the former presumably being a flat topped form for the dressing of the food.<sup>41</sup> Shelves and stands for storage were also occasionally noted, particularly in kitchens and butteries.

TABLE 4. CUPBOARD AND COURT CUPBOARD LOCATION 1598-1618

No. of rooms	1		2		3		4		5+	
	c	cc	c	cc	c	cc	c	cc	c	cc
Hall	6	-	11	-	6	-	5	-	5	-
Parlour	-	-	-	-	4	1	-	-	7	2
Chamber	-	-	1	-	-	1	2	2	2	5

c: cupboard

cc: court cupboard

In wealthier houses the most important and valuable single piece of furnishing would have been a bedstead (Fig. 2.1). The terminology of the time found in wills and inventories described the wooden frame as the bedstead, consisting of the 'bedstock' frame, generally with a base of cords on which the underlying padding of the 'beds', cloth envelopes filled with straw, wool, flock or feathers would be laid. Also occasionally mentioned are the woven mat 'mattress' presumably underlying the 'beds'. Tester or 'high' bedsteads would also consist of a head board, and a tester or canopy either of cloth, or commonly at this period of panelled wood.<sup>42</sup> Curtains and valances of linsey and wolsey (linen and woollen woven cloth) would have hung either from the frame or wall-mounted curtain rods.<sup>43</sup> A second form of bedstead was the half headed bedstead, with lower headboard and without integral canopy. The bedsteads of the best quality were joined throughout and sometimes carved; low bedsteads of lesser quality of turned or nailed boarded construction, such as the 'two boarded bedsteads' listed in the parlour of Grace Andrews in 1641.<sup>44</sup> The inventories often make no distinction between different forms of bedstead, apart from joined construction. Thus it is hard to know whether bedsteads were low or canopied forms. The absence of mention of hangings around bedsteads, possessions of considerable value, perhaps indicate that low bedsteads were more common. The listing of curtains and valances would seem to indicate a high tester bedstead, whilst the listing of curtain rods only may possibly refer to hangings suspended from the wall or ceiling above a low bedstead (see Fig. 7).

<sup>40</sup> Inventory of Robert Springall, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 50/5/32.

<sup>41</sup> Inventory of Cecilie Benson, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 32/5/18.

<sup>42</sup> Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, 385-96.

<sup>43</sup> Will of Eleanor Crues, 1669: 'I give & bequeath unto my daughter Elizabeth Bewe... my standinge carved bedsted... with the curtaines & vallances belonginge to the said bedsted': ORO, MS Wills Pec. 35/2/18.

<sup>44</sup> Inventory of Grace Andrews, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 32/1/39.

The term 'standing' was also occasionally applied to bedsteads, as the 'two standing beds' in the chamber of Simon Minchard, and also to other pieces of furniture.<sup>45</sup> The term at the time was commonly used to describe some degree of permanent position ('Keep all your standings and stir not a foot', wrote Christopher Marlowe<sup>46</sup>) and so might denote a piece built into the fabric of the room, especially as no 'built-in' furniture was otherwise listed. Besides the main bedstead were found 'truckle' or 'trundle' beds (Fig. 2.3), low pieces on wooden wheels which could be used by servants or other members of the household, and rolled under the main bedstead during the daytime. In this case the term 'bed' seems to have been applied to the wooden support itself. Beds were furnished with sheets – ranging in quality from the finest 'holland' and lockram linen sheets to the coarsest hemp or hurden sheets reserved for labourers and servants, pillows in 'pillowbeares' [pillow cases], blankets, coverlets and rugs.<sup>47</sup> Often in the poorest homes and servants' chambers only a flockbed was found, with no bedstead.

Storage for linen, clothes and other valuables consisted mainly of various forms of chests, coffers and trunks (Figs. 2.4, 2.5), seemingly serving similar purposes, and probably distinguished by form and methods of construction.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes as prized personal possessions and also containers of valuables they were given greater accuracy in terms of description or location in the house in bequests or inventories; for example the 'lytyll sypres chest' listed in the chamber over the hall of Thomas Striblehill.<sup>49</sup> Coasters and trunks were traditionally made by the cofferer, and originally designed for carriage as well as storage, for which purpose they might have been leather or cloth covered. For strength and security, and also perhaps suggesting a crude nailed board construction, some chests were iron bound; 'one iarne bound cheste' was also listed in the chamber over the hall of Thomas Striblehill.<sup>50</sup> Randle Holme in the mid 17th century differentiated the chest from the coffer by the flat as opposed to domed top: 'if it have a straight and flat cover, it is called a chest; which in all other things represents the coffer, save the want of a circular lid, or cover ...'.<sup>51</sup> The will made by William Tipping,<sup>52</sup> however, bequeathed 'two chestes one of them beinge myne owne coffer', making no distinction between forms, whereas the inventory of Edward Cope listed 'one winscet [wainscot, oak or joined] chest one truncke two smale cofers', all in his chamber over the parlour.<sup>53</sup> Within the chest was often a lidded till serving as a container for small valuables, or, by tradition, herbs to keep clothes sweet smelling and vermin free. Safes also occurred occasionally, probably a wall mounted storage container of some form; 'a little safe with the shelves' was listed in the inventory of Thomas Zoane in 1611.<sup>54</sup> Frustratingly, given the wide range of storage that chests and coffers served, the inventories do not supply an indication of use or size. Wills, on the other hand, do sometimes indicate not only distinguishing characteristics and location, but also the contents when these are also part of the bequest. Katherine Benson dictated that 'I give unto my sonn George Benson my

<sup>45</sup> Inventory of Simon Minchard, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 46/1/16.

<sup>46</sup> *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: 'standing' quotes Christopher Marlowe.

<sup>47</sup> The inventory of Thomas Striblehill, butcher, of 1598 gives a good description of various types of linen: 'v pare of course shete for labourers beds, viij pare of hempen shetes, viij pare of flaxane sheets, xj table clothes, j diapare table clothe, iij doz[en] of napkins, xj diapare napkins, xij pyllowberes'.

<sup>48</sup> Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, 358.

<sup>49</sup> Inventory of Thomas Striblehill, *op. cit.* note 24.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> R. Holme, *Academie of Armory* (c. 1649), quoted in Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*.

<sup>52</sup> Inventory of William Tipping, *op. cit.* note 34.

<sup>53</sup> Inventory of Edward Cope, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 34/4/26.

<sup>54</sup> Inventory of Thomas Zoane, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 56/7/11.



Fig. 2. 1. Ceiled tester bedstead. 2. Turned stump bedstead. 3. Truckle bed. 4. Joined chest. 5. Coffin or trunk. 6. Box. 7. Clothes press. 8. Cooking vessels, from left: pot, kettle, frying pan on trivet, and skillet. 9. Eating vessels and candlestick, from left: pewter platter, whiteware saucer, cup and dish, Midlands blackware mug, and Rhenish stoneware jug.

best chest and my will is that he have it and use it himselfe... the foresaid sheetts brass pewter & table clothes given to him he shall finde them in his chest that I have given him as aforesayd'.<sup>55</sup> Boxes (Fig. 2.6), small lidded containers with flat bottoms, and therefore not designed to be floor standing, would have been used for smaller valuables; when furnished with writing slopes they were termed desks. Presses (Fig. 2.7), containers with doors which would now be referred to as cupboards or wardrobes, were also making an appearance.

The furniture listed in the 17th-century inventories would have been the work of the carpenter, joiner, turner and wicker weaver. The simpler nailed or boarded furniture could have been constructed locally by the carpenter. The best wooden furniture employing the mortice and tenon joint would have been the work of the joiner. Two references to joiners occur in the 1620s in Thame; the will and inventory of John Groome, a joiner, in 1624,<sup>56</sup> and John Adams, a joiner, as kinsman and executor in the will of Thomas Addams, a yeoman, in 1623.<sup>57</sup> Better quality furniture might have been obtained from a larger and more sophisticated centre of trade, such as Oxford, or possibly London. The wood turner would have been responsible for turned seating and household implements. By the early 18th century Daniel Defoe noted that the nearby Chilterns were a centre for the production of turned goods.<sup>58</sup> The wood of preference for furniture at this time was oak, sometimes referred to as 'wainscot', another name for oak derived from the Dutch *wagenschott* whence much of the timber was imported.<sup>59</sup> Gabriel Francklin had 'a cubbard of waynscott' listed in his hall.<sup>60</sup> Other indigenous hardwoods would also be used according to their qualities; the inventory of Katherine Benson listed 'one chest of elme' in the chamber over the shop.<sup>61</sup> It is possible that woven rush or straw furniture, mainly in the form of seating, was produced either as a 'cottage industry' or by poorer members of the community whose belongings did not warrant a probate inventory.

