Humphrey Ryddell and the *Swan* at Coleshill: a sixteenth-century small-town innkeeper and his inn

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The cosy and reassuring idealised image of the inn, with its sturdy half-timbered exterior and interior full of warmth and bucolic conviviality, is a potent symbol in the popular imagination of the past. Medieval inns occupied the most prominent position in the hierarchy of medieval drinking establishments, catering for wealthier travellers, and innkeepers frequently stood at the apex of both the victualling trade and of small town society. Inns often had a commanding position in the townscape, frequently in the market place. With their easily remembered and distinguishing names, they provided social space as well as food and drink for their customers, accommodation for travellers and livery for their guests’ horses.1 Contemporaries sometimes regarded them and their landlords less favourably, the commonest complaints about innkeepers being that they forestalled grains, broke the assize of bread and ale, sold horse-bread and fodder at high prices, and competed unfairly with cooks in retailing processed foodstuffs. Some town authorities voiced suspicions of such establishments and their customers, passing byelaws and ordinances expressing concerns over the unsavoury character of some of their patrons and the potentially nefarious activities they might host, such as gaming, gambling, general idleness and prostitution.2

Historians have also explored their role in providing venues for private business transactions in comfortable, warm and well-furnished rooms, where patrons could be fed as they met clients to conduct business convivially away from the formal structure and regulation of the market place.3 Others have emphasised their profitability, which encouraged large scale investment in their buildings by lay and ecclesiastical landlords. Medieval innkeepers often enjoyed considerable economic resources and dominance within their locality, while many diversified commercially, the inn being but one element among varied business activities. In fifteenth-century towns brewing often became concentrated in the hands of innkeepers.4

Inns are most often associated with an urban environment. By the late-fifteenth century large centres, such as York, Ipswich and Winchester, might typically support ten to twenty inns, while smaller market towns might have as many as half a dozen, although at Newmarket by 1472 there were thirteen inns or larger alehouses.5 In late medieval Warwickshire inns are recorded at the market towns of Shipston-on-Stour, Atherstone, Nuneaton, Sutton Coldfield and Polesworth and at the informal trading centre at Knowle.6 Others had rural locations, often meeting the needs of travellers on busy roads, such as Halford on the Fosse Way or the *George* at Middleton on the well-travelled route between Lichfield and Coventry.7

By the early sixteenth century there were at least six named inns or larger alehouses in Coleshill, a town which lies roughly equidistant from Birmingham, Tamworth and Coventry. The town was long established, formalised in 1207 when Osbert de Clinton II obtained a market charter from King John. The diversity and numbers of traders, merchants and craftsmen by the mid-thirteenth century suggests that it flourished—Coleshill was sufficiently established by 1275 to send two representatives to Edward I’s first parliament—and during the later Middle ages it sustained many resident craftsmen and traders, while the weekly market attracted people from a wide area.8 This was helped by its position on a significant crossroads. On the Gough Map (circa 1360) it is shown on the road between Lichfield and Coventry, part of the long-distance Welsh Road used by drovers moving from the pastures of Wales to London, and with linking roads from the north-west. At Coleshill this was crossed by a road from Birmingham leading eastwards into Leicestershire and beyond. Throughout the year these routes brought travellers, traders and drovers from well beyond the immediate hinterland served by the market.9

Inns were first recorded in England towards the end of the thirteenth century. The earliest reference from Coleshill is from 1295, when a ‘hospitale’ abutting the tenement of John, son of Walter de Gudelsdone, is mentioned. Another early, albeit imperfect, reference is in a deed of 1259x1279, whereby John de Clinton I granted to Richard his tailor a messuage with appurtenances, probably in the High Street; a later hand has written on the back ‘original deed concerning a tenement in Coleshill called la Swan’.10 There were other inns in the town by the fifteenth century. The *Angel*, first recorded in 1456, stood on the eastern side of High Street, while the *Bell* appears in a survey of 1495. The present establishment of that name is on the road to Birmingham but no building
is shown in this position on the earliest map of Coleshill (1783): the earlier one was probably in High Street. Other inns mentioned in the early sixteenth century were the Lion, known as the White Lion in later centuries, on Church Hill facing the market place close to the churchyard, and the Woolpack–Woolsack and the Crown whose locations are less certain. There may also have been others for which documentation is lacking.13

Although inns were less numerous in the countryside, by the sixteenth century there were at least three in Coleshill’s primary market zone, all sited strategically on major roads. The George at Middleton, first mentioned in the early fifteenth century, stood on the busy road to Lichfield which passed through the west of the parish. Two other inns mentioned in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries also catered for long distance travellers. The Gammon of Bacon was at Bacons’ End, a small cluster of dwellings on the well-travelled Chester Road, another route much favoured by cattle drovers and in later centuries by stagecoaches from London to the North West. There was also the White Lion at Shustoke, providing facilities for those travelling through Coleshill towards the East Midlands.12

In Coleshill it is possible to identify a number of innkeepers from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries. As in other small towns, many were drawn from a combination of specialist victuallers, merchants or those with other commercial interests, and some were even members of the gentry. At best, inns were highly profitable businesses, many innkeepers enjoying an income comparable with that of a small gentry estate. Their potential to generate revenues encouraged religious institutions, lords and merchants to invest generously in their construction and maintenance. At Coleshill some were owned or managed at various times by local gentry families such as the Digbys, the Lecrofts, the Mountfords, the Roches and the Rugeleys. Their profitability is reflected in high rental values and the high tax assessments of many of their owners.13 Town innkeepers were often wealthy men, long-standing members of the urban elite and active in local, and sometimes royal, government through participation in courts and office holding.14

