Peter McCullough

Lincoln College Oxford

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I would like to begin this evening at the *end* of my story: 23rd March, 1756, when the Rector of Lincoln made this entry in the College Register: **SLIDE** 'Memorandum: That the sum of One Hundred Pounds, being Mr. Vesey's Legacy to the College was this day put into the College Treasury, it being to be disposed of for the Uses of the College as the Rector and Fellows shall think fitt. And at the same time his Executor deliver'd up his Books together with his Roman and English Coins, to be placed according to the direction of his Will, in the College Library.' This is the last notice in the College's records of one of it's longest-serving Fellows, William Vesey, elected July 1703 and who died in College, 2nd December 1755, aged 77. Over those remarkable fifty-two years, Vesey served under four Rectors, was unanimously elected to eight one-year terms as Sub-Rector, appointed 11 eleven times as Bursar, and as many as Librarian, and was known in the City for repeated stints as the College's rector of St Michael at the Northgate. He also appears to be the first Fellow to use the then unofficial title of 'College Archivist'. From the earliest years of his Fellowship he was recognised in Oxford as a good antiquarian, even by the notoriously cranky Thomas Hearne, who, approving of Vesey's work in the College's medieval muniments, said in 1725 that he 'seems to delight in Antiquities'. Vesey was elected by the College to serve its turn providing a University Proctor in 1709-10 – the only glimpse of that service to survive being Hearne's acid comments on Vesey's speech at the end of his term, which, if we translate from Hearne's bitter disaffection as a Non-Juring Jacobite, show Vesey, like the Fellowship of Lincoln at

the time, to have been screamingly high Tory. It must be said that Vesey was not a scholar, at least in any conventional sense. He never published anything. And although he was ordained, and had proceeded Bachelor of Divinity in 1710, he never resigned his Fellowship for clerical preferment, nor did he pursue a higher degree. The latter decision even required a suspension of a College statute requiring those Fellows who continued in residence to pursue the DD. Another memorandum in the College register, 13 years into Vesey's Fellowship in 1716 noted that 'it was granted to Mr Vesey, Bachelour of Divinity . . . that it shall be lawful for him without danger from the said statute to defer takeing his Doctors Degree til he shall judg it more convenient'. It seems never to have been 'more convenient', as the matter was never raised again, and thirty-nine years later Vesey died still Fellow - and still a bachelor (in both the degree and the unmarried senses). He had settled instead for the life of the consummate 'College don', devoting himself to College offices, the custody and cultivation of the College's muniments and library, and the social comforts of the Senior Common Room. The College's Buttery Books, which show Vesey almost never missing a meal in his 52 years, vacations included (albeit with extra port purchased each Christmas), suggest a life which almost never took him beyond the College gates, or perhaps even very far beyond the same set of College rooms. He was given those upon election in 1703; in 1706 he was partially reimbursed for the £10 he had spent on new 'doors, windowshutters' and 'painting'; and the account entries even specify which room: 'the Middle Chamber over the passage betwixt the two Courts'. That is, **SLIDE** the set over the passage between Front and Chapel Quads, refitted in the 1920s as a memorial to one of Vesey's contemporaries in the Fellowship and - erroneously - called **SLIDE** 'The Wesley Room'.

But if, alas, we have no 'Vesey Room', we do have the Vesey Library. The some 1,000 titles that were handed over to the College by William's executor in May 1756, have ever since been part of the Lincoln Library, now housed in the former **SLIDE** All Saints Church. Appropriately, that Oxford landmark was being erected when Vesey was elected to Lincoln. Even more appropriately, his books still reside **SLIDE** in the original Georgian bookpresses that house the core historic collection, called the Senior Library.

Although scattered throughout the Senior Library, following the disciplinary logic of subject and the imposed order of size, we have been always been aware of the presence of Vesey's books, in particular his remarkable collection of **SLIDE** English plays, badly rebound, but, still in the gatherings he made sequentially as he collected them, complete with his **SLIDE** tables of contents for each. This is a relic not of scholarship but avid collecting, something he kept track of in his own catalogue, as well as his annotations his copy of **SLIDE** the 1726 ed. of *The Complete Catalogue of all the Plays that were yet printed*, where he not only ticked off his purchases, but, **SLIDE** on interleaved blank pages, added entries that purportedly *The Complete Catalogue* had missed – including, it should be noted, works by female authors like the actress, playwright, and novelist, Eliza Heywood. In the playtexts themselves we find Vesey more as a bibliographer than an evaluative literary critic, his annotations mainly limited to things like supplying the names of authors for plays printed anonymously, or publication dates omitted in the imprint, like **SLIDE** this by Aphra Behn, and life dates for authors and actors. But Sarah Cusk's remarkable antiquarian cataloguing work, still ongoing, has pointed us to the fact that we have in Vesey's books a collection unusual for a College library in other ways, something first focussed for us by the high number of texts containing ownership inscriptions not just

by **SLIDE** William when at Lincoln, but many by him as an **SLIDE** undergraduate at Merton, and others by a host of other Veyseys, many from long before William's lifetime, like this **SLIDE** 'Robert Veysey 1642'; even more unusually for a College library, **SLIDE** some of them women; and other intriguing ones like this **SLIDE** Edward Coles, a Lincoln undergraduate, but who gave a book to Vesey while he was still at Merton, and described by Veysey in later inscriptions as (abbreviated) 'amicus et consanguineus' (his 'friend and kinsman'). Well, these were all red flags to this biographer's bull, and the research that started just to identify the owners of Vesey's books has ballooned into a study of the whole Vesey family itself – the scale of the project was prompted in the first instance just by how difficult it proved to identify even William's parents; and then by realising how the Veseys were a family of some local note in the history of Oxfordshire; and finally, how the Veseys afford a vivid case-study of one Oxfordshire family's attempt to raise itself from very obscure husbandry in the mid-Tudor period, to county gentry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At one stage, when knee-deep in Vesey research, I enjoyed, as a welcome diversion, reading in my colleague Daniel Smith's outstanding study of the papers of the much grander Conway family, only to have one of those shocks of self-recognition that the scholar should occasionally suffer. And that was from Dr Smith quoting Lord Macauley's contemptuous description of a contemporary antiquarian as 'a man who would go a hundred miles through snow and sleet on top of a coach to search a parish register and prove a man illegitimate or a woman older than she says she is'. Such, I realised, I had become; but I'd like you to climb on top of that coach and join me for edited highlights of my quest through sleet and snow for the truth about the Veyseys. I am going to have to jettison some of the trunks of detail I've accumulated, all very hard-won because there are absolutely no personal papers,

letters, or diaries, and I have had to rely on very complicated legal and estate documents, wills, and parish records. I will focus here this evening primarily on the Vesey who made the family name and fortunes, Robert the Elder (d. 1635), and then tour through selected bits of the family saga to point out salient examples of his descendents' attempts to cling on to gentry status, glimpses of political and even literary connections, and always on the look out for their books, to bring us back round to William Vesey and the books he left us.