Cooking and eating vessels (Figs. 2.8, 2.9) formed an important part of the household assets. Cooking would have been carried out at an open hearth with some vessels hanging over the fire on pothangers or pothooks. Meat was grilled on gridirons, or roasted on the spits mounted on cobirons, under which were placed dripping pans. Trivets, three-legged stands, supported kettles or pots. Besides kettles, the most common form of cooking vessels were pots and pans, posnets (a small metal cooking pot on three feet) and skillets (a larger metal cooking pot on three feet with long handle). Better quality cooking vessels were itemised as made of brass. Chafers were small brasiers employing hot coals or charcoal to heat food and drink.

The most common eating vessels were platters and saucers, of wood or earthenware. In wealthier houses these would be substituted with the more valuable pewter dishes, or 'plate'. Porringers (bowls) and basins could be of earthenware, pewter or silver, as could cups and tasters. There were also salad and fruit dishes. Earthenware dishes would be of various origins; if coarse, of the local Brill/Boarstall ware, simply decorated with incised lines on domestic ware but featuring a red and white slip decoration on tableware. Coarse whiteware

<sup>55</sup> Inventory of Katherine Benson, op. cit. note 15.

<sup>56</sup> Will of John Groome, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 39/3/35.

<sup>57</sup> Will of Thomas Addams, PRO, PROB 11/142 (PCC 82 Swann)

<sup>58</sup> B.D. Cotton, *The English Regional Chair* (Antique Collectors' Club, 1990), 32.

<sup>59</sup> Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Inventory of Gabriel Francklin, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 38/3/11.

<sup>61</sup> Inventory of Katherine Benson, op. cit. note 15.

pottery from the Surrey/Hampshire borders was also found increasingly in the region at this time. Better quality flagons and jugs were made of Rhenish stoneware, especially found in taverns.<sup>62</sup>

Other very important items of household furnishing were candlesticks, either of pewter or brass. Wall coverings were also incorporated into inventories; in wealthier households the panelling or 'wainscot' was still considered a moveable part of the assets of the deceased (suggesting recent insertion into the property) and painted cloths of linen, a more traditional poor substitute for richer hangings, were found in houses at all levels.

#### GROUP STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF FURNISHING

One of the main problems in obtaining a truly representative picture of domestic furnishings in the homes of this period is the fact that each inventory represents an individual dwelling and its organisation. Households may be idiosyncratic in their organisation, articles may have been removed from their original position or be excluded from the inventory, or furnishings of lower value may simply be dismissed as 'lumber'. It is relatively easy to extract information from inventories, harder to interpret it meaningfully. With the large number of inventories available for Thame, it is possible by compiling all the data on furnishings to build up a reasonably reliable picture of the norms of furnishings in these dwellings in this period.

Table 5 shows the average furnishings for the hall. In dwellings of only one room the hall represents the total living accommodation and furnishings. Not surprisingly the value of furnishings in these single-roomed dwellings varies from the modest £0.65 of Thomas Francklin,<sup>63</sup> labourer, to the £4.93 of Vincent Hester,<sup>64</sup> cordwainer. This latter sum is not far short of the £5.66 of furnishings found in the hall (one of six furnished rooms) of Reynold Graunt, yeoman.<sup>65</sup> In fact the average value of furnishings of halls is highest where this was the only room of the dwelling. The importance of the room in the house as represented by the value of furnishings within it is shown by the comparative value of those furnishings against the average value of furnishings, per room, for that house, or *room value to average ratio*, where the value of 1 represents the average, and higher and lower values greater or lesser importance respectively (see Appendix 2). This column in Table 5 shows that the hall is furnished at rather less than the average value in dwellings of more than one room, perhaps indicating a shift of social life away from the hall. As far as norms of furnishing were concerned, in poorer single-roomed homes chairs, stools, forms and tables predominated, with, as might be expected, simple sleeping furniture of beds and sometimes bedsteads, and coffers and chests for storage. The absence of fire irons in some inventories suggests the use of a fire elsewhere, or still at this time possibly still a central fire. The inventory of Thomas Clerk lists cooking implements without mention of fire irons.<sup>66</sup>

Dwellings with two rooms or more where there would also be chambers showed a complete absence of sleeping furniture in the hall, and a gradual increase from the smallest to the largest house size in the same items of furniture; chairs (1 to 2), cushions (1 to 4), stools (2 to 5). The incidence of forms, benches, tables and even cupboards remained roughly at a

<sup>62</sup> M. Mellor, 'A Synthesis of Middle and Late Saxon, Medieval and early Post-medieval Pottery in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, lix (1994), 111-14.

<sup>63</sup> Inventory of Thomas Francklin, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 38/3/16.

<sup>64</sup> Inventory of Vincent Hester, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 4/1/38.

<sup>65</sup> Inventory of Reynold Graunt, op. cit. note 16.

<sup>66</sup> Inventory of Thomas Clerke, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 34/3/24.

TABLE 5. AVERAGE ROOM FURNISHINGS 1598-1618 (BY FURNISHED ROOMS PER HOUSEHOLD): HALLS

			Room value £		Room to av. ratio		Average occurrence of furniture types																								
Rooms per household	Number of households	% households*	Low	High	Average	Low	High	Average	Fire irons	Chairs	Cushions	Stools	Forms/upstanding	Benches	Tables (on frames & trestles)	Small tables	Carpets	Cupboards/court cupboards	Shelves/stands	Beds (mattresses)	Bedsteads	Bed furniture	Bedding	Truckle/standing beds	Presses	Chests	Coffers/trunks	Boxes/safes	Wainscott/painted cloths	Notes	
			1	7	14	0.65	4.93	<b>2.47</b>	1.0	1.0	<b>1.0</b>	0.6	0.7		2.5	0.7	0.3	0.7						1.9	0.7		0.9		0.2	0.8	1.5c
2	15	31	0.45	2.25	<b>1.23</b>	0.2	1.3	<b>0.6</b>	0.7	1.1	0.9	2.2	0.6	1.0	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.2							0.2		.2s	.2w/.2p		
3	8	17	0.33	3.20	<b>1.60</b>	0.4	1.0	<b>0.7</b>	0.8	1.8	1.8	3.3	0.2	0.5	1.1	0.5		0.8											.2w/.4p		
4	10	21	0.08	2.33	<b>1.73</b>	0.3	1.2	<b>0.7</b>	0.8	1.1	2.0	4.3	0.3	0.7	0.9	0.4		0.7	0.1										.1w/.3p		
5+	7	14	1.00	5.66	<b>2.06</b>	0.3	1.9	<b>0.7</b>	0.7	2.1	4.3	5.4	0.8	0.6	1.2	0.7		0.6	0.1						0.1			.9w/.3p			

## Notes

\* Percentage of total households in period 1598 to 1618 having this number of rooms

a: includes one furnished kitchen.

Shaded area denotes sleeping furniture.

level in dwellings of different size, however, being items of which multiples were not necessary to create more seating. The only furnishing which was found increasingly in larger households was the small table for serving or occasional use and the replacement of painted cloths by wainscoting or panelling. Otherwise larger, wealthier households do not seem to have been distinguished by a markedly greater wealth of furnishing in the hall, perhaps an indication of the hall's diminishing importance as the centre for social life and display of wealth.

Table 6 shows the average furnishings found in parlours. Firstly it will be noted that there was a complete absence of parlours in dwellings of two rooms; in other words the secondary room to a hall in a two-roomed dwelling was always termed a chamber, even if parlours in larger houses performed similar functions. This raises the question of whether the chamber in a hall and chamber dwelling either became by function or was renamed a parlour when an additional floor was added over the original ground-floor chamber. Dwellings of three rooms and upward showed the incidence of parlours rising from two-thirds to three-quarters in the largest dwellings. The value of parlour furnishings in the poorest household (£0.25) was a fraction of that in the wealthiest (£8.5), but on average the value in the smaller, and generally poorer houses, was about half that in the wealthier houses. The relative importance of the parlour in terms of furnishing value was constant between different sizes of house, at approximately the average value of furnishings per room (or value of 1) for the house. The furnishing of the parlour showed its use as a private sleeping space, with the norm of only one bedstead. In the three-roomed houses there were tables with forms, suggesting eating; in the larger houses more seating with cushions and small tables, suggesting a room for private entertainment. In these houses the parlour also contained a chest, possibly for storage of personal valuables. There were a few instances of wall coverings of painted cloths or wainscot.

Table 7 illustrates the furnishings of chambers, which can be found either as the single additional room in a hall dwelling, or in larger dwellings as both the principal room of the house used both for entertainment and for sleeping, and secondary sleeping chambers with furnishings ranging from those for the family down to the simple chambers for the servants. As there is considerable diversity of furnishings in these larger dwellings, the principal and secondary chambers are analysed separately in dwellings of four and more rooms; this allows a true picture of the principal chamber to emerge. The chamber is found on ground and first floor and is nearly always used for sleeping; only occasionally in 'lodging chambers' is a bedstead absent. The nomenclature of chambers – the 'chamber' over a ground floor room – may indicate that in many houses the chamber on the second floor was a fairly recent addition. The single chamber found in two-roomed houses had on average two bedsteads with limited seating and chests and coffer for storage. In two- and three-roomed houses the value of furnishing of the chamber was some 1.5 times the average for the house, indicating that this was the more important room. In larger dwellings the average value of furnishings in the principal chamber is some six times the value in secondary chambers, with the principal chamber furnishings worth up to 3.5 times the average room value for the same dwelling. This indicates the great social importance of the principal chamber. In these dwellings the principal chamber has some seating with tables, bedsteads and chests and coffer for storage. Secondary chambers have less seating and fewer bedsteads. At the lowest level chambers for servants may feature only a simple flockbed and chest.

