

The 18th Century

As the 17th century drew to a close, events were to take place within the descent of the Lords of the Manor of Beckett that would bring it into the Barrington dynasty. It was an unusual circumstance which brought it about and started with the first John Wildman.

In his Will, (PRO PROB 11/527) dated October 1670, Wildman describes himself as; *'Of Beckett, in the County of Berks, Esq,'* thereby confirming that he is resident there. He continues, *'I give to my wife, Lucy Wildman, all the lands, tenements etc, currently occupied by Henry Pemberton, Edward Rose and John Stone, of Beckett, Yeomen'.* So, three years later Pemberton and Rose who appeared on the hearth tax lists are still there. Of the buildings, Wildman leaves to Lucy also, *'Lodgings for herself and servants in that small house of Beckett, with all necessary rooms for the greatest convenience of her life. That those small buildings will afford, together with one Moiety of the use, benefit and convenience, of all and every the Court Yards, Gardens and Orchards belonging to the said House of Beckett.'* He leaves the actual Manor House of Beckett to his only son also called John, and he adds that, *'He is to honour Lucy Wildman as though he was born of her body,'* Lucy being his Stepmother. John Wildman senior also left to his son, *'All of my Manors at Shrinham, ie. Shrinham Salop, Shrinham Claycourt and Shrinham Stallpitts, together with the Hundred of Shrinham. Also the manor of Beckett itself and the Capital Messuage of the farm.'* It was this large estate that John Wildman Junior had no heir to whom he could pass on. Instead, when he died in 1710, he left the whole lot to somebody he barely knew, John Shute. Six years later the fortunate John Shute also inherited the estate of Tofts in Essex, home of Francis Barrington. His good luck ever continuing, John Shute became the recipient of a newly created Peerage of Ireland and became Viscount Barrington. Choosing to make his home there, in 1720, John Shute Barrington became the first Viscount Barrington of the Manor of Beckett.

Although we have very little information concerning day to day events at Beckett at this time, the odd snippet does emerge from some documents. For example, within the Will of John Barrington, (PRO PROB 11/690 dated 1726) he referred to his gardens as an item, *'I give and devise unto my said wife the Wilderness newly planted and added to my gardens belonging to my Mansion House at Becket in the County of Berks...'* Just what the 'Wilderness' consisted of we don't know. Hopefully, it will come to light eventually.

We know that around this time the China House (also known as the 'Fishing Lodge' and 'Summer House') was built by the ornamental lake. It still stands today and has gained much acclaim over the years for its fineness. (photo below). A Book of English Gardens, by Gloag, describes the building as, *'One of the greatest treasures in the way*

of garden architecture...set like a rare gem in the midst of flowers, with a background of dark yews.'



It was during this early part of the 18th century that scandal was afoot on the estate. A list of Penances (apologies to God for sinful behaviour) noted that Ann Pemberton of Beckett was named for, '*Fornication with Thomas New.*' She was summoned to be present in the porch of the chapel at Longcote on Sun July 20, 1715, where she would learn what she must do and say in front of the whole congregation. (BRO M.F. 96248. Slide No 6). The name Pemberton is one that occurs frequently within Beckett documents.

Within the Berkshire County Archives at Reading there is reference to a legal wrangle between Pleydell and Barrington. (BRO D/Epb/L2) The Pleydell family at the time were holding the Manor of Coleshill and had bits of land dotted around the various manors in Watchfield, Shrivenham, Bourton and Longcot. This was also the case for the Beckett Estate. There were many local customs still in force concerning tithes, copyholds, rent rights, boundaries etc, and became a legal nightmare. It was one of the many reasons for the introduction of the Enclosures Act later in the 18th century in an attempt to sweep away many of these complicated rights.

The documents were in a fragile state and couldn't be produced without prior application. However, I was eventually allowed a gentle look at them. They are dated April 17, 1724, to Aug 21, 1734, so it was a legal dispute that went on for a decade. The main thrust of the arguments was concerning land boundaries and what ancient rights, did or did not apply. On July 30, 1731, Pleydell's lawyer wrote, '*That Lord Barrington shall admit all my lands in Shrivenham and Bourton to be Freehold*

and acquitted from all Harriots quitrents messauge money and from all payments and acknowledgments whatever to ye Manor of Shrivenham or to himself and convey accordingly.'

At the end of a long document is a note written at a later date; '*Upon ye death of Thomas Pleydell the son (who by the deed of 1714 was only a trustee for Sir Mark as to all the Copyholds in Shriv) Lord Barrington seized the Cattle of Thomas as Herriots in respect of these Copiholds as well as the Copiholds in Bourton which were the said Thomas's and Which he was actually in possession of at ye time of his death.'*

However, in true gentlemanly fashion, the two aristocrats were still very amicable towards each other. There is a letter in this folio written by Lord Barrington himself to Pleydell and the ink has flecks of gold in it which still sparkle when read. It's headed, '*Beckett House, Oct ye 14, 1729.'* He signs himself off as, '*Barrington.'*' Then added a PS, '*I return you my thanks for your present of Alder wine. It is extremely good. I have had ye pleasure to drink ye Founders health in it several times. When my wifes Orange wine is ready she designs to ask your favour of you and Mrs Pleydell to taste it. She joins with me in complimenting you.'*

John Shute Barrington died on December 14, 1734. To read more information on the circumstances of his death and subsequent funeral, please read, '*Beckett & The Barringtons.'*' He was succeeded by his eldest son known as William Wildman Shute Barrington, who inherited the title of Viscount, and became the 2nd Lord Barrington of the Manor of Beckett. His reign was to be a long one lasting a little over 60 years, and it's during this period that we have a considerable amount of information