MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

A Study of Gentry Families in England

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Arts, University of Sydney.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library
D.N.B.	Dictionary of National Biography
Duppa	Sir Gyles Isham (ed.) The Correspondence of Bishop Brian Duppa and Sir Justinian Isham 1650-1660 (Northampton, 1951)
ERO	Essex Record Office
H.M.C. Egmont	Historical Manuscripts Commission. Report on the Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont.
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
Herr.	The Sherfield Manuscripts, Herriard 44 M 69, from the Jervoise Collection of Herriard Park.
IC & IL	Isham Collection, in Northamptionshire Record Office.
Isham, Diary.	Sir Gyles Isham (ed.) The Diary of Thomas Isham of Lamport (1658-81) kept by him in Latin from 1671-1673 at his Father's command (Farnborough,1971)
KAO	Kent Archives Office
NRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
O.E.D.	Oxford English Dictionary
PRO	Public Record Office
V.C.H.	Victoria County History

The spelling, punctuation and capitalisation of all quotations from manuscripts and from contemporary published works has been modernised. Most contractions have been extended. Dates have been given in Old Style, and with the year beginning on 1 January in the text, but footnoted '1627/28' until March 25 of each year. Words which are illegible have been represented within quotations by a [ ], and the same method has been used to indicate missing names or dates in footnotes.

CONTENTS

		Page
Acknowledgements		
Abbreviations		
INTRODUCTION		1
Families		19
PART I	MAKING MARRIAGES	27
Chapter 1	Match-making	36
	Parental Responsibility	43
	The Role of Family and Friends	64
	The Involvement of Bride and Groom	72
Chapter 2	The Criteria of Spouse Selection	83
	Financial Considerations	83
	The Importance of Personal Attraction	104
	Other Criteria	123
PART II	MARRIED LIFE	140
Chapter 3	The Theoretical Basis of Marriage	149
	Mutuality in Marriage	163
Chapter 4	Marital Roles	167
	The Domestic Sphere	167
	Beyond the Domestic Sphere	175
Chapter 5	Husbands and Wives	207
PART III	THE NUCLEAR FAMILY	252
Chapter 6	Parents and Children	258
	Parenthood	258
	Birth	271
	Wet-nursing	289
	Childhood	295
	Children's Responses to Parents	316
Chapter 7	The Peripheral Family	320
	Younger Sons	320
	Unmarried Daughters	347
	Step Relationships	355
CONCLUSION		367
Appendix		376
Genealogical Tables and Charts		376
Bibliography		390

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades family history has become so firmly established that it is unnecessary now to demonstrate its importance or relevance.[1] Much of this work has involved seventeenth century England, and many different studies have broadened our knowledge about the seventeenth century family. The scope of demographic knowledge about the seventeenth century has increased dramatically, primarily due to the work of Peter Laslett, Roger Schofield and E.A. Wrigley.[2] Economic historians have looked at a variety of aspects of family wealth, inheritance and financial settlement.[3] Studies of communities or class groups have shed light on family life in the early modern period. Analyses of European family life, and also the conclusions of Edmund Morgan and John Demos about family life in seventeenth century New England, have provided

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1 There are still pockets of resistance - Geoffrey Elton, for instance, is apparently embarrassed by the unwarranted intrusion family historians make into the personal lives of those who should be left in peace. [G.R. Elton 'Happy Families. When Fathers Ruled. Family Life in Reformation Europe, by Steven Ozment.' New York Review of Books, (14 June 1984.)]

2 Peter Laslett, Family life and illicit love in earlier generations. Essays in historical sociology (London,1977); Peter Laslett & Richard Wall (eds) Household and Family in Past Time (Cambridge, 1972); Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost - further explored (London,1983); E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield's many studies culminated in 1981 in their massive demographic work The Population History of England 1541-1871. A Reconstruction (London,1981).

3 Lloyd Bonfield, Marriage Settlements, 1601-1740. The Adoption of the Strict Settlement (Cambridge,1983); Christopher Clay, 'Marriage, Inheritance, and the Rise of Large Estates in England, 1660-1815.' Economic History Review, Vol. 18 (1968) pp.503-518; Mary Finch, The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families 1540-1640 (Northampton,1956); H.J. Habakkuk, 'English Landownership, 1680-1740.' Economic History Review, Vol.10 (1939-40) pp.2-17; H.J. Habakkuk, 'Landowners and the Civil War.' Economic History Review, Vol.18 (1965) pp.130-151; H.J. Habakkuk, 'Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century,' Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th ser. Vol. 32 (1950) pp.15-30; Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641 (Oxford,1965).

interesting comparisons with family life in England.[4] And very significant progress was made in family history by the publication, in 1970, of Alan Macfarlane's study of the family life of the seventeenth century clergyman, Ralph Josselin.[5]

In 1977 Lawrence Stone published a comprehensive study of three centuries of family life in England. In The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 he used a large range of data, including the results of studies which had been done in the many areas of family and social history, his own work on the aristocracy, and the evidence of published diaries and collections of letters. The book provided a wealth of useful detail about upper class family life in England. It also postulated dramatic changes in social and family organisation and relationships between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Family, Sex and Marriage dominated the literature of family history for some years following its publication - as much by the controversy it provoked as by the information it contained.

An important focus of Stone's work was on the emotional experience of family members and the nature of their relationships with each other. He believed that 'about all that can be said with confidence on the matter of emotional relations within the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century

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4 J.T. Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry. The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart England (London,1984); J.T. Cliffe, The Yorkshire Gentry. From the Reformation to the Civil War (London,1969); Peter Roebuck, Yorkshire Baronets 1640-1760. Families, Estates, and Fortunes (Oxford, 1980); M. Spufford, Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge,1974); K. Wrightson & D. Levine, Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700 (London,1979); Jean-Louis Flandrin, Families in former times. Kinship, household and sexuality (Cambridge,1979); Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, The European Family. Patriarchy to Partnership from the Middle Ages to the Present (Oxford,1982); John Demos, A Little Commonwealth. Family Life in Plymouth Colony (New York,1970); Edmund S. Morgan, The Puritan Family. Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England (New York,1944/1966).

5 Alan Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin. A Seventeenth Century Clergyman. An Essay in Historical Anthropology (Cambridge,1970)

family at all social levels is that there was a general psychological atmosphere of distance, manipulation and deference....'.[6] Seventeenth century marriages and family life, he believed, were dominated by patriarchal authority, female subjection, the priority of the financial interests of the family over the interests of the individual, and indifference towards children, particularly the very young. He maintained that it was not until the eighteenth century that strong ties of reciprocal affection developed between spouses, and between parents and children. Among the many aspects which Stone considered, these changes and developments in affective relationships seemed to interest him most.

Certain of Stone's conclusions are supported by aspects of other studies. For example, both Edward Shorter and Randolph Trumbach saw strong emotional ties within families developing only after the seventeenth century. Shorter in The Making of the Modern Family, published in 1970, had contended that romantic love and good mothering are the inventions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 'The Bad Old Days' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he claimed, the family was 'much more a productive and reproductive unit than an emotional unit. It was a mechanism for transmitting property and position....' Shorter considered that 'affection and inclination, love and sympathy' had to wait for the development of the modern family.[7] Randolph Trumbach in his study of the aristocracy observed the growth of warm family relationships and domesticity as the product of the eighteenth century.[8] Miriam Slater, in her study of the Verney family, apparently confirmed the notion of an emotional desert in the seventeenth century family. She found a family

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6 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.117.

7 Edward Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family (New York,1975) p.5.

8 Randolph Trumbach, The Rise of the Egalitarian Family. Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England (New York,1978)

environment in many ways similar to that which Stone had allocated to his 'Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family' of 1550 to 1700.[9]

However, a number of historians have argued that Stone's view of the family in the early modern period requires serious modification. Both his methodology and many of his sweeping conclusions, particularly about the lower classes, have come under attack. Critical reviews by historians such as Alan Macfarlane, E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill have raised significant questions about his work.[10] Keith Wrightson included in his examination of English society between 1580 and 1680 a chapter on family formation and another on the relationships between husbands and wives, and parents and children. Although not written as a critique of Stone, these chapters nevertheless provide evidence of family life with a very different emotional and relational base from that described by Stone, Shorter or Slater.[11] A number of studies directed toward very specific aspects of family life have also provided evidence which calls for reassessment of suppositions about early modern family life.[12]

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[9] Miriam Slater, 'The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-century England,' Past and Present, no.72 (Aug. 1976) pp.25-54; Miriam Slater, 'A Rejoinder,' Past and Present, no. 85 (Nov.1979) pp.136-140; Miriam Slater, Family Life in the Seventeenth Century. The Verneys of Claydon House (London,1984).

[10] Alan Macfarlane, 'Studies in the Philosophy of History. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800.' History and Theory, XVIII, no. 1 (1979) pp.103-126; E.P. Thompson, 'Happy families. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800.' New Society (8 Sept.1977) pp.499-501; Christopher Hill, Essays in Bibliography and Criticism, LXXX. 'Sex, Marriage, and the Family in England.' Economic History Review, Series 2, 31 (1978) pp.150-163.

[11] Keith Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680 (London,1982).

[12] See for example: Patricia Crawford, '"The sucking child": Adult attitudes to child care in the first year of life in seventeenth-century England.' Continuity and Change, Vol.1, no.1 (1986) pp.23-51; Roger Hainsworth, 'Fathers and Daughters: Patterns of Marriage and Inheritance Among the Later Stuart Gentry.' (Unpublished Paper); Roger Hainsworth, 'Manor House to Counting House: The Gentry Younger Son in Trade in the Seventeenth Century,' in Frank McGregor & Nicholas Wright (eds) European History and Its Historians (Adelaide,1977) pp.66-74; Richard Wall, 'Woman Alone in English

(Footnote continued)

In his survey history of the early modern English family Ralph Houlbrooke rejected the idea that the period saw a revolution of sentiments and attitudes. He believes that 'passionate attraction and the anguish of bereavement could be as forcefully expressed in the fifteenth century as they are today'.[13] After reviewing the existing literature on family history in the early modern period Houlbrooke suggested, 'there is much to be done. The systematic exploration and analysis of the intimate records of the literate and articulate has only begun'. And he optimistically concluded: 'The next few decades will see great advances in our understanding of past relationships between individual, family and community'.[14]

All approaches to family history may profitably be explored and developed, and ideally the insights of all aspects of family study should be brought together to create as complete a picture as possible. But the area we know least about is the nature of personal relationships - emotional experience, expectations and roles. The issues raised about the structure and function of the family, the roles of the various family members, what they thought of each other and why, and the nature of the ties between them, can only be resolved as more studies of seventeenth century families address these issues. So far only a beginning has been made.

For example, the most authoritative aspects of Stone's work relate almost exclusively to the aristocracy, as does Trumbach's study of the eighteenth century. Much of Wrightson's evidence comes from his study of the diaries of Ralph Josselin, Adam Martindale and Henry Newcome, who were

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[12] (continued)
Society.' Annales de démographie historique (1981) pp.303-316.

[13] Ralph Houlbrooke, The English Family 1450-1700 (Harlow, Essex,1984) p.254.

[14] Ibid. p.15.

all clergymen. Macfarlane's study of Josselin, although extremely thorough and comprehensive, is also limited to the family of one clergyman. Vivienne Larminie's thesis on the lifestyle and attitudes of the Newdigate family touches only lightly on the nature and quality of the family's emotional relationships.[15] And the many studies which have looked at specific aspects of family and private life will remain fragmentary until they can be placed more confidently in the context of studies of complete families. The only study so far to look specifically at the dynamics of family relationships is Miriam Slater's study of the Verney family. She has stressed the emotional distance and manipulation in family relationships based on reciprocity, the overwhelming importance of the authority of the head of the family, and the comparative unimportance of personal preference or emotional needs. In light of recent work questioning this picture of family life in seventeenth century England there is obviously a considerable need for studies of more families in order to assess whether the Verney family was in any sense typical.

This thesis looks at aspects of the family life of three gentry families and their kin throughout the seventeenth century - the family of Henry Sherfield of Salisbury, three generations of the Dering family of Surrenden Dering in Kent, and five generations of the Ishams of Lamport in Northamptonshire. The families were chosen because a sufficient number of personal family documents survive to make it possible to discover a great deal beyond the bare facts of family structure. They are representative in the sense that they are a random sample taken from approximately the same class, the gentry, in three different counties. The selection was

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[15] Vivienne Larminie, 'The Lifestyle and Attitudes of the Seventeenth Century Gentleman, with Special Reference to the Newdigates of Arbury Hall, Warwickshire' (Unpub. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1980).

guided by a desire to find the norm rather than the exceptional.

The difficulties of creating a realistic picture of all or any of the factors involved in the interaction between husbands and wives and the various members of their families would be considerable in the twentieth century. The undertaking is even more difficult with men or women who lived three hundred years ago, with values, attitudes, and presuppositions so different from our own. But not to attempt it would be to admit that the most basic facets of human motivation and relationships can never be understood, and we would be left without a large part of the foundation upon which the structure of history has to be built. To know not only what men and women thought but what patterns of behaviour conditioned their thinking, it is necessary to know the most basic facts about the structure of their world, and their emotional attachments and needs within their primary and most significant social group, which in the seventeenth century was always the family.

Some of the most important areas of debate, and those most in need of investigation in seventeenth century family relationships, concern the making of marriages, the quality of married life, and the most controversial, the relationship between parents and children, and the experience of childhood. This study addresses itself specifically to these three areas of family life.

Study of family formation and the making of marriages and the methods and criteria of spouse selection is pivotal in understanding family and societal values and behaviour. It is also vital because the expectations and values with which the making of marriages was approached greatly influenced the type of marriages and families created, and the environment within which the whole family functioned. Several important questions must be answered if we are to understand how and why marriages were made. Who made the marriage? In whose interest? How much freedom of choice did young people have? What criteria did parents and their offspring use in

choosing prospective partners? Did financial considerations predominate? And was there any place for romantic love?

Already a considerable amount of work has been undertaken in this area.[16] Stone's view is that the patriarchal society of the seventeenth century limited freedom of choice in spouse selection and emotional intimacy in marriage to the point where 'marriage was not a personal union for the satisfaction of psychological and physiological needs', but was 'an institutional device to ensure the perpetuation of the family and its property'.[17] If this view should need modification, as some have already suggested,[18] then certain very basic assumptions about social values, family behaviour and modes of change in the seventeenth century must also be modified.

Few of the issues about making marriages have been satisfactorily resolved. When weighing up the factors which went into making early modern marriages a recent review article referred to 'the embattled state of the art in family history'.[19] This embattled state is exemplified in

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16 Bonfield, Marriage Settlements; Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry; John R. Gillis, For Better, For Worse British Marriages, 1600 to the Present (Oxford,1985); Hainsworth, 'Fathers and Daughters,'; Ralph Houlbrooke, 'The Making of Marriage in Mid-Tudor England: Evidence from the Records of Matrimonial Contract Litigation.' Journal of Family History, Vol.10, no.4 (Winter,1985) pp.339-352; Vivienne Larminie, 'Marriage and the Family; the Example of the Seventeenth-century Newdigates, Midland History, IX (1981) pp.1-22; Alan Macfarlane, Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840 (Oxford,1986); Miriam Slater, 'The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-century England.' Past and Present, no.72 (Aug.1976) pp.25-54; Sara Heller Mendelson, 'Debate. The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-Century England,' Past and Present, 95 (Nov.1979); Miriam Slater, 'A Rejoinder.' Past and Present, no.85 (Nov.1979) pp.136-140; Ferdinand Mount, The Subversive Family (London, 1982); Linda Pollock, Review article: '"An Action Like a Stratagem" Courtship and Marriage From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century.' The Historical Journal, Vol. 30, no.2 (1987) pp.483-498; Wrightson, English Society.

17 Stone, Crisis, p.613. This much quoted summary of Stone's view has been maintained by other writers, most strongly by Slater in her study of the Verneys.

18 See for example: Larminie, Mendelson, Mount, Wrightson, Houlbrooke and Alan Macfarlane.

the response to Alan Macfarlane's Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840, in which he argues that most marriages in early modern times were made for love.[20] Linda Pollock had concluded that although Macfarlane 'depicts too harmonious a world between the sexes', there is little to disagree with in his findings. Alison Wall, on the other hand, believes the work to be seriously flawed by the choice of evidence. She has also pointed out that although the marriages which Macfarlane uses as examples were made for love, as he suggests, and were based on conscious decisions - the decisions were made by men.[21]

Many historians have studied the literary evidence about what marriage was supposed to be in the seventeenth century, and this evidence is now almost as familiar to historians of the seventeenth century as it was to seventeenth century family members.[22] There is a need now to look at specific families, and consider how strongly they were in fact influenced by such factors as the ideals of female submission, or the desire for

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[19] Pollock, 'An Action Like a Stratagem,' p.497.

[20] Alan Macfarlane, Marriage and Love in England 1300-1840 (Oxford,1986).

[21] Alison Wall. 'The Approach to Family History. Stone, Cold or Sober? A Review Article.' Parergon. new series, no.5 (1987) p.168.

[22] Kathleen M. Davies, 'Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage' in R.B. Outhwaite (ed) Marriage and Society. Studies in the Social History of Marriage (London,1981); Roland Mushat Frye, 'The Teachings of Classical Puritanism on Conjugal Love,' in M.A. Shaaber (ed) Studies in the Renaissance, Vol. II (New York,1955); Richard L. Greaves, Society and Religion in Elizabethan England (Minneapolis, 1981); John Halkett, Milton and the Idea of Matrimony. A Study of the Divorce Tracts and Paradise Lost (New Haven & London,1970); William Haller, '"Hail Wedded Love",' English Literary History, XIII, 2, (June, 1946) pp.79-97; William & Malleville Haller, 'The Puritan Art of Love,' Huntington Library Quarterly, 5, (Jan.1942) pp.235-272; James T. Johnson, 'English Puritan Thought on the Ends of Marriage,' Church History, XXXIV, 4 (Dec.1969) pp.429-436; James Turner Johnson. A Society Ordained By God English Puritan Marriage Doctrine in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century (Nashville,1970); Edmund Leites, 'The Duty to Desire: Love, Friendship, and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage,' Journal of Social History (Spring,1982) pp.383-408; Chilton Latham Powell, English Domestic Relations 1487-1653 (New York,1917); Paul N. Siegel, 'Milton and the Humanist Attitude Toward Women.' Journal of the History of Ideas. 2 (1950) pp.42-53;

(Footnote continued)

companionship and mutuality in marriage. Were they overwhelmed by financial considerations and the needs of 'a patronage society' as Miriam Slater suggests, or influenced more by romantic notions acquired from French literary works?[23] Some answers to these and other questions have been given already in studies based on published diaries and letters, and in a small number of studies of individual families.[24] Since contradictory points of view have been argued, a resolution of the issues and a clearer picture will only become possible as studies multiply. The procedures and priorities observed in making marriages can reveal a great deal about the relative importance of individual freedom, patriarchal control, personal satisfaction, and family preservation and promotion, within individual families and in society at large.

The second part of this study examines the marriages created by the match-making process. It looks first at the assumptions society made about the roles of men and women, particularly female inferiority and submission. It considers the reality of the roles men and women assumed within their marriages, the extent of a wife's independent responsibilities, and the nature of the relationship between husbands and wives.

A study of marital relationships will reveal many of the values and assumptions basic to a society in which the family was the unit of primary

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22 (continued)
Margo Todd, 'Humanists, Puritans and the Spiritualized Household.' Church History, Vol.49 (1980) pp.18-34; Alison Wall, 'The Elizabethan Ideal of Woman,' (Unpublished Paper); John K. Yost, 'The Value of Married Life for the Social order in the early English Renaissance,' Societas, VI (Winter,1976) pp.25-39.

23 Mendelson, 'Debate' p.129,130.

24 For example: Patricia Crawford, 'Katherine and Philip Henry and Their Children: A Case Study in Family Ideology,' Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol, 134 (1984) pp.39-73; Vivienne Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' & 'Marriage and the Family'; Miriam Slater, Family Life, & 'The Weightiest Business.'

social significance, and within which most of the functions of socialisation, regulation and support were centred. Miriam Slater has rightly referred to marriage practices as 'the acid test of society's values and attitudes'.[25] Within the enormous variety of opinion about the purpose of marriage, how it should function, and on what basis one should choose a spouse, one fact was held with universal certainty in the seventeenth century - marriage was totally basic to life and the choice of the right spouse was overwhelmingly important. Sir John Perceval wrote to his uncle in 1651,

> Marriage is the greatest game man plays all his lifetime, his whole there lies at stake, fortune, joys, comfort and whatsoever else is dear unto him, 'tis that which makes him completely happy or forever miserable.[26]

Alexander Nicchols in his book of advice wrote in 1615, 'Marriage of all the human actions of a man's life, is one of the greatest weight and consequence, as thereon depending the future good or evil of a man's whole aftertime....'[27] The historian of the family must assess the dynamics of marriage with equal seriousness.

The third section of the thesis looks at children and parents, and how they related to each other in childhood and adulthood. Were they bound by ties of affection or duty? What were the expectations and duties of fathers and mothers? What was the life of the child like in a gentry family in the seventeenth century? How did the family support its various members? What added difficulties were faced by younger sons or step-children? How did single daughters fare?

Conclusions about childhood readily undermine or confirm the most strongly held views about relationships within the seventeenth century

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[25] Slater, 'The Weightiest Business,'p.26.

[26] Sir John Perceval to Beverly Ussher, 3 Sept.1651, H.M.C. Egmont Vol.I, pt.2, p.500.

[27] Alexander Nicchols, Of Marriage and Wiving, (London,1615) p.4.

family. For that reason many of the views held have been very extreme, and the debate heated. It is therefore important to review some of the most significant literature on the history of childhood,[28] and in particular those conclusions which relate to the seventeenth century. Studies of childhood began to attract attention with Philippe Ariès' influential L 'Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l' Ancien Regime published in 1960, and have generally concluded that most children in the past were neglected and callously treated.[29] Ariès, who wrote about France, concluded that during the medieval period there was no concept of childhood as different from adulthood. He argued that a recognition of childhood began to grow in the seventeenth century, but this did not necessarily improve the lot of children, since although they were likely to be 'coddled' when very young they were also believed to be weak and inconstant and in need of correction. Thus the influence of priests, moralists and lawyers eventually led to an extension of the years of childhood to include years of often harsh schooling.[30]

Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, who published the first volume of their study Children in English Society in 1969, argued that a new concept of family and a new consciousness of childhood was emerging in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, they believed that the brevity of life of both parents and children, and the conception of the family rather than the individual as the central unit of society explained

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[28] Studies of childhood are part of the literature of family history, but have developed into a separate genre within family history. See Pollock, Forgotten Children, Chap.1, for a detailed review of the literature written from the point of view of her own study.

[29] Ariès was not the first writer in the field, but his book nevertheless is generally considered to be crucial in exciting interest and prompting debate in the field. Edmund Morgan's earlier work on New England puritan families took a less negative view of the treatment of children. [Morgan, The Puritan Family.]

[30] Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood (Harmondsworth,1960/1973) p.129,316, & passim.

why children and childhood were 'of little account in pre-Restoration England'.[31] Stone's conclusions about most of the seventeenth century were very similar. He believed that high infant mortality rates made emotional investment in young children imprudent, and distance was both exemplified and created by wet-nursing and the removal of children from the family home between the ages of seven and fourteen. However, he conceded that toward the end of the seventeenth century children within some upper-class families were treated with greater affection and permissiveness, and there was more recognition of their unique individuality.[32] Shorter claimed that 'Good mothering is an invention of modernization', and that 'in traditional society mothers viewed the development and happiness of infants younger than two with indifference.'[33]

Lloyd de Mause's editorial essay, 'The Evolution of Childhood' in The History of Childhood, published about the same time as the works on the family by Shorter and Stone, began with the statement: 'The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused.'[34] De Mause's psychogenic theory of history traced changes in the treatment of children through six different

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31 Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, Children in English Society (London,1969) p.41,13. Berry in his study of the works of Thomas Phaire and John Jones also observed a new concept of the child as unique developing in the sixteenth century. [Boyd M. Berry, 'The First English Pediatricians and Tudor Attitudes to Childhood.' Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol.35 (1974) pp.561-577.]

32 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, pp.405-480.

33 Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family, p.168. Elizabeth Badminter in The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct (London,1981) has carried this view to even greater extremes.

34 Lloyd de Mause, 'The Evolution of Childhood' in Lloyd de Mause (ed) The History of Childhood (London,1976) p.1.

stages which began with the Infanticidal and Abandonment Modes, moved to the Ambivalent Mode during the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, and gradually improved until in the mid-twentieth century the ideal Helping Mode was reached. De Mause provided a wealth of evidence which overwhelms the reader with horror and grief at the treatment meted out to children in past times.[35]

Others, most notably Linda Pollock, Patricia Crawford, Alan Macfarlane, Ferdinand Mount, Keith Wrightson, and Ralph Houlbrooke, have interpreted the evidence differently, and have observed both parental concern in child-rearing methods and love for children and infants in the past.[36] This new approach to the history of childhood has been augmented by critical reviews of both Ariès and Stone.[37] Ferdinand Mount's excellent chapter attacking the myth of the indifferent mother convincingly showed that the context of much of the evidence used by Ariès and Shorter necessitates conclusions very different from those which they presented.[38]

Wrightson in his chapter on family life in English Society demonstrates that not only are previous conclusions about the family life of

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[35] Ibid. p.52,54, & passim. Although not all the articles in The History of Childhood take a view as extreme as that of de Mause, they generally present a very depressing view of childhood. See particularly : M.J. Tucker, 'The Child as Beginning and End: Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century English Childhood,' p.229,252; Joseph E. Illick, 'Child-rearing in Seventeenth-Century England and America,' p.323,315,316; both in de Mause (ed) Childhood.

