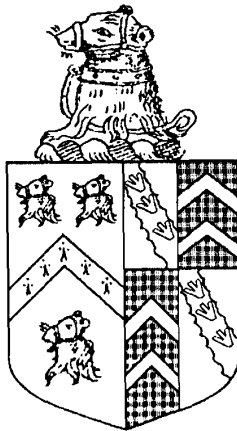


The Wirdnam's – Part Three

by Lis Garnish



William Wirdnam
of Charlton
= Mary Boswell, daug. of Robert Boswell, esq.

Robert Wirdnam
of Charlton, gentleman
= Alice, daug. of Hugh Hyde of Letcombe Regis,
Margery Wirdnam = ??? W??
Mary Wirdnam
Elizabeth Wirdnam
Dorothy Wirdnam = Jasper Scoles of Charlton, son of Walter Scoles

George Wirdnam
of Priorshold, gentleman
= Elizabeth, daug. of Bartholomew Tipping
Thomas Wirdnam
Catherine Wirdnam = William Stevens
Bridget Wirdnam
Mary Wirdnam
Cecilia Wirdnam

Martha Wirdnam
Catherine Wirdnam
Dorothy Wirdnam

Robert Scoles = Mary, daug. of Thomas Brewer of Horsham, Sussex
William Scoles
John Scoles
Edward Scoles
Thomas Scoles
Dorothy Scoles = William Gifford of Middlesex
Anne Scoles
Joan Scoles

**WIRDNAM of PRIORSHOLD
in WANTAGE**

As represented by George Wirdnam at the Heralds' Visitation of Berkshire in 1623

In Part Two we traced the history of the rest of William Wirdnam's generation and saw that they were part of the yeoman class farming in the area. William's own money was probably made largely through farming and through the profits of the tithes which he rented from the Dean and Canons of Windsor. However, it is likely that he had money invested in other business enterprises in Wantage, such as the cloth trade and tanning. He probably speculated in property as well, since it was the sale of some of the Charity Lands which first drew him to the attention of the Privy Council and led to his disgrace.

The next Visitation by the Heralds was in 1623, by which time William was dead (1). The information for this pedigree was supplied by George Wirdnam. He repeated William's version, but with some interesting amendments. Except for Richard Wirdnam., in the second generation, all earlier claims to the title 'gentleman' were dropped. George seems to have based his claim on the status of Mary Boswell and Alice Hyde as daughters of armigerous families. Even this was a suspect basis but at least it had more merit than William's claim. George confined himself to William's five children named in the 1566 visitation, ignoring Edward and Francis. He also ignored the marriages of two of his father's sisters and gave only the sketchiest information about the marriage of the third. To include all the information on male descendants of the Wirdnams would make this article far too long, so it is necessary to confine ourselves, as he did, to William's children and grandchildren.

William's eldest son, Robert, must have been born about 1558, whilst William and Mary were still at Catmore. By 1578 Robert was acting with his father as Attorney for the Dean & Canons of Windsor, to represent them as suitors and witnesses in the Courts of the Manor and Hundred of Wantage (2). This means that Robert must have been at least twenty to have been entrusted with such a responsible position. Two years later, in 1580, he married Alice Hyde of Letcombe Regis in Wantage church (3). Alice was related to the Cater family and her second cousin, Francis, was involved with William Wirdnam in the Charity Lands scandal. She was the sole heiress of her uncle, Peter Hyde, and her sister Cicely married William Wilmot, so the marriage provided both money and good family connections. William's step-mother, Annis, died in 1577 and it is likely that between then and 1580 William moved from Wantage into Wickes manor house, so that Robert and Alice could set up home in The Priory, the manor house of Priorshold. The baptism of George, their eldest child, took place in Letcombe Regis church on 23 January, 1585/6 and he was probably named after Sir George Hyde. The first child recorded in the Wantage register is Kateryne, born in 1587, and Kateryne was quickly followed by Alice, 1588, Bridgett, 1590, Robert, 1591, Mary, 1592, Cecilia, 1594, Susann, 1596, William, 1598, Elizabeth, 1601 and Thomas, 1604. Robert and William both died as babies and, since Alice and Susann do not appear in the 1623 Visitation, it is likely that they, too, died as children. Bridget, Mary and Cecilia do not appear again after 1623 but it is possible that they married in London or somewhere else away from Wantage.