Just to give you your modern **SLIDE** Google bearings, 'Vesey country' lies due west of Oxford, roughly bounded on the north by the modern A40, and on the south by the Thames, in the **SLIDE** quadrant stretching at the northwest from William Vesey's birthplace, Taynton, near Burford; east to Witney; south to the Thames at Chimney (now largely deserted and a nature reserve); and northwest again through Bampton. Topographically this is a region of great contrasts, from **SLIDE** Taynton, nestled in the chocolate-box higher Cotswolds, **SLIDE** falling south to the flood-prone water meadows upstream from Newbridge at Shifford and Chimney. Administratively this was in the Veyseys' day **SLIDE** Oxfordshire's Bampton Hundred, parochially dominated by the huge eponymous ancient parish of Bampton with its **SLIDE** minster church and dependent chapelries, and the socially and economically important River Windrush towns of **SLIDE** Burford and **SLIDE** Witney.

The elevation of the Oxfordshire Veseys from husbandmen to gentry was the doing of one man, **SLIDE** Robert Veysey, born ca. 1555, presumably at Chimney, as in his 1635 will, he requested burial 'neere vnto my deceased ffather' in the chancel of its nearest church, 'the Chappell of Shifford in the parrish of Bampton'. (A **SLIDE** Victorian church stands on the footprint of its medieval predecessor; **SLIDE**

undulations in the fields around it being the only remaining signs of the village of about 30 households in Veysey's day.) Robert's father, **SLIDE** William Veysey, was the eldest son of John Veysey, husbandman of Chimney whose **SLIDE** 1550 will is the earliest surviving evidence of the Bampton Hundred Veyseys. As a registered copy of a nuncupative will we can't judge whether this John was literate, but, as a check upon the tempting narrative of Robert the Elder having raised the family from absolutely nothing, it is worth noting that though his grandfather John was a husbandman, one notch below yeoman status, he was prosperous, leaving to all five of his children an solid range of livestock, as well as farm implements and generous quantities of household linen. Robert's father William **SLIDE** was living as late as 1584 when he appears as a witness to a Chimney will, but as the witnesses' names are all written by the scribe, it is again difficult to rule his literacy in or out.

Robert, however, was confidently literate, and probably to some degree Latinate, fond as he was of his **SLIDE** emphatic legal signature '*per me* Robert Veysey'. His posthumous claim to at least local fame is as the founder of a free grammar – which is to say Latin and Greek grammar – school **SLIDE** at Bampton. And Veysey's school building has recently achieved not just local, but international fame for its cameo role, as a Yorkshire village hospital - **SLIDE** 'Downton Cottage Hospital' in fact, over which raged what some reviewers cruelly described **SLIDE** as the dullest plot line ever known to British costume drama. But the attention came at a very good time, as the building, now used as the town library and archive, is in need of repair; and to raise funds, **SLIDE** Lord Grantham himself, playing a very good Hugh Bonneville, has pitched in on the campaign to raise the quarter of a million needed to make the upper story, originally the schoolmaster's lodgings, safe for extended community use.

SLIDE But what did the school mean to Robert Veysey, and what can it tell us about him? In his lengthy will, which doled out legacies and annuities to his kinsmen and women totalling thousands of pounds, his only other charitable gifts were paltry – a grand total of £3 10s scattered in small change between the parishes and chapelries of Taynton, Chimney, Shifford, Cote, and Brize Norton. Unlike in the wills of so many of his contemporaries of similar station, there are no gifts to friends or tenants, no bread for the poor, no money for church repairs, no sermons endowed. So the grammar school was Veysey's single and sole play for the kind of testamentary benevolence that was such a crucial component of gentry efforts to cement their paternalistic roles in their communities, and **SLIDE** the terms of the gift in his will repay some close attention: 'Item I give and bequeath to and for a free schoole to be founded and erected in Bampton the full somme of one hundred pounds for and towards the building thereof with Ashleare worke and I give two hundred pounds more to be disposed of as myne executor Mr William Hodges Mr Iohn Palmer and three other of the sufficientest men in Bampton shall thinke fitt concerning the same Schoole with some portraiture at the vpper end of the same.' Veysey's specification that the school was to be stone-built and faced in cut 'ashlar' immediately speaks for his desire that his would be a prestige building. The *VCH* notes that the pre-seventeenth-century Bampton townscape, now largely Georgian stone and render, was dominated by houses of timber construction. So Veysey in 1635 was specifying that his school should stand on a scale of architectural importance with the town's then few landmarks in dressed stone, all of them medieval ecclesiastical or manorial: **SLIDE** St Mary's Church, the Rectory (Georgianised), Bampton Castle (largely destroyed 1660s), and Bampton Deanery (much reduced). County-wide, the school would also place Veysey among a very small number of gentry founders of grammar

five of which were post-Reformation, and of those, only four had been endowed by a single benefactor like Veysey. Walter Calcott, a Staple Merchant, built **SLIDE** Williamscott school during his lifetime in 1572, and put his arms over the door. The other three made their school foundations, like Veysey, in their wills. Each of them gave careful instructions for his school's financial administration, and its academic and religious character, but said nothing about the buildings that were to be erected or whether or how as donors they were to be memorialized in their fabric. Unfortunately, Richard Cornwell's 1585 Woodstock Grammar does not survive in an architecturally legible form, but his will only specified the godliness required of the schoolmaster. Christopher Rawlins, fellow of New College, who gave the villagers of Adderbury their school, left funds sufficient to stipulate that no child was ever to be charged a fee, and said nothing about the physical building except that if anyone wanted to contribute, it would be sufficient for villagers to help carry stone, clay, and timber to the site. As the building's only embellishment, his executors placed a **SLIDE** simple date-stone in the apex of the central gable; and the executors of Lord Williams of Thame's cash bequest, placed that donor's armorial achievement over the door. Unlike these other school founders, though, Veysey says nothing about the actual administration or character of his school, but, again unlike the others, specifies the prestige building material, and gives the decidedly unusual and striking instruction for 'some portraiture at the vpper end' - which I take to be not only an image of him, but also one *inside* the schoolroom, at the dais or lectern end, looking straight down at the pupils. And I don't think Robert envisioned a painting, either, because 'a portraiture' in this period could refer equally to a stone-carved bust, as **SLIDE** common in funerary monuments of clergy (like this Jacobean dean of Christ Church), something

schools. At the time of his bequest, there were only ten free grammars in Oxfordshire,

that would be consonant with Veysey's specification for a stone building, and with his ties to the quarry towns of Tainton and Burford. Although there was a twenty-year delay in construction, which I'll come to in a moment, Bampton did get Veysey's Grammar School, though probably never with the 'portraiture' of the founder, and **SLIDE** this picturesque view from the 1820s responds well I think to the donor's intention of a prestige building connected in material and status to the church. But to understand better Veysey's motives, we need to go backward in time from his deathbed to the career that somehow grasped gentry status in a single lifetime.