Table 3 illustrates the location of cooking activities as indicated by pot hangers, cobirons and spits. The preparation and consumption of food was a vital part of domestic life. The cooking and eating of food in the hall, particularly in smaller dwellings, suggests a relatively public conduct of household activities. Where the kitchen was used for cooking in houses with a greater number of rooms, furnishing elsewhere in the house suggests a possible choice

TABLE 6. AVERAGE ROOM FURNISHINGS 1598-1618 (BY FURNISHED ROOMS PER HOUSEHOLD): PARLOURS

	Room value £	Room to av. ratio	Average occurrence of furniture types																	
Rooms per household																				
Number of households																				
% households*																				
	Low																			
	High																			
	Average																			
	Low																			
	High																			
	Average																			
			Fire irons																	
			Chairs																	
			Cushions																	
			Stools																	
			Forms/upstanding																	
			Benches																	
			Tables (on frames & trestles)																	
			Small tables																	
			Carpets																	
			Cupboards/court cupboards																	
			Shelves/stands																	
			Beds (mattresses)																	
			Bedsteads																	
			Bed furniture																	
			Bedding																	
			Truckle/standing beds																	
			Presses																	
			Chests																	
			Coffers/trunks																	
			Boxes/safes																	
			Wainscott/painted cloths																	
			Notes																	

Notes

\* Percentage of total households in period 1598 to 1618 having this number of rooms

Shaded area denotes sleeping furniture.

TABLE 7. AVERAGE ROOM FURNISHINGS 1598-1618 (BY FURNISHED ROOMS PER HOUSEHOLD): CHAMBERS

			Room value £		Room to av. ratio		Average occurrence of furniture types																									
Rooms per household	Number of households	% households*	Low	High	Average	Low	High	Average	Fire irons	Chairs	Cushions	Stools	Forms/upstanding	Benches	Tables (on frames & trestles)	Small tables	Carpets	Cupboards/court cupboards	Shelves/stands	Beds (mattresses)	Bedsteads	Bed furniture	Bedding	Truckle/standing beds	Presses	Chests	Coffers/trunks	Boxes/safes	Wainscott/painted cloths	Notes		
			1	0	0																											
2	13	86	0.25	8.00	<b>3.35</b>	0.7	1.8	<b>1.3</b>		0.5		0.6	0.1		0.3	0.3		0.1			2.6	1.8		1.0	0.3		0.2	a	2.0	.2p	a)1.5c,4.5t	
3	8	100	0.94	5.48	<b>2.64</b>	0.7	3.0	<b>1.4</b>		0.2	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.2		0.2	0.2			2.0	1.2		1.0	0.3		0.7	b	0.1	.3p	b)1.5c,1.5t	
4	10	100	0.42	18.00	<b>4.66</b>	0.7	7.7	<b>2.4</b>		0.3	1.0	0.3	0.3			0.5	0.2	0.3			2.2	1.4		1.4	0.2		1.0	.5c	0.3	.2w/.2p	principal**	
4			0.06	1.50	<b>0.66</b>	0.1	0.7	<b>0.4</b>		0.1			0.1	0.4	0.1		0.1	0.1	0.1		0.5	0.4		0.2	0.2	0.2	0.6	.2c,1t			secondary	
5+	7	100	2.30	15.00	<b>12.39</b>	2.1	4.1	<b>3.4</b>	0.3	1.3	4.3	1.2	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.8			3.0	2.0	0.2	1.3	0.3	0.2	1.7	1.5c,2t			principal	
5+			0.33	10.13	<b>2.14</b>	0.1	2.1	<b>0.7</b>		0.2		0.2	0.3		0.2	0.2		0.1			1.9	0.5		0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	.35			secondary	

## Notes

\* Percentage of total households in period 1598 to 1618 having this number of rooms

\*\* Average of principal chamber and secondary chamber furnishings

Shaded area denotes sleeping furniture.

of alternative eating locations, the hall or the more private chamber or parlour. Numbers of eating vessels, in particular platters, suggest the size and sociability of the household; numbers ranged from as few as three platters in the household of John Wittney,<sup>67</sup> a husbandman, to as many as 36 for Edmund Tomlinson, a yeoman.<sup>68</sup> Pewter dishes were found in households of various size and wealth.

#### CASE ANALYSIS OF DOMESTIC CULTURE FROM INDIVIDUAL INVENTORIES

In addition to statistical analysis of the inventories, which is necessary to establish as far as possible the patterns and norms of furnishing and house use, individual inventories, especially those which are more detailed, give an opportunity for a deeper interpretation of domestic culture. The use of averages derived from all the data available in the period makes possible the selection of individual inventories for further interpretation which represent the norms of furnishing. The grouping of items in the document may suggest an association of use in the minds of the assessors; for example 'a table & frame and four stools'. This picture would be enhanced by a knowledge of the arrangement of the furniture within the room, which is occasionally given in wills; for example 'the cheste at my beddes foote' bequeathed by Anne Tipping.<sup>69</sup> By analysing the association of furnishings it is possible to deduce how the room might have been used, bearing in mind that a piece of furniture can have different social significance in different circumstances; for example, a chair can be both for solitary use or for socialising. By assembling evidence for the rooms in the house with their various functions a picture can emerge of the domestic organisation and social manners of the inhabitants. The listing of rooms in Table 1 reveals that more space was being created within some houses by the insertion of floors. Analysis of the furnishings can give some indication of the way in which this new space was being used, possibly altering the balance between public and private portions of the house. For example, do the furnishings indicate that the hall was no longer the centre of the social life of the house? Individual case analysis is open to the criticism of subjectivity, but does present a tool for understanding the ordering of domestic life. A degree of cultural objectivity is important in order both to read the data sensitively to assess exactly how furnishings might have been used in the early 17th century, and to lay aside any assumptions as to the use and significance the same items of furniture might have in the present day.

Figs. 3-8 give a pictorial representation of the furnishings in their place in the house. The furniture depicted is that listed in the inventories. However, the exact form that the furniture takes and the arrangement of rooms within the house, and of the furniture within the rooms, is speculative.

Representative of a larger dwelling in Thame at the start of the 17th century is the house of Edmund Tomlinson, a yeoman and man of substance to judge from the request in his will that 'my bodie to be buryed in the church of Thame as neare to my seat as conveniently may be', succeeded by his wife Margaret, three sons and six daughters<sup>70</sup> (Fig. 3). His 1607 inventory reveals a traditional dwelling evolved from the medieval model, consisting of an entry, hall, little chamber next the hall, parlour, great chamber, servant's chamber (both possibly on the first floor of a cross wing) and kitchen. Attached to the building or without were a milk house and brewhouse, and beyond an old barn, wheat barn and carthouse, with

<sup>67</sup> Inventory of John Wittney, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 54/1/21.

<sup>68</sup> Inventory of Edmund Tomlinson, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 52/3/15.

<sup>69</sup> Inventory of Anne Tipping, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 52/3/12.

<sup>70</sup> Inventory of Edmund Tomlinson, *op. cit.* note 68.

contents relating to agriculture: dairy and farm implements, harvested crops and livestock. Taken together with the outbuildings this dwelling represents the agricultural and domestic unit at the heart of Thame's economy in the early 17th century.

