

A Merchant Family in Tudor & Stuart England

Chapter One: Lewes & London

The Puckle family who are the subject of this study, appear to have originated in Sussex - at least there are people with variants of that surname who left wills or paid taxes in the period before parish registers begin. The earliest is a Robro de Pukhole who was assessed at three shillings in the Sussex Subsidy of 1296. There are a large number of Puckles in Essex & also some in Kent whom I have been unable to link to this family - all but one of the 14 PCC wills before 1730 are of testators descended from the Sussex Puckles.

In the early sixteenth century there were possibly two Thomas Puckles living in Lewes: Thomas Puckle of Southover was assessed at £6 for the Lay Subsidy of 1524/5. He may be the same person as the Thomas Puckle (spelt Pochyll) who was assessed in the parish of St Peter Westout, a small parish outside the West Gate of the town: his goods were valued at £5. Either of these Thomases may be the father of the three brothers: Robert, Edmund & John all born in Lewes in the 1520s or 1530s. John's year of birth & birthplace are certain as he was a prominent citizen in Lewes & on various occasions was a juryman in the Lewes Archdeaconry Court, & obliged on oath to state his birthplace & age. We know from this that he was born in Lewes early in 1533 & lived there most of his life. Robert & Edmund both went to London, probably as apprentices. Anyone wishing to work in the City had to serve an apprenticeship there. After he was "made free" of the City Robert settled in the large parish of St Stephen, Coleman Street, married & had ten children. Apprentices were forbidden to marry until they had served their seven years. As they usually began their "servitude", as it was called, at the age of 12-14, most apprentices were about 21 on completing their "time". The entries of baptism for his children in the register of St Stephen's reveal that Robert was a "freemason", which at that date signified a stonemason rather than a member of a secret society. The Masons' Company was in existence as a craft guild by 1356 when a code of bylaws was promulgated. The few documents surviving from before the granting of a charter in 1677 suggest that at one time there was a distinction between masons & freemasons, possibly based on whether they worked in brick or stone, but no further information has survived to shed light on this. In a list of craft guilds compiled in 1421/2, now in the Brewers' archive, the masons are ranked 38th of the 112 guilds listed. According to John Stow in his "Survey of London" (published in 1598), at the Mayor's Feast in the Guildhall in 1531/2 the company was represented only by the Wardens & a single member, & was therefore allotted only "one mess". This livery company was therefore not a prominent one & an apprenticeship would have probably cost Robert's father considerably less than one in any of the "Great Twelve" companies who produced most of the Aldermen & Lord Mayors of London. The Masons' Hall was in Masons' Alley off Basinghall Street. This must have very convenient for Robert because it adjoined his parish church of St Stephen, Coleman Street. Masons' Alley is now called Masons' Avenue but the Hall site was sold by the Company in 1865.

The name of Robert's wife has not survived: it is possible that she came from Suffolk & that her father was Gabriel Eland. I have no real evidence for this but, Robert, the couple's first child was baptised on 18 January 1545 at Cratfield, Suffolk. The names Samuel, Gabriel & George only occur among Robert's children & their descendants,

not in other branches of the Puckle family. All these names feature in the Eland family, who were based in Cratfield but may have had relatives in London, as the name certainly occurs there in the sixteenth century. Most of the other children: Elizabeth, Gabriel, Anne, George, Samuel & Sarah were baptised in the London parish of St Stephen Coleman Street. I have been unable to find the baptisms of William, Margaret & Richard who are mentioned among Robert's children in the wills of other members of the family. The last recorded baptism was Sarah's in 1558. By 1582 when the City of London was taxed for the Lay Subsidy, Robert was living further south, towards Thames Street in one of three parishes in Dowgate ward: St Lawrence Pountney, St John the Baptist or Allhallows the Less; he was assessed at £3, less than his relatives were worth in the 1525 subsidy in Sussex. He lived to at least 76 - a great age for the time, outliving at least four of his children, but clearly was dependent on his children in his old age: both Samuel & Gabriel make provision in their wills for him. Gabriel's will (1593) stipulates that "the rent of my house in Walbrook shall go to the maintenance of my father Robert Puckle". Samuel's (made 1596) states "I doe give to my father Robert Puckle twentie shillings a yeare soe longe as he shall live, to be paid in every feaste of St Michael tharchangell by my Executor". Robert ended his days in Rottingdean. His daughter Margaret had married John Cole in St Margaret's Rottingdean on 7 February 1588 (date of ML). They had seven children including one named Robert after his grandfather. Robert Puckle died in 1599 & was buried at St Margaret's Rottingdean on 8 April.

The fact that Margaret married in Lewes rather than in London indicates that close contact was kept with the branch of the family remaining in Lewes. Gabriel makes his "Uncle John Puckle of Lewes in Sussex" one of the overseers of his will & leaves him five marks for his "paynes". Robert's third son, George was baptised in St Stephen's in 1551 & apprenticed to his uncle Edmund in London in 1565. He may be the George Puckle whose daughter Mary was baptised in St Dustan in the East on 6 January 1569/70, but he died at the age of 27 & was buried not in London, but in All Saints Lewes on 6 September 1578.

