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Servants

One of the characteristics of [yeomen](#) which the sixteenth century writer, William Harrison, saw as distinguishing them from the gentry is that they have servants who 'get both their own and part of their master's living' in contrast to the 'idle servants' of gentlemen. What he means is that yeomen's servants were essential to their economic livelihood rather than merely reinforcing their master's status. In the Tudor period the majority of adolescents entered some form of service or apprenticeship from their mid-teens onwards. 'Life cycle' servants such as these would remain in service until they got married, and then establish independent households of their own. They usually lived with their employer and might be engaged in domestic or agricultural work. We do not know how many live-in servants [Thomas Wells](#) had but it is probable that he had at least two female servants and one male servant. These servants were not necessarily of lower social status than their employer. They expected to be adequately fed and clothed during the period of their service and not to be beaten; masters (and mistresses) who abused their servants could be prosecuted. In Bayleaf the female servants probably slept alongside the children in the second chamber; the male servant may have slept in the room above the kitchen