The 1524 and 1552 lay subsidy lists for Coleshill suggest that, after Sir Reginald Digby, the town’s innkeepers were among the highest assessed taxpayers: for example, in 1525 Humphrey Greville was appraised at £10, William Hussey at £10 and Martin Rygley at £15.15 Greville and Hussey styled themselves gentlemen but both ran the Lion at some point in the early sixteenth century. William Hussey probably held it in 1495 when a survey shows he paid 9s 3d, the largest rent of any tenant in the town. His considerable resources were evident on his death in 1503, when he held four messuages in Coleshill, one of which was ‘le Lyon’. This remained in his family until 1533 when the holding was divided among his granddaughters.16 Another member of a gentry family involved in running an inn was Martin Ridgeley or Rugeley, who appears in the Coleshill court rolls between 1518 and 1536 as owner of a ‘lodging house’. In 1520s the Crown was held variously by the Digbys and the Mountfords of Kingshurst and in 1527 was leased for life by Sir Henry Willoughby of Middleton and his wife, Dame Alice (widow of Sir Simon Digby), to Richard Worth for 33s 8d a year. A yeoman, Worth was bailiff of Coleshill by 1522, and in the courts of the 1520s and 1530s was frequently amerced as a ‘common lodging house keeper who sold victuals at excessive prices’. He was a member of the guild of Knowle from 1506: perhaps, in addition to any religious motives, he felt it was essential, given his range of economic activities, to join an organisation which provided not only fellowship but also the opportunity to network with people of similar status, resources and aspirations.17

Deeds document the changing ownership of the Angel. In 1416 Richard Hawnell, a servant of Sir William Mountford, received from his master a messuage there, which had come into Mountford’s hands as a result of the outlawing of Ralph Toly in the same year. Hawnell’s involvement in victualling is reflected in his pseudonym Richard ‘of the Botery’, or Buttery, a place where alcoholic drink was stored. He managed the Angel in the first half of the fifteenth century and also cultivated at least ten acres of land in the open fields of Coleshill.18 By the mid-fifteenth century the Angel was held by Edmund de la Launde, who had purchased it from Thomas de la Roche, lord of Castle Bromwich, emphasising the active involvement of gentry in the ownership of Coleshill inns. By 1477 it was sold on to Thomas Babbbethorpe, sometimes known as Thomas Burton but more often as ‘o’the Selar’, suggesting expertise and experience in victualling. Babbbethorpe first appears in Coleshill documents in 1451, when he leased lands and tenements from William Lawson, a baker, including a two-storey building in Coleshill, and farmed the wood and underwood of ‘Rokesley’ for two years from Sir William Mountford.19 Babbbethorpe sold it to his son, known as Simon Scotte, but sometimes as ‘o’the Selar’, who then leased it back to his father for ten years. The son was a draper of Well Street in Coventry and clearly appreciated the potential of an inn to generate revenues to supplement those he made in the cloth trade.20 Thomas seems to have died before 1490 when Simon quitclaimed the Angel to his brother John, also known as ‘o’the Selar’.21

Soon afterwards William Abell, vicar of Coleshill, and John Seller, son and heir of Thomas Babbbethorpe, enfeof the Angel to Henry Badeley, who was also leasing the Swan. In 1508 Badeley’s widow granted the Angel to John Bond of Coventry. It was then described as three cottages with an adjoining garden and a substantial holding of forty acres of arable land. Bond was a wealthy clothier and also a Merchant of the Staple of Calais, and was the son of Thomas Bond, who had founded a hospital at Bablake in Coventry in 1506. John entered landed society by his acquisition before 1515 of the small manor of Ward End in the parish of Aston where, to emphasise his gentry status, he built a chapel, now St Mary and St Margaret’s church, and emparked thirty acres in Little Bromwich to keep deer.22 Between 1518 and 1527 ownership of the Angel was disputed:
Christopher Jackson, a ‘sherman’ of London, and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of John of the Selar and niece to Simon Scotte, contested Bond’s right to the property. This continued involvement of wealthy merchants from London whose origins lay in Coventry, and of a member of the local gentry who had risen from the mercantile class, further indicates the value of the inn to the commercially aware. By 1527 Jackson and his wife granted the Angel to Humphrey Greville and Katherine his wife, well-established innkeepers in the town, who at some point in the early sixteenth century had owned the Lion. However, in 1534 Bond sold the Angel to John Harman or Vesey, bishop of Exeter, originally from a gentry family in Sutton Coldfield, who still enjoyed strong ties with many families in the area.

The involvement of gentry as innkeepers is further illustrated by William Lecroft, a gentleman who held neighbouring Marston Green. For most of the fifteenth century his family were resident in Coleshill, even bequeathing money by 1490 to found a chantry in the parish church. In addition to his modest landed resources he also held the Swan which in 1490 he leased to the lessee of the Angel, Henry Badeley and Anne his wife. It was described as a ‘mese place [called] The Swane with all manner of houses longyng thereto with all the tanne and gardens’, as well as three parcels of meadow. Another member of the guild of Knowle, Badeley was among the town’s elite, holding the position of bailiff and with sufficient resources and confidence in the profitability of the inn to take it on a 20-year lease in 1490 paying eight marks (£5 6s 8d) annually. In 1496 he was described as a yeoman of the Crown (valetudo corone domini regis), an office of the extended royal household—he was a well-connected man of substance. However, his involvement with the Swan was short lived and by 1495 it was back in the hands of Lecroft’s son-in-law Henry Lisle, an esquire who held Moxhull in Wishaw.

By the mid-sixteenth century Humphrey Ryddell was holding the Swan. The inventory compiled on his death in 1573 (see the appendix) gives a good impression of the rooms and their contents and of Ryddell’s wider commercial activities. His family had lived in the area for at least two generations. His father, usually called Robert Redhyll, held lands in Coleshill from the late fifteenth century and in 1523 was buried in the parish church. He also leased lands in the manors of Packers and Blyth in neighbouring Shustoke: on joining Knowle Digby, that autumn. Both the Ryddell brothers left armour and weapons in their inventories, hinting that at some point they had been more than yeoman farmers.

Robert’s sons played important roles in local society. William leased half the manor of Blyth in Shustoke and on his death in 1558 was living at Blyth Hall and presumably farming the estate, while renting the manor of Packers and some woodland in Shustoke. In 1534 he leased the parsonage at Bickenhill from Markyate Priory for 31 years, as well as the ‘Newe Garden’ and a pasture called ‘Blackpole’ held by the priories in Coleshill. He may have been farming these holdings for many years—in the 1525 lay subsidy for Shustoke he had the highest assessment (£7 3s 6d). In contrast to his younger brother Humphrey, his wealth was based exclusively on agriculture and at the time of his death he was running a mixed farm based at Blyth Hall with a dairy herd of 25 cows, a flock of 78 sheep and wheat, barley, rye, oats and peas to the value of £13 6s 8d. In his will he bequeathed money and linen for an altar cloth for Shustoke church, though he chose to be buried in Coleshill and left money to pay for an obit there on St George’s Day. Dugdale gives the wording of his and his brother’s wife’s floor brasses in Coleshill church. Although his younger brother Humphrey does not appear on the 1544 lay subsidy list for Coleshill, he was bailiff of the manor by 1546 and on his death in 1573 held the Swan and leased the vicarage and its tithes. He had acquired the advowson and right of patronage of the Coleshill living from George Southworte in 1565 for £63 6s 8d. He took charge of the revenues and goods to provide for the maintenance of services following the death of the vicar, John Fenton, in May 1566 and presented the next incumbent, Simon Digby, that autumn. Both the Ryddell brothers left armour and weapons in their inventories, hinting that at some point they had been more than yeoman farmers.