Robert **SLIDE** first appears in the written record early in January, 1588, as one of eleven witnesses to a property transaction that was part of the union of two Tudor *arriviste* families who would dominate the Burford area for over a century. This was the settlement of a slew of manors, rectories, and properties in Taynton and Burford upon Edmond Bray, part of the consolidation in Bray's hands of the lands left by Edmond Harman to his several children, who included Bray's wife Agnes. This branch of the Brays had been seated at the Gloucestershire Barringtons, adjacent to Taynton, since the 1550s. Edmond Harman had amassed his wealth as barbersurgeon to Henry VIII and master of the Barbersurgeons company, **SLIDE** here fourth from Henry's left in the famous Holbein commemorating the royal charter of the company, and better known locally for his **SLIDE** 1569 monument in Burford church with its early representation of what seem to be Native American figures. Veysey's witnessing this Bray indenture documents the start of his long association not with his native Chimney, but with Burford and Taynton, and what proves to be his and generations of his family's association, as retainers, land agents, and general *factotums* to the Brays, who seem to have been instrumental in Robert Veysey's accumulation of wealth in the area. In 1603 he took a 90-year lease from the Brays of the profitable Taynton

rectory farm and four other messuages in the village; Taynton manorial rolls do not survive before 1626, but by that date, and presumably earlier, he appears in the frankpledge as a freeholder, and from the 1590s is consistently styled 'gentleman of Taynton' or 'of Burford'. Thus settled in Taynton, Veysey assembled a sizeable property portfolio, mostly leasehold, in Burford that by his death included a long list of domestic dwellings and burgage plots, as well as **SLIDE** The George Inn, and **SLIDE** Burford Priory, and the huge High Street house that he left to his sister Anne Jordan, received from her son John Jordan, West Oxfordshire's solicitor of choice in the reign of Queen Anne, **SLIDE** this masterpiece of provincial baroque, now the Methodist church.

So, **SLIDE** mutually beneficial service to the Brays and investment in lands were a key part of Veysey's financial success. But it still doesn't get us very close to how he made most of his money. Some recent retellings seem to take their cue from the Oxfordshire Pevsner's description of Veysey as 'a woollen merchant'. I have found no evidence at all to link Robert Veysey with the wool trade. But what there is more than ample enough evidence for is that if Veysey had anything to do with wool, it was in the metaphorical form of fleecing people. Because, having accrued enough capital through investment in rent-generating property in Burford, and profitable arable lands in Taynton, Veysey was primarily that most resented but necessary evil among early modern gentry – the provincial moneylender. Or, in the period's morally uncompromising diction, a usurer.

More than two *dozen* **SLIDE** Chancery cases in The National Archive (a tiny sample here) name Veysey or his executors as litigants, and consistently document Veysey's moneylending model, wherein capital outlay of even a modest loan could yield a double return. Interest rates themselves had in 1571 been capped at 10%. But

the debtor's nightmare, and Robert Veysey's specialism, was the tyrrany of the so-called 'penal bond' - for twice the amount loaned, plus interest - due the minute a recipient defaulted. Penal bonds were how Robert Veysey made his money and, as we shall see, his reputation, not least because he seems to have deliberately sought out financially vulnerable clients who he probably knew would default and open the way for him to sue for the penal amount or to take more real estate as settlement.

One of these cases also shows Veysey adding to his usual repertoire of leases and penal bonds a marriage contract for his chosen heir as a way to entrap an indebted landowner. Smooth succession of an estate by inheritance was the most basic requirement for the perpetuation of any family's gentry status, and was best guaranteed in this period of course by the system of primogeniture. So here I need to introduce you to Robert's immediate family: **SLIDE** He himself was an eldest son, but he never married. So, who to inherit? Primogeniture would dictate his eldest brother, Simon, and then his heirs, defaulting next to the second brother, Walter, and his heirs. And both Simon and Walter were both well-supplied with healthy sons to carry on the family name: **SLIDE** here Simon's family; and **SLIDE** Walter and his wife Elizabeth could populate the earth with Veyseys. And notice that **SLIDE** these two broods included a Robert each, no doubt Robert the Elder's godsons, strategically so christened with great expectations. But as a *pater familias* with no son of his own, Robert the Elder perhaps showed just how new he was to gentry status by **SLIDE** ignoring primogeniture altogether and making up his own rules – bypassing his **SLIDE** next senior brother Simon, and his son **SLIDE** Robert, and the next senior brother **SLIDE** Walter, and even his eldest son William, to choose as the heir to the new Veysey estate, **SLIDE** Walter's second son, Robert – 5th in the line of conventional succession, and only 13 when, in 1613, Robert the Elder contracted this

little nephew's marriage as part of a manipulative business deal with the financially distressed lord of the manor of Charlbury, Edward Chadwell – the reason for skipping so many more expected heirs being I think that the promise of a young unmarried heir was better bait for attracting new cash and lands to add to the Veysey portfolio. (Incidentally, the marriage fell through, but Veysey pursued Chadwell and his son from beyond the grave through his executor for every last penny.)

As if this weren't excitement enough, at the same time Veysey was convicted in Star Chamber for his involvement in an episode of Chimney history more worthy of the Wild West than of West Oxfordshire. At its heart was bad blood between his brother Simon Veysey and his son, Robert's in-laws. In a succession of cases heard at the Oxford Assizes and then in Star Chamber between 1612 and 1615, the plaintiffs charged Simon Veysey and his wife and servants, with breaking and entering a Chimney house and stealing a disputed lease, assaulting the tenant and his wife with pitchforks and sticks, driving off and killing their cattle, and then (as an afterthought?) stealing a rick-full of newly-cut hay. When the sheriff's deputies arrived a few days later, they were allegedly met on the highway by the men from the same Veysey gang, threatened with guns and daggers, and shot at until they fled. Robert the Elder was nowhere near Chimney at the time, but he was named in the cases, charged with ordering the assaults, paying all the defendants' legal fees, and suborning both witnesses and jury at the Oxford Assizes. The trouble with cases papers like these from Star Chamber, like Chancery, though, is that there are of course two sides presented, almost always exaggerated for effect, and only rarely do judgements survive. So, who to believe? Well, in a deliciously wicked twist of historical survival, it is a letter from Robert Veysey himself who has recorded for posterity the fact that he was found guilty of all of these charges, for among the State Papers is **SLIDE**: the

December 1616 'humble petition of Robert Vesey' to the Lord High Treasurer Suffolk, which opens, 'whereas your poore peticioner was in the Michaelmas Terme 11° Iacobi Regis by a decree in the highe Court of Starre Chamber fyned in three hundred powndes to his Maiesties vse for riotts and other offences' – it goes on, breathtakingly, to beg that, even though, by an earlier petition, Suffolk had reduced his fine to £100, it would now be granted to pay it in instalments, 'your poore peticioner being no way able to make present payment . . . for that his estate is very much empayred'.