[36] Macfarlane, Josselin; Mount, The Subversive Family; Wrightson, English Society; Pollock, Forgotten Children; Houlbrooke, The English Family; Crawford, 'The sucking child.'

[37] Reviews by Adrian Wilson, E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and Alan Macfarlane on Stone have probably been the most influential. Adrian Wilson, 'The infancy of the history of childhood: an appraisal of Philippe Aries.' History and Theory, Vol.19 (1980) pp.132-154; Thompson, 'Happy families'; Hill, 'Essays in Bibliography and Criticism, LXXX'; Macfarlane, 'Studies in the Philosophy of History.'

[38] Mount, The Subversive Family, Chap.7.

the majority of the population inadequate, but even those about the upper classes must be reconsidered. Wrightson considers that parents 'made a material and an emotional investment in their children which was both considerable and prolonged'. They expected little in return, but were in fact generally rewarded by their children's lasting affection. He concludes that 'there seems no reason to believe that parental attitudes towards or aspirations for their children underwent fundamental change in the course of the seventeenth century'. Any allegation that the attitudes of men like Josselin, Newcome or Martindale represent 'novel departures in domestic relations' would be, he claims, 'an argument from silence'.[39]

Linda Pollock's work on parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900 is the most recent comprehensive study in the history of childhood in England and America. Published in 1983, Forgotten Children is an attempt to completely reverse the view of childhood argued by Ariès and Stone. Using evidence about infancy and childhood, child-rearing methods, discipline and parent-child relationships, from 416 published diaries and autobiographies, Pollock comes to the conclusion that although there has always been a great deal of individual variation in parental care in the past, the material analysed 'does not support the evolutionary theories on the history of childhood'. She argues that in the period her study covers there has always been a concept of childhood as a separate stage of development, and that discipline 'varied according to parent and child rather than the time period', and was seldom unduly harsh in the home. And she also believes that children were neither ignored or unwanted, but were 'an integral part of the family unit, from at least the 16th century on'.[40] The weight of Pollock's evidence is very impressive, and seems to leave little room for theories positing neglect and indifference toward

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[39] Wrightson, English Society, pp.112,118.

[40] Pollock, Forgotten Children, pp.270,271,141,199,260,261.

children.

However, although the first part of Pollock's book efficiently counters much of the evidence and many of the conclusions of previous historians of childhood, she herself has based her research only on diaries, and there is considerably less of this kind of evidence for the seventeenth century, and particularly the sixteenth century, than for the later period. Peter Stearns has suggested that 'perhaps Pollock mainly demonstrates (what would not be surprising) that there were scattered anticipations of 18th-century reactions earlier'.[41] Pollock's book has gone a considerable distance toward undermining theories about indifference and neglect of children, but only substantial evidence from a variety of sources will convincingly illustrate whether what Stearns refers to as 'favourable accounts of childhood and an emphasis on affection'[42] were the norm or the exception in the seventeenth century.

Houlbrooke in The English Family concludes that 'children were welcome gifts from God'. He maintains that 'parental love was the most deeply rooted of all human instincts, and showed itself especially in the mother's tender and loving care of the helpless baby'. He admits that to show that parental love was common does not prove it was universal, but he believes there is no good evidence of widespread indifference and neglect, whereas there is 'much direct evidence of the reality of loving care in some families and of parental grief in face of loss of children'.[43]

In her study of adult attitudes to child care in the first year of life in the seventeenth century Patricia Crawford presents very convincing evidence for loving and well-intentioned care of infants. She concludes

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[41] Peter N. Stearns, 'Review of Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900,' in Journal of Social History (Summer,1985) pp.664,665.

[42] Stearns, Review, p.664.

[43] Houlbrooke, The English Family, p.155,138,156.

that 'while some of the practices of infant care may be regarded as cruel from our differently oriented child-rearing theories, the evidence cited shows many adults perceived their babies as individuals whose needs they sought to satisfy and to whose care they devoted love and attention'.[44] An equally important aspect of this study by Crawford is the attention she gives to the question of why historians have been so pre-occupied with ideas of parental neglect and cruelty when so much evidence to the contrary has been available to them. She demonstrates that 'one reason for the historian's judgment of mismanaged child-care is their uncritical attitude to the misogynous character of much of the surviving literature'. Since women were responsible for child care they were to blame when things went wrong. She points out that care must be taken in using such evidence since much of it was written by domestic and medical advisers who often 'blamed women rather than questioned the value of their [own] methods'. Their hostility as professionals has influenced historians.

Crawford raises issues such as the significance of ultimate paternal authority even in such an apparently female dominated area as child care, and the failure of historians to distinguish between the attitudes of men and women toward their children. She stresses the need to give 'due weight to the less common but equally significant statements of women'.[45] This aspect of her work is particularly important and could profitably influence other areas of the study of the family.[46] It is also important to bear in mind that often the comments of women also reflect patriarchal

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[44] Crawford, 'The sucking child,' p.44.

[45] Ibid p.41,43,44.

[46] In a recent article Peter Laslett stated: 'Feminist scholarship in my view has shown itself to be the most powerful and revealing intellectual activity in respect to the study of the family in the social structure, past and present, especially when feminism is combined with neo-Marxist critical theory'. [Peter Laslett, 'The Character of Familial History. Its Limitations and the Conditions for its Proper Pursuit.' Journal of Family History, Vol.12, nos.1-2, p.267.]

ideas which they have internalised, or are expressing in order not to provoke hostility.

The major source of evidence used in the present study has been personal letters. One of the chief merits of family letters is their lack of self consciousness as a record for posterity. In the family context, reasons for writing (including possible hidden agendas), and something of the personality of the writer are known, letters can be a more reliable source than a self-consciously written diary, particularly if the diary is completely divorced from any other volume of evidence about the individual or family. The assumptions shared by letter writer and receiver, and therefore needing no explanation, are of the greatest significance. Arthur Searle in his discussion of seventeenth century letter-writing and the value of letters as historical documents concluded that personal letters of this period 'in theory as well as in practice were to everybody a straightforward and truthful expression of feeling'.[47] This makes them an invaluable source of evidence.

Quantitative estimates and assessments, and most examples, in the thesis, come from the three core families and their connections. This method of using a clearly defined sample is intended to circumvent any accusation that evidence was gathered selectively to maintain a particular point of view.[48] Miriam Slater's study of the Verneys has shown that an individual family could function in a very distinctive way, and this has pointed up the danger of using conclusions drawn from a study of only one family, and its relationships, to support generalisations about family life. Because three very different gentry families have been included in

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[47] Arthur Searle. 'The Barrington Family Letters, 1628-1632 an edition.' Vol. I and II (M.Phil. Thesis, University of Leeds, 1982) p.lxii.

[48] However, my conclusions have also been influenced by printed editions of seventeenth century letters and diaries and in particular by the manuscript letters of some members, particularly women, of the Harley and Barrington families.

this study it may be appropriate to generalise somewhat more widely, and the likelihood of detecting the exceptional may be greater. Nevertheless, the only observation which can be made with absolute certainty is that these are the patterns of behaviour in these three families and similar patterns may be found in some other families.

THE FAMILIES:

Henry Sherfield was a moderately prosperous[49] puritan lawyer from Wiltshire. His political career included representing the city of Salisbury in the four parliaments between 1624 and 1629, and serving as Recorder of Southampton and of Salisbury. Sherfield was the son of Richard Sherfield of Winterbourne, in the county of Wiltshire. He had two brothers, Richard and Roger, both of whom were married with children during the years covered by the letters in this collection. In 1607 Sherfield married Mary Bedford, the widow of George Bedford, a clothier of New Sarum. She provided Henry with six stepchildren ranging in age from 15 to less than a year. Sherfield's only heir, a daughter, Matilda, was born to this marriage, and in 1612 Mary died after giving birth to a still born son. In 1616 Henry married again, this time to Rebecca, the widow of Henry Long of Whaddon. Rebecca Long had eight children whose ages at the time of her marriage ranged from 9 to 26. The family thus established makes an interesting study in seventeenth century step relationships. And the larger family group established by the convergence of these three families also provides ample illustration of the comfort and support

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[49] In 1608 Henry Sherfield valued his estate at £2895 [Herriard 44 M 69, XXVI, 2.]; In 1613 he stated that his estate was worth £4640 [Herriard 44 M 69, XXVI, 4.] In 1623, seven years after his second marriage he estimated that his law practice had brought him approximately £1000 per year, and other yearly revenue before his marriage in 1616 brought him £300. But by that time he was £2000 in debt because of his marriage. [Herriard 44 M 69,XXVI, 10.]

gained from a wide kin network of children and stepchildren and their spouses.

The manuscripts used for the research done on Henry Sherfield and his family are the Jervoise Manuscripts of Herriard Park, which are kept in the Hampshire Record Office. These documents include a large collection of family and personal letters received by Henry Sherfield between 1608 and 1633, and personal and family-related accounts drawn up by or for him. There are large numbers of letters over a number of years from several family members, which provide many revealing insights.

The Derings of Surrenden Dering in Kent, were an upper gentry family of reasonable estate,[50] who during the seventeenth century sought to improve their position by office holding. This study looks at the marriages and families of Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, who died in 1644, and the family life of his son, the second baronet of the same name. Both men are familiar in their public roles to students of the seventeeth century.

The first baronet is famous as one of the most prominent of the early seventeenth century antiquarians and the creator of the Surrenden Library in which he brought together a large collection of books, charters and manuscripts. William Dugdale described Sir Edward as 'a most complete gentleman in all respects, and an excellent antiquary....' [51] Due at

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[50] The estates of Sir Edward Dering (d.1644) were valued at £800 per annum by the sequestration committee in the year of his death. (He died a month before the commons confirmed the composition payment of £1,000. His son and heir was able to avoid paying the fine, but the estate had been severely plundered in the early months of the war.) The income of the second baronet in the 1650s was chiefly from rents and varied between £500 and £900 per annum. Later in his life he relied more on investments and on office holding, for example his position as Commissioner of the Treasury brought him between £1,200 and £1,920 per year. [Maurice Bond, The Diaries and Papers of Sir Edward Dering Second Baronet, 1644-1684 (London,1976) p. 6.]

[51] C.W. Wright, 'Sir Edward Dering: A Seventeenth Century Antiquary and His 'Saxon' Charters,' (1931) in Sir Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickens (eds) The Early Cultures of North-West Europe (Cambridge,1950) p.373.

least in part to the influence of Buckingham, who was a kinsman of his second wife, Dering was created baronet in 1627, and was able to purchase the Lieutenancy of Dover Castle in 1630. He was elected to the Long Parliament and was initially a popular supporter of radical reform in religion and Chairman of the Committee for Religion. By mid 1641 he had changed his course, and was advocating 'a right form of primitive Episcopacy'[52] and speaking and writing against the Root and Branch Bill which he had introduced. In November 1641 he opposed the Grand Remonstrance.

After the king raised his standard at Nottingham, Dering rallied quickly to his side. He raised a cavalry regiment at his own expense and served in the king's forces for six months. However his temperament was ill suited to soldiering, and he was already an ill man. He was given permission to return to Kent, where he became the first person in England to take up parliament's offer of pardon to royalists who would compound for their estates and take the Covenant. He died there in June 1644, while waiting to be readmitted to his estates.

Sir Edward married three times and was the father of seven children. He was married for the first time in November 1619 to Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of the wealthy Sir Nicholas Tufton, who was later created first Earl of Thanet. They had one son, Anthony, who died at fourteen years of age. Elizabeth died at the age of 20 after only two years of marriage. Three years later Sir Edward married Anne, the third daughter of Sir John Ashburnham of Ashburnham, in Sussex. Her mother was Elizabeth Beaumont who was a kinswoman of the countess of Buckingham, the favourite's mother. This marriage produced two children, Edward, who became the heir, and a daughter Elizabeth. Anne died in April 1628 at the

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[52] Derek Hirst, 'The Defection of Sir Edward Dering, 1640-1641.' The Historical Journal, xv, 2 (1972) p. 204.

age of 23 after a little over three years of marriage. In July 1629 Sir Edward, a 32 year old widower, married again, this time to Unton, the daughter of Sir Ralph Gibbes of Honington in Warwickshire. To this marriage, which appears to have been one of great mutual affection, were born two sons, Henry and Edward, and two daughters, Dorothy and Frances.

Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, was the son of the first baronet and his second wife, Anne Ashburnham. In his short autobiography Sir Edward stated that he 'most carefully and resolutely refused during all the time of the usurped powers all manner of public employment either in the militia, the peace or in their many mock parliaments....'[53] He began his public career only in the months leading to the king's return. He was a very active parliamentarian and a noted parliamentary diarist of Charles II's reign. He held a variety of government offices, and at the time of his death in 1684 was one of the five Commissioners of the Treasury. He was a man of integrity, an efficient administrator, and an authority on Irish affairs. He was a loyal supporter of Charles II, but a staunch Protestant and anti-papist.

In 1648 Sir Edward married Mary Harvey the daughter of Daniel Harvey, of Coombe in Croydon. Mary's father was a wealthy London merchant, and her mother, Elizabeth, was also the daughter of a London merchant. Dr William Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood, was her father's brother. Sir Edward and Lady Dering were married for thirty-six years, and had seventeen children, of whom ten, five boys and five girls, lived to maturity. On the occasion of their last wedding anniversary Sir Edward wrote 'all I shall say upon this occasion is, that after 36 years I believe we are not weary of one another, nor our children weary of either of us.'[54]

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[53] Dering, autobiography, p.11 in Bond, Diaries, p. 110.

[54] The Account Book of Sir Edward Dering, April 1683 - 9 June 1684, KAO
(Footnote continued)

The study of the Dering family is based mainly on documents from the Kent Archives Office. Although there are letters from all three generations of the family, the majority of those which have been preserved passed between Sir Edward and Sir Robert Southwell, the husband of his eldest daughter, Elizabeth. The many letters, and notations in Dering's account books, reveal a great deal about the household of the second baronet, and the lifestyle and emotional experiences of his family and their Southwell and Perceval relations.[55]

The third of the families which have made up the central core of this study is the Isham family of Lamport. In 1878 Walter Rye suggested that 'probably no family in England has more ample and minute materials for its history than that of Isham of Lamport'.[56] Since its establishment at Lamport in the late sixteenth century the family has included several diarists and scholars, and even those members who were neither showed a considerable family awareness which manifested itself in a massive collection of family letters, deeds, bonds, indentures, marriage settlements, wills and a variety of memoranda. The family's preservation of this substantial number of very personal family documents makes it ideal for a study of family life in the seventeenth century.

The founder of the Lamport branch of the Isham family was John Isham, a successful London merchant who purchased the property of Lamport in 1560.[57] The five generations of Ishams included in this study begin with

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[54] (continued)
U275 A4.

[55] I have not been able to locate Sir Edward Dering's Diary and Commonplace Book, 1656-1662, which was sold at auction in 1974 as Lot 2901 at Sotherbys to Messrs Maggs Bros Ltd. of Berkeley Square London. And I have also not been able to have access to Sir Edward Dering's Personal Diary, 29 March 1673 - 24 September 1675, and his Household Book, 1652-1685, both of which are in the possession of Mr Philip Blake.

[56] Walter Rye, 'Isham Family Memoranda', The Genealogist, ii (1878) p.241.

the founder's son, Thomas. Thomas, who was blind from youth, married Elizabeth Nicholson, and they had three daughters and one son. Letters between Thomas and his heir, John, while he was at Cambridge and the Inns of Court, and between the daughters, Elizabeth, Susanna and Jane, and their father and brother, show a close-knit and affectionate family in the early years of the century. Thomas Isham administered the inheritance he had from his father carefully and shrewdly, and sought to make advantageous marriages for his children. John Isham married well in 1607 to Judith Lewyn, and was knighted in 1608 and created baronet in 1627, thus the Isham family continued to improve its status.[58] John and Judith had two daughters, neither of whom married, and one son, Justinian, who acquired his distinctive name from his mother's brother and was to bequeath it to almost every succeeding generation of Ishams.

Sir Justinian is almost certainly the best known member of the Isham family in the seventeenth century. He was a notable scholar, not only in the classics, but also in science, and was one of the earliest Fellows of the Royal Society. He was a Royalist who suffered imprisonment briefly during the Interregnum, and a member of parliament after the Restoration. He was a friend and correspondent of Bishop Brian Duppa and other Anglican clerics. Sir Justinian married twice. He was married to his first wife, Jane Garrard, only four-and-a-half years, during which time they had four daughters and a stillborn son, after whose death Jane died. After

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[57] There are comparatively few personal documents from the family before the beginning of the seventeenth century, but in 1962 G.D. Ramsay used two of the account books of John Isham to illuminate the activities of mid-sixteenth century merchants. [G.D. Ramsay, John Isham. Mercer and Merchant Adventurer. Two Account Books of a London Merchant in the Reigh of Elizabeth I (Northampton, 1962).]

[58] In her study of the wealth of five Northamptonshire families Mary Finch has included the building up of the family fortunes and estates at Lamport, looking mainly at the financial skills and activities of John Isham the founder, and his son, Thomas, and grandson, John. [Mary Finch, The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families 1540-1640 (Oxford, 1956).]

remaining a widower for fourteen years Sir Justinian married Vere Leigh, and established a new family of six sons and two daughters. There are many letters which reveal the dynamics of relationships between the various members of Sir Justinian's large family. One valuable source of information about everyday family life in the Isham household is the diary which Thomas Isham kept in Latin at his father's request, between the ages of 13 and 15.[59] Sir Justinian died in 1675 when his heir was only eighteen, and still at Oxford. Thomas very soon set out to travel in Italy, and died of smallpox in 1681 soon after his return. Thomas' brother Justinian inherited the baronetcy and the family he established with Elizabeth Turnor is an important focus of this study. They were a devoted married couple, and their large family had a very warm and contented life together.

Each of the families studied in this thesis provides a wealth of evidence which adds a great deal to the picture of family life among the gentry in the seventeenth century. The nature of the collections - the letters and documents which chance has preserved, and the variety of structures found within different nuclear families, means that individual families reveal different aspects of family life. The Sherfield family illustrates the happy functioning of step relationships, the relationship of Lady Unton Dering with her stepson illustrates some of its problems. The fate of the brothers of Thomas Isham illustrates the trials of some younger sons, the careers of John Isham, the founder of the Lamport

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59 This diary, and a volume of the correspondence between Bishop Duppa and Justinian Isham during the Interregnum have both been edited by Sir Gyles Isham, the last baronet. Both these volumes have been extensively used in this study. When integrated with family letters of the same period they throw invaluable light on the lifestyle, motivation and aspirations of Justinian Isham and his family. [Sir Gyles Isham (ed) The Correspondence of Bishop Brian Duppa and Sir Justinian Isham 1650-1660 (Northampton,1951); Sir Gyles Isham (ed) The Diary of Thomas Isham of Lamport (1658-81) kept by him in Latin from 1671-1673 at his Father's command. (Farnborough,Hants.,1971).

family, and John Isham his great-great-grandson, both illustrate their possible successes. And each family illustrates a variety of methods and motivations in marriage making and family relationships. Although much may be said and many conclusions drawn, the family historian will always be left with a number of frustrating questions to which the evidence provides no answer and very few clues.

PART I

MAKING MARRIAGES

It was the duty of parents in the seventeenth century to ensure that their children married as advantageously as possible. Sir Edmund Turnor wrote to his daughter Elizabeth in 1685, 'I had but two great temporal blessings to beg of God Almighty, to dispose of your brother and yourself in marriage as might make you both and myself most pleased and happy therein ....'[1] Many parents felt as Sir Edmund did, although obviously others were less dedicated to their children's happiness. It was almost always in the interests of offspring to assist and not to thwart their parents' actions. There were certainly clashes of interest and intention between parents and the children for whom they were providing marriages; in fact at the time Sir Edmund Turnor wrote to his daughter in 1685 he was reproaching her for assisting her brother toward a marriage based on mutual attraction which he considered would be disastrous for his son. But there was also remarkable coincidence of objectives and criteria in spouse selection. Children shared most of the ideals and expectations of their parents and their class. The ideal for all generations in the seventeenth century was a marriage which brought wealth, confirmed social status, was approved by all family members, and was one in which the partners loved each other.

The expression 'arranged marriage' therefore needs to be used with some caution when referring to marriages in gentry families. The function of the arrangements and negotiations of parents was usually match-making rather than compulsion. Parental match-making efforts were usually gratefully received. Most men and women responsible for their own spouse selection, often through remarriage, seem to have maintained similar

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1 Edmund Turnor to Elizabeth Isham, 8 Aug.1685, NRO IC 1391.

ideals, and even pursued similar courtship patterns, to those of their parents. There were obvious exceptions - widows marrying rashly for love, or children resisting parental pressure - and some of these have been given a disproportionate amount of attention by historians.

Family and individual circumstances, both social and financial, the values and priorities of particular families, which were often held through more than one generation, and the temperament of the individuals involved, all combined to make the forming of new marriages complex and varied. Simplistic explanations about the criteria of spouse selection or the procedures of courtship are not adequate. The next two chapters will look at the motivation for marriage and the criteria employed in assessing marriage partners, and in particular the balance of qualities desired. It will also consider the initiative taken by family and friends,[2] the role played by family interests and involvement, and the degree of involvement and affection between bride and groom before marriage.

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2 'Friends' both in the generally understood sense, and in the sense specific to marriage negotiations - persons who acted on behalf of the bride or groom making certain of the best deal for them. It is appropriate here to consider Dr Slater's contention that the 'peculiar use' of the word 'friend' by the members of the Verney family substantiates her interpretation of family dynamics dictated by 'reciprocity' within a patriarchal society where patronage and the patrilinial strength of the family took precedence over everything else. Dr Slater claims that in the Verney correspondence the word 'friend' was 'repeatedly and almost exclusively used to refer to someone who can be helpful in advancing one's career or marriage prospects'. [Slater, 'The Weightiest Business', pp.25-29.] This was not in fact a 'peculiar' use by the Verneys, it was a widely accepted and specific use of the term in connection with marriage negotiations. It is so obviously inadequate to imply that 'friend' in the seventeenth century was only used in the narrow self-interested manner which Dr Slater described that examples need hardly be given since they are so widespread. However, a passage from Nicchole's discussion of marriage is worth quoting to illustrate the meaning of 'friend'. Extolling marriage as a superior friendship he described friendship as a 'mutual society' which is so great 'that in affliction it administereth comfort, and in joy it heapeth the measure to the brim, by detracting from the sour, and adding to the sweet, by a sensible participation in either's quality.' [Niccholes, Of Marriage and Wiving, p.5.] Jeremy Taylor wrote that 'friendships are Marriages of the soul, and of fortunes and interests and counsels... [as] they are brotherhoods too....' [Jeremy Taylor, The Measures and Offices of Friendship (third

(Footnote continued)

Because the accepted language of courtship was often affectionate or romantic, even when motives were overwhelmingly mercenary, the true situation may sometimes be obscured. Thus when Sir Edward Dering, first baronet, was pursuing the widow Elizabeth Bennett in order to make the most of her £20,000 he spoke to her of his 'strong affection', and noted in the extraordinary record he kept of his courtship, 'I said, I could not withdraw my affection, nor would not my respects, till I saw her give her hand to another'.[3] Since it is apparent from his own account that his ambitions were chiefly if not wholly financial the choice of language makes it evident that accurate assessment of feeling and motivation may be difficult without a spectrum of information.

Certain widely held assumptions must also be taken into account in attempting to understand the correspondence of courtship and negotiation. Basic to all negotiations were the assumptions of a patriarchal society with needs for patrilineal strength and survival, and unquestioned beliefs about the weakness and inferiority of women. Also the belief that if there was 'liking' love would grow after marriage was also important. Thus a negotiated 'family' marriage for financial security and even profit was not held to be incompatible with the possibility of affectionate and even deeply loving and companionable married life. The ability of some couples to rise above the financial haggling of their families and achieve affectionate marital harmony is probably more surprising to the historian than it was to those involved in the negotiations.

At times marriages were made swiftly and easily, on other occasions

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[2](continued)
edition, London,1662) pp.79-83, as quoted in Edmund Leites, 'The Duty to Desire: Friendship, and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage,' Journal of Social History, (Spring,1982) p.390.]

[3] Reverend Lambert Larking, Proceedings, Principally In The County Of Kent, In Connection With The Parliaments Called In 1640, And Especially With The Committee Of Religion Appointed That Year. (London: Camden Society, 1862) pp.xxiv and xxix.

the process could be drawn out and conducted with great shrewdness, and varying degrees of acrimony. Courtship and negotiation were sometimes separate, but usually entwined. The end result seems to have depended remarkably little on whether the first stage of the alliance began with the young couple's courtship or the family's negotiations. Determined negotiating at times frustrated and even terminated relationships, and this was one of the harshest aspects of seventeenth century marriage brokerage. But match-making seldom foisted unwanted partners on each other, in the gentry class.