Edmund was "bound" to Thomas Shottesham, a freeman of the Merchant Taylors' Company, & himself became a freeman on 14 May 1557. This apprenticeship may have been arranged with Edmund's father's business interests in mind as woollen cloth was an increasingly important export in Sussex. It was frequently sold to London merchants & made its way down the Ouse to Meeching (modern Newhaven) & then around the coast to London. There is no evidence for John's apprenticeship, perhaps because his father wished him to stay in Lewes to deal with the family's business there. He would probably have served as an apprentice to his father, as the majority of young boys did at this date. As an adult he described himself as a merchant.

The Merchant Taylors' Company, whose charter dates from 1327, had originally specialised in making tents for military purposes & "linen armour" which was the padded linen tunic worn under armour to prevent chafing, however their records show that even as early as the fourteenth century they were involved in the buying and selling of cloth. The Company ranked sixth or seventh in alternate years in the hierarchy of the City livery companies as it had been involved in a dispute with the Salters about precedence which had been settled by this compromise. The expression "all at sixes and sevens" is said to originate from this dispute. Apprenticeship to this

company was probably quite costly. Nevertheless when Edmund's & Robert's sons reached the right age their fathers seem to have regarded apprenticeship with the company as an investment. Robert bound his sons, Robert (born 1545) & George (born 1551) to his brother Edmund, & they were made "free" in 1566 & 1572. His fifth child, Samuel (born 1552) was apprenticed to his elder brother Robert in 1571 & received his freedom in 1578. A ballad composed for an entertainment given by the Merchant Taylors for James I illustrates the prestige of the company. One verse reads:-

Then let all London companies
So highly in renown
Give Merchant Taylors name & fame
To win the laurel crown.
For seven of England's royal kings
Thereof have all been free,
And with their love and favours grac'd
This worthy company.

Thomas Shottesham, Edmund's master, was probably born in Lowestoft as his will of 1574 mentions his property there & his brother (?) John's children were baptised there in the 1560s. Edmund Puckle remained on friendly terms with his master after completing his apprenticeship, as he was a witness to Thomas's will which mentions property "in the said parishe of St Mary at Hill wherin I late dwelled and wherin Edmund Puckle now dwelleth". In 1565 he is recorded as applying for the lease of a house belonging to the Merchant Taylors' in the parish of St Mary Colechurch. Thomas became a Warden of the Merchant Taylors in 1563 & was clearly a senior member of the livery company as on 15 July 1572 he was invited to be the next Master of the Company but declined & was forced to pay a fine of £40. It is recorded that he was believed to have been persuaded to refuse by his wife, Mary. She was probably afraid that being Master would prove ruinously expensive.

Edmund Puckle married Joane Coppinger on 29 July 1565 at St Dunstan in the East, & his five children were all baptised in the same church, described in Stow's Survey as "a fair & large church of an ancient building & within a large churchyard; it hath a great parish of many rich merchants". One son, Thomas died in infancy, but Edmund's eldest son William acquired his membership of the Merchant Taylors' "by patrimony" (ie by virtue of his father's freedom) in 1591. William was therefore still alive at this date but there is no record of his marriage & he is not mentioned among Edmund's children by his uncle John Puckle of Lewes in his will of 1606.

In the early 1570s Edmund Puckle became involved in a Chancery case. John Metcalfe of the City of London, skinner, claimed that he had entered into a bond with him in which John made over to Edmund the lease of a shop & tenements in Thames Street for 3 years. In return on 31 December 1571 when Edmund's tenure of the lease expired he was to pay £40 to John Colmer, grocer who presumably was a creditor of John Metcalfe's. During this 3 year period Metcalfe once more "being in want of money" approached Edmund again & asked for a loan of 50 shillings for a quarter's rent of a tenement in Thames Street which he owed to William Maynard, mercer. Edmund agreed to this loan "if he might have the keeping of the said bond of £40 to retain until he was repaid the same 50/- again". Metcalfe brought the case because he

claimed Edmund Puckle had not paid the 50/-, nor the £40, nor had he returned the lease or the bond. It appears that Edmund sometimes acted as a sort of pawnbroker because another of Metcalfe's grievances was that he had borrowed 25/- "upon a large tester of a bed & 5 very large curtains with a double vallance fringed with red & green saye which was well worth £6". Saye was a kind of fine serge frequently used for the hangings & covers of a bed which were often among the most valuable items in a household, much more valuable than the wooden furniture. John Metcalfe had a similar experience with "divers parcells of ordnance" & a bill of debt for £5. According to Edmund Puckle, however, he had been unable to gain access to the premises in Thames Street, having been prevented from doing so by the tenant, Jeffery Griffin, who also refused to pay Edmund any rent, claiming that he had a lease of 10 years from John Metcalfe. It is difficult to arrive at a fair opinion of the conduct of two persons involved because, in common with other cases surviving from the Elizabethan courts, some documents from the case & particularly the judgement are missing.