People in West Oxfordshire might have been surprised to hear Veysey's claim that his estate was 'impaired' in 1616; he may have been a *little* cash poor, but only because he was richer in lands than ever before, since in 1614 he had achieved that crucial mark of county status, manorial lordship, albeit as a tenant lord, by buying the remainder of a 99-year lease of the Chimney portion of the Manor of Bampton from the Dean and Chapter of Exeter. After what must in the locality have been the deep humiliation of the Star Chamber conviction, he seems to have pursued his dynastic ends with even greater zeal. In 1618 he placed his chosen son and heir, his nephew Robert, at university; he matriculated at The Queen's College, Oxford in May, and proceeded BA in November 1621. Two years later, the Elder added yet more to the young Robert's future inheritance with the purchase for £1600 of a 299-year lease of Shifford, the manor adjacent to Chimney, followed by two of Shifford's demesne farms, all putting Veysey very much on the local land-owning map on a par with the Hordes of Cote Place and the Williams' of Cokethorpe Manor.

By this point, Veysey was in his mid-60's, and it was time for him to set the House of Veysey in order for the future. Given his reputation, he was probably unpalatable to the local gentry for any marriage negotiations, so for a bride for

nephew Robert he turned another county, and another social group always keen for advancement, the clergy. Probably through family connections in east Wiltshire, Veysey signed in May 1630 a settlement with Adam Blithe, rector of Ogbourne St George, for the hand of his only child, Anne. Blithe was well-off – the co-heir of a prosperous Norfolk yeoman, able to have paid £1,000 for leaseholds in Ogbourne in addition to his rectory; his late brother John Blithe had died an unmarried fellow and major benefactor of Peterhouse, and had already left his neice Anne a £100 marriage portion. And Mrs Adam Blithe, who rejoiced in the maiden name Susan Sunnybank, came with further connections that would appeal to the Veyseys. She was the daughter of a German immigrant turned prosperous Ludlow vintner, and her brother Charles was a canon of Windsor then ensconced in its **SLIDE** fine Oxfordshire rectory of Great Haseley, having been a student of Christ Church, preferred by Archbishop Whitgift, a **SLIDE** published Paul's Cross preacher, and of some no modest means if we can judge by him being one of the benefactors of **SLIDE** the great Van Linge windows in Christ Church, and having advanced interest-free loans to the younger Robert Veysey's Oxford college, Queen's, whose Provost, **SLIDE** Christopher Potter, had married Sunnybank's daughter, Elizabeth (when Potter died, she neatly married his successor as Provost, Gerald Langbaine); and, even better, the Sunnybanks were armigerous (apologies for the quality here **SLIDE**) even if with a very literalistic coat of arms and a single-generation pedigree. Veysey must have been over the moon. For his part in making this alliance, Robert Veysey the Elder put into trust for the happy couple his manors of Chimney and Shifford, and the rectory of Salperton, Gloucestershire plus provision of 'one man servant and maide servant, and two geldings, sufficient keeping and maintenance & one hundred poundes yearly during his natural life'; for Adam Blithe's part, to make his daughter Anne the

chatelaine of Chimney, he stumped up a thousand pounds cash plus all of his Ogbourne lands. Things were looking up for the Veyseys of Bampton Hundred.

And it must have been with the settlement of an heir and his new wife at Chimney that Robert the Elder put another crucial piece of status-building in place – a manor house. For in the division of the Bampton manor, the Bampton half, held by the Hanks family, got the manor house (called **SLIDE** the Deanery), but the Veysey's Chimney portion had no manor house. Vesey corrected that lack in grand style. In an important letter of July 1634 to the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, carefully written as part of rent negotiations, Veysey cited this capital improvement, saying 'I buylte a house w[hich] Cost me at or [about] 500^{l} the buyldinge and did p[ro]vide timber from other plases bsides what I had of the mannor to the vallue of 50^{l} at Least'. Chimney manor survived until the 1830s, and was stone built; inventories of the property show that it was built on a traditional manorial plan of one long central range with two projecting wings, no doubt deliberately on a scale and in materials to address with the nearest local competition, **SLIDE** Thomas Horde's manor at Cote. So after forty years in Taynton, Veysey the Elder removed to his new seat at Chimney to welcome his chosen heir and his young bride. And even in this we can see here again Veysey imitating the people who had, when he started out, been his betters. **SLIDE** One of the documents he had witnessed for the Brays was the 1605 marriage settlement for Giles Bray and his bride, Anne Chetwode, which, *inter alia*, provided that the bride's parents would 'give and provide' at their home 'meate drinke and lodging meet and convenient' for the newlyweds and 'for two manservants and one maide servant to wait and attend' on them. This was conventional practice among the gentry – newlywed cohabitation of the two generations giving the couple the chance to learn their future seigneurial roles from their experienced elders, and in particular allowing

the bride to learn household management at her mother's side. But notice what Veysey has done – he apes the generous provision of maintenance, lodging, and servants for the couple, but Robert the Younger and Anne Blithe – an only child, aged only 18 – were to learn management of manor and marriage not with her parents, but with a septuagenarian bachelor uncle, and that in his brand-spanking new, one might even say *arriviste*, establishment. As with his choice of heir, Robert the Elder was making up gentry status as he went along, probably with destabilising future effects.