Some impression of an inn in late sixteenth-century Coleshill is provided by Humphrey Ryddell’s inventory. It has long been appreciated that inns were large-scale businesses employing many people and providing considerable and varied accommodation, often with galleries and ranges. They frequently contained separate, large, well-furnished lodging rooms known by individualistic and often exotic names, as well as ancillary rooms and buildings such as brewhouses, halls, kitchens and stabling. The Swan was a ‘gatehouse’ inn, its range of principal rooms fronting directly onto the High Street. A prominent passageway led to a rear courtyard, probably with ranges round, incorporating ancillary buildings, stabling and a hay barn, and with a wood pile and dunghill positioned strategically at its furthest limit. There were at least two storeys, probably in a range and possibly with stabling and other service rooms beneath the bedrooms. As with many inns, there was a garden at the rear of the property, where customers could relax while eating and drinking and where perhaps herbs and vegetables could be grown.

Inns varied considerably in size, the smallest only having one or two rooms. The Swan boasted some fourteen private bedrooms out of the 26 rooms listed. The inventory suggests that there were at least 25 beds but the capacity for guests was probably greater as beds were very often shared. There were also three in Ryddell’s own
parlour. Poorer customers may have slept on tables or on the floor in the communal rooms. Most of the guest rooms were well appointed with beds and bedding, tables, seating, fireplaces and storage, and many were decorated with painted cloths and some had maps and pictures. In these rooms guests could receive visitors or business acquaintances and have their meals served. Some had distinctive names—the Inner Paradise Chamber, Outer Paradise Chamber, the Queen’s Attorney’s Chamber and Lord Stafford’s Chamber. Some of the bedrooms were on the first floor, such as the Little Chamber next to the Stair’s Head. There were also communal rooms such as the Street Parlour and the Hall where food was served and a place to sleep was provided for those who could not afford private facilities. Inns also provided space for groups to assemble and accommodation for visitors attending such gatherings. Significantly, when inquiries were held in Coleshill in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they met in the Swan and it may well be that earlier gatherings—such as juries hearing the evidence for inquisitions post mortem in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—were also held there.

The Inner Paradise Chamber was the most comfortably furnished room, with two featherbeds and mattresses with bedding, a silk tester, a table with a carpet, two cupboards, curtains, painted cloths, a form and a chair with a cushion, a fireplace with bellows and hanging maps and pictures, valued in total at £3 14s 8d. The Queen’s Attorney’s Chamber, with movableable to the value of £3 10s 4d., was only slightly less well appointed, while more modestly furnished rooms such as the Little Chamber next to the Stair’s Head and the Little Chamber next to the Inner Paradise Chamber were comfortably provided with featherbeds, mattresses, bedding, fireplaces and tables with chairs. The Hall was one of the few domestic rooms which did not contain bedding: more sparsely furnished, it contained a board table, with two forms and two seats, probably for the innkeeper and his family to use as the guests ate at the tables in their rooms. There was an andiron with a fire fork and a harness, or suit of armour, with pole-axes and two spears (presumably hanging on the walls).

There were ancillary rooms where food and drink for guests and other customers could be prepared—the Kitchen, the Larder, the Old Buttery, the Buttery and the brew house—and a barn for storing grains, an ‘Ostery’ where the ostlers’ equipment was stored, and a hay barn to keep forage for the livery for the guests’ horses. The provision of food and drink to customers, resident and non-resident, was a major role of any inn and there was a considerable capacity, equipment and expertise to meet this demand. In 1452-3 the duke of Buckingham’s household at nearby Maxstoke castle had bought £28 of ale from John Lecroft, probably the brother of William Lecroft who held the household at nearby Maxstoke castle had bought £28 of ale from John Lecroft, probably the brother of William Lecroft who held the Swan. Assuming that £1 would buy about 160 gallons of ale, and allowing for a few shillings for transport costs, this suggests an impressive capacity for brewing there in the mid-fifteenth century. In 1573 there was a brewhouse with four pipes providing a capacity to store 504 gallons, a barrel holding thirty gallons, as well as a steeping vat where malt could be soaked, a brewing vat, an open vessel and a chest. There was other equipment for brewing in the Yell House. In the Old Buttery three barrels provided storage for another ninety gallons. There were also fifteen quarters of malt worth £6, sufficient to brew almost 1000 gallons, or 8000 pints, of ale.

The Kitchen reflected the need to supply refreshments, with large numbers of cooking vessels including pots and pans, kettles, a grater, skillets and frying pans as well as saucers, dishes and chafing dishes to serve the food. In another room called the Lathes there were many other utensils for preparing and serving food. The Larder contained items for food preparation, particularly in baking and cheese-making, while in a coffer in the High Chamber were chargers, platters and various small dishes, saucers, porringers and a chaffing dish, as well as chargers or large meat platters, platters, pewter dishes and saucers to serve food. There were pots of various measures to serve drinks to the guests including pottles, or half gallons, quarters, gallons, pints, a ‘lytell drinking pott of pewter’, leather bottles and a glass pint bottle, as well as six great basins. The Swan also had large quantities of linen for the guests’ bedrooms and for tableware, with 69 pairs of sheets and 23 board cloths and table cloths, as well as napkins, towels and quilts. The need for lighting for guests is reflected in the fifteen candlesticks stored in the Buttery, four of pewter with a further six ‘great candlesticks’, perhaps used for special occasions or esteemed patrons. Ryddell had been careful to invest some of his profits in silver, which might be used to impress favoured clients. He owned silver worth £6 15s 8d, including a goblet and bowl, as well as 41 silver spoons, distinguished by different shaped heads, some flat-headed and others round-headed, and some with more exotic designs such as lion’s heads and maiden’s heads.

