



Wilts Quarter Sessions

Wilton, Great Bedwyn 1563 & 1574-1592

The courts of quarter sessions or quarter sessions were local courts traditionally held at four set times each year in the Kingdom of England (including Wales) from 1388 until 1707, then in 18th-century Great Britain, in the later United Kingdom, and in other dominions of the British Empire.

Quarter sessions generally sat in the seat of each county and county borough. The quarter sessions were named after the quarter days on which they met in England and Wales from 1388. These days were later settled as Epiphany, Easter, Midsummer, and Michaelmas sessions.

The quarter sessions generally heard crimes that could not be tried summarily by the justices of the peace without a jury in petty sessions, which were sent up by the process of indictment to be heard in quarter sessions. The quarter sessions did not have jurisdiction to hear the most serious crimes, most notably those subject to capital punishment or later life imprisonment. These crimes were sent for trial at the periodic assizes.

The quarter sessions in each county were made up of two or more justices of the peace, presided over by a chairman, who sat with a jury. County boroughs entitled to their own quarter sessions had a single recorder instead of a bench of justices. Every court of quarter sessions had a clerk called the clerk of the peace. For county quarter sessions, this person was appointed by the *custos rotulorum* of the county – the justice of the peace for the county charged with custody of its rolls and records. There was a large fee income for the clerk, and he was usually a friend or relative of the *custos*. The clerk rarely discharged the duties of the office himself, but appointed a solicitor to act as his deputy in return for a share of the fees. After 1852, payment by salary was gradually brought in instead of fees.

Year	Date	Surname	Given Names	Abode	Details
1575/6	18-Mar	Pyper	John	Wilton	Husbandman - 50 shillings for his keeping of good order

Details Extracted from Records Held by the Wiltshire Record Society