But there was one thing left for Robert to secure as the final trophy of his hard-won gentry status. And that was a coat of arms. And of course he tried, very creatively, to get one. Even though in 1634-5 he was sending excuses of ill health and inability to travel to avoid giving evidence in yet another prosecution, this time by none other than Archbishop Laud in the Court of High Commission, he wrote with cheerful alacrity to the College of Heralds 'I, Robert Vazie, of Chimney, in com. Oxon. do promise to appeare at the office of armes in London, to give satisfaction concerning the bearing of armes both for myself & my kinsmen att or before the 22. day of August, 1634. *per Robt. Vesey.*' The **SLIDE** pedigree claims he made there didn't satisfy, and no arms were tricked or granted, no doubt because of the patently risible claims that his grandfather John – the husbandman who left his children some cattle and a winnowing fork each in Chimney in 1550 – was **SLIDE** 'brother to [can't remember his first name] Vazie Bishop of Excester in Queene Maryes time'. You have to give him credit for trying, and can probably even see the creative logic he was using, exploiting the knowledge that he held Chimney by lease from the Dean and Chapter 'of Exeter,' and that grandfather John had been a tenant when there was a **SLIDE** Vesey bishop of Exeter, and perhaps also knowing the Midlands fame of that bishop's foundation of a grammar school in Sutton Coldfield. But, even setting aside

how unlikely it would be for bishop *John* Vesey (as he was) to have had a *brother* named John, our Robert Veysey probably didn't know that the bishop wasn't even born a Vesey, but took that surname ca. 1498 in honour of a benefactor, one John Veysey - Fellow (entirely coincidentally) of Lincoln College, Oxford.

So, swallowing that last disappointment, in the summer of 1635 Robert set his new house of Veysey in final order, first with the careful settlement of all his lands by trust deeds on nephew Robert and other siblings, neices, and nephews, and then, in his **SLIDE** will, written on the 1st of July, doling out legacies and annuities to dozens and dozens of them, and of course making his sole charitable legacy of the Bampton Grammar School (with its 'portraicture' of him no doubt standing in for the new coat of arms that he really wanted), and appointing his nephew William Veysey of Burford – the *elder* brother of the chosen heir Robert, to be his executor. He died ten days later. And the last word on Robert Veysey the Elder was written that very day, and by a trustworthy source – Dr Thomas Wyat, for over thirty years rector of nearby Ducklington, who wrote in his diary: 'Robert Veisey of Chimney a ma[n] [that] by vsury & crafty bargaining had raised himself fr[om] nothing to a very great estate a singul[ar] ma[n] almost 80 yeares old dep[ar]ted this life July 11 1635 at Chimney & was buried at Shifford. Qualis vita, finis ita.' As if 'vsury & crafty bargaining' weren't damning enough, the concluding Latin tag was even darker: 'As the life, so its end.' But this, I hope, won't detract from Bampton's justifiable pride in its Old Grammar School, or from the wider locality's claiming Veysey as an important son. To start with, what a character! -- probably infinitely more interesting than a more conventional local worthy. He was, as Wyat said, 'a singular man', and although at the time that could mean, critically, 'holding no office; having no special position', Wyat is also acknowledging, however grudgingly, the other sense of 'eminent,

distinguished, notable'. And, however much his gift of the grammar school was part of a campaign of self-interest and self-adverstisement, he could have left those £300 for something else – almshouses, say. But I'm left with a keen sense that one of the things Veysey wished he'd had himself in Bampton, and wanted for his heir at this University, was learning. It also probably explains why the Elder made that unconventional choice of a fifth-in-line as his heir. As Robert the Younger explained in a later Chancery case, his uncle 'did alwayes manifest his love in a more free waye' to him, not just because he was 'of his name', but because the other candidates in that generation, including his older brother William, 'had educacion . . . butt in a meane condicion'; hence the boy with more scholastic aptitude was the apple of the Elder's eye, and 'at his charges brought vpp in Learninge, and for divers yeares meynteyned in the vniuersity of Oxford'. There is a lot that Robert the Elder got wrong here, in terms of how to ensure a peacable gentry inheritance – to start with, just imagine how the elder brother William and the others felt in the face of such indulgent favouritism. And the Elder was also going against conventional wisdom by lavishing a university education, usually reserved for younger sons, on the heir whose time, it was thought, would be better spent learning how to manage an estate rather than idling in Oxford.

But if we've found a thread of learning in the Veyseys, we haven't found any books yet. To do that I have to fast-forward through the story of what happened to the estate at Chimney and Shifford that Robert the Elder bequeathed to Robert the Younger. Things did not go well. No sooner had the Elder died than all hell broke loose beteen everyone in the county with Veysey blood. Robert's siblings were enraged at the appointment of his nephew William as executor. Special decrees had to be handed down from the Prerogative Court to confirm his executorship, and three inquisitions post mortem to determine title to various properties. And then almost

every one of his relations serially **SLIDE** sued William on the grounds that they had been verbally promised in Robert's life more than he'd left them in his will. Some common denominators appear in all of these cases: that everyone had been given the impression, and often verbal promise by Robert, that he was richer than he actually was; that his real estate had already been settled on a chosen few; and that his personal estate consisted more of debts owed to him, than real cash. As executor, William simply did not have the money in hand to pay even the amounts bequeathed, much less the family's inflated expectations for more, and he had instead to sue Robert's many debtors for the amounts due on penal bonds even to begin making headway settling the estate. For the next twenty years William was constantly in Chancery carrying out the dubious honour of being his uncle's executor. And this is the real reason – not, as has been said, William's greed or even embezzlement – that it took twenty years and a royal charity commission decree to get the Bampton Grammar School built and open in 1650's. And William's troubles were also compounded by another little impediment - a Civil War. As William summed up his tribulations repeatedly in court bills and answers in the 1640s and 50s, quoting here from one in 1648, Robert Veysey the Elder had 'settled all his Landes . . . vppon other of his kinsmen in his life tyme; and leavinge nothinge to this defendant for payment of his . . . owne debtes and ingagements . . . which amounted to aboue one thousand pounds aboue his legacies and Annuities', 'and the tymes fallinge by reason of these intestine warrs and distractions, and this defendant livinge where the course of law and Iustice was obstructed by the souldiary could take noe course for foure or fiue years . . . to recover one penny of the money due to his Testator, And the Legacies beinge due, before these tymes, and some Annuities run in arrears, and this defendant sued and threatned by many . . . and many other soe disabled and impouerished, that

they cannot pay any thinge att all . . . hee hath byn & is inforced to absent himselfe from his home for feare of Arreste.' The next year, he even had to sell the Taynton property that Veysey the Elder had left to him and his son as their sole thanks and inheritance.