Innkeepers often had diverse commercial interests. Ryddell’s wealth was derived from a combination of the income he generated from the Swan, his agricultural activities, and his leasing of the vicarage and its tithes, as well as any monies that came from his role as bailiff. A terrier of 1612 describes the vicarage as a considerable structure of six bays. The 1566 inventory of John Fenton, vicar of Coleshill, shows that it was very comfortably furnished, with a hall, parlour, high chamber and inner chamber, as well as a buttery and kitchen. Ryddell seems to have kept only a few belongings there: probably most of the building was occupied by the vicar or one of the other parochial staff. Fenton’s successor Simon Digby, who may have resided there in the late 1560s, was deprived of the living just after Ryddell’s death in 1573. Various curates of Coleshill, pastorally responsible for the chapels at Lea Marston, Nether and Over Whitacre, may also have lived there. Ralph Fox, curate to Simon Digby in the early 1570s, was perhaps housed there before he was inducted in 1574. There was also a complex of agricultural buildings—effectively a home farm—including a corn barn, hay barn, stable and cowhouse, as well as an orchard, garden, and fold yard, and a cottage with a barn of three and a half bays, and a yard. In 1573, in
addition to those at the Swan, Ryddell was certainly using some of the barns and the yard at the vicarage for storing grains, hay and timber.44

He owned livestock to the value of £23 9s, including a bull, six cows, four heifers, two steers and nine calves, with a flock of thirty sheep, thirteen pigs and five horses. A disputed payment from the late 1530s for a flock of a hundred wethers bought by his wife’s first husband at Atherstone, on the interface between the wood pasture pays of the Arden and the champion lands of west Leicestershire, suggests involvement in grazing and perhaps the wool trade many miles from Coleshill.45 By leasing the vicarage Ryddell considerably increased his resources: in the early seventeenth century the glebe comprised 35 acres of arable spread over Southfield and Blythefield, two of the common fields of Coleshill. There was pasture land and 53 acres of meadow land as well as a croft of eight acres and a leasow, or pasture field, containing a further ten acres.46 Leasing the vicarage brought him tithes, effectively direct access to ten per cent of the agricultural produce of the parish.

The inventory refers to a ‘third shefe’ of a further five acres of rye as well as twenty acres of Lenten tilth in Park field and Grimshill field—that is, arable land to be sown in the spring. Ryddell died in the winter of 1573. Had he lived a few months longer lambs and fleeces from tithes might have been listed among his possessions.47 He had sown eighteen acres of muncorn, usually a mixture of wheat and rye; two acres of wheat; and nine acres of rye. At the Swan there was a whole bale of rye worth £7 as well as 6s 8d worth of oats. The combined value of the livestock and the grains came to almost £50, nearly half the value of his goods. He had supplies of timber in the barn yard at the vicarage, ten trees in Mill Meadow and pieces of timber variously described as being at the Coleseys (part of the demesnes in the Blythe Valley south-east of the town) and Maxstoke, together with a poplar tree bought from Thomas Rastell at a location described as ‘beyond Maxstoke Park’. One of the most important functions for an inn was to provide livery for the guests’ horses and in 1573 he had oats and seven quarters of peas to bake into horsebread, as well as a hay barn at the inn and more hay stored at the vicarage.

**Conclusion**

The significance of inns in England’s expanding commercial activity during the later Middle Ages is now better appreciated, although further research is required to understand more fully the role of inns and innkeepers in society. Other studies of inns draw on architectural evidence, court rolls, accounts and rentals, but our knowledge of inns and innkeepers in Coleshill is derived predominantly from deeds, especially grants and leases. These documents show changes and confirmations of possession, and occasionally challenges over ownership, but they are essentially static, presenting only intermittent snapshots of tenure. They do not illustrate the day-to-day running of inns, their fluctuating fortunes, rental values or the likely level of investment which they attracted. The inventory of Humphrey Ryddell goes some way towards redressing this balance, providing much needed detailed evidence of the fabric and contents of the Swan as well as the varied nature of Ryddell’s economic activities.48

By the 1570s the Swan was a large inn with many private and communal rooms, in a prime commercial position fronting onto Coleshill marketplace. It offered accommodation for travellers on the busy Welsh Road, providing food and drink, offering private facilities for the transactions of business, and serving as a venue for public meetings and entertainments. In larger towns innkeepers were frequently wealthy men, often merchants or larger scale professional victuallers. At Coleshill they were indeed substantial people of considerable standing in the small town society—the lay subsidies of the mid-1520s indicate that they were among the wealthiest in the parish. Some, such as Hawnell, owed their status to service to the Mountfords. Others, like Ryddell, Worth and Badeley, served as the lord’s bailiff, and Badeley was also a yeoman of the Crown. Some were drawn from the gentry, notably Lecroft and Ridgeley, while Greville and Hussey attained the rank of gentleman through innkeeping. The profitability of such enterprises encouraged gentry families such as the Digbys and Mountfords to own inns, and they attracted interest from wealthy merchants such as Bond, Jackson and Scott. Another characteristic of Coleshill innkeepers was their continued involvement in agriculture: many owned land, and Ryddell was sufficiently well resourced to lease Coleshill vicarage and its tithes which, with his other agricultural interests, accounted for about half the value of the goods in his inventory.

Ryddell was bailiff of the manor for at least 27 years and by 1573 had created the second largest holding in the town, by a combination of his own lands and the vicarage with its glebe. His status is reflected in his assessment in the 1549 lay subsidy where, apart from two members of the gentry, John Digby and Francis Mountford, he and four others had the highest assessment. He had diverse sources of income, of which the Swan was one important element. He also discharged wider responsibilities to the parish by obtaining the advowson and right of patronage of the vicarage of Coleshill and managing these revenues and assets to pay for the continued function of services after the death of John Fenton in 1566 and to present his successor.49

The importance of the Swan endured well beyond the sixteenth century and, apart from hosting the commissioners of 1612 inquiring into the foundation of Coleshill Grammar School and those who came to enclose the parish in 1780, it was the venue for many eighteenth-century meetings, ranging from the organisers of the horse races on Coleshill Heath in 1711 to those who proposed the building of the Coventry Canal in 1782 and those who met in 1796 to persuade farmers to sell grains more cheaply to labourers. Later in the century it hosted the gatherings of the Coleshill Book Club, whose members dined there and borrowed books from a library there.50 Eighteenth-
century Coleshill lay on a major long-distance route which brought Celia Fiennes, Daniel Defoe and John Byng to the town (all of whom made brief observations of what they witnessed) as well as stage coaches connecting London to Chester, Holyhead, Liverpool and Carlisle. In the 1830s two coaches a day in each direction travelled through Coleshill and all had a regular scheduled stop at the Swan, where passengers could take refreshments and the horses were changed. For centuries the Swan catered for the various needs of inhabitants of Coleshill, those who came to trade and those who travelled through the town. Happily this provision remains to the present day.