In the 1581 Subsidy Edmund was assessed at £12 & therefore paid 12/-, four times what his brother Robert paid. Edmund died in 1589 & left a will of which his wife Joan was sole executrix. He asked to be buried in St Dunstan in the East but oddly enough there is no record of his burial in the parish register of that church or in that of St Mary At Hill. His will mentions a corner messuage or tenement near Billingsgate in the parish of St Mary At Hill & one can't help wondering whether he had acquired this from Thomas Shottesham's heirs or from the unfortunate John Metcalfe, since part of Thames Street is in this parish. He left the rent & profit of this property to his son William with the proviso that he pay 100 marks each (about £66) to his daughters Anne & Elizabeth, the first instalment on the day of their marriage, & the same amount to his son Arthur to be given in full when he reached the age of 24. He divided his estate "accordinge to the Laudable Use & custom of the Cittie of London" which meant that a third went to his children, a third to his wife & the last third he could dispose of as he wished. This enlightened custom ensured that the wife of a London citizen received significantly more from her husband's estate than was usual at the time. As the widow frequently remarried, some of her husband's money might eventually benefit people who were not his blood relatives so it was quite usual to leave her only the use of the house & its contents or to recommend her to the care of her son (the heir). If she was left money it was often only on condition she did not remarry. The City of London custom also meant the children shared the estate equally with no preference being given to the eldest child or the sons over the daughters. Edmond expressed the wish that his wife would "bring upp my saide children in the feare of god as I doubt nott butt that she will have the motherly care of them until they the saide daughters are married & the saide Arthur bounde apprentice to some honest man".

Anne married John Goodfellow Citizen & Salter on 10 January 1591/2 at St Mary Abbots Kensington & bore him 10 sons & 3 daughters, 11 of whom lived to be mentioned in their father's will of 1617. They lived in the parish of St Lawrence Jewry. Their second son John was apprenticed to his uncle Arthur Puckle who was by now a freeman of the Leathersellers' Company. Arthur, Edmund's youngest son, married Mary Springham on 29 May 1615 at St Martin Pomeroy but died without issue in 1617 leaving his nephew & apprentice John Goodfellow £400. His widow Mary married Thomas Gawen & in 1627 the couple brought an action in the Court of

Exchequer against Arthur's partner, Henry Browne, claiming that he had defrauded them of a substantial amount of money by means of false accounting. The mercery business of the Puckle/Browne partnership was so substantial that the court was obliged to call in a professional accountant to audit the books. Apart from a slight undervaluation of some remnants of cloth in the inventory, the accountant & court came to the conclusion "that the books of Account for the partnership have been extraordinarily fair kept & do contain many parcels & very great sums yet can we not find any just cause of objection against the truth of the said account".

In his will Arthur left his sister Anne £200 & "to every one of her children £20 apeece". He left his Livery Company "tenne poundes to make them a Dynner" & his other sister Elizabeth £400. It is revealing that he expressed the hope that God wanted him to "enjoy that kingdom which he hath prepared for me & all his Elect". This is very much the terminology of Puritanism which was already taking a strong hold on the City. Arthur is the first to show signs of the non-conformity which several other Puckles were to share later in the seventeenth century. In his will Arthur left £10 to Mr Andrew Castleton preacher of Ironmonger Lane. It seems that he was minister of St Martin Vintry in Ironmonger Lane as he is mentioned in the will of another parishioner Margaret Touller. The fact that he is described as a preacher indicates that he was a Puritan rather than a Laudian clergyman. Charles I became so exasperated with these Puritan divines that he eventually ejected them from their parishes in 1643. Among those ejected was Josias Shute Rector of St Mary Woolnoth who was the second husband of Arthur's other sister, Elizabeth, & overseer of both Arthur's and John Goodfellow's wills. Josias & Elizabeth had married at St Mary Woolnoth on 25 April 1614. He was also chaplain to the East India Company, & a noted Hebrew scholar who had published a book of sermons. He was buried in his former church on 14 June 1643 so actually did not live to see his formal ejection which was on 1 July. Elizabeth had previously been the wife of Michael Glandfield & was older than Josias. She did not die until 1670 & was buried on 14 June at the "east end of the chancel by her late husband". She was believed to be over 100 but was actually 94.

Apart from his own son William, Edmund Puckle has also taken his brother's son Robert to be his apprentice. Robert was made free on 24 January 1566/7 & on 19 February 1570 at St Dunstan in the East he married Anne Page. His seven children were all baptised in this parish but Anne died in 1576/7 & was buried in St Dunstan's on 21 January. He married again on 2 September 1578 but unfortunately the register has a blank where his bride's name should be. Robert was assessed at £6 for the 1582 subsidy so he was not as wealthy as his former master after whom he named his second son, but he seems to have spread his net rather wider than his relatives & to have engaged in foreign trade. He was also involved in a large number of court cases which illustrate the sort of perils a merchant of the period might have to face.