Safely possessed of the manors of **SLIDE** Shifford and Chimney, though, William's younger brother Robert and his wife Anne were in a far more stable position. And although I can find no evidence of any of the Veyseys taking up arms for either side in the Civil War, Robert the Younger at the very least made peace with Cromwell's Protectorate. He appears as an under-sheriff in 1653; having bought his portion of Chimney manor back from the Commissioners for the Sale of Church Lands, in 1658 he exercised the right to present one of the Interregnum presbyterian ministers of Bampton; and, in 1660, he was appointed the last Protectorate Sheriff of Oxford. At the Restoration he was expelled from the shrievalty, and with the Dean and Chapter of Exeter again in possession of Bampton Manor, he set about negotiating a new lease with his new old landlords. And at the Restoration, the Veysey succession also looked secure. A first son – inevitably a Robert – and a daughter Anne had been born even before Veysey the Elder's death in 1635; the expected Robert III did not survive childhood, but another son and daughter had followed, gloriously respectively christened Sunnybank and Blithe, bearing the surnames of the maternal grandparents who had pumped cash and lands into the Veysey family firm back in 1630. Blithe, aged about fifteen, and her mother Anne both died of smallpox ca. 1660. And then Robert took one of the riskiest steps possible for any estate, and especially for a fragile one. He married a second time. On 22nd August, 1661, Robert married at St Cross, Oxford, Mistress Christian Hockins, the daughter of a Devon merchant, and grand-daughter of a Jacobean mayor of Great

Torrington. But she came with Oxford connections too – her brother, Thomas, was DD and Fellow of All Souls, and her mother, Joyce, was the daughter of an Oxford gentleman, Thomas Williams, himself a new claimant to gentle and armigerous status based on the wealth accrued by his father, Alexander, as proprietor of Oxford's largest and finest Inn, The Star (latterly the **SLIDE** Clarendon Hotel, which survived until its senseless demolition in **SLIDE** 1957 to make way for a Woolworths, now the carbuncle that is **SLIDE** The Westgate). And, to make matters more complicated for themselves and for historians, Robert and the second Mrs Veysey, Christian, promptly had a second family, in the unique form of twin sons, christened for father and maternal uncle, Robert and Thomas, in 1665. But before the twins were a year old, their father drew up his will in September 1666, and died in November or December.

At this juncture, faced with the need to provide a jointure for his second wife, Veysey had settled the manor of Chimney on Christian for her life and thereafter for *her* eldest son, thereby - like his uncle Robert the Elder had done - eschewing the simplifying rules of primogeniture for holding an estate together. Because instead of passing all to his eldest son, Sunnybank from his first marriage, he divided the Veysey manors between the eldest sons of each of his marriages. Shifford manor went to Sunnybank, and Chimney in trust to the infant Robert (the latter in itself inferential evidence that Robert was the elder of the twins, but something neatly confirmed as fact by the careful distinction in the Merton College buttery books, where the twins matriculated together in 1681, as 'Veysey Senior' and 'Veysey Junior'). Given the multiplying number of Robert Veyseys, and the fact now that two of the Chimney Roberts were university educated I was of course going down this road in hopes of connecting with them the several 'Robert Veysey' inscriptions in the books that came to Lincoln, many of them Latin classical titles and some even with Latin inscriptions

that might suggest a university-educated Robert Veysey. And **SLIDE** Robert Veysey's will of 1666 gave me my first possible glimpse. It is an interesting will, in the first instance as a good example of how the children named in a will are not necessarily all the testator's children. In this case, Robert's daughter Anne doesn't get a mention since she had already received her inheritance as a marriage portion. And the elder twin Robert isn't named either, because his inheritance – the manor of Chimney – had already been set aside for him in trust. That left the eldest son from the first marriage, Sunnybank (who, although already invested with Shifford, perhaps got something extra as the eldest child of all), and the younger twin from the second marriage, Thomas. First, Robert continued the Veysey tradition of bequeathing as assets outstanding loans due to him – interestingly both from royal physicians who had served in the two Charles's in Civil Wars and after: so, to Sunnybank £100 due from Sir John Hinton, and to Thomas £200 due from Sir Edward Graves (were they Robert's friends – or just hard-up Royalists to whom Veysey had made loans in while the court and army were in Oxford?). But then, additionally to Sunnybank, 'Item, I give all the Books that were his grandfathers Mr Adam Blithes'. The Cambridge-educated Blithe must have had a respectable library.

Whether Sunnybank was the appropriate recipient of those books we shall see in a moment, but, first, Robert's will unleashed a fresh round of Veysey in-fighting. The charge was led by the new husband of the surviving daughter of the first marriage, Anne. It was yet another Chancery case, again stuffed with depositions by members of the family and associates that shine a harsh spotlight on relationships otherwise lost to history. The excuse for the case was Anne's claim that she should have inherited the long lease of a property in Holywell Street that her grandfather Adam Blithe had bought for his wife's retirement should she survive him. When

Susan Blithe died, so the allegations ran, Adam Blithe repeatedly said that the house would go instead to his daughter, Anne Veysey – something so oft repeated that in the family it was called 'Nan's House' (where 'Nan' is a nickname for 'Anne'). But the lease was in Robert Veysey's name, and – shock, horror – it had passed to his residual legatee and executrix, his second wife, Christian – now of course cast by the daughter Anne as a greedy, wicked step-mother. We might assume that, given that Robert and Christian were married in Holywell, there had been the added salt in the wound of him marrying his new bride from the house known as 'Nan's' – wife number one's.

To pause briefly while the Veyseys argue some more – we know that Nan's House still stands, because it is so exactly described in the lease that survives in the Merton Archives – it is **SLIDE** No. 1 Holywell, at the corner of Holywell and Longwall, refronted in the eighteenth century, but behind it the same substantial seventeenth-century townhouse. Even better, it came with a garden across Longwall Street, against the wall of Magdalen Deer Park – **SLIDE** the site of the cottages now converted for the Oxford Conservation Consortium, where many Jane Eagan and her team give Oxford colleges' books and manuscripts top-flight conservation care.

But back to the **SLIDE** Veyseys bickering at Holywell. Also animating this suit was the daughter Anne's jealous fury over the favouritism shown by her parents and grandparents to her younger, evidently adorable little sister Blithe, an indulgence that went so far as to be widely said that her father had promised her a dowry twice the size of her elder sister's. Well, little Blithe was now very much *dead* – but Anne wanted the dowry, allegedly the ridiculous sum of ten thousand pounds, that had been promised to Blithe. And Anne had a tame lawyer, in the form of her new husband, one Thomas Hunt, who lodged the case himself, and, in addition to the charges about the house and the dowry, claimed that Robert's testamentary intentions had been

wickedly manipulated by his second wife, Christian, to the advantage of *her* children, and the disadvantage of course of his wife.

