

Lecture Reports

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'Six silver spoons and the second best bed':

Life in Chipping Norton 1500-1700 - Dr Adrienne Rosen

Chipping Norton has lost most of its records. Therefore it is all the more significant that a local research group has been busy transcribing wills and inventories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Dr Rosen's talk was based on the outcome of this activity.

She began by painting a picture of the town in the two-hundred-year period covered by the investigation. Chipping Norton was a market town with a strong wool trade base and a generous number of inns. Although blessed with good regional communications it was essentially a westward looking place whose water resources were never quite enough to encourage much factory development.

Dr Rosen's first specific focus was the transcription of wills, almost all of which had been proven locally and offered insights into families, though not always on their day-to-day lives. Overall, within the family unit husbands and wives formed a close partnership especially when it came to business.

The speaker then turned to inventories and featured especially the inventory of Edward Avery, a shoemaker in Chipping Norton, taken in 1617. The list of his goods and chattels covers items in the shop as well as the rooms of the house. For instance, among the furniture and linen listed in the parlour there were 11 silver spoons worth £2 10s 0d and in the buttery 2 brass pans valued at £1 0s 0d. He also owned a horse with packsaddle.

Sadly the exact location of Avery's house is not known. However, this missing information is balanced by surprising discoveries such as a lack of chairs in many domestic properties. On the death of the wife more evidence comes to light concerning the allocation of furnishings to offspring and of a well-stocked shop, which would be of benefit to local people.

Some inventories offered glimpses of local farming practices. Clearly the customary arable/pasture mix allowed the malting of barley and the operation of dairy houses.

Perhaps the most revealing were four seventeenth century inventories linked to the *White Hart* in the Market Place.

The meeting closed with a question session in which Jeremy Gibson, chairman, seized the opportunity to compare the research labours at Chipping Norton with much earlier studies in Banbury (see BHS Records Volumes 13 and 14 -Wills and Inventories Parts 1 & 2). A whole world of research awaits the person or group prepared to build on these findings and undertake a wider investigation.