APPENDIX

The inventory of Humphrey Ryddell of Coleshill: 19 January 1573 (Lichfield Record Office B/C/11)

Place-names and personal names have been left in their original forms and have not been rendered into modern equivalents. Money amounts have been given in Arabic rather than Roman numerals; ampersands are given as ‘and’; and abbreviations have been expanded. Monetary values inserted above the line in the original are given in brackets.

An Inventorie of all and singuler goodes and Cattells moveable and immoveable which weare Humfray Ryddelles lately deaecaste of Cowlsell taken the 19th daie of Januarie in the 15th yeare of the Raigne of our Soveraigne Lady Quene Elizabeth and praised by Simon Edson Simon Fludde Simon Jekes Reginolde Grene John Capper Thomas Clifton Robert Milles and John Couper

In the Inner Paradice Chamber

Inprimis 2 fetherbedds and 2 matteresses 26s 8d
Item 2 bolsters and 2 pyllowes 5s
Item 3 blanketts 6s 8d
Item 2 coverings one lyned and one unlyned 13s 4d
Item 3 curtens and a sylke testerne52 4s
Item one bedstede and a terle bedsted53 5s
Item a tabell with a carpet and 2 cupbords with one paynted cupbord cloth 6s 8d
Item on forme and on chaire with a cushyn 20d
Item on curten afore the wyndo
Item the chamber hanged Rownd with paynted clothes 3s 4d
Item 9 hanging tabeces mappes and pictures54 12d
Item one lawndyron55 12d
Item one pere of bellowes 4d

Summa £3 14s 8d

In the Utter Paradice Chamber

Inprimis 2 fetherbedds and 2 matteresses 20s
Item 2 bolsters and 2 pyllowes 2s
Item 3 blanketts one quylt 5s
Item 2 coverings bothe lyned 5s
Item 3 curtens of whyte and grene and a testerne of blew and grene 3s
Item one bedstead and one terle bedsted 4s
Item on tabell borde uppon a frame 16d
Item 2 formes on chaire and a cupbord and one cushyn 2s
Item on payre of bellowes 4d
Item a carpett 8d

Summa 43s 4d

In the lyttell chamber next the stayre hedd

Inprimis on fetherbedd on bolster one blankett on coverlett lyned 15d
Item on bedsted with a testerne of paynted cloth 16d
Item on bord 2 trestells 2 formes and one chayre 16d

Summa 12s 8d

In the lyttell chamber next the inner paradice

Inprimis on fether bedd on bolster 2 coveringes on lyned and on unlyned on bedsted with a testerne of paynted clothe 5s

Summa 5s

In the strete Parlor

Inprimis 2 fether beds a matteresse a bolster and 2 pyllowes 33s 4d
Item 2 blankett a quylt and on covering a bedstede with a testerne of sylke 5s
Item on tabell boord with 2 cupbords one forme and 2 benches 3s 4d

Summa 41s 8d

in the quenes Attorneys chamber

Inprimis 2 fetherbedds on matterese 2 bolsters 2 pyllowes 3 blanketks and 2 coverings
bothe lyned 46s 8d
Item a testerne of sylk with curtens of Redd and yellow say 3s 4d
Item a bedstede and a terle bedstede and 2 curtens afore the wyndoo 6s 8d
Item one tabell borde upon a frame with a carpett 3s 4d
Item 2 cupbords with on carpett for a cupbord on joynd chaire and on cushyn 2joynd stoles and 2 formes 5s
Item a hanging tabell 2d
Item the chamber hanged Rownd Abowt with paynted clothes 2s
Item on barondyron 12d
Summa £3 10s 4d

In the Lord Straunges Chamber
Inprimis 3 fetherbeds 2 matteresses 3 bolsters and 2 pillowes 3 blanketts with 3 coverletts lyned 2 testerns of sylke 2 bedsteds and on terle bedsted corded 40s
Item on bord with 2 trestells on forme and on benche 12d
Item on Awndyron 6d
Item 6 peces of paynted cloths 16d
Item on chaire with a cushyn 6d
Summa 43s 4d

In the Lord Staffords Chamber
In primis a fetherbedd 2 pillos on bolster 2 blanketts on coverlet lyned 3 buckeram curtens a blew testerne a siller bedstede on chaire with a cushyn on square cupbord 26s 8d
Summa 26s 8d

In the Knygns chamber
Item 2 fetherbeds 2 mattereses 2 bolsters 2 pillowes 2 blanketts and on Rugge blanket 2 coverings on lyned and on unlyned 3 curtens of Redd and grene on terle bedstede Item A bedsted with a testerne of wyned worke and borders of Red and grene Item on longe tabell with 2 trestells on forme on benche 2 cupbords and on cupbord carpetts and on longe bord carpett on chaire with a cushyn Item 2 hanginge tabeces and on pytture the chamber hanged Rownd Abowt with paynted clothes Item on pere of bellowes left for my Awnt Prudence

In the Knights chamber
Item 3 fetherbeds 2 bolsters
Item 2 blanketts on Redd quylt and 3 coverings 2 of them lyned and the other unlyned Item 3 bedsteds on covered 2 bordes 3 testers one of Redd and grene say and the other 2 of paynted clothes
Item on chaire and a cushin
Item on longe bord with 2 trestells on forme on cupbord and on cupbord cloth
Summa 40s

In his Parlor
Inprimis 3 fetherbeds on bolster one pyillow 2 blanketts one yrishe rug one Redd coveringe 2 quyfts 26s 8d
Item 2 bedsteds on borded over and the other with a testerne of paynted clothe 3s 4d
Item 5 coffers and a cownter with a Presse 5s
Summa 40s