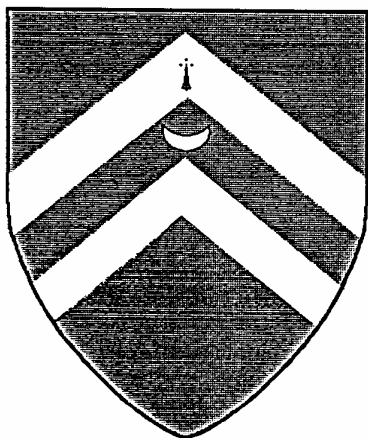
Robert seems to have followed the usual life of a country squire, attending the Churchwardens' meetings, dealing with business matters and becoming a Governor of the Town Lands (4, 5, 6). In 1601 he was named in a list of Justices of the Peace for



Cicely Wilmot, sister of Alice Wirdnam, from the brass in Wantage Church

Berkshire as "*Robert Wyrndnam Esquire, of Prior's Hold*" (7). He was one of the founder Governors of the Town Lands, which seems a little odd in view of the accusations made against his father, and he even lent £4 10s towards the costs of passing the Act of Parliament. I wonder whether William was truly guilty in the matter of the charity or if the whole episode was a legal fiction to establish the title to the lands involved, the origins of which may have become obscure.

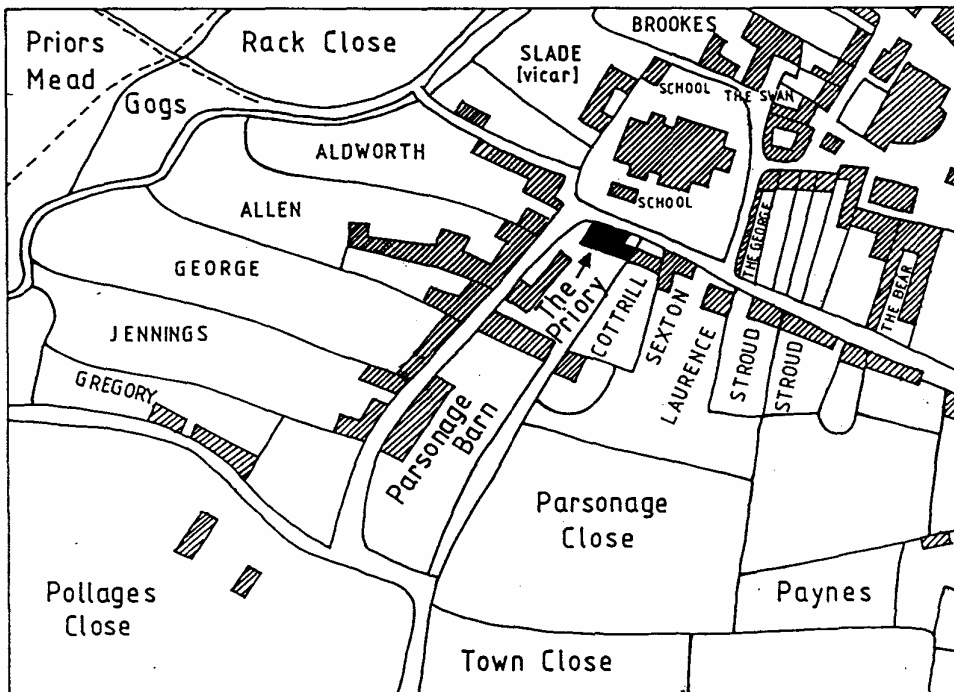
Most of the evidence would suggest that Robert died about 1612. He had passed the copyhold of the Priors Ham, the Priors Down and various lands and tenements to his eldest son, George, in 1610, and by 1611 George appeared as the "Farmer" (lessee) of Priorshold Manor (8). Robert sold the manors of Baldwyns and Wickes in Charlton in two parcels in 1609 and 1612, which left only the lease of Priorshold Manor and any personal properties in the town (9). Robert had signed the Accounts of the Governors of the Town Lands in 1600 and had been Churchwarden in 1607-8, but by 1613 George Wirdnam was signing the Accounts, in 1616 George received the Quit Rents, and in 1618-19 was a Churchwarden. However, Robert was named as a trustee in a deed of the Governors in 1617 and was recorded at the Heralds 1623 Visitation as "*surviving*" (1). Since no will or date of burial has yet appeared we can only speculate that he may have retired to Farnborough, Letcombe or London in 1612 and left George to run the estate. He was certainly not in Wantage for the Lay Subsidy of 1625 (10) and by that of 1640-1 his wife, Alice, was recorded as "*Mistris Alice Wirdnam, widow*" and paid of tax of 24s for £3 income from lands jointly with her son in law. She was still alive in 1642 but that is the last which we hear of her (11).