The first of these was an Exchequer case in 1573 involving a bad debt. The only papers surviving from this case are the evidence of Thomas Browne of Ipswich who was apprenticed to Thomas Pratt, presumably a skinner since that is how his apprentice described himself. It appears that George Clapperton owed Robert Puckle £34 & knowing that Thomas Pratt had some of George Clapperton's goods in his keeping Robert had attempted to lay claim to some mockado which he felt was worth £22 and so would go some way towards settling the debt. Mockado was a sort of

mock velvet made of mixed fibres. It was one of the “new draperies” only recently introduced by the Flemish weavers & therefore expensive. Norwich was a centre for its manufacture. It is difficult to get a full picture of events in this case especially since Thomas Browne although admitting that he now believed “the saide wares did lye in chests in the house of one Hulme a broker” to most of the other questions pleaded ignorance. It does seem rather high-handed of Robert to try to clear a bad debt in this fashion, and he emerges as a rather obstinate & determined person. This impression is reinforced by the evidence in later cases he was involved in.

In 1575 Robert Puckle & two other merchants charted a hoy to go from London to Yarmouth with a cargo of woollen cloth, stockings, felt hats & waistcoats. The ship was captured by pirates near Yarmouth & Robert lost goods to the value of £14, the other two £15 between them. The three men believed to have carried out the attack were apprehended but when the case came up before the “Sessions for the Admiralty holden at the Guildhall at Norwich” the jury “not having the feare of god before their eyes nor the remembrance of their Dutie towards your Majestie’s laws, untruly, partiallie & perjuredlie by verdict acquitted the said notorious and common robbers & found them not guiltie”. Rather disingenuously describing themselves as “very poor men desirous to get a living” Robert & his two associates brought a bill of complaint before the Queen’s Court of the Star Chamber - they wished to subpoena the twelve named members of the Norwich jury & get them to account for their perverse verdict. Once again we do not know the outcome of this case but it illustrates Robert’s determination & his refusal to accept defeat.

In a number of other Star Chamber cases Robert Puckle was in dispute with a former partner of his, Robert Bridges, a draper living at Stratford at Bowe. Here Robert seems to have met his match: neither litigant was ready to back down and instead of accepting defeat the loser would immediately launch another suit. The original case had been heard in 1578 in the Guildhall before Sir Richard Pipe then Lord Mayor of London & the Aldermen, & had been settled in Bridges’ favour. The dispute arose out of a joint venture of John Wheatley of Portslade Sussex gentleman, John Wenham of Brighthelmstone (Brighton) mercer, Robert Bridges & Robert Puckle in a ship called the Centaur of 100 tons burden. The ship left the Port of London on 20 September 1577. It was agreed she should go to Spain, to Cadiz or Ayamonte there to take on freight & supplies for the return journey. In Ayamonte Robert Puckle bought 30 wayes of salt to the value of £120. He later claimed he was out of pocket after the sale of this salt in London & also said that he had not been reimbursed for what he had spent on the ship’s supplies or the mariners’ wages, Robert Bridges claimed never to have seen the salt & furthermore that he had already paid Robert Puckle £50 in the house of one Smyth a scrivener on Tower Hill. He produced someone whom he claimed was Thomas Jones of West Ham who confirmed that he had witnessed this transaction. This evidence had been given in Robert Puckle’s own house before the Clerk of the City of London but Robert himself had been absent on Jury duty as the Newgate Gaol Delivery Sessions which were being held at the time. Robert went to extraordinary lengths to prove that Bridges’ witness had committed perjury, himself enquiring all over West Ham for a person named Thomas Jones. Eventually he was told that someone answering his description “was a waterman & dwelleth about Wapping or Ratcliffe & was sometyme called “Will of Wapping””. Will of Wapping turned out to be William Lockett, a former parish apprentice, who had spent 6 months as Robert Bridges’ servant. Robert Puckle found him in Billingsgate, got him to

confess to the perjury, bought him a drink & then had him arrested & clapped in the Poultry Compter. The ramifications & numerous depositions in these cases are too complex to enter into, but it does emerge that Robert Puckle was also suspected of attempting to suborn witnesses either by bribery or threats & it is interesting that at one point his two apprentices Nicholas Wenham & Samuel Puckle, Robert's younger brother, are brought into the case: Nicholas refused to swear that the writing in a certain book brought before the court was Samuel Puckle's.

We can see from these cases how wide an area was covered by Robert in pursuit of profit: he obviously had a lot of trade with East Anglia where many important weaving towns like Colchester, Sudbury & Norwich were situated. He travelled abroad & he still had contacts with Sussex: apart from the two partners from Sussex who shared in the ill-fated voyage to Yarmouth, Robert features in the Port Book for Lewes & Meeching in 1573. He sent from London to Lewes in the "James" of Meeching a cargo of Irish frieze, Welsh "Cotton", 3 barrels of hops, steel, pitch, tar, stone pots, canvas, 6 bottles of aquavite (a sort of brandy) & a hundred wainscots (oak panelling). Frieze was a coarse sort of woollen cloth & cotton a type of weave, not a fabric. Robert clearly did not confine himself to dealing in cloth & sometimes imported goods like canvas & aquavite which probably came from France. It is typical of Robert's rather pugnacious character that his only other appearance in the Sussex Archives is in 1572 when he appears in the Winchelsea Court for Strangers as "a prisoner for words spoken against the court". He was initially fined £5 for this offence, a very large sum since his goods were assessed at £6 in the Lay Subsidy for 1582 in London. He was able, however, to get the fine mitigated to 11s 6d. He travelled widely & in fact seems to have died away from home, as the "Robert Puckle, a merchant" who was buried in St Saviour's Dartmouth on 17 July 1596 is probably him. His cousin Edmund Puckle, son of John Puckle of Lewes, was living in Dartmouth by this date.

