Wills and other documents give us an insight into the way our ancestors lived. In the 17th and 18th centuries, and no doubt before, the Bulleids were almost exclusively involved in agriculture in mid-Devon. Some were yeomen, farming their own land; some were husbandmen, farming leased land; some agricultural labourers; and some were butchers.

The Bulleid wills make it possible to piece together how a family would have spent their evening after returning from the land. They would have sat on formes at the tablebord, which rested on tressles in the hall, to eat their main meal. There would have been fresh baked wholemeal bread containing bran from the crock after the wheat had been thresht; ham from the joint cured in the bacon hutch; and butter and cheese made in the dairy. This would be washed down with cider made from fruit squeezed in the apple press and drunk from pewter cups. They would have eaten off wood trenchers with wood spoones. The best brasse potts would be kept in the cubbert, only to appear on high days and holidays. In winter, logs cut from their woodland would be blazing in the hearth.

An article dated 1638 entitled “In the Chamber over ye Kitchen” describes the bedroom to which the head of the household and his wife would have retired:

“Upon the chimney side of the roome hanged with twoe peeces of very old Tapestry hangings, a longe thicke planke for a table lyinge upon twoe tressles, a joyned stool, twoe buffit stooles, a cushion case of needlework, a payre of playinge tables of Ivory and Ebony with a sett of men of the same in a case of blacke leather, a standinge bedstead with turnd posts with the testerne head and vallence of blacke velvet and white cloath of sylver paned, the valence hanging a deepe fringe of blacke and white silke in partes, the bed borded on the bottome, a bed matt, a featherbed and bolster of tike matched, another tike pillow, twoe woollen homespun blankets with seames in the middest, another woollen blanket, a portable bedstead lyinge in one of the presses, a square basket of wicker wherein to carry peate, three wicker baskets, a threesquare joyned stoole, a fire shovel, a payre of tonges, a paire of bellowes and twoe old windowe curtaines of redd and greene Say with a curtaine rodd.”

**Notes**

- Testerne: wooden roof on a four-poster bed
- Middest: almost in the middle
- Say: fine cloth
- Tike: tick fabric is used for pillows etc., which are to be stuffed with feathers
John Bullied of Romansleigh, who died in 1650, bequeathed to his wife Elizabeth “two bedds with their furniture standing in the chamber over the entry and our bedd with his furniture standing in the chamber where the maidens used to lye and our bedd with his furniture in the chamber over the hall and our bedd with his furniture in the little chamber.” He also left her horses, cattle lambs and pigs; wheat, rye, barley and oats; wood, hay, butter and cheese. What a lovely picture of a substantial farm with a four-bedroom farmhouse. His brother, Nicholas, who died in 1673, bequeathed to his wife, Honor, “the bed we used to lye on, performed.” Perhaps we should draw the four-poster’s curtains round that one!

Of course, not all Bulleids lived as well as this. James (1791-1879) and his brother, Richard (1793-1883) were only eight years old when they were apprenticed to learn husbandry until the age of twenty one. Their younger brother John was apprenticed for the same purpose when he was ten. They were the sons of Richard Bulleid, who died in the Union Workhouse in Great Torrington in 1840. James’ Indenture is transcribed in the section on Apprenticeships. James was the third of Richard’s six children by his first wife, Thomasine Mitchell. Richard re-married after her death and had four more children by his second wife, Elizabeth Davey. The family must have remained poor and it is hardly surprising that James’ brother Richard (1793-1833) emigrated to Canada. However, James survived to the age of almost eighty nine when he died at the home of his daughter Thomasine and her husband Christopher Coombes in Torquay, Devon. He had eight children of his own, one of whom (Thomas 1825-1898) also emigrated to Canada.

Richard’s ancestors would have enjoyed a good roast sirloin as they were butchers in Winkleigh for four generations. Thomas (1639-1762) was the first known butcher in the family, succeeded by his son Samuel (1672-1726). Samuel’s nephew, also Samuel (1698-1741) followed in the family trade as did his son Thomas (1722-1782), Richard’s father.

John Bulleid of Mariansleigh, who died in 1628, left five shillings and eight pence to be distributed amongst the poor of the parish. His son, Nicholas, of Romansleigh, who died in 1673, was sufficiently well off to be able to leave money to keep the poor of the parish in work. Nicholas’ nephews, Amos and Robert, had their names inscribed on two of the bells of Romansleigh parish church, where Amos was a Warden and possibly his brother also.