The Hyde Arms

Margery Wirdnam, William's eldest daughter, married John Withens, a clergyman, around 1574, when she was about 14. This was an unusually young age for marriage during the Tudor period, although the age of consent for girls was still taken to be 12 as during the Medieval period. Betrothals and marriages amongst the peerage were occasionally still arranged this early, but amongst the yeomanry and gentry it was more usual for girls to be in their late teens or early twenties. Margery and John's first child, William, was born in 1575 and then there is a gap in the record for nearly ten years. It is likely that during this time Dr Wythens was serving in some other parish, and other children may have been born to them. By 1583 John Wythens was back as Vicar of Wantage, but the surviving wills and the Churchwardens' Accounts give no indication that he was a very active minister (12). The only signatures found are those of various curates and Dr Wythens does not seem to have attended any death beds to give spiritual comfort. Another son, John, was born in 1584 but died two years later in 1586 and a third son, Francis, was recorded in 1589. After that we have no further reference until John Wythen's resignation in 1594, probably to enable him to move to another parish. Neither John nor Margery are recorded as dying in Wantage, although their son, William, settled there and became a Governor of the Town Lands.

In 1574 Mary, William's second daughter, had married Robert Brookes, gentleman, at the exceptionally early age of twelve and a half, even younger than her sister. Interestingly, her first child was not born until 1581, when she was about 19, so perhaps the marriage was a business arrangement, with the consummation delayed until she "came of age" at



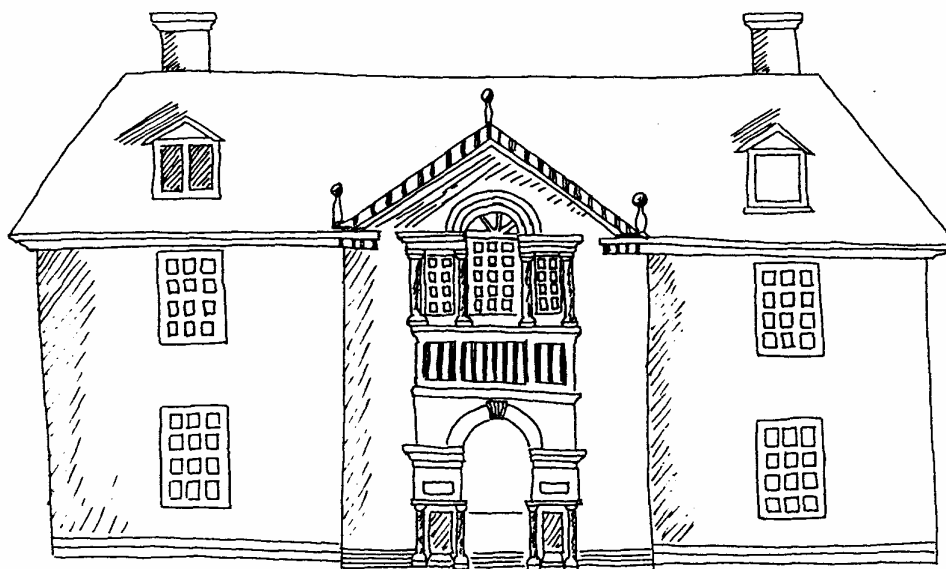
The area around The Priory, the manor house of Priorshold, where Robert Wirdnam lived in the early seventeenth century, based on the Priorshold Hearth Tax returns for 1663

18. The Brookes family rented part of Wantage Manor, and they may have lived in the remains of the Fitzwarin manor house to the west of Grove Street (13). Robert and Mary had eight children before her death in 1600, at the age of 38.