The hall was furnished with tables and seating valued at 20s. – 'two tables & frames... two forms' and also 'two chaires' with 'nine cushens', probably used for eating, although there is no indication of a fire. This room was wainscotted or panelled, indicating its importance and desire for comfort at time of building. However, the great chamber, listed next and probably set above the parlour, contained the most lavish and costly furnishing of the house valued at £13 6s. 8d., and suggests a room used both for sleeping and socialising. A fire is indicated by the 'fyre shovell & tonge'. The sleeping furniture consisted of the 'two bedsteds' with the luxury of 'four featherbeds' and copious bedding – 'five bolsters' 'two blanketts' 'two coverlids' and 'four pillows'. Also in the room, for eating and socialising, were 'a table and frame' with 'two chairs' 'three cushens' and a 'rudde chaire' (possibly describing either a chair made of wooden spindles, as in the windsor chair, or a chair made of wicker rods). Storage was represented by 'one chest', and for serving of food and some display 'two

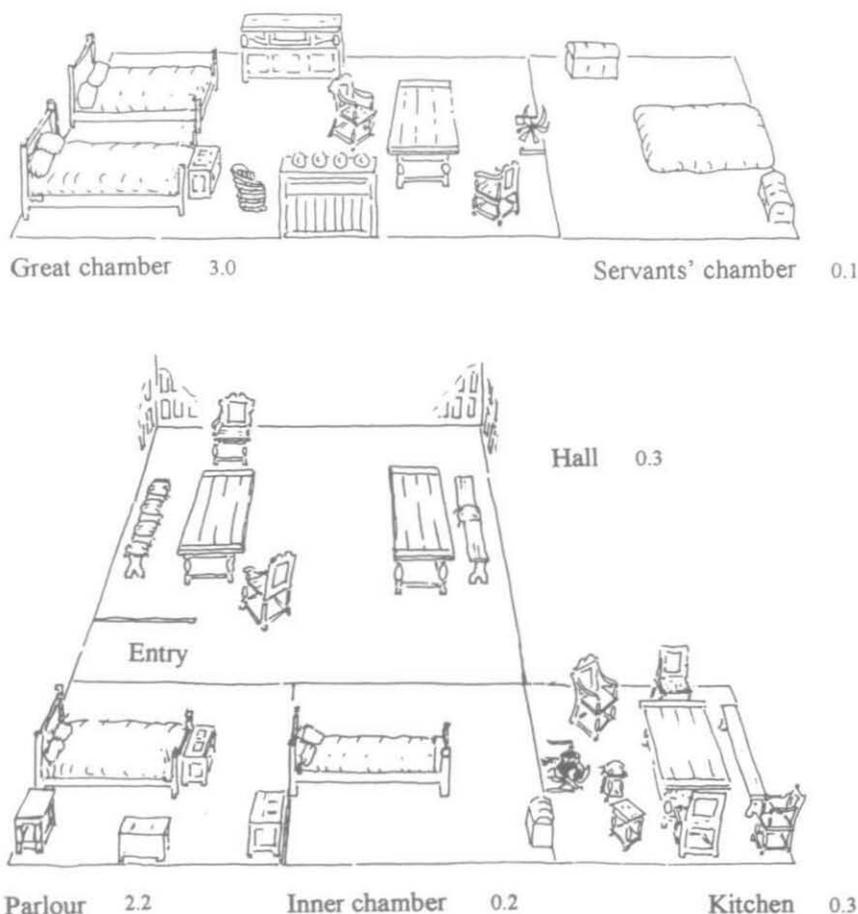


Fig. 3. Dwelling of Edmund Tomlinson, yeoman, 1607. Total value of furnishings: £26 16s. 8d. Ratio of room furnishings value to average per room for this house is shown after each room name.

cubbards' with 'a cubbard clothe', although the plate is listed separately in the kitchen. Listed next to the 'great chamber' and probably adjacent was the 'servant's chamber', extremely simply furnished with 'one old flockbed' and no mention of a bedstead, with 'a coverlid' and as additional storage for the household 'two coffers', all valued at 10s. The difference in value of furniture supplied for the servant's use in comparison with that in the householder's best rooms is an indication of the lowly estimation of the servant, and the differentiation in wealth and status within the household and the community.

The parlour appears to have been used principally for sleeping, but with only one bedstead comfortably furnished with 'two featherbeds & a flockbed' and 'two coverlids', 'five blanketts & five bolsters' was possibly a private sleeping chamber for the head of the household adjacent to the hall. The warming pan listed in the kitchen might have been used to warm this bed. The room also contained 'a table', possibly referring to the kind of small side table that was becoming increasingly common for occasional use, but no seating, and also 'three chests', possibly for the storage of personal valuables. The furnishing indicates that in acting as private space surrounded by public space this room was in many ways fulfilling the parlour's traditional role, that of a retreat for the head of the household. Sleeping furniture was also found in the little chamber next to the hall, consisting of 'a bedstead' with a less luxurious 'flockbed' and 'a coverlid'. Two coffers were also found in this room, which contained all the linen of the household; 'thirty pair of sheets', 'twelve table clothes', 'nine doz[en] of napkins and five paire of pyllowbears'. The valuation of £14, in comparison with the value of furnishings in the great chamber, shows both the cost and the importance of linen in the furnishing of a household. Linen in larger households was normally all stored in chests or coffers in one of the chambers.

The relative wealth of this household is also indicated by a kitchen which contains not only a very substantial cooking hearth, suggested by no less than 'thirteen spitts two grydyrons a jack' and 'a pair of andyrons five pothangers', 'one pair of tongs' with 'three dripping pans' and cooking vessels 'nine brasse potts five postnets five kittles a basen two skimmers a chafer', but unusually several pieces of furniture, 'a table a forme four chairs two joyned stooles' and 'four cushens'. As cushions are generally only found in wealthier households in better rooms, this suggests that the kitchen had in some way taken over the function of the hall for eating and socialising, possibly for convenience, economy and warmth. This is an example of an individual household not conforming to expected patterns, and may reflect personal vagaries, the altered habits of elderly householders or changing social manners and use of rooms. Also in the kitchen was the household plate, consisting of 'three doz[en] of pewter platters two doz[en] of fruit dishes twelve saucers' and 'one bason and two quart pots' and 'five candlesticks of brasse'. The large number and quality of the platters suggest a large household accustomed to dispensing entertainment. There is no mention of the drinking vessels used.

The furnishing indicates that the household of this wealthier member of the community was centred on the great chamber, a principal room for socialising and sleeping. The two fireplaces in the dwelling were in this room and the kitchen, where food was prepared, and unusually possibly also consumed. The parlour appears to be a private space for the householder serving also as his own sleeping chamber, with other bedsteads in the little chamber next to the hall for other members of the household, and very simple accommodation for the servant. The hall was also furnished for eating, but seemingly not central to the life of the household. Economic activity took place either in specialist rooms attached to the dwelling, at least in part carried out by servants, or in other premises.

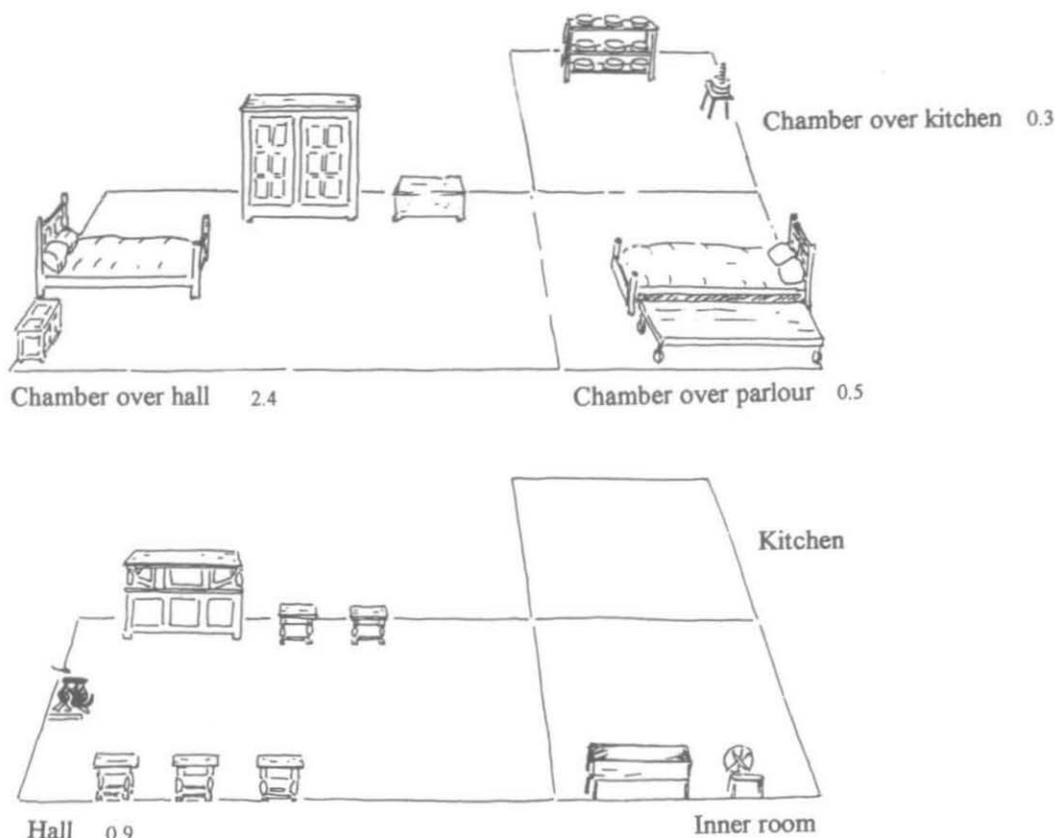


Fig. 4. Dwelling of John Vickers, husbandman, 1613. Total value of furnishings: £7 14s. 0d. Ratio of room furnishings value to average per room for this house is shown after each room name.