**Henry Thorne vs. Amos Bulled 1699**

A court case in 1699 provides a fascinating insight into family life three hundred years ago. The prosecutor was one Henry Thorne and the principal defendants were the Bulled brothers Amos and Robert. The original document is tedious to read and proves the point that a lawyer will not use one word when ten will do. No doubt even then they charged by the hour.
Henry Thorne is the Bulleds’ brother-in-law. Amos and Robert are about 48 and 43 respectively when the story starts in 1690. Thorne owns a half-share (‘moiety’) in a farm called ‘Pixyweeke’ in Kings Nympton, two or three miles from Romansleigh where the Bulleds live. He has leased the other half from three people who are living, but the lease will expire on their deaths. He has also leased a farm called ‘Hobbyhouse’ in Mariansleigh. He lives at Pixyweeke with his wife and daughter, both called Susanna, and other children.

On 22 March 1690 Thorne had acquired from William Webber of Chulmleigh the moiety of Pixyweeke for a term of 99 years to commence on Thorne’s death and end on the deaths of his wife and daughter. He owed £36 to Webber and another £37-16-0 to various other people for repairing the premises, maintaining his children etc. He assigned this moiety for a period of 40 years from the date of his death, to the Bulleds and George Tossell in exchange for settlement of the debts.

By 1 September “in the second year of the reign of William and Mary” (1690), Thorne is again in financial difficulty, owing a total of £184 to ten people including a miller and the Vicar of Burrington. He has failed to honour his bonds and we can imagine the pressure he is under. The Bulleds and Tossell agree to settle and/or take over these debts and the parties sign a Deed of Trust transferring the two properties to the Bulleds and Tossell for 40 years, or as long as Thorne shall live. They have the right to sell his goods and possessions as well as sell or rent the properties. They can recover their payments to Thorne’s creditors from the rents etc., or sale proceeds:

“And likewise by the same deed and for the same consideration and purpose did grant bargaine and sell to the said George Tossell, Robert and this defendant Amos Bulled, their Executors and Administrators, all these his the complainant’s goods therein mentioned (vizt.) two tableboards, two forms, seaven framed stools, eleaven pewter dishes, one Tinn Tankard, two brass pots, two brass pans and skilet, three Brandirons, three pairs of potcrooks, two potthangings, two chairs, three standing bedsteads, three feather beds, five feather bolster, two little feather pillow and the Ruggs, coverlets, Blanketts and sheets commonly used with the said beds, two sheets, two Bedds and the coverletts and Blanketts therewith commonly used, one hogshead, eight Barrells, a parcell of vessell staves, a parcell of hoops, three mares, one Milch cow, three young Bullocks, thirty sheep, six pigs, and the corne and hay in the Barne and Pallett att Pixyweeke aforesaid, one syder press or apple wring, and a pounding trough with a covenant for enjoyment thereof, under a proviso nevertheless that if the said complainant, his Executors or Administrators, should in a month’s tyme next after the date of the same deed procure all the said Bonds to be lawfully cancelled and delivered upp, and in the meantime should defend and indempnifie the said George Tossell, Robert Bulled
and Amos Bulled this defendant, that then the same deed was to be void.”

Three weeks later, on 27 September, Thorne has failed to repay the Bulleds and Tossell, whereupon he signs over to them all the apples he has harvested and all his other goods and chattels not included in the original deed, “except only two dry cows, a small sow pigg, which the complainant had from his motherlaw, the corne in Hobbyhouse barne, beare and syder, and all his and his familyes apparell and his bookes and ready money.” So he was all right for bread and a glass of beer or cider, but otherwise they had him by his apples!

But his troubles were not over. More debts were due, including 15/- for corn and malt, so on 18 October he signed another deed authorising the Bulleds and Tossell to fell and keep, or sell his trees on Pixyweeke.

Hobbyhouse and various goods were eventually sold to Richard Bawdon for £76, giving us an idea of the scale of Thorne’s indebtedness.