But what is particularly fun here, and interesting as a further glimpse into Robert Veysey's political affiliations, is that Anne's husband was not just any Thomas Hunt. To start with, he had been clerk to the Oxford Assizes during the Protectorate, under his father-in-law Robert Veysey as Sheriff, and like Veysey was turned out at the Restoration. Furthermore, he was 'Postscript Hunt'. And who knows not 'Postscript Hunt'. I didn't, but according to the *ODNB*, Thomas Hunt of Gray's Inn was the author of the most sophisticated and impassioned polemics in favour of excluding the Catholic James, Duke of York, from the throne. He earned his **SLIDE** nickname from one of them, and for his pains, most wanted-status and death in exile in Holland. And there is no better proof of what a threat his Lockeian constitutionalism was to the regime of Charles II, than the further compliment of being savaged by the Tory Poet Laureate, John Dryden: 'Mr *Hunt* . . . is . . . the most *incohaerent ignorant Scribler* of the whole Party. . . . and if he should return to *England*, I am charitable enough to wish his only Prison might be *Bedlam*.' We also owe to Dryden the knowledge that Hunt was (one of the worst moral failings in Dryden's eyes) fat: 'I have hitherto contented my self with the *Ridiculous* part of [Hunt] . . . even without the story of his late fall at the *Old Devil* [tavern], where he *broke no Ribbs*, because the hardness of the *Stairs* cou'd reach *no Bones* . . . the Miracle is, how he got *up again*.' But what no one has known to date about Postscript Hunt, was that his wife was Anne Veysey of Chimney – who died a widow in Banbury in 1706, aged 72.

And, alas, it seems that her grandfather Blithe's books were wasted on her brother **SLIDE** Sunnybank, as was his whole Veysey inheritance. He never attended

university, and lived his early married life in Blockley Gloucestershire, then Clanfield and Shifford. Then, there was a criminal turn: at the Oxford Assizes, Michaelmas 1671, a conviction, with two accomplices for manslaughter. There followed in March 1672 a grant for the Commissioner of the Peace for Oxfordshire to seize the 'personal estate of Sunnybank Vesey of Chimney, Lawrence Kempe, and Cresset Stonehouse, all of Oxon, forfeited for manslaughter'. That financial blow set in train a desperate spiral of debt and successive mortgages stretched out over more than a decade and resulting finally in the sale of Shifford manor in 1697. The Veysey patrimony, already divided between two half-brothers, were now reduced by half. And along the way there had been more criminal trouble – in 1689 Sunnbank presented at the Quarter Sessions two servants for stealing 30 bottles of ale from his 'mansionhouse' at Shifford; they were acquitted, and at the next sitting Sunnybank and his half-brother Thomas were themselves in the dock and convicted of assaulting and inflicting 'desperate wounds' on the same servants. One wonders then wonders if Sunnybank was in fact *compos mentis*, because in 1704 his wife unusually wrote her own will, bequeathing in her own right 'the house wherein I now live in Stanlake' to her widowed daughter-in-law, but not so much as mentioning her husband, even though he signed the will as a witness. || We will never know when Sunnybank died, because his burial would not have been recorded. We find in the notebooks of the Oxford antiquarian Richard Rawlinson, in a collection of anecdotes on Bampton collected ca. 1711: 'Sonibanke Vesey and others . . . swore at Bampton fair they would kill the first man they met, which they accordingly did and . . . the law could not lay hold on them' – so, that clearly the 1671 manslaughter conviction for what was believed to be murder. But Rawlinson continued: 'Vesey did himself justice by hanging himself with his fishing line'.

Such unhappy, even tragic ends, for the promisingly named Sunny, Blithe, and Nan, and – with the seizure of Sunnybank's personal property and years of ensuing debt, so much for Adam Blithe's books. Did the twins of the second marriage to Christian Veysey fare better? Robert and Thomas left Merton after only two years, without taking degrees, probably due to financial pressures. During their minority, Chimney had been run by their indomitable mother Christian, **SLIDE** amply demonstrated by her business correspondence with the Dean and Chapter in Exeter during her son and grandon's minorities. Fine evidence of the presence she maintained in the locality on behalf of her husband and heirs is **SLIDE** this communion cup, still in use at Shifford, its gift history explained in the inscription, 'This was given to the Church of Shifford by Robt Veisey Esqr decay'd and renew'd by Christian Veisey his Widdow 1689'. Upon reaching his majority, **SLIDE** Christian's son Robert took over with a new lease in his own name in 1691, and appears as an active trustee of the Bampton Grammar School founded by his great uncle. But over the early 90's the **SLIDE** Exeter receiver's accounts show a gradual slowing in Robert's earlier prompt payment of rents, falling into arrears by 1695, at which point serious borrowing began, probably all to raise the capital for his marriage to Mary Anderson, the daughter of a threadbare Cavalier baronet, Sir John Anderson of Broughton in Lincolnshire, which took place in 1695 and included a new lease of Chimney settled on Mary for life and then their heirs. But more borrowing with more penal sums rapidly followed, as did four children, again with the obligatory eldest Robert, and three others christened in honour of maternal grandparents: John, Anderson, and Elizabeth. With these four children, all under six, this third Robert Veysey of Chimney, the elder twin, aged only 34, seems to have known that his health was failing, and in the weeks before his death early in 1700 sold real estate to the

value of £2000 in an evident effort to spare his widow from his creditors. He failed. No sooner had he died but the suits in Common Pleas and Chancery mounted up, and the young mother, to satisfy the judges in Chancery that she had done all she could to settle her late husband's accounts, produced not just a **SLIDE** detailed and very long list of debts due and debts yet to pay, but also of the whole contents of Chimney Manor, **SLIDE** room by room, including the nursery, but also, an even more detailed schedule **SLIDE** 'mencioning the persons names of whome the sumes of money for what this defendant sold seuerall goods and Chatells late of the Mr Veisey'. Comparison of this inventory with that Robert the Elder from 1635 will afford a valuable analysis of the changes over the century in use and furnishings of a small Oxfordshire manor house, and its agricultural output, but I can only linger here to point to what must have been the mortification Mary suffered of seeing Bampton and Oxford tradespeople, local gentry, and her own relations and tenants barter for everything in her house from fire spits and chafing dishes to 'Turkey carpets' to 'Crimson & white hangings' to cattle to 'four pictures in the litle parlour' and, yes **SLIDE** – for £3 – Mr Veisey's books. The house itself and lands of Chimney, though, were safe from creditors in the hands of trustees for the infant heir apparent, Robert IV. But Mary herself died three years later, a widow in Abingdon.