Lower down the scale in the agricultural economy was the dwelling of John Vickers, a husbandman, succeeded by his widow Alice, three sons and one daughter<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 4). There is a record of the marriage of a John Vickers to his bride Alice Reynolds on 26 October 1601 in the Thame parish records, so at the time of his death 12 years later his children must have been still minors. We can be reasonably certain, therefore, that this represents a family household. The inventory, compiled in 1613, detailed the contents of a hall, inner room, kitchen, chamber over the hall, chamber over the parlour and the chamber over the kitchen; the traditional arrangement of rooms of hall with service wing containing inner room (parlour?) with the relatively recent addition of a second floor. In addition his agricultural assets, two acres of corn in the field, were listed. The hall contained a fireplace used for cooking as indicated by 'a fyre shovell a pair of bellowes tongs a racke & andyrans' and 'two spitts'. Also listed were 'a table five joyned stooles & a cubbard', furniture normally associated with sociable eating and the storage of vessels. The term 'table' may imply a nailed or wedged construction rather than the joined 'table and frame'. The absence of cushions

<sup>71</sup> Inventory of John Vickers, *op. cit.* note 5.

also indicates a lower standard of comfort. The kitchen, listed next and possibly adjacent, contained both cooking implements, including 'one brasse pott a kittle' and also eating vessels 'fyve platters two sawcers a saltseller & a candlestick'. As is the case with several inventories of this period, particularly in the smaller houses with one hearth in the hall, there is no mention in the kitchen of furniture for the storage or preparation of food or a fireplace on which to cook it. It seems that the kitchen would have been a small room, commonly off the hall, used for the initial preparation of food and the storage of cooking utensils. Storage of food was simply provided in this household by 'two shelves in the buttry & one in the kitchyn'. The function of the kitchen is one area, possibly not concerned with articles of value, where the inventories do not provide a full picture of this important aspect of domestic life. The low number of platters and the single candlestick, compared to those in the house of Edmund Tomlinson, indicate a small household eating for subsistence and not for entertainment and socialising. Also in the kitchen were vessels which might be associated more with the gaining of a livelihood than domestic needs; 'a paile a yelvat two bolles & two boldishes a kinderkin', the latter being a large container for liquids, in addition to 'a great brewing pan'. As a market town the sale of beer could be an additional source of income indicated by brewing vessels in several dwellings of this kind. In the chamber over the kitchen 'a verguis press' (fruit juice much used in cooking), 'a chese press & a stand dere for beare' (a stand or standard for beer?) and the cheese rack were also listed. In his will John Vickers also bequeathed 'unto my sonne Richard Vickers my malt mill to be deliv[er]ed unto him after the decease of my wiffe', obviously of continuing importance to the economic well being of her family.

The most important room in the house would seem to have been the chamber over the hall, to judge by the quality of the bedstead and bedding: 'one wainscot bed a featherbed two bolsters one downe pillow one coverlid two blancketts', valued at £3 6s. 8d. Also in this chamber were a 'a wainscott presse' (a joined oak wardrobe valued at £1) and 'two chests' containing the modest household linen, 'three pair & one sheet one tableclothe & two towells'. By contrast the chamber over the parlour – presumably a smaller chamber due to the size of the room below – contained 'one wainscot bedsted & a truckle bed' valued at only £1. The reason for the discrepancy in value between these two wainscot beds is not apparent, one of the frustrations of the scant information on articles supplied in inventories, but possibly due to the value of the 'feather beds' and bedding listed with the former. The contents of a parlour were not listed; either because the room contained no furniture, or was one and the same as the inner room.

Again in the inner room, presumably next to the hall, there are indications of the household economy, but none of household comfort. The room contained 'a bowlting wich' for the preparation of flour for baking, a 'powdering trough' for salting meat, and 'a wollen & linnen wheele' and a pair of scales with weights. There is a marked contrast between the industrious nature of this room, and the parlour of yeoman Edmund Tomlinson, a comfortably furnished room of private retreat. Although similar in terms of number of rooms to Edmund Tomlinson's dwelling, that of John Vickers was much more modestly furnished, with the furniture in his principal room worth a quarter of the value of the contents of Edmund Tomlinson's great chamber. Other rooms showed the presence of economic activity in the home, with implements and equipment for cheesemaking, brewing and spinning, as well as baking, preserving meat and juice pressing. In contrast the yeoman's house was devoted entirely to domestic comfort, socialising and privacy, with economic activity seemingly located without in outhouses, or possibly even subcontracted.

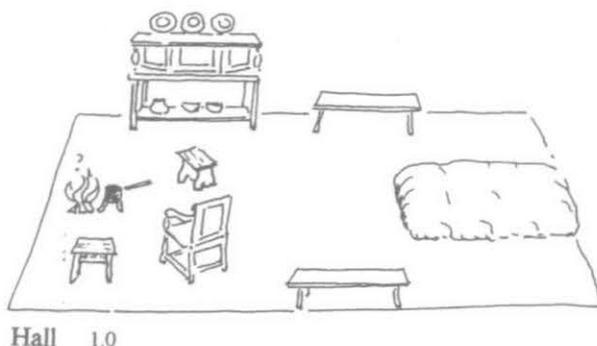
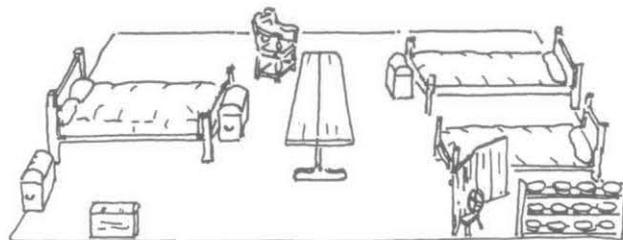


Fig. 5. Dwelling of Thomas Clerke, shepherd, 1602. Total value of furnishings: £1 0s. 0d. Ratio of room furnishings value to average per room for this house is shown after each room name.

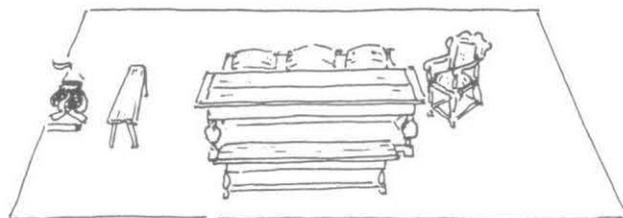
At a lower level still in the agricultural economy was Thomas Clerke, a shepherd.<sup>72</sup> At the time of his death in 1602 no surviving dependants were noted. His whole dwelling consisted of a simply furnished hall, similar in character to those houses of the period still extant in Moreton, the hamlet where he lived (Fig. 5). The furniture consisted of 'one cubbord' and 'a chair stoles formes & other lumber' without mention of a table, although two table cloths were listed. The one note of decoration lay in the 'paynted clothes', wall hangings of linen with some form of painted decoration. These were a fairly common form of wall covering, a poor substitute for the panelling or wainscot found in wealthier houses, or the tapestries of grander houses. Sleeping furniture consisted of 'one flockbedd', with no mention of a bedstead and therefore either laid on the floor, or on a simple nailed box of no value (possibly some of the 'lumber' listed above), with 'four payre of sheetes' and 'two coverlids two blankets... and two pillowes' which may have been stored with his clothes and other belongings in the 'three coffers' listed. Also in the hall were his eating vessels, 'five platters five sallet [salad] dishes and sawcers' and few cooking vessels, 'two kittles [kettles] and two posnetts and a little pott'. No fire irons are listed suggesting that he might possibly have 'made his fire against his reredos in the hall' in the words of William Harrison,<sup>73</sup> into which the three legged posnet could be placed. Various agricultural assets were listed, including crops of hay and 'a yeard of wheat in the field', possibly the common field. The produce of his livestock, 'five hennes & a cocke' and 'twenty sheepe... a littel hogge... two kyne' might well be related to the 'three milk booles and two bucketts' in his hall. Although belonging to a man with a few assets, this dwelling, consisting simply of one furnished room, providing the bare essentials of life – shelter, possibly some limited socialising, the preparation and consumption of food, storage of goods and sleeping – must represent the lower levels of domestic life in Thame at this time not shown in the inventories. As such it gives some indication of the standard of living of the less affluent bulk of the population not covered by the inventories. Obviously within such a dwelling differentiation between public and private space becomes meaningless.

<sup>72</sup> Inventory of Thomas Clerke, *op. cit.* note 66.

<sup>73</sup> William Harrison, *Description of England*.



Chamber over hall 1.4



Hall 0.6

Fig. 6. Dwelling of Joan Spindler, widow, 1612. Total value of furnishings: £4 8s. 0d. Ratio of room furnishings value to average per room for this house is shown after each room name.

