

COURTWICK, TITMORE GREEN,  
LITTLE WYMONDLEY

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The name 'Courtwick', although with different spellings and perhaps with different pronunciations, can be traced back for more than five centuries. In the manor records of 1438 it was spelt Kotewyk and a few years later it became Cotewyke. After the year 1700 the most usual spelling had become Courtwick. The origin and meaning of the first part of the name is therefore doubtful, while the word 'wick' we are told, had the Saxon meaning of a dairy farm. But the local meaning, still in use among the older country folk, relates to any small enclosed piece of land, so that a small field with a pond in it may be called Pondywick. It is likely enough, therefore, that a small field with a cottage on it might be called 'Cotwick'. But alas for picturesque and historic names; the Courtwick cottage is now referred to as No. 10, Titmore Green.

Early admissions and surrender through the manor court refer to the property in different ways. In 1476 it was called a parcel of land, held by Margaret Carpenter. In 1508 John Maunfield held a croft called Cotwyke for which he paid a quit rent of two shillings. In 1549 the property of his son Robert Maunfield is described simply as a tenement ('holding'), and this word might or might not include a dwelling house. The word 'tenement' occurs again in the years 1558, 1606 and 1624, but when John Woodward<sup>1</sup> died in 1637 it was reported that he held a messuage called Cotwyk and one acre of land belonging to it. The use of the word 'messuage' tells us that the cottage which we see today had already been built at that time. John bequeathed<sup>2</sup> the property to his brother Edmond who was then aged eighteen years. Edmond Woodward became a lawyer and in his will<sup>3</sup> dated 1659 he is described as 'late of the Inner Temple'. He bequeathed the sum of twenty pounds yearly to provide a scholarship for two students at Peterhouse College, Cambridge, the money to be taken from the sale of his properties, among which was the cottage at Titmore Green. But before we proceed with tracing the names of subsequent owners of the cottage, we may go back a few years and see what the will of one of the tenants has to tell us about the house.

In the year 1630 Agnes Sharpe who was a widow, was the tenant. The fact that she died in the house in that year, tells us that it must have been built at least some years before 1630. The will which she made, probably on her deathbed, together with the inventory of her goods, gives us some idea of her life style.

The will is well written in the Secretary hand, but is signed by her mark, indicating that she herself could not write. Legacies include an annuity of twenty shillings

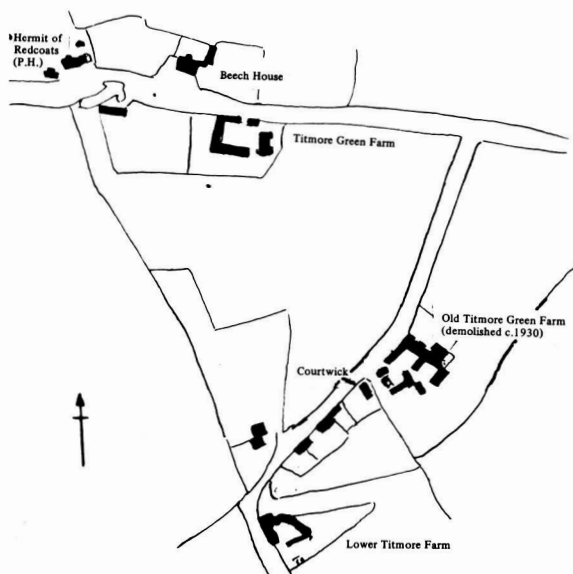
to her father William Garner, a sum of fifteen pounds to her son and six shillings and eight pence to each of her five nieces and nephews. To her son Edward she bequeathed a selection of household items which seem to have been chosen to provide him with essentials if he lived by himself. He was to receive 'two pewter platters, one of the biggest sort and the other of the lesser sort, my little candlesticks, one salt cellar, my little brass pot, one round table and little chair, two plain stools, my little drink firkin (nine gallon cask), one pair of hemp sheets and one pair of tow sheets, one short tablecloth, two plain narrow pillowbeares (pillowcases), two plain table napkins, one boarded bedstead which I use to lie on, one coverlet which I commonly use to lie on the same bed, and my second biggest kettle'. The remainder of her household goods she left to her daughter Elizabeth. The inventory of her goods is attached to the will and the three persons appointed to 'prays' (value), moved through the house writing down a list of her effects in each room. It was not a long journey for them because the cottage at that time consisted of a single ground floor room with one undivided room above and a lean-to shed.

The list starts with items 'in the Hall', the ground floor room. In it were noted a cupboard, a potshelf, two chairs, three stools, two tubs, two drink firkins, two bowls, two wheels (probably spinning wheels) and three painted cloths (for wall hangings) of a total value of eleven shillings. There was also a brass pot, three kettles, six pewter dishes and five other small pieces of pewter, a frying pan, a spit, a pair of andirons or firedogs and a pair of bellows. These items together with 'certain other trumpery' were valued at eighteen shillings and sixpence. 'In the Chamber', the upstairs room, was a bedstead, a coverlet, two each of blankets, bolsters and pillows, a mattress, three coffers (chests) a small chair and painted cloths, together valued at twenty two shillings and fourpence. Listed separately were eight pairs of sheets, four pillowcases, three tablecloths and four table napkins of a total value of forty

eight shillings and eight pence. Her wearing apparel was worth twenty three shillings and four pence and there was 'certain course wool and twelve and a half yards of course woollen cloth' worth twenty seven shillings. Perhaps this large amount of wool and cloth was the product of her own spinning wheels and the loom of her neighbour who was a weaver. But the highest value of any items in the inventory was 'Ready money and debts owing unto her at the time of her decease, ninety three pounds and four pence' – perhaps mostly money lent at interest. In the yard and lean-to woodhouse were two hens, firewood and lumber.

