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SUMMARY:

1749 Letter from Charles Webber of Exeter Cathedral in reply to Samuel Norris of D& C Canterbury as they are refusing to set the Fine for the lease for the new tenant unless he can send some one up to Canterbury who understands the situation. He thinks Canterbury are expecting too much from this '*poor estate*'.

He explains the custom of Doccombe Manor is to grant 3 lives with widowhoods for each tenement – i.e. 1 male life to possess it & 2 in reversion (waiting) each with a widowhood (6 lives) but one old male life of 90 on his deathbed may agree to marry a neighbour's daughter of 14 or 15, be entitled to his widowhood & not remarry but live as a whore, keeping the tenement up to the total of 150 years. Hence no income to the lessee from fees for adding lives for 150 years for that tenement.

He thinks that a 21 year lease for Doccombe is the same as 60 years as on the very last day of the tenure he will fill up every male life of the manor before surrendering the manor up, probably lasting for the next 40 or 50 years. If the lease expires it will be very difficult to find another lessee for 21 years as they will not earn anything from adding any lives.

Exeter Cathedral has several similar manors but the fines for the renewals of the leases are different; some a 1/5th. some a 1/6th & some a 1/7th of a year's value of the rack rent. This lessee is agreeable to lease the manor for the same fine as his predecessor did or he will arrange for someone appropriate to calculate the rack rent.

TRANSCRIPTION

Outside

To Mr Sam Norris Chapter Clerk at Canterbury

1749 Mr Webber Doccomb[e] Manour Letter from Charles Webber

Inside

Sir

I Rec[eived]d yours by the last Post wherein you write me that the Accounts Rec[eive]d of the Nature & value of Doccombe are so different from the Expectations of the Dean & Chapter that they do not choose to set any Fine unless the Tenant will send up some person who is acquainted

with the Estate with full Power to Treat about it & that your audit ends the Ninth Inst[ant].

Tis now the 4th day of the Month so that tis Impossible for y[ou]r Tenant to send any person capable of Giving Satisfaction that can arrive at Canterbury till it would be too late.

What might raise the Expectations of your Venerable Body to think highly of this poor Estate I cant say but I suppose it must be Owing to their being unacquainted with the Nature of the Tenure as I imagine such kind of Copyhold Estates are all most peculiar to our County & therefore I will endeavour to show you what they are as fully as the compass of a Letter will admit.

These Estates notwithstanding the restraining Acts the Church had a Power to Grant Leases for 21 years for Three Lives according to the Custom of the Mannor.

The Custom of the Mannor of Doccombe is to Grant Three Lives upon each Tenem[en]t with Widow's Estate That is to say One Male Life in possession & 2 Male Lives in Reversion so that upon the death of the first Life his Wid[ow] holds the Estate during her Life or Widowhood & upon her Death or Marriage The Sec[on]d Life & his Widow & so on to the T[hir]d & his Widow insomuch that there may be Six Lives upon each Estate & not only so but one of those Lives may be born 60 or 70 y[ea]rs hence for you must understand that none of those Copyholders do down to their Graves without a Mournfull Wid[o]w to attend their Hearse & tis no unusual thing for a Neighbours Dau[ghter] a Girl of 14 or 15 y[ea]rs of age to be bro[ugh]t to the Bedside of an old fellow of 90 & there Married to him upon his Death Bed, by which she is Intitled to his Copyhold Estate for her Widowhood who rather then Marry & lose her Estate plays the Whore all days of her Life & by such a Managem[en]t the Lords may be kept out of such Tenem[en]t for 150 years.

I look upon a Term of 21 y[ea]rs Granted in these Mannors under the above Circumstances to be Equal to a Term of Three Score y[ea]rs for the very last day of the Term the Tenant may & Doubtless will fill up every Copy with three Male Lives Accord[ing] to the Custom of the Manor which in all Probability will be more durable that 40 or even 50 y[ea]rs & how much Short Such Grant of the Fee & if the Chapter & the Tenant dont agree about Renewing but suffer the Lease to Expire w[ha]t then will the Chapter have come into their hands but a Caput Mortuum for

who will Purchase a New Lease for Twenty one years when in all Probability they will not see a farthing from it within that Term But I ask Pardon for Presumeing to say any thing which may have the least Tendency towards direct. The Prudence of so Learned a Body who know best what they have to do, but the Nature of the Case Lead me Invincible into it.

We have Several Estates of this Tenure belonging to our Church & the Fines for renewing them differ from Some we have a fifth from some a Sixth & from others a Seventh part of a years value of the Rack rent.

Your Tenant is willing to renew upon the same Terms his predecessor did Last or he will Submit to a calculation to be made by Mr Demoivre or any other Man of Eminence in that way which you know from the above Account of the Nature of the Tenure he may with advantage to himself safely Acquiesce in.

If the Gentlemen will be Pleased to Accept of the above offer the Tenant doth not desire any time of Paym[en]t for his Money will be ready as soon as the Lease which upon that Condition you may make out as soon as you Please a Line in Answer to this will Oblige

Sir y[ou]r very Humble Serv[ant]

Charles Webber

Exon 4 Dec[ember] 1749