Many seventeenth century marriage negotiations proceeded in an orderly manner from the recommendation of the suitable party, to thorough investigation of assets and attractions and a tentative settlement, pending the compliance of the prospective bride and groom. Then if the young people liked each other the marriage could go ahead - hopefully without hindrance. However, probably just as many negotiations proceeded in much more confused ways. Negotiations were often begun when acquaintance or liking already existed, or when incorrect or insufficient information had been obtained. Such negotiations could lead to disappointed expectations, financial frustrations and disappointments, and sometimes to personal embarrassment and anguish. Activities relating to all the stages of courtship and negotiation could be carried on simultaneously, and particularly if some courtship and commitment had preceded the negotiations this could limit or extend the powers of the negotiators.

Within the families in this study there is some detail about more than fifty matches or attempted matches, and they were characterised by an enormous variety of methods in establishing contact and assessing potential partners. Parents were concerned for the happiness of their children, or at least wished that a 'good' marriage be made in their children's interests. There was strong reliance by children on parental

approval and assistance, and settlements were usually negotiated with great care. Daughters had much less freedom of action than sons. Children almost always had the right to reject a prospective bride or groom, and parents invariably had that right. Both specific detail, and some overall figures, are needed to demonstrate these features of seventeenth century marriage making.

The families in this study follow fairly closely the accepted demographic facts of seventeenth century gentry marriages.[4] The sample is quite small and the statistics of the Sherfield, Long and Bedford families, who were lower gentry, have been included with those of the Ishams and Derings and their connections. The averages in both groups turned out to be very much the same, which is an interesting discovery in itself. Those used in the calculation of marriage statistics include all family members and their spouses for whom dates are known. In calculating the numbers of those who remained unmarried only members of the immediate families in the study were counted.

In the period 1600 to 1650 the ten women for whom definite ages and dates of marriage are known married at an average age of 21; but the ages at marriage varied between 17 and 27. Only two out of a sample of twelve daughters who lived beyond the age of 20 in this period did not marry, and one of these was too ill over a long period to contemplate marriage.

In the same period, the average age at which heirs married was 23. Walter Long who married at 29 was an exception, he was a younger son who married almost immediately upon becoming the heir at the death of his

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4 J. Hajnal, 'European Marriage Patterns in Perspective' in Glass, D.V. & Eversley, D.E.C. (eds) Population in History. Essays in Historical Demography (London,1965); E.A. Wrigley, 'Family Limitation in Pre-Industrial England,' Economic History Review, XIX (1966) pp.82-109; R.M. Smith, 'Some Reflections on the Evidence for the Origins of the "European Marriage Pattern" in England' in Chris Harris (ed) The Sociology of the Family: New Directions for Britain (Keele,1979); Stone, Family, pp.46-54; Laslett, The World We Have Lost, pp.81-90, 161; Wrightson, English Society, p.68.

elder brother. Few of the ages at marriage of younger sons are known, but an estimate which includes ages at which they were known to be not yet married makes it possible to say that on average they married later than 28. Some may not have married at all. Letters or documents regarding such marriages are scarce, suggesting a lack of family participation in the marriages of younger sons, compared with heirs.

Thus Laslett's statistics on age at first marriage for gentry applicants for marriage licences in the Diocese of Canterbury 1619-60 coincide fairly well with those in this study. He found that the mean age for brides was 21.75 and for bridegrooms 26.18.[5] E.A. Wrigley found that between 1630 and 1649 the mean age at first marriage for men was 25.8, and for women 26.5 for the population of the parish of Colyton in Devon. In data from twelve parishes Wrigley and Schofield calculated the average age at first marriage between 1625 and 1649 to be 27.6 for men and 26.6 for women.[6] This would seem to indicate that while gentry males married at about the same age as men of other orders their spouses were about four and a half years younger.[7] Gentry women who were dependent upon their fathers for a portion did not have to improve their financial position before they married, however, the younger sons of the gentry were likely to have to establish themselves before they could marry.

Between 1650 and 1700 the ten women studied for this thesis married for the first time at an average age of 22.5. The ages at marriage varied between 15 and 33. The mean age of those who married heirs was 19.5. Six out of thirteen daughters during this period remained unmarried. Heirs married at an average age of 25, and younger sons at 34. Four out of

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5 Laslett, The World We Have Lost, p.2.

6 Wrigley & Schofield, Population History, p.424.

7 E.A.Wrigley, 'Family Limitation in Pre-Industrial England,' Economic History Review, XIX, (1966) p.87.

thirteen sons remained unmarried. The rise in the number of men and women who remained unmarried, and the late age of marriage among younger sons are consistent with trends observed by Wrigley and Schofield. Data for the years between 1675 and 1699 from the same twelve parishes placed the age at first marriage for men at 27.9 and 26.8 for women.[8] However, once again gentry daughters were marrying much younger than those in the classes below them.

The figures for the period 1700 - 1750 include only one generation of the Ishams and their spouses - sixteen people. The sample is a totally inadequate one on which to base generalisations, yet it is interesting in the light of the suggested trends. Wrigley found that the average age at first marriage in Colyton between 1700 and 1719 was 28.1 for men and 30.7 for women.[9] Laslett's figures for the general population in 1749 were about 27.2 for men and 25.8 for women.[10] However R.M. Smith, and Wrigley and Schofield in the twelve parish sample, have noted a decline in the age at first marriage.[11] In fact among the Ishams and their spouses the age at first marriage for women was 27.8, and for men 39.6. The average at first marriage for heirs was 32, and of the four (out of five) younger sons who married, the average age at first marriage was 43.5. Lawrence Stone observed that younger sons were, by the eighteenth century, marrying in the early to middle thirties and were choosing brides about ten years younger.[12] But the Isham brothers were somewhat older when they married and the age disparity between them and their brides was correspondingly

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8 Wrigley & Schofield, Population History, p.424.

9 Wrigley, 'Family limitation,' p.87.

10 Laslett, The World We Have Lost, p.161.

11 Smith, 'Some Reflections,' p.84. Wrigley & Schofield, Population History, p.423,424.

12 Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage, p.48.

greater, for example, 44/30, and 41/21. One of the younger sons remained unmarried, and three of the four daughters did not marry, including the eldest. This trend was also typical of the early eighteenth century, and considering the late age at marriage of younger sons, the Isham family seems to have been a family which found the avoidance or postponement of marriage a viable lifestyle.[13]

So it appears that the statistical information from these families confirms the trend observed in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Members of the peerage married earliest,[14] the gentry were slightly older, and those further down the social scale older still. And those with the most advantageous financial position, heirs and sometimes eldest daughters, married earliest. Younger sons who shared with men in the lower classes the need to make their own way in the world, married at the same age as men in the general population, or even later. The families in this study do not appear to have made any effort to marry their daughters according to birth order, although at times the eldest daughter seems to have enjoyed an advantage. Marriage at a later age, particularly among younger sons, seems likely to have lessened parental control over choice of spouse, and may have increased the emotional commitment between later marrying partners. Certainly it must have influenced the nature of the relationships. The marriage of a 19 year old woman to an heir only two or three years older than herself was likely to

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[13] In his study of the British peerage T.H. Hollingsworth observed that 'a great discrepancy in age between husband and wife seems to be associated with late marriage and higher social class', and 'if the average age of those who did marry is high it is likely that the proportion who did not marry was also high'. [T.H. Hollingsworth, 'The Demography of the British Peerage,' Population Studies, XVIII, 2, (1964) p.13,16.]

[14] Hajnal, using Hollingsworth's data, estimated the mean age at marriage for the peerage 1480-1679 to be 24.3 for men and 19.5 for women; and the mean age between 1680 and 1729 to be 28.6 for men and 22.2 for women. [Hajnal, 'European Marriage Patterns,' p.114.]

be very different in expectations and behaviour from that of a woman of 27 or 35 who married a man ten years her senior, who had been obliged to make his own way in the world.

But statistics, while providing a very useful basis for comparison, disguise the variety of seventeenth century marriage practices and the human dimension in decisions about when and whether to marry. Heirs may have married at an average age, but even within this small sample their ages at first marriage ranged between 20 and 38. Women may not usually have married below the age of 20, but one in this sample married at 15. In general, remaining single may have been dictated by lack of money, but at least one in this group remained single after parental negotiations broke down and prevented her marrying where she wished. To reveal the diversity of marriage practices, where it is possible to do so, will be more illuminating than revealing statistical patterns.

CHAPTER 1 MATCH-MAKING

'Arranged' marriages, in which young people were compelled to marry partners chosen by their parents, were rare among the gentry in the seventeenth century. But many marriages were 'arranged' in the sense that parents initiated the match, and relatives and friends involved themselves in the search for partners. Among gentry families a wide range of relatives and friends kept an eye open for possible matches, or actively sought prospective partners. Fathers and widowed mothers accepted it as their responsibility to see at least the heir and their daughters advantageously married. They often continued to concern themselves with the marriages of younger sons also - sometimes over long periods of time, and with little success. Lower gentry families generally allowed their children greater independence in match-making. But even when parents were not involved in initiating the match, they, or close relatives or friends, usually took a prominent role in supervising the negotiations on behalf of their children to ensure that the settlement would not disadvantage the young person for whose future they were responsible.

So it is reasonable to see the arranging of marriages among the gentry primarily as match-making. It began with the search for prospective spouses who measured up to the vital criteria. The search was orchestrated by the parents, usually the father, but could involve an amazing array of friends and relatives. Others who were perhaps older, widowed, orphaned, younger sons, or were for a variety of reasons able, or obliged, to act independently, organized their own search and courtship. Even then there was often a wide group suggesting possible matches, and, if the one to be married was close enough kin, or influential enough, offering their help in other ways. An advantagous marriage was so important and valuable, that to have assisted a relative, friend or

acquaintance toward such a match, could be not only altruistic, but personally beneficial. In a society where influence and contacts were of paramount importance such a favour owed was a valuable credit to have acquired.

It is soon evident from a study of the variety of individuals in the match making process that it mattered little where the knowledge of a good match came from, or who initiated the match. If the proposed individual met the criteria of wealth and social standing, and there was 'liking' between the couple, the opportunity would be seized. The pressure to find suitable spouses was great, and any good match was likely to be accepted with alacrity. Parents seem to have checked the most promising prospects and hoped that their children would find them attractive. And young people had considerable freedom to become acquainted with those whom they hoped their parents would perceive as appropriate matches. Although there were certainly autocratic fathers who vetoed such matches, the coincidence of expectations and criteria between parents and children, which has already been mentioned, may have made this less frequent in the seventeenth century than one might otherwise expect.

Since the match of a particular individual could involve a wide variety of suggestions, from a large number of people, it was likely that a number of motions toward marriage would be put forward about the same time. Such suggestions might come from information meant to be passed on in an informal way, or from tentative but specific suggestions, or they might be a definite motion of marriage. Hence quite frequently more than one possible match was being considered at a time. This was perfectly acceptable, and even when negotiations faltered or broke down, or there was outright rejection, this usually occurred without loss of face, or any apparent annoyance. The match-making for John Isham at the beginning of the century illustrates this particularly aptly.

Between July 1605 and the end of 1607 at least ten different brides

were suggested for John Isham.[1] In July 1605 John Isham received a letter from his cousin George Isham. 'Sir', he wrote, 'at your last being with me I asking you why you got you not a good wife, you answered asking me whether I knew where a good one were for you. Since which time I have earnestly thought upon one'. The young lady was virtuously brought up, and of answerable portion, and George had spoken to her widowed mother and promised to bring John Isham to visit. So he urged that they should ride over together, preferably after John had sent a gift of venison.[2] The match came to nothing and in November that year John's father let him know that he would be welcomed by the widow Woodward's daughter.[3] Two months later John Ireton wrote that he had 'some hope of a good marriage' for him, Sir William Skeffington having left 'a virtuous lady without issue, having jointure £300 yearly'.[4] In May 1606 Sir Anthony Tyrringham's daughter was offered, and finances were discussed.[5] In September that year two more possibilities were mentioned rather vaguely. John's stocks might have been quite high with one of them, since she would not marry 'any whose father is alive', and John had inherited in December 1605.[6] In the next month Mr Francis Bernard wrote proposing his eighteen year old niece, and this possibility seems to have been briefly entertained.[7] Soon after this John Isham's brother-in-law, Sir Anthony Denton, suggested four different possibilities in one letter. First there was Alderman

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1 John Isham was 23 years of age in 1605.

2 George Isham to John Isham, 30 July 1605, NRO IC 46.

3 Thomas Isham to John Isham, 12 Nov.1605, NRO IC 53.

4 John Ireton to John Isham, 13 Jan.1605, NRO IC 63.

5 Francis Catesby to John Isham, 27 May 1606, NRO IC 73.

6 Basil Brooke to Mr Sharrock, 6 Sept.1606, NRO IC 82; Richard Beale to Henry Tremyll, 27 Sept.1606, NRO IC 83.

7 Francis Bernard to Richard Isham, 29 Oct.1606, NRO IC 84; Francis Bernard to John Isham, 15 Nov.1606, NRO IC 87.

Swinnerton's daughter, about whose 'great portion' he had already told John, and there were also the three daughters of the late Mr Darcy, of whom he might learn more if he enquired of Mr George Wrightson in the Middle Temple. Each of them was to have £1000 and £140 yearly income from land.[8] The last letter discussing marriage possibilities came from James Pagitt bearing the news that 'the gentlewoman continued still unresolved touching her affection.... but was willing to have you continue your acquaintance....'[9] This letter almost certainly referred to Pagitt's sister-in-law, Judith Lewyn, who married John Isham in October 1607.

This catalogue of opportunities for John Isham might make it appear that motions concerning young women were the most frequent. But in the correspondence of the families of these women, the discussion would have been of the eligibility of John Isham, and others, his jointure offers and dowry expectations, and in some cases the specific approaches made and negotiations begun. This large number of proffered matches was in no way exceptional, particularly for an heir. Numerous offers were considered on behalf of most heirs, and for many well connected and well dowered daughters.

There was a certain etiquette to be followed in making and considering motions of marriage. Although almost anyone might make a suggestion or pass on news of a possible match, a mere acquaintance, or someone seen to be too obviously self-seeking might be viewed as rather impertinent. Mr Thomas Jay who brought an eligible widow to Justinian Isham's attention in 1651, although a fellow royalist, was a mere acquaintance who knew Isham only a little 'in person', although he claimed to know much of Sir Justinian's 'adornments'.[10] Even such chance met recommendations could be

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8 Anthony Denton to John Isham, [1606] NRO IC 88.

9 James Pagitt to John Isham, 16 Dec.1607 [incorrectly dated, John Isham and Judith Lewyn were married 19 Oct.1607] NRO IC 111.

valuable in the search for a spouse. This one brought Isham's 'best thanks' to Mr Jay;[11] nevertheless he seems to have thought the recommendation somewhat intrusive, particularly as Mr Jay's motives were not only to benefit Isham, but also to assist the widow, who was his friend, toward a satisfactory marriage. The letter Bishop Duppa wrote to Justinian Isham excusing this presumption aptly illustrates the role of proposer and chooser:

> I confess, I cannot blame him for having a desire to make his friend happy. For had I either friend or daughter that I thought worthy of you, I should fall into the same error that he doth; and pursue you as eagerly; for though it must be your part to choose, there is still left the liberty of proposing, and till the choice be made, there is no injury done to give you a longer field to choose in.[12]

But proposing matches and assessing the proposals was a complex activity. The bishop was a somewhat more cynical observer when he wrote to his friend after two more years of Isham's courting and being courted.

> I know you are wary, and you ought to be so. Many overtures have been made to you, and some of them so strangely, that with my purblind eyes I thought I saw the hand of Providence working in them, but I have found how short-sighted we are in things of this nature, which are not discovered till we see the event of them.[13]

The etiquette of match-making also required that the manner of the rejection and the reasons given (even if fallacious) ought not to give offence. Writing to his son-in-law in 1668, Lord Thomas Leigh seemed perfectly content that Mrs Pargiter, whose relatives had put forward the motion of a match between her daughter and his son, had 'declined'. However, he added indignantly,

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[10] Thomas Jay to Justinian Isham, 5 March 1650/1, NRO IC 275.

[11] Draft reply, Justinian Isham to Thomas Jay, on letter 5 March 1650/1, NRO IC 275.

[12] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 8 April 1651, Letter XV, Duppa, pp.32,33.

[13] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 15 Feb.1653, Letter XXVIIA, Ibid. p.62.

> I conceive her objections not qualified with much respect or civility, and however she values her daughter and her fortune, yet as my son's quality is superior to the one, so she must give me leave to think him in the other, and I doubt not he may deserve one no whit inferior to what she has so high a conceit on.[14]

In 1656 Bishop Duppa assisted in the early negotiations of Captain Thomas Jervoise with Sir Justinian Isham for one of his daughters. When it became apparent that the match was unlikely to 'take effect' the bishop wrote to Isham, 'my judgement is that it should therefore be broke off the sooner, which may be fairly done without disparagement to either party, having not yet so much as seen one another'. Duppa had begun the process of letting the Captain down gently, but Jervoise wished to hear specifically from Sir Justinian. 'Only dismiss him fairly', the bishop wrote, 'and if you bestow a letter of kindness on him it will not be lost'.[15] For some reason Isham declined to write, and Duppa had to write and 'absolutely set a period to this business'. He told Isham that he had written as fairly as he could on his behalf.

> I first let him know that you did rightly set a value both upon his person and upon the friendship which he showed in making this address to you.... As for the impediments that hindered your giving him encouragement for the farther prosecution of it, they proceeded not from any thing in relation either to his person, or to his estate, but merely from this, that your daughters, having been so long under the education of their aunt, there is a great unwillingness on both sides to part, and especially at so great a distance. And therefore having not yet so much as seen one the other, or any treaty begun, there might be a desisting without any disparagement at all, or any breach of the kindness begun between you.[16]

In fact Lady Denton had written, 'The business you writ of we know not how to answer, the party being afar off and ancient....'[17]

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[14] Thomas Leigh to Justinian Isham, 28 Sept.1668, NRO IC 618.

[15] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 11 Nov.1656, Letter LXXXIII, Duppa, p.131.

[16] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 2 Dec.1656, Letter LXXXIV, Duppa, p.132.

[17] Elizabeth Denton to Justinian Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4319.

It was also important to inform people as soon as possible which way one intended to proceed. When he suggested Dr Wright's son for one of Sir Justinian's daughters, Sir Ralph Verney wrote, 'Some say Sir [Nicholas] Cary of Bedington is a pretender to one of your daughters in Suffolk, if so, and that you intend to proceed with the doctor, t'were well he knew it, and to which, for many reasons'.[18]

Sir Thomas Dayrell was a close friend of Sir Justinian Isham, and godfather of Isham's eldest son. Letters between them in the summer of 1659 illustrate the etiquette of proposing and entertaining matches. In 1658 Sir Thomas had 'designed' a nephew of his cousin Chichely 'to be a servant to one of your deserving daughters'. However neither party had followed this up because Mr Chichely's mother and friends had matrimonial plans which they were hatching in town. These came to nothing, and in 1659, while considering the qualifications of a Mr Cutts on Isham's behalf, Sir Thomas Dayrell remembered his cousin again 'who returns his service to you and promiseth me (from whom only comes this motion) that he will engage all his powers to bring it to effect'.[19] And whereas the mere mention of him as a possibility a year before was not followed up by Sir Justinian, on receipt of this letter he expressed his gratitude to Sir Thomas and added, 'I shall refrain myself from engaging elsewhere till I hear further from you'.[20] However after two months of silence Dayrell was full of doubts and felt obliged to write,

> I would not that any expectation of this should hinder other good motions, for this silence makes me somewhat doubtful (there may be other engagements) which I shall not much longer tend to hear of, but shall press for an absolute answer. In the meantime I doubt not of your good opinion of my hearty intentions to serve you....[21]

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[18] [Ralph] Verney to Justinian Isham, 9 April 1656, NRO IC 394.

[19] Thomas Dayrell to Justinian Isham, 20 June 1659, NRO IC 489.

[20] Ibid, Endorsed reply by Justinian Isham.

[21] Thomas Dayrell to Justinian Isham, 17 Aug.[1659] NRO IC 491.

It is apparent that Sir Thomas saw his commitment in this not only to assist his cousin's nephew to a good match, but also to take care that Sir Justinian's plans were not in any way disrupted by the other engagements which the young man and his family might be entertaining. Since all this proceeded without the knowledge of Isham's daughters, any inconvenience was purely in planning. However, etiquette demanded that such speculative planning be assisted to run as smoothly as possible. Of course not everyone observed these polite usages.

It was also usual for those who had previously assisted the family in the search for spouses, and might conceivably do so again, to be kept informed. For example Sir Euseby Isham, who had assisted his cousin Thomas Isham toward a very satisfactory match for his daughter Elizabeth with Sir Anthony Denton in 1601, was kept informed about the progress of matches for Thomas's other two daughters and son John.[22] Information about dowries and jointures which might be offered was often made available to persons like Sir Euseby who were likely to take an active role in seeking spouses, and might want to exchange vital information if a suitable prospect was mentioned. At all stages of making a match in the seventeenth century, and particularly in the early stages, when a maze of possibilities might be put forward and negotiations started, the importance of not alienating anyone concerned was paramount. After all, if this match fell through they may have another to suggest - for the same individual, or another family member.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY:

In match-making and negotiating the father's role was dominant, although by no means solitary. The role of the mother was also important,

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[22] Thomas Isham to Euseby Isham, 21 Nov.[1604] NRO IC 3636.

but is usually more difficult to assess. It becomes more apparent in the case of widows whose responsibilities were more obvious. And the extent of the activities which widows accepted as appropriate for themselves in match-making may be an indication of the involvement of mothers when they had concern and interest, but not ultimate responsibility, as widows did, for the marriages of their children. It would seem that mothers frequently concerned themselves with the personal qualities of the proposed spouse, and the feelings of their children. Usually they left the financial aspects of the match to husbands or, if they were widowed, to sons or other male relatives. There were widows who drove effective bargains, and other women who by force of personality involved themselves in exceptional ways in marriage making, however, the authority and responsibility of the head of the family was crucial in making marriages. He not only led the search for spouses for family members, but also assessed and rejected them, sometimes before they were known to anyone else. And since his was the decision about what dowry or jointure would be offered, his ability to make or break projected matches was only limited by the existence of a strict settlement.[23]

The assumption of ultimate responsibility on the part of the father might take several forms even within the same family, and did not necessarily preclude involvement by the children. In April 1673 Sir Edward Dering was involved with two sets of marriage negotiations on behalf of his children. The first of these was part of his search for a wife for his heir. Dering apparently initiated it himself, and it failed for financial reasons. Although he considered the £3000 portion offered with the bride adequate if backed by expectations from her uncle Sir John Norton, when Sir John failed to commit himself to enlarge her expectations, Sir Edward felt it an inadequate match for his eldest son.

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[23] See Bonfield, Marriage Settlements.

Nothing is known about the attitudes of either of the young people.[24] The second match in which Dering negotiated in April 1673 was a match based on an attachment already formed between his daughter Mary and Thomas Knatchbull. In this case Dering appears to have become involved only two weeks before the young couple married. Yet his approval was vital, and he detailed the factors which 'induced me to it',[25] apparently justifying to his own satisfaction a match for his second daughter to a younger son of moderate estate. In these two sets of negotiations Sir Edward's role and involvement was very different yet in his autobiography he wrote 'this month I treated [for] two matches....' He tied the two together as being equally his responsibility.[26]

The scenario was slightly different when Sir Edward again involved himself in the search for a wife for his heir later that year. Once again he rejected the match for financial reasons. However, this time the widow who negotiated with him on behalf of her daughter had thought she could drive a hard bargain 'believing my son had an affection for her daughter'.[27] If Ned's affections were engaged, his father certainly did not let it weigh against an unsatisfactory financial offer. Dering accepted a large measure of responsibility for the bestowing of his children, but any genuinely suitable match was welcomed by him, regardless of who initiated it. His only uncompromising financial demands were in his search for a wife for his heir, for his other children he wanted a 'good' match, for their own comfort.

While she was visiting her sister Betty, Sir Edward's daughter Katherine fell in love with Sir John Perceval, the nephew of Betty's

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[24] Dering, autobiography in Bond, Diaries, p.112.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid, p.113.

husband Sir Robert Southwell. Dering approved the match enthusiastically. Moreover he was content to leave all the negotiations to his son-in-law, since Katherine and Sir John were both staying in his home, and he was entirely to be trusted to arrive at a settlement fair to both parties. Yet even here Sir Edward's approval and preparedness to increase Katy's portion was necessary. The match was so advantageous to Katherine that it was most unlikely that approval would be withheld. On the other hand to increase one daughter's portion, while other family members remained unmarried, was something Dering did not do lightly, and he was not prepared to consider such an increase on another occasion.[28]

Although Henry Sherfield's Bedford and Long stepchildren took considerable initiative in finding suitable spouses for themselves, the children of his first wife expected to be advised by him, and those of his second wife expected to consult with their mother and with him. All the children whose marriage plans are known expected their stepfather to conduct or assist with the negotiations. In 1617 when she was having difficulty deciding about a suitor whom her family approved, Martha Long stated that she referred the matter 'next after god' to her stepfather.[29] After Mary Bedford had declined a would-be suitor while staying with her grandfather in Winchester, she received a concerned letter from her stepfather. Her reply shows very clearly the role he perceived for himself in making matches for his stepchildren, and Mary's grateful acceptance of that role. First she allayed his concerns that a match had been prepared 'to take me at the first hop' - she was 18. This she assured him was not the case 'for I think my Grandfather and my uncle Bud do love me too well to do any wrong unto me'. It is clear from the letter that in this

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[28] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 9 Dec.1680, 1 March 1680/1, 8 March 1680/1 & 17 June 1682, KAO U 1713 B/8, B/29, B/30 & C/43.