John, the only brother to remain in Lewes, married Barbara Page, a widow, in about 1560 & had at least three children, all sons: John, Edmund & Thomas, this last son being the only one whose baptism was recorded. He was baptised in All Saints on 27 October 1567. Unfortunately the surviving parish registers for Lewes all begin in the mid 1560s. John & Thomas remained in Lewes but Edmund settled in Dartmouth, a port which regularly traded with Lewes. In the 1530s the Ouse was diverted from its silted-up outfall at Seaford to a purpose-built "New Haven" further west (at Meeching) & this had increased Lewes's river trade. The head-port for the area was Chichester, "Meeching with Lewes" was a "Creek" within the jurisdiction of Chichester, & therefore from 1565 had to keep a record of all goods passing through the port & the taxes payable on them. Some of these port books for Lewes have not survived but those that have record the fact that in the 1580s & 1590s John Puckle was sending cloth of various kinds such as Welsh frieze, Irish frieze, "mantells", & bolts of silk to London. This cloth was presumably destined for his brother Edmund to sell in London, but he also sent wainscots, as well as (oak) barrel boards & iron, these last items being products of the Sussex Weald. On two occasions in the 1580s he bought cargoes of bay salt but it is not clear whether he was importing it to sell locally or sending it somewhere else.

Lewes by Elizabethan times was already an important market town. In 1586 William Camden, the Elizabethan antiquary, said of Lewes "for populousness & extent it may

be ranked among the principal towns in the county". It was well placed for both road & river transport & as the only bridge across the Ouse was sited in Lewes, most of the trade of the area passed through the town. It was also an important administrative & social centre. In about 1564 a Town Hall & Sessions House was built in the middle of the High Street near the White Hart, for use at the four Quarter Sessions which took place every year. These were presided over by Justices of the Peace drawn from the local gentry. The Archdeaconry Court of Lewes also met in the town & had jurisdiction over most of the eastern half of the Diocese of Chichester.

John Puckle lived through uncertain times in Lewes: an outbreak of plague in 1538 led Thomas Cromwell to ask the parish of St Anne to allow the victims to be buried in their churchyard, probably chosen because it was outside the town. The "honest men" of the parish finally agreed but only after "consultation together for half a day & a night". The same Thomas Cromwell presided in 1536 over the Dissolution of the Monasteries which initiated a rush for land among those prosperous enough to take advantage of it. The Friary of the Franciscans or Greyfriars was sold in 1544 to John Kyme, one of the two burgesses Lewes was entitled to send to Parliament, & he converted it into a private house later known as "The Friars". Cromwell himself acquired the estates of the very wealthy Cluniac Priory in Southover & converted the Prior's lodging which became known as the "Lord's Place". It passed to the Crown on Cromwell's execution & eventually became the property of Richard Sackville 2nd Earl of Dorset whose father Thomas, Lord Buckhurst had become Lord Lieutenant of Sussex in 1569. In July 1545 neighbouring Brighton, then a small fishing village, was attacked by the French fleet & when Seaford was threatened, the gallant Sir Nicholas Pelham of Laughton, who had a town house in Lewes, led the successful defence. His lavish memorial in St Michael's church praises his "brave exploit in great King Henry's days" & concludes with a pun on his name:

"What time the French sought to have sacked Seaford,
This Pelham did repel them back aboard"

In the 1550s when Queen Mary attempted to return England to the Church of Rome a total of 17 Sussex people, two from Lewes, were burnt at the stake in Lewes High Street between 1554 and 1557 - events which must have made a deep impression at the time & are still commemorated every November 5th by the town's bonfire societies. Elizabeth's reign was more peaceful for the inhabitants of Lewes: members of the local gentry built houses for themselves in the increasingly prosperous town. In 1568 the Pelham family of Laughton bought the premises which later became the White Hart Hotel. George Goring of Ovingdean built a lavish house for himself in 1573 in St Andrew's Lane, it later became Pelham House. His brother Henry remodelled the Bull House as his town house in 1583. The prospect of a Spanish invasion was the only real threat to the prosperity of the town. Lord Buckhurst as Lord Lieutenant of Sussex chose Lewes as the place to store the county's ordnance & munitions. On the 31st January 1588 42 barrells of gunpowder, together with cast iron ordnance & other munitions were delivered to the Constables of Lewes. 20 of these were given to Lord Buckhurst "at the tyme that the spanyshe fleet came along by Newe Haven, for my Lord Admarall", one of the remaining barrells was given "for the use of the towne of Brighthelmstone". Some time later one of the remaining barrells was "by the holl consent of the Fellowship spent in shooting of the great peeces in the Castle att the Rejoising day for the overthrow of the Spanyshe navie".