Inevitably, the dwellings of widows do not fit into any ranking which reflects status and wealth based on occupation, although occasionally widows did continue to run their husband's business.<sup>74</sup> The value of furnishings range from the £1 3s. 4d. of Amy Mortimer<sup>75</sup> to the £8 14s. 3d. of Anne Tipping,<sup>76</sup> the widow of a prosperous shoemaker. The inventory of Joan Spindler dated 1612 is that of a reasonably prosperous widow with furnishings valued at £4 8s. in a hall and chamber over the hall<sup>77</sup> (Fig. 6). Her small-scale husbandry, represented by 'four hoggs... five beasts... two sheepe', connected to the 'bowles pans' and 'a cherne bords' in the milk house, may be representative of the small-scale enterprise which was carried out by widows and poorer members of the community. A calf bequeathed to her neighbours and appraisers, Henry Ayres and Thomas Minchard, appears to be grazing on land called the Mores on which she paid rent. Having no issue herself, the beasts were bequeathed singly to various kinsfolk as part of her will. At a time of high prices of consumables the small-scale production of agricultural commodities must have been an important hedge against poverty, albeit increasingly difficult for the poorer members of the community due to enclosure.<sup>78</sup> Also bequeathed were the 'ten bushells of malt' possibly

<sup>74</sup> Hodges, *op. cit.* note 21, p. 318.

<sup>75</sup> Inventory of Amy Mortimer, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 46/1/17.

<sup>76</sup> Inventory of Anne Tipping, *op. cit.* note 69.

<sup>77</sup> Inventory of Joan Spindler, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 51/1/4.

<sup>78</sup> Phelps Brown and Hopkins, *op. cit.* note 10, pp. 290-3: craftsmen's earnings measured against prices of consumables fell by 50% between the late 15th century and early 17th century. Landless labourers endured the full effects of inflation of these prices, which may explain in part their exclusion from probate inventories.

associated with the 'querne & vatts' in the production of 'the beare in the house'. The proceeds, or possibly the shared labour in this enterprise enabled her to keep a servant, Elizabeth White, named in her will. Her hall appears to have been the place for the cooking with 'a pair of racks two doggs tongs & bellows' and 'two pothangers', and 'a spitt grydiron & frying pann'. The vessels of 'pewter & brasse', not individually specified, indicate a degree of quality. The furnishing of 'one table & frame a chair the benches' and 'a forme' was complemented by 'six cushens' not in this case associated with stools. The comfort of the cushions, in addition to the 'three tableclothes' and 'six napkins' indicate a degree of socialising. The 'painted cloth' on the walls is perhaps another attempt at modest comfort and decoration. Unusually there is no mention of a cupboard of any form. The value of furnishings in the chamber over the hall, £3 ls. 5*d.*, was more than twice the £1 6*s.* 8*d.* of those in the hall. The principal contents were 'one bedsted' with 'a flockbed' and bedding of three coverlets 'two bolsters' 'a blanckett three pillows & a flockbolster'. Linen is listed as 'four pair of sheets' and 'three pillowbeares'. In addition there were also 'two olde bedsteds' and four coffer, one of which may have been the 'chest that is at my beds foot' bequeathed to her kinswoman Katherine Eustace with 'all that is in yt'. A 'pair of trestles' with 'two plancks' may have served for eating with 'a little chaire', or with the 'two shelves' and 'a cheesrack' for the storage of foodstuffs such as the 'apples cheese & baccon', in addition to '2 bushells of barley'. Domestic economy is also expressed by the 'two wheeles' for the preparation of yarn. Again 'a painted cloth' would have added a small degree of comfort and decoration. This household, like that of John Vickers the husbandman, has economic activity, or the gaining of a livelihood incorporated into the dwelling space. Whilst the hall served for both the preparation and consumption of food with some degree of socialising, the chamber, possibly on a newly inserted floor over the hall, served for sleeping and also for the storage of foodstuffs and equipment.

The inventory of Leonard Yates, a blacksmith, compiled in 1605, provides an example of a craftsman's dwelling<sup>79</sup> (Fig. 7). He was succeeded by his widow Isabell; there is no mention of any progeny. A hall, parlour, chamber over the parlour and chamber over the hall were listed, suggesting the insertion of a second floor into a traditional dwelling. In addition there were a cellar and the blacksmith's shop. The hall appears to have fulfilled its traditional function as a place for the preparation of meals and the centre of social life. The fireplace is indicated by 'one payre of bellowes' 'one payre of tonnges' 'one grydiorne' 'one payr of pott hangers' with cooking vessels comprising 'one kyttell one lyttell posnet' and for eating vessels 'fyve pewter dyshes one lyttell sawser & two lyttell ould saltes with fyve spoones'. The furnishing of the hall suggests a traditional arrangement; 'a table' with 'a bench & the back being of wainscott' – probably against the wall with a panelled back, a mark of better construction – 'a chayre' for the head of the household, and 'three stooles'. There is no mention of cushions. Apart from the wainscotted bench back this is modest furniture valued at only 14*s.* Also mentioned in the contents of the room were 'one paynted cloth with a bord at the bottome', possibly some form of wall covering, which would have given some semblance of comfort and decoration, and 'glass in the window and the shutt', suggesting a single glazed and shuttered window possibly recently installed. As in the house of John Vickers, 'one buckett' with 'fower stone jugges' – often drinking flagons – suggest the brewing of drink for home consumption or for sale on market days.

<sup>79</sup> Inventory of Leonard Yates, *op. cit.* note 35.

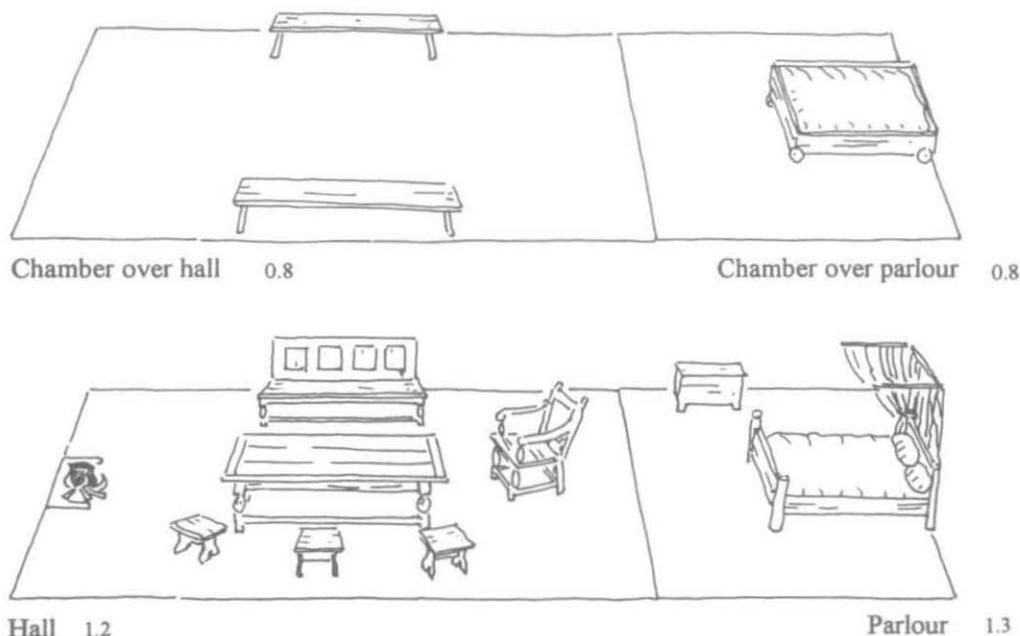


Fig. 7. Dwelling of Leonard Yates, blacksmith, 1605. Total value of furnishings: £2 5s. 6d. Ratio of room furnishings value to average per room for this house is shown after each room name.

The parlour contained the only bedstead in the house, with its simple bedding: 'one bedsteed one strawbed and one flocke bed' furnished with 'one fether boulster one checker rugge & a payr of hurden sheetes'. 'Hurden' or 'harden' was coarse cloth made of the 'hards', the coarser part of the flax or hemp plant. Hangings, not mentioned, would have been hung from the 'curten rod' probably attached to the wall, and a touch of sophistication was lent by 'one ould painted clothe over the head'. The furnishing was completed with 'one lyttell ould chest'. The furniture in this room was valued at 15s.

The chambers on the upper floor were crudely furnished, suggesting that they were not yet evolved into important secondary chambers, or simply not needed for accommodation or privacy. In the chamber over the parlour was 'one truckelbed' on its own, without accompanying bedstead, with the most basic of bedding: 'one matteris one strawbed one ould coverlid one payr of sheetes'. The 'ould kyver to put in ashes' could have been some simple form of bed warmer. This furniture is valued at 8s. Apart from a few pieces of napery, only 'two ould formes' are listed in the chamber over the hall.

The list of contents of the blacksmith's shop provides an indication of the working life of one of Thame's craftsmen. Listed in his workshop were such items as the 'rocke stafe with bellowes' with 'six payre of tonges... with a forge trough' for the forge, the 'anvill the towing iorne' and the 'bigge iorne' with the 'three sledgis' and 'hand hammers' for the shaping of the iron. The 'manderelles & punches' suggest the making of horse shoes, the 'vice' possibly the making of other articles of ironmongery, such as straps and hinges for the furniture and buildings, and the 'grindstone... with the troughe' the making of agricultural implements such as bill-hooks and scythes, and possibly a sharpening service to the community. The 'blocke with a carte nayle toole in it' indicates a link with the cartwright's craft also. Whilst Leonard Yates was of service to the local agricultural community which gathered at least part of its wealth from the market of the metropolis of London, his own enterprise was literally

fuelled by the larger national economy, in the form of 'one quarter of coales' for the furnace, possibly brought by river to Oxford and from thence by wagon.