[29] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3 June 1617, HRO Herr. XXXI, 5.

instance Sherfield's authority as a stepfather took precedence over that of a maternal grandfather and uncle. She concluded,

> And whereas you writ if I will let you have notice of all such attempts you will prefer me better, I were much to blame if I would hide any such thing from you, because you promise to be so good a friend unto me, as I hope you will be unto us all.[30]

In 1624 Mary Long and Timothy Wade met in London, formed an attachment, and brought it to the notice of Mary's mother Rebecca and her husband Henry Sherfield. To proceed, the match needed Rebecca's personal approval of Wade, which she gave since she found 'his conversation civil and honest'. And having given that approval she left everything else to her husband, Mary's stepfather. She wrote to him, 'For provision for Mary I must wholly leave to you, not only hoping, but also entreating you that you will make the best match for her that you can'. And she was able to add shrewdly, on the basis of her brief acquaintance with Timothy Wade, 'I perceive he is willing to yield to anything you shall require of him....'[31] Mary's brothers confirmed that Sherfield had drawn up the books of the marriage settlement 'for her best advantage'.[32]

Rebecca Long, Mary's sister, also married in 1624. Her husband, Sir Richard Rogers, was a very desirable match, but in spite of Sir Richard's undoubted social and economic superiority to the Longs, Rebecca's mother utterly refused to give her consent until she had met Sir Richard.[33] After her consent was given the match involved protracted negotiations before the settlement was concluded. Henry Sherfield's 'care and pains'[34] in bringing them to fruition, and his efforts on behalf of his other step-

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[30] Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 6 June 1618, HRO Herr. XLIII,17.

[31] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 7 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 34.

[32] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 33.

[33] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 April 1623, HRO Herr. XLII, 13.

[34] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 33.

children were greatly appreciated. Of course it was to their advantage that he was a lawyer. Sherfield himself obviously regarded this involvement as his duty to his family.

Eleanor Rogers' involvement in the courtship and negotiations between her son and Rebecca Long is an interesting example of very strong maternal participation in match-making, and the negative attitudes to it. As was to be expected Mrs Rogers visited Whaddon to meet Rebecca and her mother. Then after the negotiations had dragged on for about a year she took the opportunity while her son was away visiting Whaddon to attempt to have the settlement books engrossed and sealed, and liverie and seisin given, in spite of the fact that neither Sir Richard Rogers or any one representing Rebecca was present. She also caused convenants to be drawn up and added to the books preventing Sir Richard from cutting the entail or selling any of the land mentioned in the book, on a bond of £10,000. Sir Richard swore he would not agree to this, and the advice of his friend and negotiator, Mr Farwell, was that such a bond could not stand. Nevertheless Walter Long sought Henry Sherfield's advice on his sister's behalf, and Sir Richard expressed his desire to have Walter Long and Roger Knight, Rebecca's brother-in-law, come and seal the books within the week.[35]

When at last a date in May 1624 had been set for the marriage, and agreement reached that the final assurances regarding the marriage settlement would be signed during the week before the marriage, Mrs Rogers arrived at Whaddon with Sir Richard demanding that the marriage take place immediately. Walter Long was affronted and suspicious, and when she would not be put off by the lack of a licence, but said she would support the minister, Mr Shipman, if he proceeded without one, Walter Long took refuge in the excuse that his mother and Henry Sherfield wanted 'to have things

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[35] Walter Long to Henry Sherfield, 18 March 1623/4, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 29.

perfected before the marriage'. Mrs Rogers took this 'very ill'. Walter was also very dissatisfied that 'things have this long depended and now to be huddled up hastily without any good assurance from them, they having received all assurance from us'.[36] The long drawn out negotiations, which Mrs Roger's demands had exacerbated, had tried the patience of the Longs. This seemed like the last straw. Walter Long left his mother to decide whether the marriage should go ahead without the final agreement, and she decided that it should.[37] The interesting aspect of this mother's behaviour is that although it was regarded as annoying, and at times probably devious, there is no hint in any of the letters that Mrs Rogers was exceeding the authority or role of a mother. It is safe to assume that in changing the settlement she intended to protect the interests of her daughters, although her methods then and later were certainly autocratic. When Rebecca Sherfield authorized the wedding to go ahead she said she did so because although she did not approve of Mrs Roger's behaviour she sympathized with her as a mother.[38]

The nature and importance of a mother's role in match-making is illustrated by Rebecca Sherfield's response to a marriage proposal her son Thomas received in 1625. During his apprenticeship to a grocer in London, Thomas Long was offered a wife with £1000, by a gentleman who wished to match his daughter 'to a tradesman in London'.[39] In a letter to his mother Thomas reported that he had given the man satisfaction in 'divers things' and now awaited his response. He asked for his mother's approval, without which he said he would not proceed. The letter survives because Rebecca enclosed it with one of her own to her husband in which she sought

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[36] Walter Long to Rebecca Sherfield, 27 May 1624, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 14.

[37] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 2 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 31.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Thomas Long to Rebecca Sherfield, 4 Feb.1624/5, HRO Herr. XXXI, 39.

his counsel and asked him to give Tom his best advice if the matter were brought up. She was surprised that someone should offer so much money with their daughter, and felt that someone needed to find out about 'the young one' and her friends.[40] While the mother's advice and approval was in this instance essential, the stepfather was only to offer advice if asked. Sherfield's contribution to the marriage of his stepson Walter Long in 1621 was much more significant. The wealthy marriage which Walter, the Long heir, made with Mary Cocks in order to rescue the family finances, was not only facilitated by Sherfield's negotiations, but made possible by his contribution of £2400.[41]

For his own daughter, and sole heir, Henry Sherfield not only assessed propositions made, but took the initiative in finding a match. However, he was always concerned to give Matilda time to make the acquaintance of her suitors, and to know her feelings toward them. In 1628 Sherfield received an offer from Sir Morris Abbott, one of the sheriffs of London, on behalf of his son. It is apparent from the letters exchanged that Henry approved this match, but it fell through because Matilda rejected it.[42]

In November 1629 Henry wrote to his wife to discover Matilda's feelings about Robert Ramsay, another suitor of whom he approved. The complementary roles of mother and father in the match-making process are illustrated in this incident - Henry Sherfield found the financially and socially suitable suitor; it was his wife's responsibility to investigate his daughter's response to the match. Rebecca replied that she had done

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40 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 12 Feb.1624/5, HRO Herr. XXXI, 38.

41 Henry Sherfield's 'consideration of his gain or loss' by marriage to Rebecca Long, 20 March 1622-23, HRO Herr. XXVI, 10.

42 Letters between Morris Abbott and Henry Sherfield, Aug.1628, HRO Herr. XLVII, 11, 12, 13 & 14.

her best to understand Till's opinion of him, 'though I could not expect she should make me acquainted with her mind in a business of that nature'. This is an interesting and puzzling hesitance on Rebecca's part, since she had brought Matilda up from the time she was a small child. From the letter it is evident that Matilda had been given the chance to become acquainted with Robert Ramsey without knowing he was a suitor. When her stepmother revealed his intentions Matilda told her 'she could not think so well of him as to make a husband of', but added that she did not know what she would do 'hereafter'. She was willing for him to visit again if it was her father's wish.[43] Her assumption seems to have been that it was proper to follow her father's wishes, unless she had very strong feelings to the contrary, but Henry himself seems to have been most anxious to know her feelings. Matilda and Robert Ramsey were married five months after that initial introduction.

The Isham-Dryden marriage negotiations of 1630 and 1631 illustrate something of the extent of patriarchal power and the comparative powerlessness of offspring, including the father of the would-be groom, whose own father was still alive.[44] The extant correspondence dealing with these negotiations on behalf of John Dryden, the grandson of Sir Erasmus Dryden, and Elizabeth Isham, the daughter of Sir John Isham begins in March 1630 and lasts until May 1631. In March 1630 plans for the match were well advanced and the books already drawn up. During the negotiations, which dragged on for more than a year, the young couple were actively encouraged to become acquainted, and John Dryden stayed on visits with the Isham family. The negotiations were in the hands of Sir John

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[43] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3 Nov.1629, HRO Herr. XXXI, 41.

[44] Mary Finch mentions a typscript article by T. F. Lindsay on the Isham-Dryden marriage negotiations, 1630-1, which was in the possession of Sir Gyles Isham in 1956. I have not been able to locate this article. Finch, Five Northamptonshire Families, p.34, note 7.

Isham, John Dryden senior, the father of the groom, and Sir Erasmus Dryden, grandfather and head of the Dryden family. They were assisted by family lawyers Mr Sherland and Mr Tanfield, who were well known to each other, the Reverend John Dodd,[45] and Mr Richard Knightley, a friend of the Ishams and relative of the Drydens. Mary Finch has suggested that the negotiations foundered because Sir Erasmus and Sir John 'found each other too rapacious'.[46] Although it was certainly their mutual demands which aborted the match, the situation went beyond mere rapaciousness, to obduracy and family and personal pride.[47]

The settlement already reached when the correspondence begins in March 1630 was satisfactory to John Dryden senior, and apparently to Sir John Isham. However, Sir Erasmus felt that 'some things are inserted into the books that were never intended in the draft and in sealing of the articles'.[48] Whether or not this was so it was the beginning of a dispute which was characterised by Sir Erasmus Dryden's changes of mind over the settlement. Sir Erasmus approved the character and portion of Elizabeth Isham, he knew how much his grandson wished to marry her, and how heartily his own son promoted the match. To meet a £4000 portion, he offered £300 a year in present maintenance, £400 maintenance after his death, and a £400 jointure. The negotiations broke down in mid-1630 over whether the

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45 John Dodd was associated with Richard Cleaver in writing A Godlie Forme of Household Government, and other religious works. [D.N.B.]

46 Finch, op cit.p.34.

47 For instance, John Isham stood to make no personal financial gains by insisting that specific lands be secured to quarantee the jointure offered, which was the sticking point of his intransigence. Elizabeth was to receive the £4000 whether she married or not, and in 1636. John and his heir Justinian granted her an annuity of £300 per year, which would cease if she received the £4000 in one whole payment. Since Elizabeth lived for twenty four years after the marriage negotiations broke down the £4000 was well used up. Of course negotiators could be rapacious on behalf of their offspring. [Ibid, p.34.]

48 John Dryden to John Isham, 17 March 1630, NRO IC 183.

present maintenance would be the £300 Sir Erasmus offered or the £400 Sir John Isham demanded, and over the estates of Ashby and Hodnell, from which maintenance and jointure were to be guaranteed.

In August 1630 negotiations were resumed again at the behest of Sir Erasmus, who had capitulated to the extent of settling Ashby and Hodnell on John Dryden and his heirs, but not until one year after Sir Erasmus's death. John Dryden felt he was likely to persuade his father to yield further. Soon after this Sir Erasmus requested and received a loan of £1000 from Sir John Isham, which was to be repayed if the marriage did not go ahead. In his letter to Sir John he added 'my desire is that we hasten to a conclusion as soon as conveniently may be'.[49] The settlement had been made to suit all parties until Sir Erasmus again decided, possibly from concern for the interests of his younger sons, not to include the estate of Hodnell in the settlement during his lifetime, and to alter the conditions of the disposal of part of the estate if John Dryden should die without issue by Elizabeth. John Dryden was prepared to put up collateral security for the payment of £100 during his father's lifetime,[50] he considered the changes of 'no great moment', and presumed they would move to 'a happy and speedy conclusion of this business'.[51] But at this stage Isham allowed 'the uncertain and variable resolutions of Sir Erasmus Dryden'[52] to bring his patience to an end. He refused to write to the Drydens, but sent an angry message by a servant. John Dryden senior sent Mr Knightly and the Reverend Dodd to intervene, but to no avail. He wrote at last

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[49] John Dodd to [John Isham], 22 Sept.1630, NRO IC 193; Erasmus Dryden to John Isham, 28 Sept.1630, NRO IC 194.

[50] Thomas Sherland to Robert Tanfield, 8 April 1631, NRO IC 196.

[51] John Dryden to John Isham, 8 April 1631, NRO IC 197.

[52] Robert Tanfeilde to John Isham, 9 April 1631, NRO IC 191.

> I have received no answer to give me any satisfaction, but found you still wedded to your own will, that you would not proceed unless you had your own content in all things, which forceth me to make this conclusion that you have no desire to proceed in this business. Especially considering some harsh aspersions which you cast upon my father undeservedly, whose honour I cannot but be jealous of. But these begun in love I should be most desirous should end in friendship....[53]

And the negotiations were indeed at an end - in spite of the groom's wishes.

The haggling was over finance, but as was frequently the case in such situations the amount involved was comparatively small, and in this instance would have been made up by the groom's father, who was even prepared to alter the terms of the settlement after his father's death. Both Sir Erasmus and Sir John were men accustomed to getting their own way, and although after more than a year neither of them can have been in any doubt about the degree of attachment which existed between John Dryden and Elizabeth Isham this did not weight the issue toward compromise. The final letter of John Dryden senior to Sir John Isham placed Isham's parental role in its proper seventeenth century perspective, when he wished Elizabeth much happiness 'wheresoever you please to place her'.[54]

A letter of John Dryden's written to Elizabeth a month before the negotiations were finally broken off highlights the personal consequences of this exercise in patriarchal authority:

> Sweetheart, Never was time so tedious to me as this since my departure from you, though to my thinking never was spent time better that came to less perfection. I have done my best to perfect Sir John's desires, which are my desires concerning the settling of Hodnell upon me, but as yet I cannot draw my grandfather to it.... If it please your father to yield to the former conditions I will present my true love to you speedily, if not that he think it not meet I will defer it till I can do better in it. Thy constant love makes me plain hearted, therefore Sweetheart excuse these my lines and return me an answer as pleases your sweet self. Thus in haste with my true

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[53] John Dryden to John Isham, 26 May 1631, NRO IC 200.

[54] Ibid.

> love and service.... I rest yours till death, John Dryden.[55]

John Dryden died in December 1631,[56] and Elizabeth Isham died unmarried in 1654. It is not possible to know why Elizabeth remained unmarried, her dowry was sufficient to ensure that she did not lack opportunity. It may be that keeping house for her widowed father, and after 1639 sharing the responsibility for raising her four motherless nieces was sufficiently satisfying to her; or she may have continued to mourn John Dryden.

The variety of parental involvement in match-making may also be seen in the actions of Sir John Isham's son Justinian on behalf of the four daughters of his first marriage. Numerous proposed matches were put before him on behalf of a wide variety of suitors, some he rejected independently, others he submitted to his daughters. He also initiated several searches for suitable matches for his daughters. Jane, Elizabeth, Judith and Susanna lived chiefly with their great aunt Lady Elizabeth Denton in Suffolk, but sometimes made long visits to Lamport in Northamptonshire. Their father had ultimate authority over their disposal in marriage, but because of the distance between them, and his involvement with his large second family, he in fact left much of the search for, and assessment of, prospective spouses to Lady Denton. Her role is an interesting one which in some ways paralleled that of a mother, and was secondary to that of her nieces' father, but in other ways she seems to have had more authority than most mothers - possibly because of her advanced age and secure social and financial status in the family, and maybe also because Sir Justinian was under some obligation to her for her devoted care of his daughters.[57]

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[55] John Dryden, junior, to Elizabeth Isham, 25 April 1631, NRO IC 199.

[56] See Duppa, p.84.

Lady Denton put a great deal of effort into match-making on her nieces' behalf, and was particularly firm in rejecting unsuitable matches. In 1655 Elizabeth Isham wrote to her father 'you will please to think no more of that which was not approved by my Lady [Denton] and so not rejected by me without the advice of those whose judgment (next to yours) my will shall ever be resigned to'.[58] In April 1656 John Stuteville, Sir Justinian's cousin who also lived with Lady Denton, wrote on behalf of Lady Denton

> She commands me to return you her thanks that you are pleased to acquiesce in what she hath done concerning the last match propounded; and to let you know that we shall be as careful as we can, neither to do, or admit of, anything which may be unworthy of yourself, or any of yours.[59]

On another occasion Lady Denton wrote to Isham herself of a promising baronet, and added, 'I cannot write with any certainty more of it yet, but wish I could bring it to pass'.[60] Sir Justinian appears to have made little demur when his daughters rejected suitors proposed by him, or suitors who proposed themselves with his approval.

By mid 1656 Sir Justinian had only to find husbands for his twin daughters Elizabeth and Judith, since Jane had died in November 1655 and Susanna was married in May 1656. In 1658 after some years of intermittent match-making on his daughters' behalf Isham received a visit from Sir Thomas Gardiner seeking Elizabeth Isham's hand in marriage. On his return to Suffolk Sir Thomas told Elizabeth that he had been 'not quite rejected'

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[57] Most aspects of Denton's life illustrate the ways in which individual personality and circumstances were able to forge a unique lifestyle for particular people in the seventeenth century. Such fortunate individual circumstances, which held out opportunities for self-assertion and some measure of independence, were particularly important to women.

[58] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 3 Sept.[1655] NRO IC 4840.

[59] John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 1 April 1656, NRO IC 392.

[60] Elizabeth Denton to Justinian Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4319.

by Sir Justinian, and Elizabeth wrote to her father in April 1658, 'For my inclination it shall never be for him nor no man else, without you first approve of the person and be satisfied in those things which you enquire into'. Although this was not entirely true, since she was already seriously inclined toward Sir Thomas Gardiner, it is evident that Elizabeth did not consider marriage without her father's approval a possibility, and also that his approval or disapproval would rest mainly upon the enquiries it was his responsibility to make into the young man's estate. She went on

> Of all things acted here below, this affair is to be done with greatest circumspection, because being once it done it cannot be amended.... I can freely declare to you, as I have to some who have spoken for him, that I have no aversion, nor consent to him, more than what you shall think fit, for in this, and all things else it will be my greatest happiness ever to approve myself, Sir, your obedient daughter....[61]

At the time Elizabeth wrote this to her father Sir Thomas had already made known to her 'how much of his happiness he conceived depending on her good acceptance of his devoted service', but was asking Sir Justinian for permission to 'make his addresses' and endeavour to obtain Elizabeth's 'reciprocal affection'.[62] At this time Elizabeth and Sir Thomas had known each other for three or four years so it is very difficult to assess the genuineness of their apparent lack of commitment. Was it just the proper posture to assume for her father's benefit? Two and a half years later Isham wrote to his cousin John Stuteville,

> She doth not own that she hath directly entertained any addresses from Sir Thomas Gardiner, I having long enjoined her to the contrary, but plainly perceive so much hath passed between them that she is not willing to think of any other.[63]

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[61] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 26 April 1658, NRO IC 458a.

[62] Francis Gardiner to Justinian Isham 29 March 1658, NRO IC 459.

[63] Draft, Justinian Isham to [John Stuteville] on a letter from Richard Chaworth, 3 April 1660, NRO IC 500.

This is certainly an admission that a strong commitment could exist without formal addresses being made, and also of a certain kind of limit to Isham's influence.

Since Elizabeth's mind was made up her father 'resolved to be so kind a father that I will not cross her affections'. Gardiner had only eight or nine hundred pounds per annum, and while Sir Justinian conceded that ''tis true 'tis such a fortune they may live handsomely on....' it was 'not above half that I could have with another, so that she must make the best of her own choice'. He decided he would only give a portion of £3000 if Elizabeth married Gardiner, and he was not prepared to pay that until 'he hath purchased somewhere nearer to me in a healthier place than his own in Essex'.[64] It proved impossible for Sir Thomas to sell his Essex estate even though his affection was so great that he was prepared to do so at a great loss. Elizabeth was brutally torn between a passion she felt guilty about, and the obedience she believed she owed to her father. A letter from her twin, Judith, to their father illustrates this conflict.

> I... do humbly beg and implore your pardon for my sister who merited your just displeasure in not discovering her affection to Sir Thomas Gardiner sooner. And if I may (without presumption) speak something in her behalf (though not wholly to excuse her) she did strive often and beg God that she might overcome and vanquish that passion and banish it from her heart. And had obtained so much victory that if any civil person agreeable to her friends good liking had been tended, she had accepted it and been obedient.... She must submit her will to God's will, be patient and resigned, for she knows she ought not nor did she ever think of disposing herself without your consent and approbation. Her conscience is tenderer than to give her up to commit so great a crime. And her heart smites her for going so far already.... How hard it is for poor weak women to govern their passions as they ought, you can imagine: and that small knowledge I have in the world has yet given me some experience of the sad effects of that passion above all others. My sister will I hope regulate hers what she is able, and keep herself within the limits of piety and reason.[65]

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Judith Isham to Justinian Isham, 12 Nov.1660, NRO IC 503.

Isham's draft reply on the back of Judith's letter left his daughters in no doubt of his role in making matches for them:

> I shall never urge either of you to any but with your own good liking and at your own time; but know it in my power to forbid any if I see cause, especially if not acquainted with it. Sir Thomas is now here, he offered me to take a rent charge out of his Essex estate for jointure, etc. but I absolutely refusing to deal with his Essex land and not knowing how long it may be ere he hath any other in these parts to give me satisfaction. I consider Bessie give too much way to his addresses upon such uncertainties, and wish she may not repent too late.[66]

Sir Thomas struggled for more than a year to meet Sir Justinian's expectations. Elizabeth dared to beg her father to lessen his demands, and even Lady Denton and others of their friends thought it reasonable that he allow Sir Thomas longer to make the final settlement.[67] At last in October 1661 Elizabeth wrote that she was 'free as to engagement to man' and would listen to other proposals made for her. She concluded her letter '...if I have committed or done anything to displease you, it was my error, but I did never intend to persist in any disobedience'.[68] But before the month was over news came from Gardiner that he was still trying to satisfy Sir Justinian. Elizabeth wrote to her father:

> I do humbly beg your pardon that my inclination was more to him than your liking, and cannot but confess now I consider him constant, I do prefer him before all others and humbly beg you will not reject his suit.... If with him I may have your blessing and kind affection, I will not desire greater earthly happiness (whatever my portion be) but without your favour I cannot reckon anything a contentment. I once more beg your pardon for these desires....[69] I will perform my duty in a patient submission.

Elizabeth did submit. How patiently it would be quite impossible to say.

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[66] Draft reply, Justinian Isham to Judith Isham, on letter 12 Nov.1660, NRO IC 503.

[67] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 26 Jan.1661, NRO IC 507.

[68] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 3 Oct.1661, NRO IC 524.

[69] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 21 Oct.1661, NRO IC 525.

After a friendship of six years, much of which was a courtship of mutual affection, approved by Sir Thomas's father and most of their friends and relations, the match was broken off because Sir Justinian Isham considered Sir Thomas's estates in Essex 'unhealthy', and he expected to match his children 'where I may have them nearer to me'.[70] The difference in the distance between Northamptonshire and Suffolk or Essex may have seemed a fragile one on which to build patient submission. However, by April 1661 Elizabeth was considering the proposal of a gentleman from Norfolk whom her father approved. She married him in October 1662.

A father's responsibility to make a good marriage for his daughter was an adequate contemporary explanation for Isham's actions. However, in marrying Elizabeth to Sir Nicholas L'Estrange Isham did not make the sort of good match which would justify rejection of Sir Thomas Gardiner. A study of the making of this marriage illustrates the responsibilities and pitfalls that parents faced in match-making.

Sir Nicholas L'Estrange was first recommended to Lady Denton's 'family' in Suffolk by their friend Lady Spring who was his aunt. She described his estate as 'at least £1200 a year present, £400 more in reversion, and only £3000 debt, which is most for provision for younger brothers'.[71] When Elizabeth Isham made discreet enquiries herself she discovered that he was a widower with one son living, 'of good repute' and with £700 per year not settled upon his eldest son. And 'he has so much money in his hands of his father-in-law's as brings him in £500 a year, the use being given to him, the principle to grandchildren when they come of age'.[72] In Sir Nicholas' own account of his finances he claimed a

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[70] Draft reply, Justinian Isham to Thomas Gardiner on letter 20 Dec.1660, NRO IC 505. In the draft Sir Justinian wrote '... and expect to match my children where I may have them nearer me....' and later crossed it out, but it was probably a significant consideration as it is implied in other places.