John Puckle was a member of the Fellowship referred to in the above quotation. This was a self-appointed oligarchy of approximately 12 members which had some of the power & privileges of a town council. The Fellowship had the power to levy rates & issue by-laws. It was chosen from "the wealthier & discreeter sort of townsmen". Their main meetings were at Whitsun when they elected new members & marched in the annual watch, & Michaelmas when they met to approve the accounts of the two retiring constables & elect new ones who served for a year. John served as a Constable of the town on four occasions. Among other things the constables were responsible for maintaining law & order & providing poor relief. In 1564 John was one of three burgesses to contribute 20 shillings towards the building of a Market House, as the £10 left by Alice Holter, widow of a former constable, had proved insufficient for the purpose. The other 12 burgesses contributed 10 shillings each. The market house was a small round or octagonal arcaded building shown on John Randoll's 1620 map of Lewes. It probably resembled the market cross which survives at Chichester, and was built in the middle of the High Street opposite the mouth of Castlegate. It survived until 1648, when it was replaced by a new building.

John Puckle lived in the parish of All Saints, probably on School Hill. As he is mentioned in the Town Book of Lewes for making an encroachment by "inclosing A Lane lying & Adjoining on the South side of St Johns Churchyard" during the period 1603-10, he may have lived on the North side of School Hill where his land would adjoin that in the parish of St John sub Castro. Like many of his relatives he was also involved in a legal dispute. In about 1581/2 Richard Gravesende of New Shoreham bought some iron from John Puckle, but being unable to pay for it at the time, he entered into a debt of obligation by which he engaged to pay the sum of £55 by a certain date. Later he paid £15 of the debt by "the hand of one John Pelland of Lewes" (John Pelland was a colleague of John Puckle in the "Fellowship of the Twelve"). Then John Puckle asked him to take up another "obligation" of four pounds ten shillings owed to him by John Hoshier but which Thomas Sowton was obliged to pay. Gravesende knew there was little chance of settling this debt as Sowton was "a verie poore man". Presumably Puckle would have forgiven Gravesende £4/10s of his own debt, if he had been able to collect this bad debt for him. As he was unable to do this he had now increased his debt to £40 (the arithmetic in the document is rather shaky!). John Puckle had "promised to forbear" but had forced this extra debt upon Gravesende by his "hard dealinge". Puckle now wanted to charge interest on the debt, making the sum fifty pounds & in 1587 in order to secure the debt he insisted that Gravesende make a "bill of sale or deede of guifte of all his goods." In October 1588 Gravesende sold some land in Shoreham to Robert Kent of Broadwater. This would have brought him a sum of £220 of which Robert Kent claimed he would pay £50 to John Puckle in satisfaction of the debt. He claimed that Puckle was "contente & agreed thereto". The ramifications of this case are too complicated to recount in full but the essence of Gravesende's claim was that Puckle, Kent & another person called Bartholomew Burrage were "confederate together [and] threaten to take the benefit of the said obligacion and deede of guifte by the Comon lawe & to defraude" Gravesende.

In his answer John Puckle "claimed that he had suffered great loss & hindrance" because of this debt. He said that Gravesende had paid the John Hoshier money & that he had given him the bill to be cancelled. He made no mention of Kent & Burrage in

his answer so presumably denied colluding with them. The bill of sale or deed of gift fell due on the feast of Pentecost 1588 & as this money was not forthcoming he thought he might “lawfully comence suit at the Comon lawe”. If John Puckle did commence a suit it has not survived & nor has the judgement in this case.

John’s wife Barbara was the widow of Anthony Page & was herself involved in a protracted legal case about the will of William Everett. He had died in South Malling, Lewes in 1558, & by his will entrusted the care of his children Samuel & Dorothy, who were still minors, to his friends John Manser & Anthony Page, who were also overseers of the will. They were to sell his farm & some of the money so raised was to go to the maintenance of his children. Richard Jefferies, also mentioned in the will purchased the farm for £120. Samuel Everett did not live to inherit but Dorothy did, & in 1570 she married John Shelley of Patcham. In May 1572 Dorothy was granted administration of the remaining estate. Her husband John Shelley & his brother George claimed that Manser, Page and Jefferies had colluded to defraud the Everett heirs by inserting extra clauses in the will, specifically those entrusting Page & Manser with the sale of the farm & appointing them overseers. In September 1572 the dispute had already been brought before a commission in Sussex consisting of Sir John Pelham, John Kyme MP & Anthony Stapely Esquire. They took depositions from various witnesses including Barbara Puckle who had also given testimony when the case was heard in the Lord Mayor’s Court of the City of London. The plot to acquire the farm was said to have been hatched in Anthony Page’s house & Barbara had overheard conversations about it when she “was going to and fro in the house”. The Shelleys claimed there were inconsistencies in Barbara’s evidence & accused her of perjury. They brought two cases in the Star Chamber but as the will survives in the Public Record Office with the contested clauses still in place it seems unlikely that they were successful. This litigation illustrates the problems of ensuring fair treatment for heirs who were minors when their parents & close relatives were dead.