Inventories can supply very useful information on the tools and techniques of crafts, a subject which lies outside the scope of this paper. However, the inclusion of the trade assets of the deceased and the likely proximity of the workshop to, or even within his house, indicate the way in which, as in the house of John Vickers, work and domestic spheres overlapped in households of the middling agricultural, trader and craftsman ranking. The £3 11s. invested in his work tools and stock was considerably greater than the £2 5s. 7d. value put on all his household furnishings. The dwelling itself appears to have been of an evolved form, with inserted floors possibly in a simple older building, but without the full transfer of new uses to the newly acquired space. Indeed, the very modest quantity of furnishing and the description of several pieces specifically as 'ould' indicate a household coping with daily existence rather than indulging in comfort or entertainment.

Richard Striblehill, a butcher, whose inventory was compiled in 1607, represents one of the trading elite of Thame. Besides his widow Jane, and two daughters, Mary, who was married, and Elizabeth, his household also contained four named servants; John Burton, Marmaduke Dakes, Charlie Persie and Mary White.<sup>80</sup> His dwelling consisted of a hall, parlour and kitchen on the ground floor, a chamber over the hall and chamber over the parlour, chamber over the entry, another chamber and the servant's chamber (Fig. 8). This would suggest that the inserted upper floor was divided into smaller rooms than those below. Either attached to the house or without were the dairy or 'dayhouse' (containing no fewer than 57 cheeses), boulting house, slaughter house and stable.

As in all other dwellings examined here bar that of Thomas Clerke, the shepherd, the hall contained furniture for sociable eating: 'one table and frame six joynd stooles three chairs' valued at £1. However, the absence of a cupboard for the display of vessels might imply that this room was now where the servants dined. A fireplace is indicated by 'a fire shovell a pair of bellows a pair of tonges & two doggs' but not one apparently for cooking. 'The wainscott' around the walls suggests a room of some quality. It appears that dining also took place in the parlour, furnished with 'one table six stoles' and as a mark of status no fewer than 'four cubbords' for serving food or the display of vessels in addition to 'a chest' with some articles of bedding consisting of 'a coverlid and a pair of blanketts', all valued at £3. The existence of a second room dedicated to eating on the ground floor of this dwelling, with the principal chamber on the upper floor also with dining furniture, indicates a large household with members of different rank dining separately or distinct locations for meals of differing social importance. The parlour might have become the place where the household now took their meals, the chamber over the parlour the eating room of the family and guests. The preparation of food was reserved for the kitchen, where the large hearth is indicated by 'three spitts & a pair of racks a fire fork two potthooks a frying pann two dripping pannes two potthangers & a pair of andirons'. Various cooking vessels, some of better quality, were listed including 'six brasse potts eight kittles three postnetts two pannes one skimm[er] four ladles' and eating vessels 'three doze[n] of platters four basons & a plate twelve fruit dishes twelve sawcers nine saltsellers'. The generous provision of platters and the 'four brase candlesticks' and 'five pewter candlesticks' indicate a larger, wealthier household geared for entertaining. Drinking vessels consisted of 'two cupps & two tasters a quart pott & a pynt pott' and vessels, and suggesting a somewhat old-fashioned etiquette of dining, 'a bason & a ewer' for the washing of hands. Also found in the kitchen were 'a warming pann'

<sup>80</sup> Inventory of Richard Striblehill, ORO, MS Wills Pec. 50/5/36.

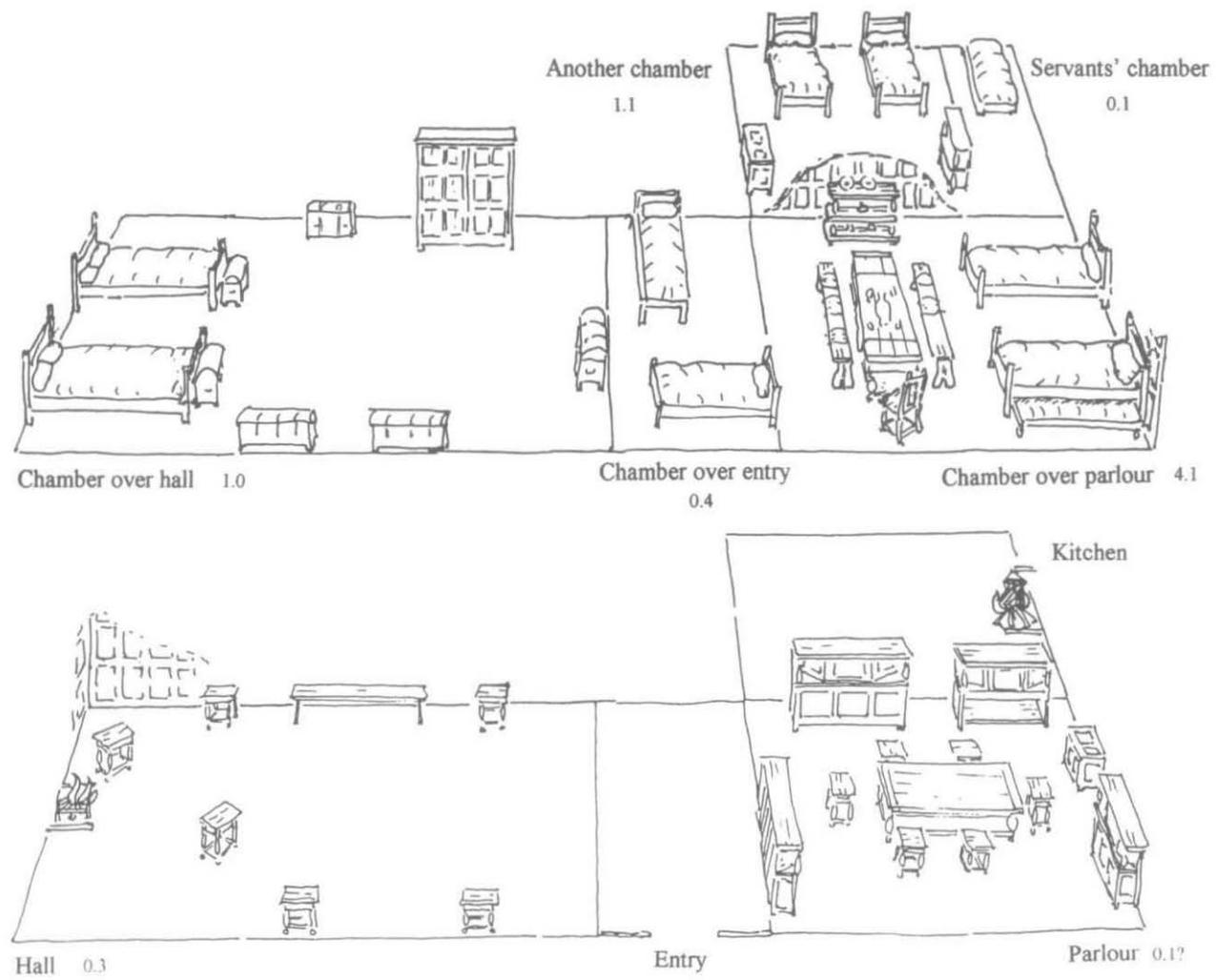


Fig. 8. Dwelling of Richard Striblehill, butcher, 1607. Total value of furnishings: £28 10s. 9d. Ratio of room furnishings value to average per room for this house is shown after each room name.

and 'four chamber potts', another mark of relative refinement, no doubt for use in the sleeping chambers. Domestic economy is reflected in 'the brewing vessells' and 'a maltmill a mustard mill'.

The first chamber listed was the chamber over the parlour, and to judge by the valuation of £15 placed on the contents, it was the principal room of the house – in effect, a high great chamber. It appears to have been used both for socialising and as sleeping accommodation for the principal members of the house. All the furnishing in this room reflected wealth and rank. For eating and entertainment 'a joynd table & the frame' was listed in combination with 'one forme... & benches' and 'one little chair' with the comfort of 'six cushens'. The 'three carpetts' would probably have been laid over the table or 'a court cubberd' on which plate would have been displayed. The 'two joynd bedstedds' were listed with 'a truckle bed' (possibly for an attendant servant) and bedding of 'featherbed... with a flockbed', and 'five bolsters a quilt four cov[er]lids nine pillowes'. The quality of the room is also indicated by 'the wainscott' panelling around the room.