[71] Lady Spring to John Stuteville, n.d. NRO IC 531.

yearly income of £1927-13-07 of which £467-13-00 was tied up in jointure payments to his mother, and only £760-01-09 was unentailed. Out of the unentailed property £128 per annum was charged with £3000 for his brothers. So his yearly income 'absolutely free' was only £600.[73]

Writing to Sir Justinian Isham after the articles had been signed and the marriage consummated, John Stuteville stressed that their counsel had 'been as careful as possible in this business, and his [Isham's] advice hath been followed in everything'.[74] However the settlement was not as secure as it seemed. In the same letter Stuteville admitted that unless they could obtain a reconveyance of Mr John L'Estrange's charge of £2000 on the estate 'the foundation of the settlement for that part may be shaken'.[75] When Sir Nicholas died intestate in 1669 after seven years of marriage the settlement was found to contain serious gaps. Although £3000 was to be paid to the daughters of Elizabeth and Sir Nicholas at the age of 18 or the time of their marriages, there was no provision for their maintenance until then. And even the L'Estrange's lawyer, John Fisher, rather emotionally referred to 'the poor younger brothers, that are now left destitute'.[76] On top of this the estate was encumbered with £8000 of debts, and the guardians of the heir[77] were rigorous in obtaining his

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72 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 13 April 1662, NRO IC 532.

73 'Particular of Nicholas L'Estrange's Estate', 16 May 1662, NRO IC 534; John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 7 May 1662, NRO IC 533; John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 1 Sept.1662, NRO IC 536.

74 John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 16 Oct.1662, NRO IC 542.

75 Ibid.

76 John Fisher to Justinian Isham, 8 Jan.1669/70, NRO IC 660.

77 John Stuteville had carelessly dismissed the heir early in negotiations saying that there was 'a great possibility that the whole [estate] may descend to second issue'. [John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 7 May 1662, NRO IC 533.] This is surprising firstly because John Stuteville was himself the son of a second marriage in which the estate was inherited by the heir of the first marriage, and also because he was a lawyer.

rights. For a considerable period following her husband's death Elizabeth L'Estrange was dependent upon her family even for accommodation.[78]

Although it is probable that Sir Nicholas created debts beyond what could have been predicted at the time of the settlement in 1662, there can be no doubt that the settlement was drawn up without sufficient care - and probably in some haste. It does not seem unreasonable to state that according to the expectations of the 1660s Sir Justinian Isham had reasonably exercised his authority in preventing his daughter's marriage to Sir Thomas Gardiner, but did not adequately fulfil his responsibilities when he approved her marriage to Sir Nicholas L'Estrange. L'Estrange's estate was even on paper no better than Sir Thomas's, and turned out in reality to be much worse. Insufficient investigation and an inadequate settlement left Isham's daughter and grandchildren vulnerable. Isham's motives and the reasons for his carelessness are difficult to assess, but they may relate to anxiety to get Elizabeth married after the unsettling years of Sir Thomas Gardiner's courtship, or the priority of Isham's involvement with his second family. The apparent carelessness of Lady Denton and John Stuteville about facts they knew - the existence of the heir, and the estate's indebtedness to Sir Nicholas's younger brothers - is much harder to explain. Possibly they had begun to think that at 26 Elizabeth would become increasingly difficult to find a match for. However, they do not seem to have been similarly concerned about her twin, Judith. The most likely explanation, while perhaps containing elements of all the above, is that they all wished to think the best about a charming and socially acceptable suitor, and their personal approval of the man made them careless.

Although it seems to have been neither unusual or unacceptable for sons of those in 'the middling ranks' to marry without parental consent,

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[78] Elizabeth L'Estrange to Justinian Isham, 8 Aug.1670, NRO IC 690.

and sometimes even without parental knowledge,[79] it was certainly unacceptable within the gentry, particularly for an heir. When Sir Edmund Turnor received news that his son and heir had married without his consent or sure knowledge, he wrote of 'his undutifulness to me', and 'his indiscretion as to himself'.[80] He bitterly reproached his daughter for assisting her brother to this match, and wrote to her, 'Search your heart and examine your conscience, there you cannot but find how much you have contributed and been instrumental to his ruin and my unhappiness'. He pardoned her, he said, because it had pleased God to lay on him the affliction of a disobedient stubborn son and an 'ingrateful undutiful daughter', and he would 'not be so childish as to beat the prod or bite the stone that hurts me'.[81] He accepted his son-in-law's assurance that he had not consented to it, but held him much at fault for not letting him know the young couple were becoming so well acquainted.[82]

A father's role was to some extent determined by temperament and circumstance, but no matter what degree of assistance he accepted in match-making, final responsibility, and a great deal of power, rested with him. Thomas Isham's warning to his son to spend cautiously because 'I am forward in talk to marry both my daughters greatly to my charge....' makes the balance clear. Others were assisting Thomas in making these matches, but the final decision and the payment of portions would be his

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79 Houlbrooke, The English Family, p.72. Houlbrooke discusses the examples of the sons of the ministers Adam Martindale, Ralph Josselin and Henry Newcome.

80 Edmund Turnor to Justinian Isham, 8 Aug.1685, NRO IC 1391. The marriage of Thomas Thynne and Maria Audley, which was kept secret from the Thynnes, caused even greater anger and alienation. The Thynnes attempted unsuccessfully to have the marriage annulled, and Maria was never accepted by John and Joan Thynne. [Alison Wall, Two Elizabethan Women: Correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne 1575-1611 (Devizes,1983) pp.xxv-xxxii, Letters: 17,18,19,20,30,31,38,41,42,43,55,64,73.]

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid; Edmund Turnor to Justinian Isham, n.d. [1685] NRO IC 4408.

responsibility.[83]

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS:

There was no limit to the range of persons who were involved, or who involved themselves, in the search for suitable spouses. Family members and trusted friends were frequently commissioned by the heads of families to make specific investigations. Such reports as they then made were usually objective and very frank. These trusted 'friends' of those to be matched also sought spouses or at least speedily passed on news of any whom they heard recommended. Once again such reports were usually accurate, or if the information was sparse, they said so. A multitude of others passed on information of possible matches, or proposed themselves, friends or family members. Since such proposals were to benefit the proposer either by the direct benefit of a comfortable marriage or to promote good will toward the proposer, these motions of marriage had to be scrutinized much more carefully.

Obviously family members were the most closely involved in searching and negotiating. The flurry of searching and bargaining that the family of Thomas Isham were caught up in between 1604 and 1607, while they looked for spouses for two daughters and the heir, illustrates this well. A letter from Thomas Isham to his cousin Sir Euseby Isham of Pytchley reveals the interlocking interests and influences of kin.

> Sir, I was told by a friend of mine of Mr Piggot, his son... that he was likely to be a good match. But belike my intelligencer mistook himself, for I, sending to my cousin Pulton of Boorton to enquire after such a one, he returned answer by my cousin John Pulton that there was none such; but one of another house which it seemeth is this gentleman of whom you write.... And for my part I did not harken much after him, but now I see it is set on foot, and that my son John hath written unto me to send you a speedy answer, because it is like you have some dealing in this matter. I thought good to acquaint you

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[83] Thomas Isham to John Isham, 9 May [1601] NRO IC 14.

> somewhat with my mind.... I will give with my daughter a thousand pounds and no more.... and expect £200 jointure, and a reasonable maintenance for them during their parents' lives, for Mr Piggot's father is living as I hear, and has many children.[84]

It is clear that although the final decision about the financial provisions remained in Thomas Isham's hands and he could therefore terminate negotiations, Sir Euseby and John Isham were both able to assume considerable authority. Thomas Isham intended to 'harken unto' Mr Piggot himself, since as yet he knew nothing for certain. And he concluded his letter by making it clear that he intended to keep the final authority in his own hands. He wrote that he would not employ Sir Euseby this time for 'I fear you would urge me too earnestly, as you did in the last match you made for me, to give more than I am able, and to pay it over hastily'. Although that last match between Elizabeth Isham and Sir Anthony Denton was very satisfactory to the family, he added, 'another like bargain I mean not to make unless my friends and wits do fail me'.[85]

There was certainly no lack of offers for Thomas Isham's daughter Susanna, or of family involvement on her behalf. In a letter in May 1604 Thomas Isham referred to a match proposed by Mr Smith, which was discredited with the help of 'my cousin Isham', and to a Mr Saunders who had renewed his suit; and there was yet another prospect about whom he sought information from Sir Anthony Denton.[86] Since both his son John, and his son-in-law Sir Anthony, were in London they were better placed than Thomas to promote Susan's interests, and he authorised both of them if they heard of 'any fit match for her' to 'deal for me therein'.[87] The role John Isham and Sir Anthony were given seems to bear out Vivien

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[84] Thomas Isham to Euseby Isham 21 Nov.[1604] NRO IC 3636.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Thomas Isham to John Isham, 4th May 1604, NRO IC 35.

[87] Ibid.

Brodsky Elliot's observation about the importance of London kin and intermediaries for gentry daughters. She states that in such cases 'paternal control was transferred to London uncles, grandfathers and brothers'.[88] However, Susanna Isham does not seem to have shown the passivity Elliot observed in these young women. John Isham's responsibilities as both the heir and Susan's brother were considerable, as his father reminded him. 'I pray you', he wrote, 'for your part be not slack of your loving duty to me and to her. To me in writing of this matter, and in hindering or furthering them as shall be thought meet; to her in advising and counselling what shall be most convenient for her'.[89]

John Isham had responsibilities not only for his sisters' marriages but for his own. And the marriage of the heir of a secure gentry family was a project likely to involve the enthusiasms of many family members, who might become involved in a variety of ways. Those most prominent in promoting the many possible matches suggested for John Isham, which were discussed earlier in this chapter, were family and kin, some quite distant. Until his death in December 1605, Thomas Isham was vitally concerned in marriage plans for his heir, although he left much responsibility in his son's own hands. Sir Anthony Denton, John's brother-in-law, was always diligent on his behalf. Others who involved themselves were his uncle Richard Isham, his father's cousin James Pagitt and other more distant relatives such as George Isham, his second cousin once removed.

Most who engaged themselves on behalf of their relatives may have done so to benefit the family or the individual. However, among the Ishams at

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[88] Vivien Brodsky Elliot, 'Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598-1619' in R. B. Outhwaite (ed) Marriage and Society. Studies in the Social History of Marriage (London, 1981) pp.94,95.

[89] Thomas Isham to John Isham 21 Nov.1604 NRO IC 41.

this time there is certainly some evidence of the sort of pressure toward family reciprocity that Dr Slater has observed among the Verneys.[90] It is seen less in sacrificing personal inclination than in the endeavour to be as useful as possible, in the hope of some future advantage. It is most obvious on the part of John Isham's uncles, Richard and Henry, who were struggling for survival, and were willing to serve the family wherever they could, and in return receives some very modest material rewards. But it was perhaps suspected in the case of some other relatives who were willing to help. When John's sister wrote that their cousin Francis Catesby had visited them to offer John one of the daughters of Sir Anthony Terringham, she added, perhaps a little cynically, 'he protested he came from his own house which was twenty miles off, in mere kindness and love to you both, and thinketh her a very fit match for you as he will make known to you....'[91] However, in spite of such possible self-interest, John Isham and Sir Anthony were glad to use Francis Catesby as the negotiator in the early stages of match-making.[92]

By no means all family involvement was self seeking. Mr William Garrard, the brother of Sir Justinian Isham's first wife, who died in 1629, was a trusted family member who was frequently involved on his brother-in-law's behalf in personal and family business. Several times this concerned match-making. For example in 1654 he began negotiations with Sir John Curson for a match between his son and one of Isham's daughters. Sir John was prepared to be even more generous than Isham and William Garrard had expected, thus Garrard ended his letter to Isham,

> I beseech you, Sir, neglect not this opportunity, for your daughter's sake. For truly my opinion clearly is, should you seek all England for a husband for her, you could not find a more deserving or accomplished person, nor

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[90] Slater, 'The Weightiest Business', p.28.

[91] Susanna Isham to John Isham, n.d. [1606] NRO IC 3699.

[92] Francis Catesby to John Isham, 27 May 1606, NRO IC 73.

everything better answering your expectations.[93]

Sir Justinian's very considerable efforts in assisting John Garrard, the nephew of his first wife, toward a marriage with a wealthy widow provide a striking example of assistance in match-making motivated by a sense of family solidarity and the belief that this was appropriate behaviour for a senior family member. He seems to have had no thought of any specific gain. And so it was understood by the members of John Garrard's family. When Isham first advised John's grandmother, Lady Jane Garrard, of the match she informed him that the family regarded his assistance as a 'signal favour' and a 'clear demonstration of your high worth, that you have still some thoughts of that family you are related to'.[94]

Although the extremes of reciprocity which Miriam Slater has observed should be questioned,[95] it is true that favours promoted reciprocal favours, and such 'indebtedness' can be seen in the continued relationships of the Garrards and the Ishams. After Sir Justinian's death his widow employed William Garrard to investigate the finances of Marmaduke Dayrell when she was considering a marriage between him and her daughter Mary.[96] And in 1679 Samual Garrard, another nephew of William Garrard, assisted Sir Thomas Isham in his negotiations for a match with Alderman Dashwood's daughter Elizabeth and her £12000. This was a useful and close connection between families related only by a very brief first marriage.

It is appropriate to mention that family influence was sometimes exercised to prevent a match. When Henry Sherfield sought the hand of

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[93] William Garrard to Justinian Isham, 3 Sept.1654, NRO IC 346.

[94] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 21 May 1668, NRO IC 603; Jane Garrard to Justinian Isham, 29 April 1668, NRO IC 599.

[95] Slater, 'The Weightiest Business', pp.28,30; and Slater, Family Life, pp.34-45,140.

[96] Mary Isham to Thomas Isham, 12 June 1678, NRO IC 1096.

Mary Ley he did so with her father's consent, but when Sir James Ley gave Sherfield a letter to give to his daughter when he visited her he implied that his brother also had a very significant role in the matter. He wrote:

> Daughter Mary, I am contented that you and Mr Henry Sherfield may see each other, and if there may be liking between you, then at convenient time for that purpose I will give my consent to your marriage to him. But I would not have it known because my brother William hath not yet given his consent, but I hope shortly to obtain it.[97]

Henry Sherfield understood William Ley to be his enemy. In Feb.1615 he endorsed another letter which Sir James Ley had given him to convey to Mary, 'Sir James Ley's letter to his daughter Mistress Mary Ley, sent by me, but never delivered because Mr William Ley's villainy did prevent my going'.[98]

One family connection often facilitated another - for instance the three matches between the Isham and Barker families. In 1552 John Isham, the founder of the Lamport family, married Elizabeth Barker, daughter of Nicholas Barker and widow of Leonard Barker, a prominent mercer. John's sister, Isabel, married Elizabeth's brother, Thomas Barker, who was a merchant, free of the Armourers Company. Later Elizabeth's son, Leonard Barker, John Isham's stepson, married the daughter of John Isham's brother Gyles. The connection was made even closer, and perhaps more pragmatic, by the fact that John and Henry Isham had been granted the rights of wardship and marriage of their three nieces, who were the very substantial co-heirs of their father; therefore Isham knew the value of the match he was making for his stepson. Similar examples are scattered throughout the families in this study. The widow of Sir Moulton Lambert married Sir John Garrard and her daughter Jane by her first marriage married Sir John

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97 James Ley to Mary Ley, 5 Dec.1614, HRO Herr. XL, 19.

98 Endorsement on letter of James Ley to Mary Ley, 20 Feb.1614/15, HRO Herr. XL, 20.

Garrard's heir. Sir Robert Southwell's sister, Catherine, married Sir John Perceval, the first baronet, in 1655, and twenty six years later Sir Robert's sister-in-law married his nephew, Sir John Perceval, the third baronet.

Such marriages within families and between kin were not uncommon, but it is difficult to know how much these were facilitated by deliberate planning or by the propinquity promoted because family members and connections were such an important circle for socializing. For example, when John Isham, the son of Thomas Isham, married in October 1607, he chose Judith Lewyn, the youngest daughter of William Lewyn, Doctor of Law and Judge of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. John's father's cousin, James Pagitt, was married to Judith's sister Catherine, but it seems likely that the family 'connection' was simply that John and Judith were able to become acquainted when he stayed in London with his cousin.[99]

In these families there was greater involvement of kin in match-making earlier in the century. Later, friends or one of a smaller group of relatives with whom the family maintained close contact, took a more prominent part in the search and negotiations. This change is hard to document fully even for a small number of families, and it may not be possible to confirm it statistically even from a larger group, but it fits in with Lawrence Stone's theory of development from 'Open Lineage Family' toward 'Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family'.[100] The evidence in this instance appears to confirm the trend Stone's theory posits, but not firmly enough to support the precise model Stone defines.

Clergymen were useful, and usually reliable allies in match-making. Some assisted as friends, others because of their ties to families, and family livings. Sometimes more than one was involved. Sir Justinian

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[99] Jane Isham to John Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4347.

[100] Lawrence Stone, Family, Sex, and Marriage, p.4-9.

Isham commissioned his trusted friend Bishop Brian Duppa more than once with the investigation of promising prospects, and the bishop proved himself particularly thorough and reliable. Under normal circumstances such a man may have had little time to spare on such personal activities, but living retired during the Interregnum, Duppa was happy to oblige in scrutinising proposed matches on behalf of Isham and others. As a man of judgment whose discretion and honesty could be relied upon, his contribution was greatly valued, and his favourable and detailed reports helped facilitate the marriage of Sir Nicholas Carew and Sir Justinian's daughter Susanna. During negotiations between Sir Justinian Isham and Dorothy Osborne's family at least four clergymen were employed to some extent. The Reverend Jeremy Stephens wrote to Sir Justinian in October 1651 to tell him 'there is a great good opinion of your self before any other'.[101] Edmund Vaughan, Rector of Pitsford, and Mr Gibson, Vicar of Haynes, near the Osborne home of Chicksands, both wrote letters and carried messages. And the Reverend Seth Ward, who was Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford, was intimately bound up in the financial negotiations, possibly as a friend of both families.[102] The Reverend John Dodd was useful to Sir Erasmus Dryden and Sir John Isham during their negotiations in 1630 and 1631. He had been the Dryden's minister at Canons Ashby, and in 1630 was employed by the Knightleys[103] who were related to the Drydens and were friends of the Ishams, and were also involved in the negotiations.

Even mere acquaintances might quite readily propose a match. One offer for Matilda Sherfield came from John Hodges, a London grocer to whom

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[101]Jeremy Stephens to Justinian Isham, 25 Oct.1651, NRO IC 301a.

[102]See Duppa, p.47,48; Dr Seth Ward to Justinian Isham, 28 June 1652, NRO IC 314.

[103]Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry, p.67.

her stepbrother, Thomas Bedford, was apprenticed.[104] The offer which was conveyed by Thomas to his stepfather was on behalf of Hodges' brother, who knew nothing of it. However, Hodges claimed that his brother was 'so linked unto him, both in great matters of his estate, as also by some other forcible ties',[105] that he could certainly be persuaded to accept the match when he returned from abroad. Hodges asked Thomas Bedford to convey the details of the proposed marriage directly to Matilda, but Thomas considered that the proper course was to approach her father first. Thomas urged Henry Sherfield to bring Matilda to London, as his master and his wife wished, so they could all become better acquainted, because there were others that desired this advantageous match for their daughters. The match came to nothing, but it illustrates the wide spread of the net in seeking out good matches, the role of London kin connections, the competitive edge which those living in London had when looking for matches,[106] the varied nature of family involvement, and incidentally a rare hint of possible compulsion of Hodges' unsuspecting brother.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE BRIDE AND GROOM:

Having observed the dominant role of the head of the family supported by a wide variety of family and friends in making marriages within his family, it is now appropriate to look at the scope for action, or the lack of it, which young people themselves had in rejecting and initiating marriages. The earliest examples of marriage-making in the seventeenth century show that children had the right to veto a match proposed to

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[104] Indemnity of Apprenticeship, 7 March 1626/27, HRO Herr. XLIII, 10.

[105] Thomas Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 18 Sept.1629, HRO Herriard 44 M 69, XLIII, 12.

[106] Brodsky Elliot, 'London Marriage Market,' p.88,89.

[107] The most limited exercise of this right was among the aristocracy, but
(Footnote continued)

them.[107] Lawrence Stone has stressed the role of Protestant moral theology and Calvinist criticism of the double standard which made male infidelities less acceptable, and therefore placed too much strain on arranged marriages. A freer choice of marriage partners, or at least the right to reject the totally unappealing, became a necessity.[108] Michael Walzer has gone further, and suggests that puritanism fostered romantic love by increasingly presenting marriage as a voluntary agreement between individuals who had chosen each other for love and because of each other's 'potential godliness'. Walzer claims that this marriage of individuals rather than families brought a 'sharp decline in kinship obligations'.[109] However, Kathleen Davies has pointed out that so-called 'puritan' views about free choice of marriage partners, and a variety of other aspects of married life, 'can all be found advocated in early writers who seem to be in no way peculiar or untypical'.[110] A canon of the Council of Westminster of 1175, which repeated a previous text, stated that 'where there is no consent, there is no marriage....'[111] In 1540 the humanist Agrippa maintained that marriages made with the free consent of love were the solution to the problem of adultery. He spoke strongly against

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[107](continued)
Lawrence Stone concedes that even heirs in aristocratic families had been given this right by the middle of the century. [Stone, Crisis, p. 599.]

[108]Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.190; Crisis, p.664.

[109]Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints. A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (New York,1966) p.194,195.

[110]Davies, 'The sacred condition of equality,' p.567. In England Cnut (1016-1035) ruled that 'No woman or maiden shall ever be forced to marry a man whom she dislikes, nor shall she ever be given for money unless the suitor wishes to give something of his own free will'. [Jo Ann McNamara & Suzanne Wemple, 'The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100'. Feminist Studies, Vol.1, no. 1 (Summer,1972) p.129.]

[111]Christopher N.L. Brooke, ~Marriage and Society in the Central Middle Ages,' in R.B. Outhwaite (ed) Marriage and Society, p.28.

parents and guardians using force to make their children marry 'without consideration of age, love, condition and especially the commandment of God'. Such tyrannical force he considered the cause of 'fornication, adultery, divorce and murder'.[112]

In attempting to assess the different roles of parents and children in the process of marriage making it is vital to establish when the right of veto became generally accepted. Among the families in this study, and probably most gentry families, the idea and practice seems to have been well established at least by the end of the sixteenth century. Two examples from the early seventeenth century illustrate that granting the right to reject suitors already required neither explanation nor excuse on the part of a parent. In 1604 Thomas Isham wrote to his cousin who was assisting him in match-making, 'I have referred my daughter's choice to herself and will not earnestly persuade her to one or other'.[113] And in 1615 Sir James Ley wrote to his daughter Mary assuring her of his approval in the match being suggested,

> This business doth most concern yourself, who are of years sufficient to make your own choice, in the liking and disliking of whom as I do beseech the Lord to direct your heart for the best, so I leave the consent wholly to your own disposition: with this that for all other matters incident unto this affair, the care thereof shall rest upon me, which I will see effected (so far as your liking will extend itself) at my coming down, and so leaving him to you and you both to God, with my hearty commendations and best wishings, I rest... your very loving father, James Ley.[114]

In the letters of the Sherfield, Dering, and Isham families and their connections, there is no evidence during the seventeenth century of children being compelled to accept matches they did not want. Of course the absence of such evidence does not prove that coercion never occurred,

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[112]Yost, 'The value of married life,' p.33.

[113]Thomas Isham to Euseby Isham, 21 Nov.[1604] NRO IC 3636.

[114]James Ley to Mary Ley, 20 Feb.1614/15, HRO Herr. XL 20.

even in these families. And sometimes when the right of veto was technically given there was little scope allowed for its operation. After their parents had entered into detailed financial arrangements John Thynne and Joan Hayward were 'to have conference together' to see if they liked each other. However, they were expected to 'yield a good reason to the not liking'.[115] Family circumstances, particularly in the upper classes, are known to have vitiated the right on particular occasions, but the general practice of the gentry for the entire seventeenth century seems to have included the right of veto. Lawrence Stone's pessimistic view that the right of veto could only be exercised once or twice by an individual cannot be supported. In the families in this study both sons and daughters frequently rejected more than one match.[116] This right, although greatly valued, particularly by daughters, could sometimes be a somewhat passive and negative one - while some daughters felt free to reject several prospective grooms others believed they must accept their parents choice, unless they felt the strongest dislike for him. The freedom to reject a suitor was far greater than that to choose one.

The opportunity to choose between several suitors approved by the family was one which was at times available to both men and women, and extended the right of veto to one of choice. Throughout the seventeenth century and beyond, parents maintained the right to reject matches, but a variety of circumstances could provide children with a wide scope for choice. They not only had the chance to initiate the possible match, but also considerable independence in determining that the marriage should take place. For example, as early as 1604 Thomas Isham wrote to his son, 'I see by your brother [in-law] Denton's letters divers motions of good will are made to your sister Susan, God grant her to entertain the

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[115] Wall, Two Elizabethan Women, Letter 69, p.54.

[116] Stone, Family, Sex, and Marriage, p.190.

best....'[117] He urged John to advise his sister wisely and to let him know the details, but the choice was certainly Susan's. Also early in the century another Isham father wrote to his daughter to dissuade her from a match. He listed his reasons for opposing the marriage and then concluded in a manner which makes it clear that in some circumstances even daughters could and did choose for themselves against parental advice.