In the maydes chamber
Item 2 matteresses on bolster 4 coverings and 2 bedstedes
Summa 3s 4d

In the osterie
Item on matteresse on bolster on wynowshete on covering an other wynowshete and 2 bedstes on coffer and a whythe with a tubbe for horsebredd 4s
Summa 4s

In the Goodies Parlor
Item 2 bedsteds 2 testernes the parlor hanged with paynted clothes 2s

In the Kyttchyn
Item 3 pannes (6s 8d) 2 grydyron (2s) 15 platters (6s 8d) 5 pewter dishes (20d) 11 sawcers (20d) 8 pottes (13s 4d) 7 kettells (12s) 4 cressetts (4s 4d) 9 breches (13s 4d) 4 fryinge pannes (16d) 2 chaffing dishes (6d) a brasen ladell (4d) 2 skelletts (8d) one great grater (2d)
In the Lathes
Item 12 brasse potts (£5) 4 posenets (5s) 2 skelletts (6d) 2 chaforns (2s) a collander (4d)
4 kettells (13s 4d) 3 pannes (30s) 2 skymmers (6d) an egge dishe (3d)
3 chafing dishes (2s) one pere of great Rackes (6s) 4 pere of pott hokes (8d) one pere of
cobberds and a odd on (2s)
Item 5 hangings for potts (2s) 2 brandryrons (8d) a tryvett (4d) one pestell (4d)
2 morters (3s) 3 stone morters (8d) one fyer shovel (2s) a pere of andyrons (12d),
a cofer (6d) 3 fynghers (6d) 3 bordes (8d) a great cawderne (3s 4d) a fyer forke (3d)
Item 13 counterfett diyshes£ (20d)
Summa  £8 13s 4d

In the Yell Howse
Item 4 leddes 2 yelyng fattes 4 lomes£ and 2 coolles£ 20s
Item a great coffer in the entrie betweene the Parlor and the Hall 3s 4d
Summa  6s 8d

In the Larder
Item 2 bryne tubes on odde cowlld a kneding trowghe a bolting wytche a steeling
trowghe on chornne one strik a pape and a gawne8 8 sawcers and chesefatts
on chese presse
in the old butterie
Item 3 barrells a greatt chest a spyninge wele 4s
Summa  4s

In the brewhouwse
Item 4 pypes a barrell on stepe fatt and a brewinge fatt 2 brewinge leaddes 3 lomes
a gawne and a skoope 34s
Summa  34s

vessell in the highe chamber in a coffer£
Item chargers platters smale dishes sawcers brode counterfettis chafing dishe
candlestick
Item in the highe chamber 7 coffers
in the hall
Item on borde 2 cupbords 2 chayres a scate harness a pollaxes and 2 speres
2 formes a awndyron a fyer fork 13s 4d
Summa  13s 4d

Sir Raffles chamber
Item a fetherbedd bolster a pyllow 2 blanketts a covering a bedsted 10s
Summa  10s

Benetts chamber
Item a matteres 2 bolsters ... a bedsted 5s
Summa  5s

lynens and naperie
Inprimis 3 diaper borde clothes£ 10s
Item a Towell of the same 6d
Item 6 diaper napkins 8d
Item 6 flaxen tabell clothes 5s
Item 5 flaxen towells 3s 4d
Item 14 shakerdowne bordeclothes£ 20s
Item 2 horden towells£ 3s
Item 20 peres of flaxen shetes£ 12d
Item 4 pere of pillowerbers 3s
Item 2 dowsen of tabell napkins and a halife 6s 8d
Item 60 paire of shakerdown shetes£ 3 quyllts
Summa of this  £7 2s 2d

in the chambers over the Kyttchyn
Item 4 coffers and on bedsted 4s

In the Butterie
Item 6 chargers (8d) 2 dowsen and 4 platters (20s) one dowsen and one pewter
dishe (5s)15 porringers (6s) of the old makinge 14 sawcers (2s 4d) 4 pottell potts
of pewter (3s) 6 quarte potts (12d) A gawne pott (12d) 7 pynt potts (16d)
Item 2 basen ... 2 flower potts (2d) 9 steell staers (?) (8d) 4 pewter candlesticks (2s)
11 other candlesticks (4d) 6 great candlesticks (6d) a coffer a lyttell bord (2s) and a sive
a lyttell drinking pott of pewter 3 wyne peces of pewter (2s)
Item 4 lether bottells (2s) one glasse pynt bottell (3d)
Item 6 6 great basens 5s

Summa £3 11s

Plate of Sylver
Item 3 sylver peces beinge 2 gobbletts and A bole £6
on sylver steel gylet with cover 20s
10 spones with flat heddes 26s 8d
5 spones with Lyons heddes 15s
8 spones with mayddenhedds 18s
on Dowson and a halie of spones with rownd hedds 36s

Summa £11 15s 8d

Vycaredge
Item on fetherbedd on coverlett on blanket on coffer 2 bedsteds 2 kymnells a knedinge
trowge on washing tubb

Summa 10s

in the Kyttchyn there
Item a pere of pott hangersand pott hokes a pann a kettell a caudernae a skellett 2 brasse potts
a grydyron a pere of townges a fyer shovell and old fringe pann

Summa £23 9s

Cattell
Item 6 kyne £6 13s 4d
Item 2 heyffers of 3 yeres old 42s 8d
Item 2 heyffers of 2 yeres old 40s
Item 2 steres and a bull of the same Age £4
Item 9 yerelinge caulves wherof 5 of them be cowe caulves 3 oxe caulves
and on bull caulve £3 12s
Item 30 shope wethers ewes and hogges £4
Item 13 swyne young and old 27s
Item for tymber in the barn ye att the vicaredge 10s

Ympellments of husbandrie
Item a plowghe a share and a culter 20d
Item a pere of slede bridells 20d
Item on oxe harrow 2s 8d
Item a pere of smale harrows with the geres to them 2s 6d
Item 3 yron teves wherof 2 of them be with William Phipes 2s
Item 2 drawght yokes and a cope yoke 12d
Item a pere of wayne clyves and a pere of plow clyves £6 8d
Item an yron bownd tumberell att Regnold Bellarse 3s
An old waynsrope 6s 8d
Item 5 peces of Tymber att the heythe end £3 4d
Item 10 trees in the mylle meddow 10s
Item a pepler tre bowght of Thomas Rastell lyinge beyond maxstoke parke 2s 8d
Item 11 poles in cosleys 6s
Item 5 peces of tymber att maxstok 5s