On 25 March 1694 Pixyweeke, with the exception of four parcels of land, is rented to Peter Rule for 7 years at £15-10-0 p.a. Unfortunately, Rule cannot keep up with the rent and in November 1698 Amos Bulled goes to demand the rent: “hee this defendant Amos in pursuance to a power to him referred in the Lease or Covenants made to the said Rule as aforesaid on the twentieth day after Lady Day last past, did repaire to the premises demised to the said Rule as aforesaid and then and there did demand the rent then due and in arrears from the said Rule. And the same being not then paid theo this defendant tarryed there untill sun sett and there being then noe sufficient distresse whereby to levy the said rent in arrear, this defendant Amos did then cutt up a turfe in the premises demised to the said Rule and entred thereon and claimed the same”. He sends in the bailiffs, later claiming that there were two bailiffs and a servant and that the distraint was peaceable, whereas in Thorne’s version there were 12 or 13 bailiffs and it was violent. Amos says that Rule didn’t have much and all he got was one little cow, eight ...... and one small ...... (both illegible). These animals were driven to the pound at Witheridge where their sale, with Rule’s other goods, made a profit of £6-0-9, the costs having been £1-12-4. Thorne complains that they were sold for well under market value and that there was no need to drive the cattle to Witheridge, six or seven miles away, when there were other pounds nearby.

The Bulleds (Tossell having died soon after signing the 1690 deed) then let part of Pixyweeke to Thomas Nott for a year for £3, another part to John Furse for a year at £7-10-0 and the remainder to Robert Tirkell for a year for £6-10-0.

In May 1699, claiming to have been unable to recoup the costs of settling Thorne’s debts and to have been forced to borrow £40 from Richard Stevens of Buckland Brewer and £20 from Thomas Nott, the Bulleds assign Pixyweeke to Stevens and Nott for 10 years, if Thorne
should live that long. The deed provides that Stevens should receive 2/3rds of the profits and Nott 1/3rd and that they “were not to molest the said Robert and this defendant Amos Bulled on the bonds given for securing the same money.” On 13 June Nott assigns his third share to Stevens.

This is all too much for Thorne and in July he issues a Bill of Complaint addressed to the Right Hon. John, Lord Somers, Baron of Evesham, Lord High Chancellor of England. The substance of his complaint is that the Bulleds, Tossell’s son and heir, Rule, Nott, Furse, Tirkell and others whose names are unknown to him, have formed a ‘Confederacy’ to defraud him of Pixyweeke, leaving him and his family destitute. He claims that the Bulleds, having become insolvent, abused the original Trust, taking profits out of Pixyweeke to settle their own debts rather than those they had taken over from him etc. etc.

The outcome is unknown, but it is interesting to have this insight into financial matters before banking was widely established in England. Goldsmiths used to lend against gold and silver in the 17th century, but it is patently obvious that Thorne and Rule were more at the pewter and tin level. The Bank of England was founded in 1694 and there was no Barclays or NatWest in Kings Nympton to lend against property. Interesting also to note how property was divided into shares, leased and so on.

Thomas Bulleid (1706-1791) was a Churchwarden and Overseer of the Poor in Winkleigh as was Samuel Bulleid in 1820, probably the Samuel (1774-1839) who occupied Stabdon Farm, Winkleigh, at that time.

John Bulleid of Mariansleigh appears in the Devon Muster Roll of 1569 as a Harquebusier. A harquebus was an early type of musket and John was liable to be called to arms. He would have had to provide his own weapon and armour, a chest protector and helmet at the very least. These would have been valued property and when he died in 1628 he bequeathed his musket to his son Richard. John was a well-to-do farmer, whose wife Thomazine had an interest in his martial arms, which she bequeathed to Richard when she died in 1635. They were already in his possession. Two of John’s relatives also appear in the Devon Muster Roll of 1569: Walter Bulhead of Hatherleigh, who is a billman, and Henry Bulhead of Winckley, an archer.

We have two tanners in the Devon Subsidy Rolls of 1524-7, both named John Bulhedde, one in Winkleigh and the other in Mariansleigh. There are also two brewers: William Bulhed, of Okehampton Manor, and Thomas Bulhedde of East Stonehouse in Plymouth. Oh, that I could find a brewer in the family today!

Horses were obviously very important to our ancestors and it amuses me to read about them in the wills:
- in 1650 John leaves his ‘red nagg, the old mare and the little mare’ to his wife
- James gets the ‘whait nosed nag’ from his father, Thomas, in 1702.
- In 1820 John leaves his ‘sorel mare called Violet’ to his wife.

White's Devonshire Directory of 1850 lists only two Bulleids in Winkleigh: Thomas, who was a cooper making and repairing barrels, and John still farming at Stabdon, which has now been occupied by the family for about two hundred years. By now, the family has largely left the land and Winkleigh, which reached its maximum size in the 1840s is in decline.