The impression gained by reading these documents, is that Agnes Sharpe in her rented cottage had been living a simple but moderately comfortable life for a widow at that time, perhaps adding to her investment income by doing some spinning. Her eight pairs of sheets and other linen may indicate that she had lived in a larger house when her husband was alive.

To return to the sequence of owners of Cotewick. After Edmond Woodward had died in 1659, the new owner was John Maynard, a farmer who lived at the adjacent Old Titmore Green Farmhouse (now demolished) and the occupier of Cotewick was John Ward. In 1664 John Maynard sold<sup>4</sup> the cottage to George Nedham who lived at Little Wymondley Priory. George died<sup>5</sup> in 1669 – he is described as 'esquire' in the manor records, and Cotewick passed to his son George, described as 'gentleman'. But the cottage was immediately sold to the occupier Edward Gardner, and members of the Gardner family were to be owners and occupiers for more than a century to come. In 1705 the report to the manor court<sup>6</sup> states 'Edward Gardner, carpenter, surrendered a cottage occupied by himself, and a meadow with a barn built thereon called Courtwicke Meade for the use of Edward Gardner junior for



Titmore Green, Wymondley (TL 214263) as it was in 1900.  
The old open common was enclosed in 1811.

life and then to Elizabeth Blesdell, daughter of Thomas Blesdell of Layston, Elizabeth being the intended wife of Edward junior, and then to their heirs'. It may be noted that the former Cotewick has now become Courtwick.

Edward died in 1757, his wife Elizabeth having died earlier. His will<sup>7</sup> shows no details of his possessions, but directs that small legacies should be paid to his three daughters and one grandson. The cottage and the residue of the estate were left to his son Edward. The will was witnessed by John Carter, the farmer who lived at Lower Titmore Farm, and by John Pym, a member of the well known family of politicians who lived at Wymondley House.

By the end of the eighteenth century, three generations of the Gardner family had lived in the cottage. All succeeding heads of households had borne the same Christian name and all had been described as carpenters. But in 1791 the last Edward Gardner died childless. His will<sup>8</sup> directed that two small legacies should be paid to relatives and as to the residue of his real and personal property 'I give, bequeath and devise unto my nephew-in-Law William Wren of Whitwell in the parish of Pauls Walden, Wheelwright'. The will was witnessed by his neighbour John Carter and by Robert Tristram the solicitor of Hitchin and Wymondley Bury. The quit rent on Courtwick and the meadow was stated to be two shillings and five pence halfpenny.

The Wren family owned the property for nearly half a century but do not seem to have lived in it because the name of a tenant, William Creek, occurs after the Gardner family had gone. William Wren<sup>9</sup> died in 1834 and in 1837 his sons Samuel and Josiah sold<sup>10</sup> the cottage and land to Daniel Goodwin for £183. When Daniel died in 1853 he left the cottage to his wife Mary. The land which had formerly

been a meadow was let out in plots and called 'garden ground', the former name for allotment gardens. Mary Goodwin died in 1863 and in her will<sup>11</sup> directed that her property should be sold and that half the proceeds should go to Priscilla Blindell who kept the grocers shop in Little Wymondley village street, and that the remainder should be divided between her two brothers John and Bruce Allen, carpenters of Todds Green. It does not seem that the Goodwins had lived in Courtwick, because the tenant there was named as James Harrison.

In 1863 Priscilla Blindell bought the whole property for £300 and the Bill of Sale<sup>12</sup> states that four cottages had recently been built on the ground and were then occupied by James Blindell, James Bray, widow Dearmer and Joseph Smith. These are the four cottages which we see today, numbered six to nine Titmore Green. After Priscilla Blindell died in 1872 her executors sold Courtwick, its land and the four cottages to George Lucas, the owner of the Elmwood Estate and kinsman of James Lucas who had achieved notoriety as a hermit. When George Lucas died in 1893 the property descended to his nephew, Edward Lake Walker. At the time of the latter's death in 1927, Courtwick was stated to be occupied by Mrs Bygrave and the four cottages by J.W. Myers, F.J. Barker, – Chambers and G. Goodship. The whole property was bought by John and Jeremiah Inns, merchants and landowners of Stevenage. Subsequently the property was acquired by the Kitchiner family.

Courtwick has been altered very little during its span of life of at least three and a half centuries. Today it has not a great many more amenities than when it was first built. A brick floor has been laid in the 'Hall' to replace the beaten earth floor of earlier times. The upper floor has been divided and there are some other partitions and at some time a second staircase was added. The water supply was at first no doubt obtained from the nearby stream and later from a well a short distance away. In the 1930s a water main was laid and water is now obtained from a standpipe in the lane by the cottage. There is no main drainage but a dustman collects refuse weekly. Perhaps the most notable change was when electricity was installed. The oak frame of the building is visible in parts but the earlier wattle and daub between the studs has been replaced by brick infilling and indeed some parts of the walls have been rebuilt in brick, probably mostly in the eighteenth century when the studs began to decay. The outside circular brick-built bread oven remains, once fired by a faggot from within the hall but it has not been used for many years. The single wide chimney, the top part of which has been rebuilt, was up to recently swept each year by a courageous lady who ascended it inside, by the built-in steps, brandishing a holly bush in the old country custom, to dislodge the soot. Below at the hearth, there are still single nooks for comfort on cold evenings. But the thatched roof is now deteriorating rapidly and the cottage has (1983) been vacated by its last occupier and is now empty. Although listed as a 'building of special architectural or historic interest', great concern must be felt for the prospects of its survival.

### *References*

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|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Herts C.R.O. 59506    | 7 Herts C.R.O. 52HW56             |
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