

The 17th Century

The year 1642 was the start of hostilities that became known as The English Civil War, when Englishman fought Englishman, and worse still, father fought son and brother fought brother. By 1646 the fighting had largely finished but politically the country was in turmoil. Beckett House was owned at this time by Sir Henry Marten, but it was his son, also called Henry, who became embroiled in the turmoil of the time. It was young Henry who became known as a 'Regicide,' and his signature on the King's Death Warrant in 1649, bears that out. Some authors of Shrivenham history refer to Beckett House being partially damaged by Royalist forces but there is no definitive documentary evidence to substantiate it. However, there is evidence to strongly suspect that Beckett has been confused with the Marten's principal house at Longworth near Faringdon. However, we do know that the house at Beckett at that time almost certainly stood a little to the North of where the present house stands. This placed it perfectly in line with the ride that led directly to Shrivenham church. (See picture below).



Highlighted is the Coach Road leading directly to the Church from the site of the earlier Beckett House

After the chaos of the Civil War, the restored monarch, Charles II, was in much need of money. Parliament agreed that he must have some form of income and on May 19, 1662, the bill for laying an imposition upon chimney hearths received royal assent. The tax was to serve as a source of income for the king, whereby twice a year, (Michaelmas Sept 29 & Lady Day March 25) one shilling was to be paid for every fire, hearth and stove within each dwelling. It was intended to be a fair tax in that those with grander properties paid more money. But, like all taxes, it was far from popular. Houses worth less than 20 shillings (£1) in annual rent or containing no more than £10 worth of moveable goods, were exempt, as were the poorest inhabitants of each parish. However, they were obliged to obtain a certificate from numerous sources in order to qualify. The lists that survive provide us with names and there are two for Beckett as follows: -

BRO. MF 652. No 84

A Return made by the Tythingman of Beckett October 14th 1662 of all fire hearths being in the Liberty.

Rowland Barkingham gent	2 hearths
John Farr	1
Edward Rose	1
Henry Godfry	1
Henry Pemberton	1
One house not inhabited	1

Given to the Constable of the hundred £0.7.0

Henry Pemberton
Tythingman

BRO. MF 653. No 613

A Return made by the Tythingman of Beckett September for the fire hearths 1663

Rowland Barkingham gent	4
Henry Pemberton	2
Henry Godfry	1
John Farr	1
Edward Rose	1
	£0.9.0

This confirms that a small community existed at Beckett after the Civil War. However, at present we have no way of distinguishing if these people dwelt separate from, or lived within, the surviving buildings of Beckett House.