Elizabeth, the third daughter, was married in 1582 to John Sudberye. No children are recorded for the marriage and she died ten years later. The fourth sister, Dorothy, was married at the more usual age of 21 to Jasper Scoles who farmed at Charlton. They had eleven children, eight sons and three daughters, before Dorothy's death in 1628. Two sons certainly died as children, and possibly a third as well, and only one daughter is recorded as marrying, so the relentless statistics of child mortality reduced William's grandchildren. William's youngest sons, Edward and Francis, are as shadowy as many other members of their family. Apart from their marriages, and the christenings of several children, only a few references are to be found for each of them. In 1596 John Aldworth of Charlton owed 13s 4d to "*Edward Wirdnam, gentleman*", and in 1599 Edward and Francis owed 7s and 40s to John Kepes of Grove, whilst by 1607 Francis also owed £10 10s to Tristram. Pratt of Grove (14, 15, 16). Edward had married about 1592, and he and his wife, Alice, had nine children, two of whom, died as babies. The birth of their son John in 1605 is the last that we hear of them in Wantage. However, he was mentioned in a case in the Court of Chancery in 1635-6 when he was described as "*Edward Wirdnam of Silchester...Gentleman*". On 31 March 1636 he was called as a witness in his own right and was described as "*Edward Wirdnam of Silchester and Stratfield Saye for 21 years, born at Wantage, Berks and aged 66 years*". There is a slight discrepancy in his age as he was actually 69 but this is almost certainly the same man (17). Francis had probably moved to Stratfield Saye at the same time. He had married Ellen Fawkner in 1600 and the

birth of a daughter, Ellen, was recorded in 1604. He had lived for some time at East Hanney (18) but after the reference to a debt in 1607 we hear no more of him until his death at Stratfield Saye in 1621 (19) His death was probably unexpected as he was only 49, and he did not have time to make a will. His brother Edward dealt with his estate, and arranged financial matters for Ellen and her seven children, who were left moderately wealthy. The last we know of this branch of the family is when Edward's son, Roger, died at Aldermaston in 1672 (20).

Meanwhile, Robert's children had been growing up. His eldest son, George, received "*a Messuage and various closes of land ... called the Priors Ham*" in 1610 and seems to have set up home there (8). This first house at The Ham, was probably only a large farm house and may have been much nearer to the road. He made a good marriage in 1616 to Elizabeth Tipping, daughter of Bartholomew Tipping of Woolley House, south of Wantage, and the Priors Ham house, all the lands around it and the Priors Down were signed over to his father-in-law to hold in trust for Elizabeth and her children (8). George undertook the usual duties of a local landowner, acting as Churchwarden, becoming a Governor of the Town Lands and holding Manor Courts to administer his estate (4, 6, 8). He and Elizabeth had five children, four daughters and a son. At least one daughter died



Drawing of The Ham, from the sketch on the Priorshold Map of 1754. Built in the early eighteenth century, this replaced George Wirdnaw's house which probably lay nearer to the road.

as a child but two others grew up and married.

Robert's eldest daughter, Katherine, had married William Stevens and two children, a son and a daughter, are recorded. Robert's next three daughters, Bridget, Mary and Cecilia, slip from sight, although they may have married out of the parish, or in London as their brother did. The fifth daughter, Elizabeth, married Francis Yeatman, a lawyer, in 1626 (21) and they seem to have remained in Wantage where they had eight children (3). They may have stayed to support Alice in her widowhood since no record of Robert is found after 1623. Robert's youngest son, Thomas, had been provided with a small estate in the town when he was only six, and was probably intended for the life of a country gentleman (8). He had just embarked on his public duties, attending Vestry meetings, witnessing a will and appraising goods for an inventory, when he died in January 1633 (22, 23). Thomas' death meant that George and Bartholomew were the only Wirdnams, in the direct

male line, left in Wantage. George also died tragically early, at the age of 43 in 1629. No will survives for George but he must have made some provision for his family as there is reference later to a trust to be administered by Elizabeth's Tipping relatives (24).

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