What happened to the next set of Veysey orphans, Robert, John, Anderson, and Elizabeth could have been written by Fielding or Richardson. But I must resist and take us to a chamber in Fenchurch Street in 1728 where the daughter Elizabeth Veysey, a spinster not yet 30, is writing her last will and testament. In it **SLIDE** she does 'appoint my my dear Cousin William Vesey of Lincolne College in Oxford my whole and sole Executor . . . and all the Residue of my Estate both Reall and personal I give and bequeath and devise to my said Cousin William Vesey'. Elizabeth in the 28

years since her mothers death had been enriched by lucky bequests from richer maternal relatives, and savvy investment with London banker friends – so much so that *she* served as banker and trustee for much of the lands and personal estate of her two quarrelling brothers, John and Anderson. To help her with this, she had enlisted the aid of her cousin, our William of Lincoln, as a trustee to keep Chimney safe, and to stave off suits from creditors of her late mother. Clearly she had also become fond of William's younger sister, Eliza, for she bequeathed her 'one hundred pounds And my gold Watch and Chain and Seals to it my best diamond Ring and my pearl Necklace'. For William of Lincoln College's part, when his cousin Elizabeth died in 1732 he refused the executorship, probably knowing the kind of litigation that the will of any Chimney Veysey attracted, and that he would find himself caught between the two warring brothers. But there may have been another reason. Also in Elizabeth's will is the strikingly generous bequest 'to Rachall Sheperd my Servant if living with me at the time of my death Two hundred pounds for her loving and faithful Service to me all my Cloaths Linnen Woollen and silk all my Table Linnen silver Spoons and my Wainscott Tea Table all my Books and Twenty pounds for Mourning'. Rachel Sheppard must have been a very special servant, and Elizabeth's brother John clearly thought so, for, within a matter of weeks after his sister died and her servant came into her inheritance – reader, twenty years before Richardson's *Pamela* **SLIDE** by this license the master married the maidservant. Our William was clearly fond of John, having been trustee lord of the manor of Chimney during his minority. And probably both he and Elizabeth knew of John's intentions for Rachel Sheppard, for by William's standing aside as Elizabeth's executor, the Prerogative Court ruled Rachel executrix and residuary legatee instead, getting the inheritance into John's hands without saying so in her will, and setting the new Mr and Mrs John Veysey up very

comfortably indeed as the new master and mistress of Chimney. They had no surviving children, and John died only eight years later and was buried at Shifford, having left by his will £10 for mourning to William of Lincoln College. And although she remarried, Rachel and her new husband, **SLIDE** George Baskerville, solicitor of Crosby Square, London kept Chimney as a country seat (Baskerville gets a footnote in Milton studies, first written-up in Warton's edition, for loving John Milton so much that the poet's grave in St Giles Cripplegate was found so that Baskerville could be buried next to him). And the very first bequest in Rachel Sheppard Veisey Baskerville's 1752 will **SLIDE** was £50 'unto my beloved Friend and Kinsman the Reverend Mr William Vesey senior Fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford'. He died before she, so may never have known of her intended generosity, but even in the testamentary language of the day the affection of 'my beloved Friend and Kinsman' rings sweetly true, as does the pride of both of them in that honorific, which in 1752 was literally true, 'senior Fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford'.

But what about the Veysey inscriptions in William Veysey's books? It's been a long journey, but the only possible way, to rule out any of the Robert Veysey's of Chimney as those who appear in William's library, but through the seizure of Sunnybank's personal property, and the sale of his half-brother Robert's possessions thrity years later, there would have been no Robert Veysey books to come William's way. And it was certainly worth the slog through four generations of Chimney Veyseys to have confirmation in Elizabeth, John, and Rachel's dealings with William from the 1720s that he was in fact kin. To place William Veysey of Lincoln College among this clan I now know requires going back to Taynton, but not to Robert the Elder, but one of his kinsmen who presumably settled there at the same time, and probably the 'Robert Veysey my cousin' to whom Robert the Elder makes fleeting

reference in his will. The parish registers of Taynton promisingly, but unhelpfully, record no fewer than *five* adult Robert Veyseys who were christened, married, or buried there, with as many as three of them living at the same time and for purposes that are of no use now, only distinguished with epithets like 'Robert Veysey near the church style'. Worse still, not a single one of these five left a will that I can find, which is one of the only hopes of sorting their relationships to one another. Through strategems more complicated than I would dare explain here, but which included most helpfully, **SLIDE** harvesting as many Robert Veysey of Taynton signatures as possible from our books, witnessings of local wills, and other legal documents, then arranging them chronologically and interpolating dates of death and taxation assessments from parish records, I can now confidently declare that Lincoln's William was the son of Robert Veysey, who was the son of Robert Veysey, who was the son of Robert Veysey, all gentlemen of Taynton, Oxfordshire. And locally esteemed they were – William's father and grandfather were successively Coroners of the County of Oxford, which explains why we have the Veysey copies of the handbooks used by every county office-holder in the Kingdom. And one of the Roberts (perhaps even both; they overlapped) was noted for his interest in local antiquities, and generously thanked by the great **SLIDE** Robert Plot, first Keeper of the Ashmolean, for contributions to his landmark *Natural History of Oxfordshire*, including statistics on quarried Taynton stone, and sending along for study and illustration **SLIDE** rocks that looked suspiciously like living creatures that we now call fossils. But the Robert Veyseys also liked to *read.* So going all the way back to William's grandfather in **SLIDE** 1642 with his Virgil, we have three generations of Veysey books, and those sometimes recording succession from father to son, like **SLIDE** this Seneca, which passed from Robert the father to William the

sense here. I've been masking the fact that all of the books I've shown you will fit in the palm of your hand. **SLIDE** Here's the Seneca again with indicators of scale. So what we've begun to realise also is that most of Veysey's books live in the **SLIDE** upper reaches of the bookpresses desigend for the **SLIDE** smallest formats. This makes Veysey biographical sense – chronologically, all of these imprints are from the mid-scventeenth century, when there was a fad for these tiny 'pocket classics' that the Robert Veyseys clearly enjoyed. But they were also *not* scholarly books – they were books for pleasure both in form and format, and none of these Veyseys went to university until William in the 1590s. This also explains why many of them are works that wouldn't be found taught at universities no matter what form they came in, because they're racy, saucy things like Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, Catullus' love poems, and Martial's spikey epigrams. And they're portable – what could be better for a county coroner to slip into his pocket for his nights away across the county on inquests? And then, what could be better for our William to pack neatly into a little trunk when he came up as a foundation scholar, now called a 'Postmaster' at Merton? But, alerted now to things I'd missed before like the tiny initials 'RV', we can see that even William's full-blown collecting mania for plays was something he got from his father – witness **SLIDE** this rarity, three plays that were very 'new' indeed, since they were three of the first plays performed on the London stage after the reopening of the theatres; scholars have decided that the actual date of publication of these plays was not 1674, but 1666, which accords with Robert Veysey's initials and the barely visible

William's abbreviated Latin inscription while at Merton. Other things begin to make