Summa 53s 6d

horses and mares
Item on black Amblinge nag
Item a sorell fillie of a yere old
Item a black mare and a black nagge in the howse

Summa 30s

Corne in the barne and on the grownd
Item in the wheate crofte 10 daies erthe [sic] of munckorne £4
Item in drake orchard 2 daies erthe of wheat 13s 4d
Item in Rye croft 4 daies erthe of Rye 26s 8d
Item in Grymscote fild of a flatt that shotethe down to the farme 8 daies erthe
of munckorne 46s 8d
Item in the same filde 5 other daies erthe of Rye 33s 4d
Item the third shefe of 2 daies erthe of Rye with Reynold Grene in Grymscote fild 5s
Item the third shefe of 2 daies erthe of Rye with henrie ball in the same fild 5s
Item the third shefe of on daies erthe of Rye with John burton 2s 6d
Item the third shefe of lenton comre with George butter of 2 daies erthe in Parke fild and 2 daies erthe with henrie ball in the same fild 6s 8d
Item 18 daies erthe of lenton tythe to be sowed in Parke fild
Item in Grymscote fild 2 daies erthe of land for lenten tythe
Item in the barne att the Swann a bay of Rye by estimacion fyve score theare praised att £7
Item otts in the same barne praised att 6s 8d
Item hey in the hey barne 40s
Item Tymber in the fild att the gate 5s
Item The dunghull att the yardeg end 10s
Item wood in the yard 20s
Item 7 quarter of pese £3
Item hay att vicaridge 30s 8d
Summa £26 10s 10d

Apparel
Item gowness cloks cotes hose and dubletts prised at £4

Armor
Item a paynted Allmayne Ryvett A back of a Allmaye ryvett with other peces of Armor prised at 13s 4d
Item certen ympellments forgotten prised 33s 4d
Item 15 quarter of mault which was forgotten praised att £6
Summa £12 6s 8d
Item a bedd in the borded parlor with the ympellements belonging to ytt 20s
Summa Totalis of the wholl Inventorie cometh £126 7s 4d

Notes and acknowledgments
I am most grateful for the generous advice and constructive support of Chris Dyer and Bob Bearman. Peter Fleming provided specific information about the role of yeoman of the Crown. The staff at Lichfield Record Office were welcoming and Tilly May kindly facilitated my visits to the muniment room at Merevale Hall. John Hoyle, Chris Lewis and Mavis Cave kindly helped out with the photographs from Coleshill Civic Society’s collection. Colin Hayfield first drew my attention to the inventory of Humphrey Ryddell and provided advice on buildings and illustrations. Simon Hayfield drew the map and helped in preparing the photographs. Kirsteen Harvey, Sophie Mallinson and Huwen Edwards supported in numerous ways.

2 Davis, Medieval market morality, 336-40; M. Bailey, A marginal economy: East Anglian Breckland in the later Middle Ages (Cambridge UP, 2008) 169-170; M. Kowaleski, Local markets and regional trade in medieval Exeter (Cambridge UP, 1995) 143; McIntosh, Community transformed, 65, 132-133
5 Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 483-485; C. Dyer, Bromsgrove: a small town in Worcestershire in the Middle Ages (Worcestershire Historical Society Occasional Publication no.9, 2000) 32; Clark, English alehouse, 6; C. Dyer, A country merchant 1495-1520: trading and farming at the end of the Middle Ages (Oxford UP, 2012) 83-84; Davis, Medieval market morality, 335
Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 496; Birmingham Archives and Heritage [BAH] 3888/A85, ms 3888/A73. The date of the deed lies between the start of the lordship of John de Clinton I and the Statute of Mortmain.

A. Watkins, ‘The development of Coleshill in the later middle ages’, Warwickshire History no. 5 (1983-1984) 173; Nottingham University Library Manuscript and Special Collections [NULMSC] MiD 3985; BAH ms 3375/430067-8; TNA SC11/683; NULMSC MiM 128/34; BAH 278337, 2; TNA C142/45/10

For rural inns and their role see Dyer, ‘Everyday life’, 297-298; Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 486; Watkins, ‘William de Kellingworth’, 130-134. For the Gammon of Bacon see Blyth, Coleshill and the Digbys, 44; BAH ms3888/A1289, ms3888/A1319, ms3888/A1454. On 13 January 1679 William Dugdale alighted from the coach from London at Bacon’s End to be met by his own transport from Blyth: W. Hamper, ‘The life and correspondence of Sir William Dugdale (1827) 140. For the White Lion and its probable location at Shustoke see Merevale Hall Muniments [MHM] 1328. I am indebted to Colin Hayfield for pointing out this document to me.

Hare, ‘Winchester College’, 188-190; Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 487-488


TNA E179/v2/139, E179/v2/130A. Reginald Digby was appraised at £60 on his land in 1525.

12 BAH ms 3375/430067, ms 3375/430063, ms 3375/430065, ms 3375/430066; M.D. Harris (ed), Coventry Leet Book (Early English Text Society old ser. vol.134, 1907-8) 483; BAH ms3888/A618/1

BAH ms 3888/A620-ms 3888/A623, ms 3888/A640.

BAH ms 3375/430067, I.S. Leadam (ed), The Domesday of Inclosures 1517-18 vol.2 (Royal Historical Society, 1897) 400; VCH vol.2, 112; Dugdale, Antiquities of Warwickshire vol.1, 193-194, vol.2 885

TNA C1/529/34; BAH ms 3888/A721. This may have been the Christopher Jackson who paid the 1541 lay subsidy in St Sepulchre.

Dugdale, Antiquities of Warwickshire vol.2 (1730) 1015. This does not survive to the present day. 

NULMSC MiD 3985; BAH, ms 3888/A706; W.B. Bickely, The Register of the Guild of Knowle (1924) 179. For involvement of the commercially ambitious in small town fraternities see Dyer, Country Merchant, 26-27.