> Wherefore consider of these things and do as God shall put you in mind; if you determine to go forward I will entreat your cousin Isham and Uncle Richard to deal for you, who shall have my purse at their commands, and you (if there be no remedy) my consent, (to avoid a further mischief). Only give me leave to be quiet and to keep my mind free to myself, and so god bless and your proceedings contrary to my expectation.[118]

Thomas Isham gave his son John remarkable freedom of choice for an heir. In 1605 referring to an offer he had received he wrote to his son,

> My answer was, I know not your mind but had referred the matter to yourself, and so as I said to him I wish you to do, I would be loath to draw you to an ill bargain; God guide you in that and all other things you take in hand.[119]

Certain families and family members were more likely to have freer choice. Members of lower gentry families seemed to have had greater freedom and greater responsibility for their own matches, than those further up the social scale. Their marriages were less likely to have significant financial consequences for other family members. A consideration of the matches in the Long and Bedford families gives the impression that any respectable match was welcomed, since the task of marrying so many children with comparatively meagre assets was a daunting one. Younger sons were very similarly placed, and seem to have accepted a large measure of responsibility for every aspect of their own

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[117] Thomas Isham to John Isham, 21 Nov.1604, NRO IC 41.

[118] [ ] Isham to [ ] Isham, n.d. [early seventeenth century] NRO IC 3279. This is clearly a letter within the Isham family, but the first names of neither the father nor the daughter are given.

[119] Thomas Isham to John Isham, 12 Nov.1605, NRO IC 53.

match-making. And those who resided in London while their parents remained in the country were also likely to have achieved considerable independence of action, as were those whose fathers were dead.

The greatest difference in the degree of free choice available was between men and women. Men almost always enjoyed an advantage in match-making. Daughters were subject to a far greater degree of parental control. Men were able to initiate a courtship with someone to whom they were personally attracted much more often than women, who were more frequently left only the right to refuse. Daniel Rogers wrote in 1642 that in a bad marriage the husband's sin was the chief since he 'had the choosing voice and the wife only the refusing voice'.[120] Advice on marrying and marriage in the seventeenth century, while often purporting to be written for both sexes, in fact addressed men. Alexander Nicchole's title page says his book is 'Pertinent to both Sexes and Conditions....' However, the title is A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving: And of The Greatest Mystery Therein Contained: How to Choose a Good Wife from a Bad....[121] During Justinian Isham's search for a second wife the letters between him and Bishop Duppa refer repeatedly to the issue of his choice. The Bishop prayed 'that God may direct you in your choice'; he referred to 'that great business of choosing an help like yourself'; and after the choice had been made he referred to Isham's 'well-chosen wife'.[122] Those he sought did not have the same freedom to choose, although Dorothy Osborne certainly refused him and several others, and married where she wished.[123]

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[120] D[aniel] R[ogers], Matrimonial Honour (London,1642) p.57.

[121] Niccholes, Marriage and Wiving.

[122] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 30 July 1651, Letter XX; 4 Jan.1653, Letter XXIV B; 9 Oct.1653, Letter XXXV, Duppa, pp.44,58,71.

[123] G.C.Moore Smith (ed) The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple (Oxford,1928) pp.6-110.

The wooing of Henry Robinson, a neighbour of the Isham's at Lamport, illustrates the greater independence men had in initiating courtships. Mr Robinson visited Lamport and found Sir Justinian Isham's daughters at home with their stepmother. He was so impressed by the eldest daughter, 20 year old Jane, that the next day he wrote to Isham proposing himself as a son-in-law since he found mistress Jane's 'person not inferior to that large character I have heard from others of her parts and breeding'. He had some doubts about whether his direct approach and desire to treat for himself with Isham directly 'kept the method of wooing' but he was hopeful of success if 'she be as free and unengaged as myself'. He added,

> I must confess my opinion and observation has ever been that those are usually the happy matches that are first concluded, I do not say compelled, by parents and friends. And I have ever thought it the civilest, if not the surest way to begin there first.[124]

So although he insisted on treating for the match himself he considered it a match made by parents and friends as long as Jane was not consulted in the early stages. In this and many other instances the gentleman concerned followed his inclination and initiated a match, his preferred lady had only the chance to respond. In this instance Jane did not even get the opportunity to make a decision about Robinson since her father replied that he was negotiating another match on her behalf and was not prepared to consider a second at that time.

Even when the attraction was mutual, as in the case of Sir Richard Rogers and Rebecca Long, the man almost always took the initiative by either pursuing the match himself and then informing his parents, as Sir Richard did; or by asking his parents to pursue the match on his behalf.[125]

In the Sherfield, Dering and Isham families young people, including

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[124] Henry Robinson to Justinian Isham, 6 Feb.1654/5, NRO IC 335.

[125] Rebecca Sherfield to Richard Rogers, 5 April 1623, HRO Herr. XLII,13.

daughters, had considerable opportunity to meet other young people socially. The freedom which they had made it reasonably likely that they would meet someone they wished to marry. The patterns observable from these letters may not have applied to all families, and to each generation, in the seventeenth century, but certainly there was a great deal of visiting and social interaction. Young people met socially and began courtships in a wide variety of places and circumstances. The details of these situations reveal significant features of seventeenth century match-making. Susanna Isham received many offers when she stayed with her sister and brother-in-law in London, but she took her time about choosing, and did not marry until she was 27. Mary Long also spent time living in London with her brother's mother-in-law Mrs Cocks.[126] She met her husband Timothy Wade while staying in the capital. Mary Bedford met one suitor who made a direct approach to her while she stayed with her grandfather, William Hodson, in Winchester;[127] and six years later a Mr Spier was able to approach her very directly and persistently while she was staying in the home of her stepsister Martha and brother-in-law Roger Knight.[128] Rebecca, the youngest of the Long daughters, became acquainted with Sir Richard Rogers whom she married in 1624, while they both visited Rebecca's eldest brother Walter at Whaddon.[129] At the time the marriage was first proposed neither Rebecca's mother nor her stepfather had met Sir Richard, although Walter Long obviously approved.

The details of John Garrard's courtship of the widowed Lady Katherine Buswell in 1669 provide ample evidence of the freedom for couples to visit in town and country, in groups or with only one other

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[126]Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 Dec.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 24.

[127]Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 6 June 1618, HRO Herr. XLIII, 17.

[128]Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 12 Aug.1624, HRO Herr. XLIII, 20.

[129]Walter Long to Henry Sherfield, 18 March 1624, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 29.

present. Garrard described to his uncle the visits of his mother and her friends to Lady Buswell, and his own many visits when Lady Buswell and he, accompanied sometimes by her sister and at other times by her friends, would spend visits conversing, playing cards or dining together.[130] Later in the century Mary Isham was to report that she had received many solicitations to marriage while in London.[131] In 1678 she chose from among her suitors Marmaduke Dayrell, the son of her father's close and trusted friend Sir Thomas Dayrell. But she chose him on the basis of the acquaintance with him that she had pursued in London, and her knowledge of his character and personality.[132] After she had made her choice from among a number of suitors, she wrote to her brother hoping that as the head of the family he was not angry with her for 'disposing myself according to my inclinations.... Everyone upon those occasions desiring a free choice, which must last for their whole life, and this I believe you expect and will take yourself....'[133] Although Mary had obtained her mother's somewhat reluctant consent to her match, her brother considered that she might have done better. However, she had married as she wished. When Sir Edmund Turnor reproached his daughter and son-in-law for assisting his son toward a ruinous marriage he complained that while his son had been at Lamport he and the young woman had been 'daily, if not hourly together'.[134]

Visiting neighhours and relatives in the country and in London obviously provided opportunities for young people to meet and become acquainted. This made it likely that they would form attachments with

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[130]John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 11 & 23 July, NRO IC 610, 611.

[131]Mary Isham to Thomas Isham, 8 July 1677, NRO IC 1008.

[132]Mary Isham to Thomas Isham, 12 June 1678, NRO IC 1096.

[133]Mary Dayrell to Thomas Isham, 14 Nov.[1678] NRO IC 1145.

[134]Edmund Turnor to Justinian Isham, n.d. [1685] NRO IC 4408.

members of families already on friendly or neighbourly terms with their own. Thus the visiting between the Knatchbulls and Derings doubtless facilitated the aquaintance and match of Thomas Knatchbull and Mary Dering. The constant entertaining and visiting of Lady Elizabeth Denton's family of nieces led to several matches being proposed by young men who had visited in their home or were nephews or friends of their neighbours. Relating how a possible match had sprung up Lady Elizabeth Denton reported to Sir Justinian Isham, 'your daughters being invited abroad with other young ladies... Sir Robert Kemp came in by chance, or rather by his own plotting with the gentleman that invited them, because he would have a sight of her, and desires to have it moved to you'.[135] The social life of gentry families in the country and in London was very full, and the freedom for young people to meet together made a much more significant contribution to match-making than has generally been recognized.[136]

It seems therefore that within the boundaries of certain widely held beliefs and customs about what was appropriate and wise, match-making was a surprisingly individualistic process. It depended on the temperament of family members, in particular the head of the family, the extent to which the family socialised, and the kinds of people with whom they socialised. It was influenced by the willingness of a wide range of family members to involve themselves. And probably most of all the process of match-making was influenced by the types of familial relationships existing in the

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[135] Elizabeth Denton to Justinian Isham, 15 April [1657 or 1658] NRO IC 4324.

[136] Justinian Isham and Elizabeth Turnor had a most affectionate and successful married life. They seem also to have married for love. A note scribbled in Elizabeth's hand in the margin of a letter from Charles Turnor to Justinian makes an interesting footnote to comments about opportunities for social contact before marriage. It reads, 'Dearest Jus I knew the hand and so broke open the letter, if you would speak with me you must come early tomorrow or tonight'. [Marginal note in a letter of Charles Turnor to Justinian Isham, 2 Oct.[ ] NRO IC 4361.

families of origin. Although Patricia Crawford has shown that the expectations of parents about their children's courtships did not necessarily reflect the ways they had behaved themselves,[137] nevertheless it does seem that fathers who had warm and affectionate ties with their wives and children were more likely to recognize the value of affection as a significant reason for marriage. Although there was a tendency as the century progressed for offspring to be permitted greater freedom of choice in finding a mate, the individuality of the process is illustrated by the fact that in some families a marked degree of such freedom existed even early in the century.

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[137]Crawford, 'Katherine and Philip Henry,' p.13.

CHAPTER 2 THE CRITERIA OF SPOUSE SELECTION

In spouse selection the criteria were an intrinsic part of all marriage negotiations, and they illustrate two facets of seventeenth century priorities - the ideal and the real. The social obligation of parents to see their children married, and the fact that to be unmarried was seldom a viable alternative life style, particularly for women, meant that parents and their children made the best marriage possible in any specific instance. In marriage they aimed for a balance of desirable qualities in a spouse - social and economic parity, personal attractiveness (or even love), submissiveness in a wife, honesty and kindness in a husband, piety, desirable family connections, and so on. Of course families and individuals had different priorities about which are desirable or necessary qualities. These were dictated by temperament, religious persuasion, political allegiance, convenience and expediency.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

In responsible marriage making material considerations were fundamental; and most marriages, whether made by parents or individuals on their own behalf, were responsibly and soberly undertaken. Thus the common image of seventeeth century marriage, made for money and advancement is easily illustrated. For example, in 1634 Sir Edward Dering wrote to his wife, 'Sir Sackville Cerow is married to £5000 and one Mrs Manners....'[1] Dering knew the value of a wealthy bride and had himself sought the widow of a weathy city merchant for her £20,000.[2] In 1673 Lady

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1 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 2 June 1634, KAO U 350 C2/43.

2 Larking, Proceedings, pp.xiv-xxxiii.

Dolly Long recommended the late Lord Warwick's nieces as good matches 'who are both young, handsome, soberly bred and a £20,000 portion'.[3] In 1677 the Reverend Richard Richardson wrote to tell Sir Thomas Isham 'here is a lady you may have excellently qualified with £12,000 portion'.[4] Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, wrote to his son-in-law that 'Eliab Harvey was married on Tuesday last to Mrs Dieu with £1700 per annum in present and £600 more in reversion.'[5] Edmunda Isham wrote cynically to her brother, 'I hear Mr West is going to be made happy in a lady of £15,000, she lives somewhere in London, her name Bartlett'.[6]

For many marriages in the seventeenth century the incentive was definitely financial. The fine line between responsible planning, financial expedience, and greed, is of course a difficult one to draw. In a landed society of inherited wealth and economic dependence for women, and often for men, to ignore the role of finance in marriage planning would be ridiculously improvident. As Sir John Perceval wrote, 'what comfort those amours are likely to produce which are certainly attended with those black fiends of ruin and misery I leave you to judge'.[7] The family of origin was of such importance in promoting the interests of individual members that the need to strengthen the family could not be ignored, particularly by heirs. Miriam Slater has demonstrated this aspect of marriage creation within the Verney family.[8] Although in the

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3 Dolly Long to Justinian Isham, 25 Sept.1673, NRO IC 791.

4 Reverend Richard Richardson to Thomas Isham, 12 July 1677, NRO IC 1009.

5 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 25 Nov.1680, KAO U 1713 B/1.

6 E[dmunda] Isham to her brother, 29 Jan.[after 1720], NRO IC 2517.

7 John Perceval to Beverly Usher, 3 Sept.1651, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. I, pt. 2 (London,1905) p.500.

8 Slater, 'The Weightiest Business,' p.28,29; Slater, Family Life, pp.60-107.

families in the present study family members who were not heirs were sacrificed less often, and other aspects, such as personal attraction, were usually considered, financial qualifications were inevitably the first to be considered, and the lack of such qualifications was an absolute bar. One might reject a wealthy but unattractive match, but not accept an attractive but impoverished one.

Obviously a family's responsible concern to maintain its position and provide for children, or concern that a son or daughter be provided for by a wealthy marriage, could look very different from the angle of the individual who was to be the financial acquisition. There were some attempts at the most ruthless exploitation. Heiresses were obviously the most vulnerable. They could be protected by fathers and other relatives or friends, but wardship among the upper classes, and the ambitions of some merchant families, made the position of many such women unenviable. According to seventeenth century mores, if a man was marrying for money, but could offer social position, and fair jointure, and did not personally disgust his prospective bride, few would have seen the marriage as exploitative. The wealthy brides offered to Sir Thomas Isham for example, stood to improve their social standing and gain a bridegroom of outstanding beauty and charm. That he was also an extravagant, self-centred profligate weighed with at least one of his prospective brides. It is very difficult to assess the degree of compulsion behind the apparent consent of wards, or the daughters of wealthy men of lower social status marrying into the gentry.

The role of finance in marriage planning differed with position in the family. It is evident that the heirs in this study were generally in a position to make more financially advantageous marriages than their younger brothers, but the advantages they enjoyed were frequently offset by the need to marry for the advancement or preservation of their family. So although more brides of wealth were available to them, they were

probably less free to be influenced by other characteristics.

Walter Long's marriage appears to have been an attempt to repair the Long family's financial position. Henry, the eldest son, was heavily in debt at the time of his death in 1621. The main family property, Whaddon, had been placed on the market, and Walter's stepfather, Henry Sherfield, referred to 'this match of my son Walter whereby the whole family is preserved and in fair estate.'[9] Immediately after the marriage Walter Long assumed responsibility for the unpaid debts of his father and his older brother, his own indebtedness to Henry Sherfield, the payment of his mother's jointure, and for provision for his younger brothers and sisters.[10] It is evident from the assumption of this heavy financial burden, and the comparative speed with which Walter began to pay off these debts[11] that the marriage must have been one highly favourable to the Long family.

The marriages of Sir Edward Dering, first baronet, illustrate the complex variety of reasons for marrying in the early seventeenth century, with a heavy emphasis on the pragmatic. In November 1619, when he was 21, Dering married Elizabeth, the 18 year old daughter of Sir Nicholas Tufton. Elizabeth was the eldest of nine daughters, a fact likely to reduce the portion even of the eldest. However, Sir Nicholas was a very wealthy man, and was also a man of influence and increasing prestige, who was subsequently made Lord Tufton and Earl of Thanet. His wife was the daughter of Thomas Cecil, first Earl of Exeter, the eldest son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley.[12] It is safe to assume that whatever the degree of

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9 Henry Sherfield's 'consideration of his gain or loss' by marriage to Rebecca Long, 20 March 1622-23, HRO Herr. XXVI, 10.

10 Notes on covenants to be performed by Walter Long, 14 Dec.1621. Herr. XXXIV, 5.

11 Memorandum of Covenants between Henry Sherfield and Walter Long, 4 June 1622, Herr. XXXIV, 12.

attachment between the very young bride and groom, the marriage was financially, politically and socially prudent.

This first marriage was ended after two years by Elizabeth's death. Three years later Dering married again. His second marriage seems to have been one chiefly of political advancement. In January 1626 he married Anne Ashburnham whose mother was a kinswoman of the Duke of Buckingham's mother. Lady Ashburnham was 'very eminent for her great temper and prudence',[13] and it was obvious that the connection could be made a highly advantageous one. During the marriage Lady Ashburnham busied herself on Dering's behalf, and he spent a great deal of time in London applying himself to political advancement. He was elected to parliament in 1625, was created baronet in 1627 and was appointed a gentleman of the privy chamber.

Sir Edward Dering and Anne Ashburnham had the chance to know each other before their marriage, and Anne held her future husband in high esteem and was pleased to marry him.[14] A letter written by Anne Dering to her husband in 1625 is addressed: 'For Sir Edward Dering Knight and Baronet a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber and one of the King's servants'.[15] Although most letters were addressed in a similarly formal way, they were not always as detailed. This seems to reflect a strong awareness of Dering's social and political status, which may well have included the awareness on his wife's part of her role in the improvement of that status - the chiefly passive function of her acquisition.

Anne Dering died in April 1628 at the age of 23. By November of that

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[12] Bruce, preface in Larking, Proceedings, p.ix.

[13] Family Monument quoted in Ibid. p.x.

[14] Anne Ashburnham to her sister Elizabeth, 1625, KAO U 1107 C/3.

[15] Anne Dering to Edward Dering, 1625, KAO U 350 C2/9.

year Sir Edward was seeking another bride. In common with numerous others he was besieging Mrs Elizabeth Bennett, the widow of a wealthy London mercer. The widow was reputed to be worth £20,000, and Sir Edward pursued her unflaggingly between November 1628 and February 1629. The energy of the pursuit is illustrated by the amount of time and money he was prepared to lay out to bribe her servants, and the number of people he involved to speak on his behalf. But the unveiled mercenary nature of that pursuit is shown clearly enough by the fact that, on his very first meeting with the lady, he laid before her his own financial circumstances and asked her to marry him. Other meetings followed, most of which seem to have been disastrous. In fact, his courtship of the widow seems to have been characterised by a strong element of farce - including the bribed servants, contrived meetings, Sir Edward's protestations of love, and Mrs Bennett's deliberate deception. In February 1629 she gave him a categorical denial, and shortly afterward she married Sir Heneage Finch.[16]

Five months after failing in his quest for financial security with Mrs Bennett, Sir Edward Dering was married again, this time to Unton Gibbes, the daughter of Sir Ralph Gibbes of Honington in Warwickhire. The match, although respectable, did not bring Sir Edward great wealth, or strengthen his political influence in Kent or London. This may indicate that the marriage was from the beginning one of romantic attachment, certainly the marriage was one in which mutual affection and passion remained strong until Dering's death in 1644 after fifteen years of marriage.

Sir Edward Dering's marriages and courtships in the first half of the seventeenth century are thus seen to have been motivated mainly by the

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[16] Bruce, preface in Larking, Proceedings, p.xiv-xxxiii. I have not found any other references to this incident, either confirming it or throwing doubt on the documents concerned. I have accepted the validity of the autobiographical account partly because the letter from Edward Dering to his third wife, Unton, in Larking's Collection tally so exactly with the style and content of others in the Kent Archives Office.

prospect of political or financial advancement. His second marriage in particular seems to have been governed by the kind of social and political aspirations which Stone believes were replaced by more directly financial ambitions as the century progessed.[17] But it would seem that these practical intentions were not necessarily a bar to mutual attraction and marital happiness.

Many other marriages illustrate a family and individual priority on finance. Thus Sir Edward Dering the second baronet along with many another father considered marriage to a wealthy woman a possible way for his younger sons to establish themselves. In his diary during the winter of 1680-81 Sir Edward recorded his efforts 'to get a good wife for Charles, that being the best way of settlement I can think of, he being too old to take up any profession'.[18] Charles dutifully pursued an heiress who had been dubbed 'the West Indies' for her fortune, and did not hide the purely mercenary nature of the quest. He wrote to his brother-in-law, 'I will not brag how much I may by your return have conquered of the West Indies, but if my success prove as great as my desires I believe I should not leave much unconquered'.[19] The heiress remained unconquered by Charles.

During 1668 John Garrard patiently and persistently laid seige to Lady Katherine Buswell, who was a near neighbour of the Ishams at Lamport. When her husband died and left her in possession of a very considerable estate, Sir Justinian Isham notified the Garrard family of this desirable match for his nephew by marriage, John Garrard. Within weeks of her husband's death Sir Justinian made the first approach, but she replied

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[17] Lawrence Stone, Crisis, p.618,619.

[18] Account Book of Sir Edward Dering, 1680-1683, KAO U 275/A3.

[19] Charles Dering to Robert Southwell, 27 Nov.[16]80, KAO U 1713 B/3.

that 'in earnest at present I have not any thoughts of changing my condition'.[20] However Sir Justinian went ahead and ensured that his nephew would be welcome to visit the friends she would be staying with in London.[21] In spite of the lady's lack of interest John Garrard seems to have taken an optimistic view of his chances. His mother and her friends all visited Lady Buswell in London, and as Garrard wrote to his uncle, 'thus the design is laid to storm the fort, but when it will yield he only knows that knows the hearts of women'.[22] Since her husband had only died in March 1668 Lady Buswell certainly had some justification for maintaining, as she did early in July, that to 'alter her condition' was not only unlikely but an injury to her husband's memory.[23] Garrard seems to have been impervious to the widows wishes, and kept up a steady stream of visits, even when she begged him not to be so public in them.

However, after a few months he seems to have had a few doubts, and he wrote in August to his uncle for advice on how to 'expedite the work' because faith and patience may 'prove Jades if a nimbler Gent gets the start'.[24] At last as the year of her widowhood drew to a close Lady Buswell agreed to marry John Garrard - perhaps because she had begun to love him, or believed she could do so in time, or perhaps because she realised that other suitors would be just as mercenary and relentless.[25]

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[20] Katherine Buswell to Justinian Isham, 18 May 1668, NRO IC 602.

[21] Draft of Justinian Isham on the letter of Katherine Buswell, 18 May 1668, NRO IC 602. The insensitivity of actually drafting a letter in direct disregard to the lady's wishes on the back of her letter is impressive, but it is not so surprising in a man such as Justinian who believed that women's judgments and opinions, even in personal matters, needed the guidance of a man.

[22] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 2 July 1668, NRO IC 608.

[23] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 11 July 1668, NRO IC 610.

[24] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 14 Aug.1668, NRO IC 615.

[25] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 18 March 1668/9, NRO IC 641.

There is no doubt that the match was initially proposed because it was in 'every way so satisfactory to all concerned relations' as Garrard told Sir Justinian when thanking him for recommending it.[26] Financial considerations spurred on other suitors to Lady Buswell, and probably sharpened John Garrard's persistence, however he also claimed 'the dotage of a love sick brain' as the excuse for begging his uncle, for advice on wooing[27] so it may be that his motives did not remain solely mercenary.

The search of Sir Thomas Isham and his friends and relatives for a satisfactory bride illustrates a variety of motivations and criteria, but chiefly the financial.[28] While Isham was still on his European tour in 1678, Mr Gilbert Clerke, who was acting very effectively as his agent at home, reminded him that the payment of the legacies which he was responsible for 'must be done by a wary and prudent marriage or the sale of some outlying land'.[29] A few months later he was able to pass on the proposal of Mr Catesby of Ecton for a match with his eldest daughter, with whom he would give £5000, and settle £1200 per annum in land upon her heirs. Clerke, who was most anxious that the increasingly shaky Isham finances be placed on a more secure footing, was of the opinion that this was too good a match to turn down.[30] However the match with Mary Catesby did not appeal to Sir Thomas.[31]Gilbert Clerke and Isham's old tutor the Reverend Richard Richardson, who also assisted the family at Lamport, were

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[26] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 21 May 1668, NRO IC 603.

[27] John Garrard to Justinian Isham, 14 Aug.1668, NRO IC 615.

[28] Thomas's match-making efforts are described in the introduction of Gyles Isham's edition of Thomas's schoolboy diary.

[29] Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 3 Aug.1678, NRO IC 1113.

[30] Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 3 Feb.1678/9, NRO IC 1161.

[31] Mary was 13 years old in 1679 and her father planned for the marriage to take place when she was 15, it may be that Isham and his advisers did not wish to wait. [Ibid.]

very relieved to hear from Sir Thomas that he intended immediately upon his return 'to make a push at that which with the blessing of God may put a period to your present straits, and lay a firm foundation for your future happiness'.[32]

And Isham did immediately begin negotiations with Alderman Dashwood[33] for a match with his daughter Elizabeth and her very sizeable portion. The unflinchingly mercenary nature of these negotiations is demonstrated by the letters which Isham and Samuel Garrard, who dealt for him, exchanged. The Alderman offered a dowry of £12000, but Garrard was convinced he could make him increase it. In December 1679 he wrote, 'we will not be idle but we will torment the old man's soul if he does not give us the other two or three thousand to make it up fourteen or fifteen thousand pound down.... if it does not come to that I pray consider of the person, the money and that the family will not be a penny charge to you.' The Alderman wished for £800 or £1000 jointure but Garrard felt it might just be possible to bring them off for £600. He persuasively added, 'Sir, £12000 is a great sum to be paid down, I may boldly say that we have not the like in London. Weighing all things together I say the money down, that is the word'.[34] He admitted that Alderman Dashwood would be 'a plain father-in-law' but he would be a useful one.[35] The alderman was too shrewd to be pushed into giving more than he intended, but he loved his daughter[36] and agreed to give 'three thousand more to the three first

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[32] Reverend Richard Richardson to Thomas Isham, 28 June 1679, NRO IC 1193.

