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What is a Probate Inventory?

A probate inventory was taken shortly after an individual's death by two or more people, described as 'appraisers'. They normally began the inventory with cash ('money in his purse') and clothes ('his wearing apparel') and then proceeded around the house from room to room listing and valuing the deceased's movable goods, before moving outside to list the contents of agricultural buildings, livestock and crops growing in the fields. Anything that was not movable was omitted, which means you might get a list of cooking utensils but no oven, window curtains but no windows. Inventories do not record real estate – whether lands or buildings – although will include movable documents relating to it (e.g. 'his lease'). They also excluded debts owed by the deceased, although sometimes record debts owing to the deceased. Appraisers often identified goods by room, thus providing evidence of both rooms and room use. However, it is impossible to tell whether all the rooms in the house have been listed, unless there are internal inconsistencies (e.g. a 'chamber over the buttery' but no 'buttery').

In law the possessions of a married woman belonged to her husband and so married women did not make wills or have inventories made for them. In theory, this meant that a married man's inventory would include the possessions of his wife. However, in some cases it is evident that goods owned by a wife before her marriage were excluded, along with her personal goods (for example, her clothes). Goods might also be omitted from an inventory where they had already been bequeathed in the deceased's will or otherwise bestowed (since the function of the inventory was to value the deceased's goods for sale to pay off his or her debts). It should also be borne in mind that probate inventories omit a significant number of inhabitants (perhaps as many as fifty per cent) whose estates fell below the inventory thresholds (i.e. they were too poor to have goods worth valuing).

There are no surviving probate inventories for Bayleaf or for the parish of Chiddingstone. However, there are plenty of examples from other parts of Kent. [Click here](#) to see the probate inventory for another yeoman, William Goldsmith, who lived in the parish of Rolvenden.