The chamber over the hall and 'another chamber' both contained two bedsteads, with 'flockbeds' and 'one featherbedd' and various coverlets and blankets. One of these chambers contained 'a court cubbord', another a 'press', and a combined total of no less than ten coffer and one chest. As well as other belongings some of these no doubt would have contained the lavish napery: 'twenty seven pair of sheets eight pair of pillowbers twelve table clothes six doze[n] of napkins & twelve towells'. The chamber over the entry contained 'two little bedstedds' with 'one featherbed and... a cov[er]lid a blankett & two bolsters'; possibly accommodation for children? The lower status of servants is indicated by the simple 'bedsted' with 'a flockbed a blanket a cov[er]led & a bolster' valued at only 10s. in the servant's chamber. Wall decoration consisted of 'painted cloths throughout the house'.

Like that of yeoman Edmund Tomlinson, the household of Richard Striblehill the butcher reflected the wealth and status of another prominent figure in the economic and social life of Thame, that of the processor of agricultural produce. The extensive household was arranged for comfort, display of wealth, and status expressed by differentiation between more public and private spaces.

The six properties analysed above give an intimate picture of the material and social stratification of Thame at this time. In the poorest household of the shepherd the domestic arrangements and furnishing suggest few concerns beyond basic human needs for shelter, warmth and sustenance. The dwellings of the husbandmen and craftsman contained a greater availability and differentiation of space, but with a considerable inclusion of the economic activity of the householder, possibly involving all members of the household. In the wealthier households of the agricultural and trading elite of the town, the yeoman and the butcher, space was highly differentiated between those areas permitting and those restricting public access. The opening and restricting of access to different parts of the house, as much as the comfort and wealth of furnishings, reflected the status of the householder. Fig. 9 attempts to convey diagrammatically the varying status of space in the six houses analysed above for comparison. The 'open' or 'closed' character of various parts of the dwelling gives an insight into the way in which it was used, and the changes in use which may have been occurring faster in some dwellings than others. However, various occupations and uses, such as eating or seating, may verge from the public to the private, or like storage be neutral in significance. Hoskins speculates that the development of houses in the later 16th century was driven as much by a desire for greater privacy, as by greater wealth.<sup>81</sup> This theory appears to be borne out by the domestic arrangements of Edmund

<sup>81</sup> Hoskins, *op. cit.* note 9, p. 54.

### Individual case studies

Edmund Tomlinson, yeoman, 1607



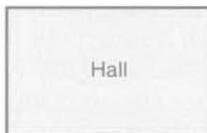
John Vickers, husbandman, 1613



Thomas Clerke, shepherd, 1602



Joane Spindler, widow, 1612



Leonard Yates, blacksmith, 1605



Richard Striblehill, butcher, 1607





### Group statistical analysis

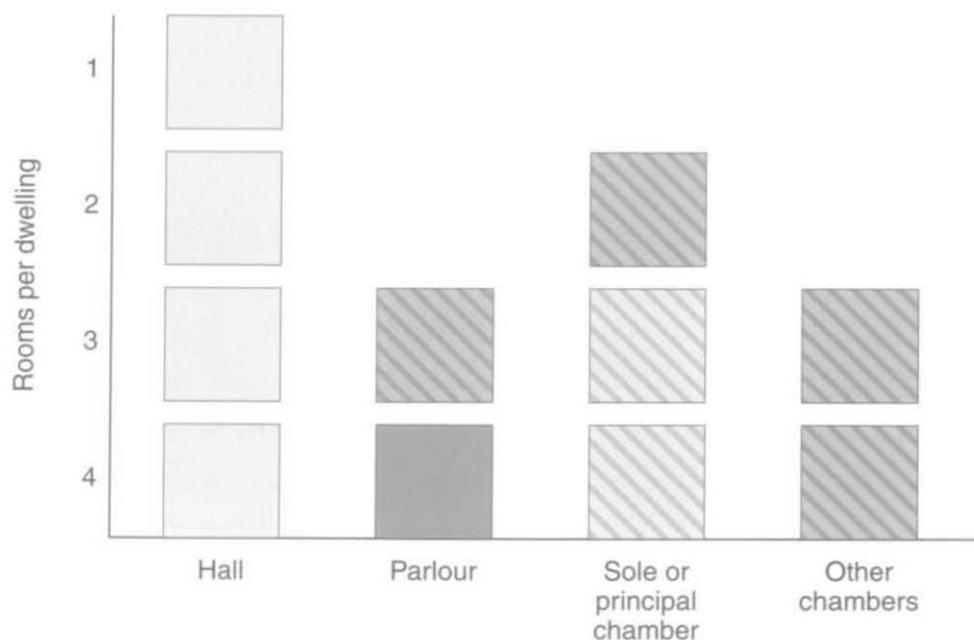


Fig. 9. Significant social access.

Tomlinson, where, in a more traditional dwelling with a hall and high chamber, the kitchen was nevertheless furnished for social use. These households therefore illustrate different stages in the evolution of house forms and domestic arrangement, nevertheless making clear the element of choice of individual households towards innovation in domestic life and the use of space.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to gain an insight in to domestic conditions and organisation in Thame in the early 17th century. The data represents only the agricultural, craftsman and trading classes of the town, leaving the domestic conditions of the bulk of the population to speculation. Nevertheless, the number and quality of the inventories make it possible to move beyond mere piecemeal reading of the material to a more methodical analysis. Relationships between occupation, house size, room distribution and value of furnishings give an indication of the way in which social status was reflected in the dwelling and its furnishings. The group statistical analysis establishes a picture of variations in type and value of furnishings related to different rooms. The use of rooms varies according to the number in the house, those in smaller dwellings obviously employed for a greater variety of purposes, whilst those in larger dwellings show greater differentiation between function and social significance. Whilst group statistical analysis can reveal general patterns, individual case analysis yields a more intimate view of the day to day organisation of domestic space and social life in specific households. Both methods of analysis show wealth and status reflected in the furnishings of the house, the way in which space within the house was differentiated between public and private use, and the development of the wider domestic culture at this time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the Thame Local History Research Group whose transcription of the wills and probate inventories has made them easily accessible, and to Mary Hodges for her assistance in my interpretation of this material. Conversation with Victor Chinnery informed my research into the 17th-century nomenclature of furniture, and correspondence with Malcolm Airs at Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, and with Lauren Gilmour at the Oxfordshire County Museums, helped to clarify my elementary knowledge of housing fabric and household vessels respectively.

## APPENDIX 1. CALCULATION OF RATES OF REPRESENTATION

It is obviously important to establish some idea of how representative the probate inventories are in order to understand how typical they might be of the population as a whole. The science of population studies is dealt with comprehensively by E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541-1871* (1981). Estimating the percentage of the eligible population represented in the probate inventories is made exceedingly difficult by the paucity of records with which to correlate the inventory figures. Parish records for baptisms, marriages and burials only exist for Thame from 1601. However, it is possible by backwards extrapolation to make a rough estimate through these records of individuals reaching maturity. An average of 36 baptisms per annum occurred between 1601 and 1620. Allowing for child mortality calculated by Wrigley and Schofield (p.249) at around 25% before the age of 10 years, approximately 27 men and women would have reached maturity each year in this period. Between 1598 and 1618 there are 36 surviving probate inventories from Thame of men's estates, and

9 widows' inventories. Mary Hodges calculates widows constituted 27% of the total adult population of nearby Woodstock in 1619.<sup>82</sup> Allowing for the gradual increase in population at this time, estimates of 15-20% of potential males and 8-10% of potential females represented in the Thame inventories are calculated from these figures.

## APPENDIX 2. CALCULATION OF ROOM TO AVERAGE RATIO

This figure is a means of estimating the importance of a room in the overall furnishing of a house, and therefore to some extent the importance of the room with regard to social life and the display of status. Estimates of the way in which the furnishing varies between houses can be made in three ways. Firstly, the *total expenditure* (in £ value) on furnishing each house gives an indication of the relative wealth, and possibly status, of the householder. Secondly, comparison can be made between the *value of room furnishing* of the same room in different houses, and the value of furnishing of different rooms in the same house. Thirdly, however, in order to establish the *importance* of the room within the house reflected in the value of furnishings, a ratio of the *value of furnishings in a room* to the *average value of room furnishing* of the house is required. This is obtained by dividing the value of the furnishing in the room in question into the average value of furnishing per room, which is in turn obtained by dividing the total number of rooms into the total value of furnishings in the house. Below is an example of a comparison made between the importance of the hall in terms of furnishing value (in £) in three houses of different sizes with furnishings of different value:

House size No. rooms	Total value house furnishings	Average value per room	Hall furnishings	% of household furnishings	Room to average ratio
1	5	5	5	100	1
2	20	10	10	50	1
4	40	10	10	25	1

As can be seen in this example, neither a comparison of actual expenditure on furnishings in the hall nor a comparison of the percentage of total value of furnishings in the household would give a true comparison of the importance of the hall in terms of its furnishings in each dwelling, which is equivalent despite differences in house size and furnishing value.

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<sup>82</sup> Hodges, *op. cit.* note 21, p. 310.