John Puckle married for the second time in February 1593/4. His bride was Thomasine Mabbe presumably a relative by marriage of his son’s wife Sarah. The licence states that John was a merchant & Thomasine a widow. She seems to have married at least three times, as at least two of her grown-up children bore the surname Dawson. Thomas Dawson, John’s stepson, served as a Constable of Lewes in 1596/7, the year following John’s last holding of the post, and again in 1605/6. John appointed Thomas Dawson one of the overseers of his will. John died on 23 June 1606 & was buried at All Saints on 25 June. He left a very detailed will naming all his living relatives.

As Thomas & John Puckle, John’s sons who remained in Lewes, grew up they showed no interest in municipal office & the Puckles disappear from the Town Book & the Book of John Rowe (a collection of documents relating to early history of the town collected by the antiquary of that name who was steward to the Marquis of Abergavenny). Nor did they apparently share in their father’s business activities, John especially, hardly features in any records & Thomas seems to have been more interested in consolidating his social position in the town & in acquiring land to support it. He owned property in Midhurst & Tortington which were the subject of disputes in 1617 & 1619 when they had descended to his son. He also owned the lease of Kingston parsonage which had belonged to his father. On 3 October 1609 there is a mention in the “church book” of St John the Baptist, Southover of a

disagreement between Thomas Puckle & Thomas Russell over who had a right to sit in a pew "which belongeth to the house of Mrs Plomer". The vestry, of which Thomas Puckle was a member, settled the disagreement by ruling that "the man who did or should dwell in the house should sit uppermost or highest in that seat". At this date it is clear that men & women sat in separate pews. This was really a dispute about status as only the wealthier churchgoers had their own pews at the front of the church. At the age of 38 Thomas had married Agnes Fuller of Hawkhurst. They lived in Southover which was then a village separate from Lewes, in a "mansion" house probably on the site of what are now nos 40-42 Southover High Street. There is no record of the baptisms of their children at any of the Lewes churches but Thomas died in October 1610 & in his will mentions his son Thomas, daughter Elizabeth & an infant yet unborn. He appoints John Goodfellow one of the overseers of his will. This is yet another link between the Sussex & the London Puckles, as John Goodfellow Citizen & Salter, was the husband of Edmond Puckle's daughter Ann. It is interesting that after Thomas's death in 1610 his widow Agnes remarried in 1615. Her husband was Henry Plummer (whose family probably owned the pew) & they lived in the mansion house until their deaths, after which Thomas Puckle the younger sold it to Ambrose Trayton.

John Puckle the younger, Thomas's brother, who also remained in Lewes, married Sarah Mabbe on 27 February 1586 at All Saints. Their first child, John was baptised at All Saints on 26 October 1587, but this child seems to have died, as their next child was also christened John on 27 February 1589. After that there were no more children so Sarah may also have died. John's only other appearance in the records is on 20 May 1592 when "John Puckle the Younger" together with a group of other prominent inhabitants of the town, many of them members of the Fellowship, acquired the "broken church" of St Nicholas which stood in the market on the site of the present war memorial. This might suggest that the John Puckle who was a constable in 1594/5 was this John & not his father, but there is no way of proving this, John Puckle the Elder was still active in the town's affairs because in 1591 he is recorded as attending a meeting for the feoffees of the Free School in Lewes, set up by Agnes Morley's will in 1512. His son John died in October 1605 & was buried in All Saints on 20 October 1605.

When John Puckle the Elder died on June 23rd in the following year the heir, John Puckle the grandson was still a minor. John Puckle had held his lands in Lewes, Ringmer & Southover direct from the Crown & his death meant that the land reverted to the crown & an Inquisition Post Mortem had to be held. Since the heir was a minor, custody of the lands & the wardship of the heir & the right to arrange his marriage passed to the monarch who usually sold these rights, sometimes to next of kin but often simply to the highest bidder. Thomas Puckle, the heir's uncle may well have bought the Wardship, but there is impossible to establish this. John Puckle who had been named in his grandfather's will as "mine heir apparent" was also made executor of the will although he was only 17. He received a rather different preparation for adult life from his forbears as he was admitted to the Middle Temple on 4 May 1608 although there is no record of his being called to the Bar. According to William Harrison in his "Description of England" of 1587 "our merchants ...often change estate with gentlemen" & this seems to have been the third John Puckle's intention. He aspired to live the life of a country gentleman. In 1610, the year in which he would have come into his inheritance, he bought Wood's Tenement in the Hole, a