BAH ms 3888/A472; Calendar of the Close Rolls, 1447-54, 519; BAH ms 3888/A505, ms 3375/430063, ms 3888/A502, ms 3888/A537, ms 3888/A545, ms 3888/A562, ms 3888/A578

BAH ms 3375/430061, ms 3375/430063, ms 3375/430065, ms 3375/430066

THE LIFE AND CORRESPONDENCE OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD (Yale UP, 1986) 57-58; Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 481

Lichfield Record Office [LRO] B/C/11 Register of Wills 1516-26, 46; WCR H2/74; BAH 278336 fol.2; ms 3888/A685; Guild of Knowle, 93

MHM manuscript history of Blyth, 16, 18-19; BAH 278361, fol.32-7, 44-7; TNA SC11/683; NULMSC MiM 133 /2-8, MiM 133 /12-1462

MHM Manuscript history of Blyth, 16-17; LRO B/C/11 (will of William Ryddell of Shustoke 2 Sep 1558); WCR CR 1184 Box 4 (7 May 1555); TNA E314/480/10, E367931, E179/v2/130A, W.B. Bickely (ed), Monastic and other estates in the County of Warwick (Dugdale Society vol.2,1923) 130. The priestess of Marketaye held the rectories of Bickenhill, Coleshill and Kingsbury in the area (VCH vol.4, 39, 56, 112).

LRO B/C/11; Dugdale, Antiquities of Warwickshire vol.2, 1015. Dugdale gives: ‘Isabella Ryddel late the wife of Humfrey Ryddel baylie of Coshill, the only daughter of Edmund Parker of Hartshill’, died 29 October 1566 and ‘the bodies of William Riddell of Blyth Hall and John his wife’, William having died on 31 August 1558 and Joan on 19 August 1556. These brasses do not survive. There may have been another brother, George, a clergyman (LRO B/C/11 [will and Inventory of John Bellers of Bacons’ End, 4 Jan 1559]) while a Henry Ryddell was living in Fillongley in 1555 (BAH ms3888/A722).

BAH ms 3888/A761; TNA E179/v2/156, rot 16; Manuscript history of Blyth, 16

BAH ms 3888/A781-6; Dugdale, Antiquities of Warwickshire vol.2, 1015

LRO B/C/11 (will of William Ryddell of Shustoke, 2 Set 1558). William had a white harness, or a suit of armour of plain polished steel without any permanently attached covering, along with a sallet, a bill and a pole-axe. Humphrey had a set of almain riveted armour, which was composed of a sallet or helmet, a gorget or collar, breast and back plates as well as splints or vambraces: Claude Blair, European Armour, circa 1066 to circa 1700 (Batsford Macmillan, 1958) 58, 114, 118-119, 200-201, 206-207.


NULMSC MiD 3977; BAH ms 3375/430067; Pantin, ‘Medieval Inns’, 187

Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 481

ibid; Dyer, ‘Inquisitions post mortem’, 111; WCR H2/1, QS75/29

The value of their fittings was £128 8d and 5s respectively.

LRO B/C/11 (inventory of Humphrey Ryddell 19 Jan 1573); Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers’, 481
69 Strainer used in brewing
67 Either a cooler or, more likely given the context, a vat with ears.
66 Tub, bucket or vat
65 The meaning is uncertain but possibly dishes made from base metal or solid metal ware or possibly another name for porringers.
64 A spit
62 A counter could be a table or desk, or more likely here a dresser or side table. A press was a large cupboard with doors and shelves often
61 No total is given after this section.
63 Small vessel of iron to hold oil or grease, which was then burned to give light, sometimes attached to poles or hung from the roof
60 Covering of tapestry in the form of a canopy for a bed.
57 Pair of horizontal bars on three short feet placed on side of hearth to support burning wood
58 These were ornamental irons on each side of the hearth to hold in the fire.
56 ‘Hanging’ was used as an adjective to describe something regular or plain on an inclined plane.
55 Metal grid for supporting burning logs in hearth
54 ‘Tabeces’ [tapestries] and ‘mappes’, with the pictures, were presumably decorations hanging on the walls.
53 Trundle or truckle bed on low wheels or castors
52 Covering over a bed
51
50 WCRO H2/1, QS75/29; S. Jones (ed),
49 TNA E179/143/184; Dugdale,
48 Hare, ‘Inns, innkeepers, 496-497; Clark,
47 R.N. Swanson, ‘A universal levy: tithes and economic agency’, in B. Dodds and R. Britnell (eds), Agriculture and rural society after the
46 WCRO Z398/7. For leasows, see Dyer,
45 TNA C 1/1057/81-82; Watkins, ‘Atherstone, medieval market town’, 41
44 WCRO Z398/7. For leasows, see Dyer,
43 LRO B/C/11 (will and inventory of Geoffrey Adryngton of Coleshill, 29 March 1559); B/C/11 (will and inventory of Henry Smithe, 27
42 WCRO Z398/7; LRO B/C/11 (will, 7 May 1566 and inventory, 24 May of John Fenton of Coleshill)
41 Bennett, Ale, beer and brewsters, 20
40 Davis, Medieval market morality, ?; M. Harris and J.M. Thurgood, ‘The account of the great household of Humphrey, first Duke of
39 Buckingham for the year 1542-3, Camden Miscellany vol.28 (1984) 13, 29, 30, 37, 49; Watkins, Small towns in the Forest of Arden, 11-
38 For the scale of commercial brewing, see J.M. Bennett, Ale, beer and brewsters in England: women's work in a changing world 1300-1600 (Oxford UP, 1996) 20, 44, 48; Mate, Trade and economic developments, 61-62.
37 Bennett, Ale, beer and brewsters, 20
36 Heath End was a mile south of the town of Coleshill. First recorded in 1447, it probably originated as a settlement on the edge of the
35 commons for migrants which later became a permanent feature of the landscape (J.E.B. Gover, A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton, Warwickshire
34 Agriculture and rural society after the
32 ‘Clyves’ were U-shaped iron attachments which were bolted to a plough or the beam of a wagon, to which tackle could be attached.
31 ‘Clyves’ were U-shaped iron attachments which were bolted to a plough or the beam of a wagon, to which tackle could be attached.
30 Crossed out and no value given
29 Crossed out and no value given
28 ‘Clyves’ were U-shaped iron attachments which were bolted to a plough or the beam of a wagon, to which tackle could be attached.
27 Crossed out
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