

# Castle Acre *‘The Past is All Around Us’*

## Information about Wills and Inventories

In 2021, the Parish Council was awarded a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a one-year project to discover more about the history and wildlife of Castle Acre.

The Castle and the Priory, the Church and the Bailey Gate draw visitors and are well-documented so the project's volunteers concentrated on researching and exploring the other areas of the village and the surrounding landscape.

### Wills and Inventories

Medieval wills provide insights into the lives of ordinary people: their family and social networks, their religious convictions and piety, their wealth, their personal and domestic possessions, their livestock and the tools of their trade.

The wills also provide names of numerous relatives, servants and friends in the locality.

After the Reformation, wills were worded very differently with “worldly goods” being left simply to family and friends, and rather than payments for masses and candles, you will find bequests towards the repair of the local church and bequests to charities and public works.

Wills were primarily concerned with real estate.

Before 1870 all property of a married woman legally belonged to her husband.  
The content of a will

- Gives the testator's name, place of residence and date written – and sometimes their occupation.
- Often starts with the phrase “being sick in body but of good remembrance I make this my last will and testament ...”.
- States the fate of the soul and the body.
- Makes bequests to religious organisations to reduce the time a testator's soul would spend in Purgatory.

- Names who will inherit property and possessions.

Gives the names of the executor and witnesses

Wills were often written by scribes, but signatures give insights into literacy.

Inventories

- Every will should have included an inventory of the testator's moveable possessions and any money owing to them.
- Inventories were made by a person's peers, who moved from room to room in the dwelling as well as through any outbuildings, valuing all the goods.
- An inventory did not have to include items bequeathed in the will.
- Debts owed by the testator were not included.
- Inventories have often been detached from wills and lost.
- Most surviving Norfolk inventories date between 1580 and 1770.

The value of an inventory

- provides details of furniture and other household possessions.
- Gives details of animals kept.
- States crops grown.
- Allows a tentative reconstruction of the house.
- The time of year an inventory was made affected the agricultural products listed.

## *Glossary and Notes*

- Agricultural wages – 4d per day in 1500, 8d per day in 1600, 12d per day in 1650, 16-18d per day in 1750.
- A priest's salary or stipend - £6 per year in 1530.
- A coomb of wheat = 18 stone; a coomb of barley = 16 stone.
- Meslyn is a mixture of wheat and rye.
- Indulgence – “a grant of remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory”.
- Scala Coeli – an indulgence based on a mass in an abbey just outside Rome; first introduced into England in 1500 and widely popular by 1520.

## *Limitations of Inventories*

- Only a small proportion of the population made wills – those with over £5 of property to bequeath.
- Many wills and inventories have not survived.
- A will may simply state “I leave all my worldly goods and possessions to ... .. and make him my executor”.
- Inventories may have been under-valued.