house & farm of about 200 acres at Glyndebourne, & probably in the following year he married, his bride's name being Anne (I have found no record of the marriage). The couple made their home at Glyndebourne. A son named John was baptised at Ringmer on 4 Aug 1612 but was buried a few days later. In 1614 John "enfeoffed" a number of small pieces of in Wellingham & Ringmer to William Delve of Ringmer - these were probably inherited from his grandfather. In 1615 he bought another 200 acre farm at Ringmer, the Manor Farm of Gote, from Thomas Langworth, this adjoined his property at Glyndebourne. When the churchwardens of the parish of Ringmer were "beating the bounds" on 1 June 1618 they walked beside "Mr Puckle's brook" but its owner now styled himself "John Puckle Esquire", & was possibly in financial difficulties, because in August of the same year he sold the entire Glyndebourne estate to Herbert Haye. This estate later came by marriage into the possession of the Christie family who established the Opera House at Glyndebourne, & part of Wood's house survives within the present mainly Victorian house. I have not been able to discover where John & Ann Puckle lived after leaving Glyndebourne or where they are buried.

Elizabeth & Thomas, the two children of Thomas Puckle of Southover, were the only Sussex descendants in the next generation of John Puckle the merchant. Elizabeth married Thomas Luxford of Wartling at Hailsham on 26 August 1637. The Luxfords were a gentry family & appear in the Heralds' Visitation of Sussex in 1664. Sadly Elizabeth only lived another year & probably died in childbirth, as she was buried on the same day her daughter Elizabeth was baptised, on 4 June 1638. On 30 October 1632 Thomas Puckle, her brother, had married Mary Tourle in Lewes, at St John under the Castle, as it was then called. She was the daughter of Edward Tourle, a prominent butcher in the town, who served as a constable in 1624 & 1633. The family were of sufficient standing to require a marriage settlement, which survives, & from it we learn that the property in Southover (now nos 40-2 Southover High Street) together with "Hamlands" (40 acres of meadow & pastureland the Puckles still owned in Wellingham near Ringmer) were to be Mary's jointure, but she would not receive it until after the death of both her husband Thomas himself & his mother, who was living in the Southover house with her second husband. Thomas was buried on 20 March 1664/5 at St John sub Castro but Mary survived him & was not buried until 2 Jan 1670 so it seems odd that Thomas sold the Southover property to Ambrose Trayton in 1653.

The couple had two children baptised in St John sub Castro: Thomas & Mary, & three more children who, like Mary, were buried at All Saints, Lewes between 1640 & 1651. The baptism of another son John is not recorded in either church but we know of his existence because he was apprenticed to Thomas Addison of the Tallow Chandlers' Company on 10 August 1654 when he was probably about 14. He seems never to have married & was buried in 1692 in St Stephen Walbrook. Thomas the eldest child moved the Sussex Puckles to the other end of the county when he married Mary Holmden whose mother was a member of another Sussex gentry family, the Combers. The couple married on 18 August 1659 at Limpsfield in Surrey & made their home about 4 miles away, at Westerham Kent, where at least seven children were born to them (the register is defective in the 1670s). The only children to survive infancy however were the daughters: Elizabeth, Mary & Anne. Elizabeth died aged 19 & was buried at Westerham on 6 October 1694, Mary & Anne were mentioned in the will of their great-uncle Dean Thomas Coomber in 1700. Mary probably did not

marry, as she was unmarried in 1700 when she would have been 33, but Anne who was only 23, may well have married. I have not been able to find out any more about them. Their father Thomas was still alive in 1684 when he brought a case in the Court of the Arches against Sarah Fuller, the widow of John Fuller of Northiam, butcher, whose will of 1679 was the source of the dispute. Thomas's mother was Agnes Fuller of Hawkhurst & John Fuller was probably Thomas's cousin. Thomas was only left £10 in the will, & all John's land in Hawkhurst as well as all the rest of his capital after funeral expences etc were paid went to John's wife Sarah. It is difficult to see how Thomas could quarrel with this, but like most of his family, he seems to have been fond of litigation & perhaps he felt he had some claim to the Hawkhurst land. Thomas's wife, Mary was buried at Westerham on 29 June 1684 but he is not buried there. He may be the Thomas Puckle who was Commissioner for Roads in Sussex in 1709, but he would have been 75 by then. I have found no burial for him.

There is a family of Puckles in Icklesham near Rye in the 1690s. John Puckle was living in Rye when he married Mary Reynolds of Icklesham in October 1694. He probably acquired Lynthurst Farm in Icklesham through his marriage, & henceforth made his living as a grazier, which meant he had large flocks of sheep & herds of cattle, who would have grazed on the extensive marshland in the area. John was churchwarden of Icklesham in 1702 but he died in the following year & was buried at Icklesham in July 1703. The family continued in Icklesham through the first half of the eighteenth century but they do not appear to be connected to the Puckles who originated in Lewes. There was a John Puckle living in Brookland, just over the county border in Kent, in the 1670s. He married Winifred May at Brookland in 1671. A number of his letters about legal matters to Samuel Jeake of Rye are in the East Sussex Record Office. Brookland was part of Romney Marsh, also noted for its grazing & it seems most likely that the Icklesham family came from there & that John Puckle of Brookland is the father of John Puckle of Icklesham.