[33] Alderman George Dashwood was a very wealthy brewer who lived at Hackney. [Gyles Isham, The Diary of Thomas Isham of Lamport (Westmead, Farnborough,1971) p.42.

[34] Samuel Garrard to Thomas Isham, 25 Dec.1679, NRO IC 1220.

[35] Ibid. Since Samuel Garrard was himself a grocer [Isham, Diary, p.42.] this comment probably does not imply social disapproval, but is a reference to Dashwood's personality.

fruits' of the marriage. This he believed would make Isham love his daughter more.[37] Garrard was convinced that 'he will be a kind father' (doubtless meaning generous) 'if you will but love the daughter'.[38] However, Sir Thomas made no attempt to woo the daughter, and his contempt for the alderman led to the negotiations breaking down when Dashwood could not be 'persuaded and argued' out of more than £12000.[39]

Isham next paid court to Barbara Chiffinch, the daughter of William Chiffinch, Keeper of the King's private closet. The possibility of this match with one who was believed to be a papist, and was moreover connected with those aspects of the Restoration Court which Sir Thomas's mentors most deplored, filled his family and friends with anxiety.[40] 'I beg you', his cousin Zaccheus Isham wrote, 'by all that is dear to you, utterly to leave off, and desist'.[41] The match came to nothing, and soon after Sir Thomas seems to have formed a strong and passionate attachment for Henrietta Maria Wentworth. Sir Gyles Isham believed that for some time he was a favoured suitor. This was a match socially and financially acceptable to Sir Thomas's family and friends, but Lady Henrietta became Monmouth's mistress, and died heart broken soon after his execution.

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36 Reverend John Eyre to Thomas Isham, 13 Nov.1679, NRO IC 1205.

37 Such an indulgent response may not have been uncommon. While working toward the marriage of John Thynne and Joan Hayward Richard Young wrote to John Thynne about Rowland Hayward, 'I do think he will do more for his daughter than you do desire of him, for she is his darling,...' [Wall, Two Elizabethan Women, Letter 69, p.54.] In his study of the relationships between fathers and daughters in the Lowther families and the family of Daniel Fleming of Rydal Hall Roger Hainsworth found that finance to enable a daughter to make a good marriage was a high priority with fathers. [Hainsworth, 'Fathers and Daughters.']

38 Samuel Garrard to Thomas Isham, 27 Dec.1679, NRO IC 1222.

39 Samuel Garrard to Thomas Isham, 6 Jan.1679/80, NRO IC 1223.

40 Isham, Diary, pp.43,44.

41 Reverend Zaccheus Isham to Thomas Isham, 26 Feb.1679/80, NRO IC 1239.

Soon after his disappointment over Henrietta Wentworth, Ann Wyatt wrote a letter apparently declining Sir Thomas's offer of love as insincere. Sir Gyles Isham believed she was declining an offer of marriage from Sir Thomas,[42] but the letter may just as readily be interpreted as part of a flirtation, which in view of the company he had been keeping would not have been entirely foreign to Isham. The letter begins, 'Most Honoured Sir, All you have writ is so gallant and so wittily expressed that it would charm me if I already knew not that you know better how to write than love'. She considered the suffering he claimed to have felt in her absence 'imaginary evils', and added 'I know by experience that you pass away the time very well where you reside'.[43] For Sir Thomas to consider a match with the daughter of a lower-gentry family would have been improvident and unexpected, but not impossible. Since he had been prepared to consider a city bride, it was not Ann Wyatt's social status which made her an unlikely marriage partner, but her family's lack of money.

His final match-making venture was far more typical. At the time he died he was engaged to be married to Mary van den Bempde whose father was a wealthy city merchant. Mary's portion was the payment of a debt of £6800 for Sir Thomas by her father. The marriage was prevented from taking place when Sir Thomas died of small-pox in July 1681 on the eve of his wedding.[44] Sir Thomas's attempted matches were varied - at least two daughters of wealthy merchants; Henrietta-Maria, Baroness of Wentworth, a

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[42] Isham, Diary, p.49.

[43] Ann Wyatt to Thomas Isham, n.d. [1680] NRO IC 4510. Although Ann Wyatt refers in the letter to her feelings 'in the beginning of our engagement' this need not be interpreted as an engagement to be married. The word was often used to mean a close and specific friendship, or the beginning of courtship or negotiation.

[44] Isham, Diary, p.50.

peer in her own right; and Barbara Chiffinch who would have brought wealth and influence at Court. But although Sir Thomas was apparently known for his dalliances, his ventures toward matrimony were most provident and well thought out. Unless Ann Wyatt is an exception, he saw marriage as the acceptable way to repair his depredations on the Isham fortune.

Those negotiating on behalf of heirs were obliged to take into account the needs of other members of the family. Thus Sir Erasmus Dryden eventually broke off the negotiations for marriage between his grandson John and Elizabeth Isham in part because he believed that the guarantees for jointure which Sir John Isham was demanding would disadvantage the younger children in the family. This sacrifice of the attachment formed by an heir in the interests of younger members of the family seems to confirm, at least in this one instance, the findings of Vivienne Larminie rather than Miriam Slater. Dr Slater believes that 'marriage choices were rarely made on the basis of romantic inclinations', but on what could be offered to the bride financially, and that therefore heirs were in the best position.[45] Larminie has shown that two Newdigate heirs were 'the victims rather than the beneficiaries of their position'. John II's marriage at 16 was a calculated scheme to raise money, and he became little more than a pensioner in his wife's household. John Newdigate III came into his inheritance at 21 in 1621 with financial obligations for the debts and portions of the younger children amounting to nearly £4000. He too was forced to make a marriage for money.[46]

Sir Edward Dering, second baronet, rejected one proposal for his heir because the portion offered would have been in land which he noted was 'not to my convenience'.[47] With daughters of his own requiring portions,

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[45] Slater, Family Life, p.63.

[46] Larminie, 'Marriage and Family,' pp.2-6.

he needed to acquire ready cash. Roger Hainsworth goes so far as to claim that 'the likeliest cause for estrangement in a gentry family was for a father to take the view that his eldest son was not sufficiently cooperative in his plans to provide for the other sons and the daughters'.[48] Within the Lowther and Fleming families he found a number of examples which illustrate this parental concern for younger children very explicitly. Some of these clashes between the head of the family and the heir led to permanent estrangement.[49] But if in the marriage planning of parents and heirs, other desirable qualities were at times subordinated to the needs of family advancement and welfare, this did not mean that the desirability of affection and the necessity for 'liking' was entirely ignored, or that such marriage planning was cynically mercenary.

Sir John Perceval's letter to his uncle in reply to a proposed match in 1651 characterises the financial responsiblities of the heir very aptly:

> Nor doth my bliss or ruin alone, or my wife's (if heaven designs me one), depend on my matching; my brothers' and sisters' good or bad fate is likewise involved. How void of natural affection, how little deserving the blessing of brothers and sisters, would you and all the world conclude me to be, if rashly I should put myself into such a condition as makes me uncapable of providing for them as becomes their quality? Nay, indeed, I must do it whether I stand or fall....
> You see then how convenient or rather absolutely necessary it is for me to have a round sum of ready money, and perhaps when you have read this you will censure me for covetousness, as too much adoring that common idol; but if you knew me, or I know myself and may be thought a competent judge in my own case, 'tis that I abhor and am not in the least guilty of it; for were that my aim, without considering the person and qualities of the lady and how descended, 'tis not unlikely (nay my friends perhaps could instance some unto you who were proffered me) but that this place would have afforded me plenty of rich ones. No; the salique law in my breast forbids

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[47] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 26 Aug.[16]73, KAO U 1713 A/24.

[48] Hainsworth, 'Fathers and Daughters,' p.13.

[49] Ibid. p.13-15.

> regina pecunia to reign there. I had rather with the cynic hug my poverty than for the addition of a little wealth become a slave to her I could not love. But yet as I would not lose my contentment to gain a little golden dust, so on the other side I have no cause (if I can avoid it) wilfully to make myself (and not myself alone but many more) miserable for want of a competency of it.[50]

Sir John Perceval, Walter Long, John Garrard and Sir Thomas Isham all had the planning of their marriages largely in their own hands. Their realistic acceptance of their responsibilities, is an indication that such dynastic financial planning when undertaken by parents on behalf of their children, does not necessarily mean they lacked affection for their offspring. It may well be an indication of concern to provide adequately for all their children. Survival of family finances was the basic prerequisite to such provision. However, there is a considerable difference between Sir John's acceptance of family responsibilities coupled with the wish for love in marriage, and the ruthless pursuit of rich brides by Sir Thomas Isham and his allies. Among the families in this study even those who stressed the primacy of finance usually tended more toward the more complex and varied expectations of Sir John Perceval than Sir Thomas's ruthlessness.

Marriage plans for children other than the heir, even when they placed a high priority on financial viability, showed this concern in the interests of the individual to be married, not the family. The calculating attitude of parents, and indeed of persons about to be married, certainly need not mean they cared only for familial enrichment, and dynastic security and advancement. However, sometimes families had financial standards which family honour required be met. In 1656 as John Stuteville continued to assist in the search for husbands for Sir Justinian Isham's daughters he wrote to Sir Justinian, 'as bad as the

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[50] John Perceval to Beverly Usher, 3 Sept.1651, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. I, pt. 2, p.501.

world is at this present, we shall not doubt of meeting with a fortune, which may be more for your honour, and their content'.[51] And the matches of daughters to socially, politically or financially useful men, or of sons or daughters into prominent or useful families was most desirable. For this reason Thomas Isham was prepared to increase the dowry of his daughter Elizabeth when she married Sir Anthony Denton in 1601, and Denton indeed proved a very useful acquisition to the family. He frequently made loans to his in-laws, he assisted in match-making for other family members, and provided his brother-in-law in particular with accommodation in London for lengthy periods. Similarly, in 1624 the Long family were prepared to increase Rebecca Long's portion from £666-13-4 to £1500[52] to facilitate her marriage to Sir Richard Rogers, who would be a very desirable connection for the Long family. Friends, parents and offspring calculated the odds which went into a satisfactory marriage, but in most instances the predominant concern was for the security and comfort of the children.

Even when marriages were most definitely being planned to recoup family finances and the portion size guided the choice of spouse, money was not the only attribute considered. When the Reverend John Eyre recommended Elizabeth Dashwood, and her £12,000, to Sir Thomas Isham in 1679, his letter also noted that the 'lady elect' has been 'very virtuously educated by a careful and vigilant mother, and is of an excellent temper and disposition, naturally brisk and cheerful, a notable housewife, and may prove a very endearing consort if well managed'.[53]

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[51] John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 1 April 1656, NRO IC 392.

[52] 'Mr Long's estate, debts to be paid.' 6 March 1616/17, HRO Herr. XVI, 7; Articles of Marriage of Sir Richard Rogers and Rebecca Long, 24 Sept.1623, Ibid. XLII, 20.

[53] Isham, Diary, p.43.

When Mr Robert Guy conveyed his proposal to Sir Thomas in 1679, he vouched for the young lady's 'person, virtue and family'.[54]

Just as other desirable attributes were not entirely ignored when marriages primarily for money were being planned, so when financial needs were not pressing, a proper balance still required care in financial provision - but only as one criteria from a whole range. In 1654 Bishop Brian Duppa conveyed to Sir Justinian Isham a proposal for one of his daughters from 'a very noble and honest gentleman' on behalf of his only son,

> a young person of a very good outside, handsome, and well fashion'd, and of such parts of civility, and good literature, as cannot but be very acceptable and agreeable to you. The father is your countryman, and a great lover of you. But when I have said all this, it may be I have begun at the wrong end, and should have told you first what the estate was, which though it ought not to be the principal verb, yet the whole sentence will be lame without it.[55]

In assessing a possible match with Mistress Culpepper for his eldest son in August 1673 Sir Edward wrote:

> The fortune was not great, but my son was now 23. This was a considerable family in our own country, and the young lady of competent beauty, and of great repute of prudence, sweetness and obedience to her mother, so I resolved to take £5000....'[56]

However in spite of the desirable character and acceptable appearance of the young lady the negotiations broke down over finance. Lady Culpepper drove too hard and unsatisfactory a bargain with Sir Edward. She wished him to accept £1000 'in present money', £1000 at her death, and the rest in land, which according to Sir Edward she overvalued and also refused to submit to independent valuation.[57]

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54 Robert Guy to [Sir Thomas Isham], 4 J[ ] 1679, NRO IC 1195.

55 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 17 April 1654, Letter XLVII, Duppa, p.86.

56 Dering, autobiography in Bond, Diaries, p.113.

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A priority on finance is seen again in John Stuteville's letter to his cousin Sir Justinian Isham congratulating him upon the marriage he had negotiated for his youngest daughter Susanna with Nicholas Carew.

> ...we cannot but congratulate, and much rejoice at the bon adventure my cousin Susan is like to arrive at. We hear little of the gentleman, he is so young: but his family, and fortunes have reached us, and his rare house and gardens have made a sweet smell in our nostrils.[58]

Carew's material assets greatly recommended him, yet the early stages of negotiations had included the closest scrutiny of his character, behaviour and connections, and consideration of his temperament and how it was likely to match with Susan's. In his report of Carew Bishop Duppa had first written of his financial status, and then added,

> I shall come now to the main, the disposition, and inclinations of the person, which must be the chief ingredient to make marriage happy. And concerning this, of all that I yet hear here is nothing but good; his temper (they say) is very gentle, no roughness, or obstinancy in him... I cannot hear that he is any way corrupted....[59]

The young couple were then given a chance to become acquainted before marriage. This was an 'arranged marriage', and finance was a primary consideration, but there was no compulsion, and considerable care was taken over all aspects of the match.

During his search for a second wife Justinian Isham considered the daughter of Sir John Gayer, Lord Mayor of London. He asked his friend Duppa to enquire after the young lady's 'person and estate'. Duppa was able to report that she was commended for 'her modesty, and education' and that Dr Henchman, who had conducted the enquiries for him, believed that she was 'a match for a very good man, having to her portion... above

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[57] Ibid.

[58] John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 1 April 1656, NRO IC 392.

[59] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 18 Feb.1656, Letter LXXI, Duppa, p.120.

£10,000'. The conclusion of his letter to Isham is an apt illustration of the balance of criteria sought in a wife:

> There is money enough to be had. But either I am deceived in you, or your heart moves not upon that hinge. I would neither have you choose her only for her portion, nor to be so hard-hearted to yourself as to refuse her for it. My prayer is, that God may direct you in it, for concerning her person (which must make up your happiness) I am in the dark.... Before you can resolve anything, you must see the person, and trust your own eyes, which will tell you more than seven watchmen from a tower.[60]

Ambitions for financial security balanced with other desirable traits were not readily achieved. As Lady Isham wrote to her son: 'The times being so scarce for civil men and good husbands makes parents abate of several advantages which otherwise they might well expect', so she had not opposed her daughter's match with Marmaduke Dayrell 'because the good character of the gentleman is such as not to be disliked by anyone'. She added, 'I did hope indeed to have matched her to a greater estate, but if all other things did not agree, that could not alone make her happy'.[61] Financial considerations were again important, and in this case clearly not for the sake of the family, but for the well being of the daughter. However, they were not allowed to overset the balance of other attributes.

Where financial gain was not sought, parity at least was expected. In negotiations between families or individuals of similar social and economic status, the bargaining aimed at the fair balance of jointure to portion. As William Garrard wrote to his brother-in-law during negotiations in 1654, 'he shall be contented to do for his son, beyond your proposals, provided you make her fortune answerable'.[62] When the very eligible Sir Robert Kemp was a suitor to Elizabeth Isham, her aunt

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[60] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 15 Feb.1653, Letter XXVIIA, Duppa, pp.62,63.

[61] Vere Isham to Thomas Isham, 29 Jan.[1678], NRO IC 4198.

[62] William Garrard to Justinian Isham, 13 Sept.1654, NRO IC 346.

wrote to her father to know what portion he would offer because 'You wrote to me you might upon a good occasion... give more portion than you writ of, so I desire to know upon this occasion, which I think is no other but good, what you please to do'.[63] Whereas Sir Justinian had given £4000 with his daughter Susanna because Sir Nicholas Carew was a very good match and worth at least £1500 per year,[64] he would offer only £3000 with Elizabeth if she married Sir Thomas Gardiner who had only eight or nine hundred pounds a year.[65] This aim of parity often led to tortuous and long drawn out negotiations.

The Spectator summed up the ideal role of financial considerations, 'The happy Marriage is, where two Persons meet and voluntarily make Choice of each other, without principally regarding or neglecting the circumstances of Fortune or Beauty....'[66] In making the ideal match personal attractiveness should not be allowed to blind the parties to the need for sensible financial planning, neither should financial demands be so pressing as to override issues of personal attraction. Dr John Fell wrote to Sir Thomas Isham in 1680

> when all is done it is not the portion but the wife that makes the fortune; and if it please God that you can meet with a lady of virtue and parts; one who is fit to be your friend, for nothing besides friendship can make marriage happy, you need not be solicitous for the odd thousand pound.[67]

Fell was mistaken in his optimistic assessment of Sir Thomas's need of the

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[63] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 15 April [1657 or 1658] NRO IC 4324.

[64] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 20 Feb.1656, Letter LXXII, Duppa, p.120,121.

[65] Draft, Justinian Isham to [John Stuteville] on a letter from Richard Chaworth, 3 April 1660, NRO IC 500.

[66] From The Spectator 1,451, as quoted in Ellen McClung, 'For Love or Convenience: Women on Marriage in Literature, 1670-1750,' Atlantis, 2 (Fall,1976) p.76,77.

[67] Dr John Fell to Thomas Isham, 29 July 1680, Isham, Diary, p.45.

odd thousand pounds, but he expressed a view widely held by the 1680s, and probably believed by many even earlier in the seventeenth century - money without affection could not make a happy marriage. Friendship and affection were vital components of marriage, however, just as Sir Thomas looked in reality for a rich bride whom he hoped also to like, many others also settled for the best balance of qualities possible in their individual circumstances.

The marriage of Sir Justinian Isham, the brother of Sir Thomas, provides a very clear example of such a balance. When Sir Thomas died, leaving the estate burdened with debt, it was the responsibility of his brother and heir to rescue the family fortunes by a profitable marriage. It took Sir Justinian almost two years to find such a bride, but when he chose Elizabeth Turnor he took a bride who was not only able to benefit him financially, but one who was his social equal, who was temperamentally compatible, and to whom he was passionately attached at the time of their marriage. In fact the ideal seventeenth century marriage.

There can be no doubt that economic considerations were vital to the gentry in marriage making, but their importance may be somewhat exaggerated by the nature of the evidence. Letters of negotiation and marriage settlements provide concrete evidence of the material criteria observed in gentry marriages, but this mass of evidence should not blind us to the other criteria and qualities considered important in a suitable match. Financial details were easy to ascertain, so this qualification was usually the first to be established - particularly if the match were being recommended by someone who did not know either of the young people well.[68] It was well understood that 'liking' was a much less predictable

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[68] Barbara Harris comments: '...social convention encouraged close relatives to use the language of economic advantage and favour in their dealings with one another. This language may well have masked a great deal of emotion that is consequently invisible to historians, just as
(Footnote continued)

qualification, and a man or woman whom a parent could recommend with enthusiasm might unaccountably turn out to be particularly unacceptable to their son or daughter when a meeting took place. Also it was evident - particularly to parents sensitive to their childrens' feelings - that to break off a financially desirable match for lack of liking by the young couple only involved an element of regret for lost funds; but to break off a match for financial reasons, when the couple had developed feelings of affection for each other, was a much greater cause of distress.

To conclude that most seventeenth century marriages were made only for profit, whether individual or familial, would be a distortion. While gentry families undoubtedly made their plans fully conscious of the need to provide the heir with financial power, and other children with security, usually they did not consider wealth alone an adequate basis for marriage. The situation was far more complex, and most consciously strove for an advantageous balance of qualifications. Assessing the balance between financial considerations and personal attraction can be subjective, and the researcher may easily be influenced by preconceptions and philosophical expectations about familial values in the past. However, it is vital to attempt such an assessment since it is a fundamental indicator of the purpose of marriage, and the values held in individual marriages.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL ATTRACTION:

In 1678 when Mary Isham accepted a match for herself with Marmaduke

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[68] (continued)
in our society, which defines the family as a series of emotional relations, the language of emotion often masks a great deal of economic calculation and concern about power.' [Barbara Harris, 'Marriage Sixteenth-Century Style: Elizabeth Stafford and the Third Duke of Norfolk.' Journal of Social History (Spring,1982) pp.371,372.]

Dayrell she wrote to her eldest brother by way of explanation, that although she had been offered greater fortunes she would have had to put up with 'their debaucherys, or something as bad... and then in my judgment one had better be buried than married'. By her observation, good qualities and riches could both 'scarcely be had together', and she maintained that it was easily known 'by any wise body which of the two is to be preferred'. Mary was also pleased to find herself similarly valued by her intended. Someone able to offer a £4000 portion (Mary had only £3500, and there was some doubt about the availability of all of that) was wooing Dayrell for her daughter, but he had been constant in his interest in Mary. She wrote to Sir Thomas, 'this gives me, I must confess, the great satisfaction of knowing that he did value the person above the money which is very rare in this age'.[69]

A man or woman valued for their 'person', or the 'good qualities' which Mary desired, may have qualified on the basis of piety, honesty, social standing or any one of a host of other criteria, but in gentry families in the seventeenth century the issue always came, early or late, to personal attraction and emotional affinity.[70] No matter how good the match that was proposed, mutual attraction was the deciding factor - sometimes from the earliest stages, at other times as the final detail which led to acceptance or rejection of negotiations already in progress. Thomas Gataker wrote: 'There are secret links of affection that no reason

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69 Mary Isham to Thomas Isham, 12 June 1678, NRO IC 1096. As the Isham family friend and agent informed Sir Thomas, Mary was very annoyed when her much loved brother failed to share her comparative disregard for financial advancement and maintained that a jointure of £600 per annum was not good enough for the sister of Thomas Isham. [Gilbert Clerk to Thomas Isham, 28 Sept.1678, NRO IC 1130.]

70 This point of view runs contrary to Miriam Slater's contention that arranged marriages were characterised by the 'prominence of financial concerns in marriage negotiations' and 'low priority on the psychological and physical gratification of the partners....' [Slater, 'The Weightiest Business,' p.25.]

can be rendered of, as there are inbred dislikes that can neither be resolved, nor reconciled'. When such unexpected affection or dislike was found, Gataker believed that one must confess, 'There is a finger of God here' and 'in such marriage matches this is even God's own doing, and there is no contradicting of it'.[71]

If the three families and their many connections in this study can be considered a guide, love, or at least some degree of personal attraction, was basic to all but an exceptional few matches among the gentry in the seventeenth century.[72] But what was meant by 'love' needs interpretation. About 1606 George Sharrack wrote to reassure John Isham that his rejection of a marriage proposition was not taken amiss, since those involved understood that God was 'the author of all marriages and the mover of heart to like or loath'.[73] In this context of initial contact 'love' meant personal, probably physical, attraction for which an individual was not to be held entirely accountable. Frequently this initial personal attraction was referred to as 'liking'. Most marriage negotiations were begun on the understanding that they would proceed if there was 'liking' between the young couple. As Stone has pointed out, the relationship at this stage could be as tepid as 'a lack of positive antipathy'.[74] During courtship the 'secret links of affection' which Gataker and others observed and approved, seem often to have been no more than the

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[71] Thomas Gataker, A Marriage Prayer (London,1624) pp.11,12.

[72] One of Houlbrooke's conclusions from the evidence of matrimonial contract litigation in the consistory court of the Bishop of Norwich is that among the middling ranks of society in the mid-Tudor period personal preference was a very high priority in marriage choices, and marriage plans were usually initiated by the couple themselves. [Houlbrooke, 'Making of Marriage.']

[73] George Sharrack to John Isham, 3 Nov.[1605-7] NRO IC 3671.

[74] Stone, Crisis, p.651. Stone believes this to have been the basis of many noble marriages.

visualisation that an affectionate relationship could develop. This was particularly so if the match was being arranged, or promoted by friends or family.

Although Lawrence Stone may be right to maintain that few in the aristocracy married for love in the seventeenth century, for those further down the social scale the concept of love in marriage was not a remote ideal believed to impinge only occasionally upon reality.[75] Letter writing manuals from the sixteenth century on provide a wealth of evidence about the wide spread belief in marriage for love.[76] Margaret Spufford's study of the courtship chapbooks makes it clear how widely spread ideas of romantic love were. Although most of the chapbooks on the 'art of love' were at least in part satirical they show 'that the concept of romantic love as a basis for marriage was very much present in seventeenth century humble society'.[77] In the families in this study, personal attraction was held to be vital, and affection within marriage was the norm. Whether through the influence of poetry, plays and novels, or the example of good and bad marriages among family and friends, the language and idiom of 'love' was known and understood. This did not always mean passionate attraction or romantic love, but it certainly could do so. In May 1681 Sir Edward Dering wrote to his son-in-law 'my cousin William Finch is

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[75] Mendelson's article in answer to Slater contends that not only does Slater exaggerate the role of financial motives in match-making, but she has ignored the very wide understanding of concepts of romantic love, and the effect these ideas had on young people. [Mendelson, 'Debate: The Weightiest Business,' p.127 & passim.

[76] Katherine Gee Hornbeak, 'The Complete Letter Writer in English 1568-1800,' Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, Vol. XV, nos. 3-4, (April-July,1934) pp.1-150.

[77] Margaret Spufford, Small Books and Pleasant Histories. Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-century England (Athens, Georgia, 1982) Chapbooks were small books of popular fiction. The term was not used before the nineteenth century, but the genre existed well before that time.

suddenly to marry Sir William Hoskins younger daughter', a few days later he added 'cousin Will is deeply in love, and I believe next week we shall be able to give you accompt of the wedding day'.[78]

Such ideas prevailed, even though throughout the century passionate love was feared by many as potentially disruptive. The attachment of Helena Perceval and Captain Daniel Dering illustrates very dramatically attitudes to a passion which overruled sound judgment. Helena and Daniel's families regarded their feelings as a frenzy. Helena's uncle, Sir Robert Southwell, wrote, 'in this career I see not how she can very long keep out of her grave'. Since the Captain would not be able to make sufficient money to be able to marry her, Southwell believed she would 'for vexation die'. He added,'I can judge no other from the romantic strains you mention and the sickly condition that has already overtaken her'. He advised that she be kept closely guarded 'as a crazy and unhappy sister'.[79] Even though to prevent the marriage might be her death, her family did not interpret that as a reason for relenting, but as the appalling result of unbridled passion. There was also the possibility that the passion would wear itself out. Sir Edward Dering wrote of his son 'now his passion has gone to its height, I hope it will evaporate'.[80] However, in spite of its dangers, passionate love was by no means wholly undesirable, if accompanied by a right balance of other qualities. In Helena and Daniel's case the problem was not in fact their mutual passion, but Daniel's comparative poverty as a younger son. If the marriage had been financially wise their love would not have been inappropriate.

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[78] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 10 & 14 May 1681, KAO U 1713 B/42 & B/43.

[79] Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 12 Jan.1682/3, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, pp.124,125.

[80] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 18 Nov.1682, KAO U1713 D/6.

'Liking' and 'love' described varying degrees of emotional affinity and attachment on a continuum from lack of antipathy to the extreme of passionate absorption in another person. Those historians who minimize the role played by love in making a marriage in the seventeenth century do not deny the extensive knowledge of romantic love in medieval romances, and contemporary plays and poetry (although some certainly choose to ignore it). The issue is - to what extent did such notions impinge upon real life? Was such love conceived of as a rare occurrence unlikely to be permitted in one's own life? The complexities of the expressions of 'love' and the realities of emotional attachment can only be unravelled by the study in some detail of individual experiences.

Some of these issues are illustrated in the courtship of Mary Bedford by a Mr Spier in 1624. When he met Mary at the home of her stepsister and brother-in-law he 'fell in liking' with her. The match was very financially desirable and although Mary's portion was only £350, and far less than he might have been able to aim for, his feelings were obviously strong and as she reported to her stepfather Henry Sherfield, he 'told me that the lesser my portion was the more I would love him, but he should love me as well as though I had £2000'. Mary's response was to thank him and say she would do nothing without her stepfather's approbation. To Henry she wrote: 'As touching how I am affected towards him, is little or nothing as yet, but upon your liking and the persuasion of my friends I shall like the better of him'.[81] However, before Spier had a chance to see her stepfather, Mary's willingness to be persuaded by her family waned. As she wrote to Henry, 'I considered with myself, that I could not love him, and that I think I should not be persuaded to affect him... besides I should do him wrong to delude him along, and deceive him of his

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[81] Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 12 Aug.1624, HRO Herr. XLIII, 20.

expectations in the end'. She could not bring herself to hurt him by saying she did not love him, but gave him no encouragement, and eventually told him that 'the more I thought of marriage the farther I was from affecting it, therefore I would live as I do unmarried as yet'.[82]

It is very evident that falling in 'liking' was a strong physical or emotional attraction with Spier and that Mary and her family understood very well the nature of this attachment which had developed at the first meeting. Mary's certainty that she could not be attracted to him was almost as swift. She wrote to her stepfather that when on their third meeting he expressed the hope that she would change her mind she

> thanked him for his love, entreating him to remove his affection from me. And then he did so grieve which made me sorry to see it, and I could not tell what to say to him, but at last I told him that if he would write the next week I would answer his letter. He told me, God did put that in my mind, but I told it not him because I did think I should be of another mind, but because he should not be so discontented.[83]

Spier was a good match whom Mary's family approved of personally and financially. Mary had reached the age of 24, she was not financially comfortable and often stayed with her grandfather or stepsisters; so she had strong motivation toward marriage and her own establishment. In this incident personal attraction was the instant motivation for Mr Spier, and it is obvious that Mary herself considered such attraction vital to a marriage, and worth making some sacrifice to obtain.

It has been noted previously that the language of courtship was usually the language of love, even if the attraction involved was only financial. Another aspect which confuses the issue of 'love' is the way in which many seventeenth century suitors were able to look in more than one direction, in spite of a degree of attachment for one individual.

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[82] Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 29 Aug.1624, HRO Herr. XLIII, 21.

[83] Ibid.

Early in 1614 when Henry Sherfield asked the widow Rebecca Long to marry him she declined. When he wrote to her of it again a few weeks later she thanked him for having made his 'love' known to her, but reiterated that she had 'no intent to marry'.[84] Henry apparently accepted this as a final answer, as between December 1614 and February 1615 he unsuccessfully courted Mary Ley, the daughter of his friend Lord Chief Justice Sir James Ley.[85] After this failure Henry renewed his courtship of Rebecca, this time successfully. None of his letters to Rebecca survive, but from the content of hers, including references to things he had said and written, it is obvious that no matter how convenient and pragmatic may have been the considerations urging them into marriage,[86] they conducted a loving and, on Rebecca's part at least, an apparently romantic courtship.

During Sir Justinian Isham's courtship of Dorothy Osborne he felt a strong attraction to her, and a definite emotional involvement, judging by the negotiations and Dorothy's letters to William Temple. Yet when the negotiations broke down in July 1652, he searched for a bride elsewhere. Dorothy Osborne reported to William Temple after Sir Justinian renewed his approach to her, unsuccessfully, in June 1653, 'he says that he has made addresses (tis true) in several places since we parted, but could not fix anywhere, and in his opinion he sees nobody that would make so fit a wife for him as I'.[87] Yet in a letter written two months later Vere Leigh referred to Sir Justinian's 'affectionate endearments'[88] and later that

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[84] Rebecca Long to Henry Sherfield, 7 May 1614, HRO Herr. XXXI, 43.

[85] James Ley to Mary Ley, 5 Dec.1614 & 20 February 1614/15, HRO Herr. XL 19 & 20.

[86] Henry Sherfield's stepchildren ranged in age from 10 to 24, and the younger ones obviously needed a mother; and the usefulness of Henry's legal expertise in the rather muddled affairs of the Longs at this time was considerable.

[87] Dorothy Osborne to Willam Temple, 11 June 1653, Letter 25, in Smith, The Letters Of Dorothy Osborne, p.55.

month he married Vere with every appearance of satisfaction, and definite personal attachment.[89]

These examples emphasise the question about what degree of attachment was considered a sufficient or desirable basis for marriage. The answer varied a great deal between individuals and families, and probably also over the century. Men and women in the later seventeenth century seem to have placed more importance on pre-marital affection,[90] and probably through out the century more children than parents emphasised its importance. Certainly 'liking', finding someone at least acceptable, and preferably attractive, was the minimum requirement. The belief that if there was no active dislike, love would grow after marriage was very influential, and the speed with which many matches proceeded is an indication that it was usually not considered necessary for the relationship to develop far before marriage. The frequency with which matches were broken off, and affections between a young couple ignored or suppressed, would seem to indicate that such attachment was believed by some to be something easily set aside, and seems to confirm the idea of love which would grow after marriage, but was in the meantime controllable

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88 Vere Leigh to Justinian Isham, 4 Aug. 1653, NRO IC 324.

89 Duppa, 47-51; Duppa to Justinian Isham, 28 Feb.1654, Letter XLIX, Duppa, p.82.

90 One must be cautious about drawing too much from the apparent increase of discussions of marriage for love. As Wrightson has pointed out, this may have more to do with survival of evidence, than changes in attitudes to 'emotional considerations'. [Wrightson, English Society, p.87.] The changes may be in the use of language; or in the conventions governing formality, or the lack of it, in letter writing; or customs permitting freer discussion of personal feelings; rather than in more dramatic shifts in behaviour. Christopher Hill suggests that 'All the historian is entitled to say, surely, is that talk about marriage for love increased'. [Hill, 'Essays in Bibliography and Criticism, LXXX,' p.462.] As the number of studies of individuals and families increases it should be possible for historians to draw wider and more authoritative conclusions about the role of love in marriage making.

- or should be controlled. When Daniel fell in love inappropriately with Helena Sir Edward Dering wrote, 'Love and despair do not commonly afflict young men very long, but an ill marriage and beggery may last as long as life'.[91] Such control (loving 'wisely') was believed possible, even after couples had become acquainted and had promoted their own match.

However, one other partial explanation of the nature of commitment before marriage can be offered. For everyone in the seventeenth century, but particularly for the devout, God's leading in life had to be accepted. Thus at a time when their courtship was well advanced and there was a definite attachment between them,[92] but it seemed that their marriage may not take place, Rebecca Sherfield wrote to Henry Sherfield:

> Our minds are known to each other, our hearts to God, to whom let us both continue our prayers that if it may be to His glory, the true comfort of us both, and the good of ours, that He may further our proceedings, if not let us remember what our Master says, all things work for the best to them that feares him.[93]

When Henry Sherfield declined a suitor who had applied to him for his daughter's hand he urged him to turn his thoughts some other way 'as God shall direct you'.[94] When he and Sir Morris Abbott exchanged letters regarding a possible marriage between their children, Sir Morris suggested that marriages are made in heaven. He may have been appealing to sentiment, but Sherfield replied seriously, 'And because I believe, as you write, that marriages are made in heaven, I do commend the disposing of theirs to the maker of heaven and earth.'[95] When after much searching Sir

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[91] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 4 Nov.1682, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.121.

[92] This probably existed on both sides, but it is only possible to be certain about the strength of Rebecca's feelings.

[93] Rebecca Long to Henry Sherfield [misdirected to Thomas Chafin] 20 Dec.1615, HRO Herr. XXXI, 49.

[94] Henry Sherfield to Mr Middleton, 16 Dec.1629, HRO Herr. XLIII, 22.

Justinian Isham found a satisfactory match, Bishop Duppa wrote to him, 'How you have been crossed in other offers, your self best knows, and how smoothly you have gone in this, enough to make the old saying creditable, that "Marriages are made in Heaven"'. In his reply Sir Justinian wrote, 'As God had appointed it so I trust His blessing will go along with us.'[96] The earthly interpretation of God's will is always highly personal, and often a comforting rationalisation. Dr Samuel Ward, Master of Sidney-Sussex College, debating with himself in his diary about a possible marriage in 1621 wrote:

> 1. Rom[ans] 8, Diligentibus Deum, omnia cooperantur in bonum, etiam frustratis votorum. [To those who love God all things work together for good - even when disappointed in their vows.] 2. Consider whether God do call thee to that state, considering how thou failest, notwithstanding thy orderly [proceedings?]. 3. This disaffecting in the party is from a special providence of God, and therefore great reason to rest content therewith. 4. It is God that hath command of hearts and affections.[97]

It is possible that submission to God's will, as well as the will of the head of the family, and the force of circumstances, often assisted in making the unacceptable acceptable.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL QUALIFICATIONS:

The relative priorities of finance and attraction are probably best illustrated by consideration of the procedures of courtship and negotiation. In what might be considered the more orthodox or conservative way of proceeding, the financial status of both parties was

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95 Morris Abbott to Henry Sherfield, 20 Aug.1628, HRO Herr. XLVII, 14; Henry Sherfield to Morris Abbott, Aug.1628, HRO Herr.XLVII, 13.

96 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 7 Sept.1653, Letter XXXII, Duppa, p.67; endorsed reply Ibid.

97 M. M. Knappen (ed) Two Elizabethan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward (Chicago,1933) p.121.

established first, then the matter proceeded to 'liking'. In 1605 George Isham laid the groundwork for a possible match for his cousin John Isham. He knew John's financial circumstances and checked that the portion of the woman he had enquired after was 'answerable'. Having established that, he urged his cousin to visit the lady 'and if it please God, that you like and affect one another, I doubt not, but that your father and her mother [a widow], shall very well agree'.[98] About a year later another of John Isham's cousins, Mr Francis Catesby, attempted to assist him to a desirable marriage. After bringing the match to John's attention he returned to the other party, Sir Anthony Tyrringham. He wrote to John in May 1606,

> I did let him understand what your estate was and likewise what portion you required in marriage with your wife... he did like very well your estate; and disallowed not much your demand for portion, but desireth to respite the certainly thereof, until such time as you and his daughter had seen each other, and then (if it please you) that there may be good liking betwixt you, he sayeth that money shall cause no disjunction thereof.[99]

In 1652 the Reverend Seth Ward, engaged in negotiations between Sir Justinian Isham and Dorothy Osborne's family, expressed his confidence 'that if you came to converse together it would be a match'. At that time extensive negotiations about dowry and jointure had already been conducted, in fact the Ward's letter was written to excuse himself from blame over a misunderstanding about jointure offered by Sir Justinian.[100] When Captain Thomas Jervoise made himself a suitor to one of Sir Justinian's daughters the financial details on both sides were investigated before any of the parties met. Captain Jervoise asserted that although he could have looked elsewhere for more than £3000 in dowry,

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[98] George Isham to John Isham, 30 July 1605, NRO IC 46.

[99] Mr Francis Catesby to John Isham, 27 May 1606, NRO IC 73.

[100] Seth Ward to Justinian Isham, 28 June 1652, NRO IC 314.

'such a sum with a virtuous gentlewoman well descended may make me live happily'. It was then planned that he should confer with Sir Justinian, and meet later with one or more of his daughters if Sir Justinian approved.[101] In 1683 Sir Emanuel Moore's courtship of the Perceval family for a marriage between his son and Katherine Perceval followed a well known pattern. He made his proposal to Sir John Perceval, who checked both the fortune and the characters of the father and son. Being satisfied with both, he invited them to Burton to 'kill a buck with us'. Thus the young people were able to meet socially, and Sir John appointed his wife to consult his sister 'who was therein to be a party concerned'. Katherine gave them 'leave to proceed', and the marriage took place soon afterwards.[102]

When the initiative for beginning the match was with the young people themselves, it was understood that they should not make a final commitment until their families had assessed and negotiated the financial aspects. In 1624 Mary Long and Timothy Wade became acquainted in London, but Mary gave her word to 'keep herself free until all things are performed that are required by her friends'.[103] Personal attachment should take second place to financial security, but this did not mean that one would be obliged to marry elsewhere without personal attachment.

The most successful match was a love match which measured up in other respects, or a financially viable match in which both parties found that they loved each other. Sir Edward Dering, second baronet, accepted Thomas

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[101] Thomas Jervoise, 4 Aug.1656, endorsed on Letter LXXVIII, Duppa, p.128; Duppa to Justinian Isham, 24 Sept.1656, Letter LXXXI, Ibid. p.130. The match did not proceed so Jervoise did not meet any of Isham's daughters.

[102] John Perceval to Robert Southwell, 12 & 26 June 1683, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, pp.132,133.

[103] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 7 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 34.

Knatchbull, who was only the second son of Sir Norton Knatchbull, for his daughter Mary in spite of a modest financial settlement, because Sir Thomas was 'a very civil man, well beloved by all that knew him, one that seemed to love my daughter well'.[104] So in this case there appears to have been an attachment existing between the young people before the negotiations were concluded. This is confirmed by the fact that they were married only two or three weeks after Sir Edward began to conduct the marriage negotiations. The match was suitable because of the young man's character and expectations, because their families knew each other, and because he loved Mary. However, with four daughters unmarried this was probably a match well within the financial range Sir Edward was prepared to accept, and, as he noted himself, he had 'hopes of future kindness from Sir Norton [Thomas's father] to him'.[105] The relative importance of affection and finance would have been more graphically illustrated if in spite of the emotional involvement of Mary and Thomas, Thomas's prospects had been such as made him totally unacceptable.

Sir Edward Dering entered into marriage negotiations on his heir's behalf on at least two occasions while Ned was in his early twenties. However, when Ned Dering married at 27, he did so on the basis of his own choice, although with his father's whole hearted approval. A letter, written two weeks before the marriage of Ned Dering and Elizabeth Cholmely, illustrates well some of the dynamics involved in a courtship of affection. The letter shows the importance of the settlements which were still being finalised in an atmosphere of mutual trust, and the bride's place in her new family. The letter is worth quoting in some detail because it illustrates open affection, expressed with a light touch but

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[104]Dering, autobiography in Bond, Diaries, p.112.

[105]Ibid.

obvious sincerity, which seems to have become more typical by the 1670s.

> So kind was your last letter my dearest Betty to me, and so obliging to my father, that having shown it to him, he has commanded me to return you his thanks for the confidence you have in his justice and his friendship, and to assure you that you never shall have reason to lessen the opinion you have of him; I have entrusted him in all your letters, and if he were not the best father in the world I should be jealous of a Rival in him, for all the time we now spend together is in contemplation of your perfections, and disputing who shall be fondest, he of his pretty daughter, or I of my beloved Wife, and we shall always strive which shall make you love most. But my dear Betty as I had the good fortune of seeing you so long before him so I beg the advantage too of being first owned by you, which with impatience I expect the return of the deed, that I may see under your own hand, and avowed to the world the happiness I so long have waited for, and which you have given me leave to think you intend me. You know how proud a man I am already made by my hopes, you know how well, how dearly I do love you; try me not then for asking still one kind blessing more, that when you have signed the writing, you will send one charming line to me, and tell me how kind be this day fortnight, no longer Betty Cholmely but the adored treasure of my dearest your most affectionate and most devoted servant, Edward Dering.[106]

Ned Dering's younger sister, Katherine, married Sir John Perceval in March 1681. Their marriage is an illustration of a fortunate combination of circumstances and personalities, and an almost ideal balance of financial and personal requirements, leading easily to a desirable outcome. Theirs was a love match made with the approval and encouragement of Katherine's brother-in-law, Sir Robert Southwell, who was also Sir John's uncle. They became well acquainted in the Southwell home and Sir Edward Dering, Katherine's father, left the few negotiations involved to his son-in-law '...entreating you with the same kindness you have begun it, to carry it through'. Because the circumstances of the match were 'very persuasive, and very hardly to be found again' Sir Edward gave £2500 with his daughter, although he had not thought to go above £2000, and did not intend to do so for his other daughters. He wrote: 'It is a portion

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[106]Edward Dering to Elizabeth Cholmely, 19 May 1677, KAO U 350 C2/125.

that never before so much as came into my thoughts to give, but neither did I expect such an estate nor so good an man, and where I can promise myself to see her so happy.'[107]

Dering was totally satisfied with the match, and wrote repeatedly of the expected happiness of the newly wed pair,

> We talk of a wedding, and think of the satisfactions that attend an alliance so valuable in all respects...I pray God...to give them joy, and truly I do think there is as much liklihood of happiness on both sides as ever I saw.[108]

And a few days later he added, 'God be praised the young couple do meet upon as fair a prospect of happiness on both sides, as I think any have done this great while.'[109]

To Katherine's family this love match was satisfactory in every way. However, Sir John's grandmother was far from satisfied. She wrote to Sir Robert Southwell strenuously objecting to the marriage on the grounds of Sir John's youth (he was six months short of his majority), the inequality of age (Katherine was nine months older than Sir John), and the inadequacy of the portion. She resented the fact that she had not been consulted, and she felt that Sir Robert had persuaded her grandson against his best interests.[110] Although Sir John was satisfied that he had 'done well' [111] in his marriage, his grandmother assessing the meagre gains to his family found love an insufficient inducement.

This marriage, somewhat unequal and very advantageous to Katherine Dering and her family, and approved and encouraged by them, makes an

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[107] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 9 Dec.1680 & 17 June 1682, KAO U 1713 B/8 & C/43.

[108] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 1 March 1680/1, KAO U 1713 B/29.

[109] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 8 March 1680/1, KAO U 1713 B/30.

[110] Katherine Perceval to [Robert Southwell], 14 Feb.1680/1, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.103.

[111] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 17 March 1681, KAO U 1713 B/34.

interesting contrast to the courtship of Daniel Dering, Katherine's brother, and Helena, Sir John Perceval's sister. This was also a love match, but was disapproved of by both families. In 1682 Daniel and Helena fell in love while Daniel, who was a sea captain, was recuperating from a serious illness at his sister's home in Kinsale, co. Cork. As soon as their attachment became known it was combated with the utmost severity. Helena's brother wrote to their uncle Sir Robert Southwell that Daniel's 'violence and indiscretion' was such that it prevented other proposals, which was doubtless Daniel's intention since he declared publicly that he would marry Helena.[112]

Helena also helped thwart marriage plans by making her feelings known publicly. One of the most interesting aspects of this affair is how completely implacable and totally unsympathetic Helena's brother and her uncle Sir Robert Southwell were. Both these men, in other aspects of their family lives that can be understood from the written evidence, appear affectionate and concerned about the welfare of family members. However in this they would not bend. Even Sir Edward Dering, Daniel's father, whom his son-in-law Southwell considered too indulgent a father[113] was very resolute. All three believed that the match would be ruinous to both Helena and Daniel. It is true that Helena could have done a great deal better, and even Daniel might have managed a more advantageous match. Their survival on Daniel's pay as an officer, and the revenue of Helena's portion, if she received it, would be meagre indeed.

Southwell scorned 'the Captain's senseless pretentions', and advised Perceval that his wife should explain to her brother that he must 'expect our utmost opposition, and that his own relations must also abandon him,

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[112] John Perceval to Robert Southwell, 25 Aug.1682, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.118.

[113] Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 12 Jan.1682/3, Ibid. p.125.

and that therefore he should not make himself an instrument of disturbance in the family'. And in the meantime Helena should be kept away visiting relatives while Daniel was in port.[114] There had already been some falling out between Sir Robert and Daniel,[115] and Sir Robert seems to have believed the worst of him. He advised Sir John that if 'any promises or engagements be already made'[116] not to give more portion than the law required 'for should it get into his management, it would soon come to nought'.[117]

Sir Edward gave his approval to whatever methods Sir John felt necessary to pluck up 'this amour' of his son's 'by the roots'. He thought Helena and Daniel should be told seriously 'the apparent manifest mischiefs of the consequences of it', and he believed that Helena would be 'too discreet to do an action by which she would lose herself with both those families she was most concerned to please.' He promised to write to Daniel and did not 'much doubt of a compliance from him in what is at once both his duty and interest.' In the meantime, if necessary, Sir John should forbid him the house.[118] But Daniel did not respond as his father expected. By November Sir Edward had written to him four times on the subject and received no response.[119] However Helena admitted that there

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[114]Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 11 Sept.1682, Ibid. p.119.

[115]Daniel Dering to Robert Southwell, 7 April 1682, KAO U1713 C/26.

[116]This is an interesting acknowledgment that even when private such agreements were regarded as binding. It was socially injurious, particularly to a young woman, to enter into such an agreement. Such a prohibition is one of many examples of a social norm designed to enhance parental authority.

[117]Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 11 Sept.1682, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p. 119. This was a very definite conclusion to reach, considering that Daniel Dering was 24 years old in 1682, and had (with his family's help) already advanced to Captain.

[118]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 16 Sept.& 7 Oct.1682, KAO U 1713 C/46 & D/2.

was no contract between them, and agreed 'to be ruled by her friends'.[120]

The three men who were devoted to saving these rash young people from themselves believed that it would be necessary to marry Helena elsewhere, but Dering seems less vehement than the other two. In January 1683 Southwell wrote to his nephew that Sir Edward had sent Daniel six dozen of sherry 'and fancies wine will divert love'. His proposed solution was more stringent. At this stage he advised that Daniel's letters should not be answered when they mentioned the subject of the match, Helena should not be allowed to meet him, and Sir John should have 'a strict sentinel on her, that she break not away to him'. Some lampoons should be written and filtered back to her through 'her confidants' ridiculing the language in which she described her feelings and implying that Daniel was involved with someone else.

Daniel Dering certainly did not court Helena for the sake of her portion, and he turned down at least one very good match in 1685, being resolved, as Southwell reported, 'to pursue his old affair'.[121] This unresolved state of affairs continued until after Sir John's death in 1686. They were married quietly in July 1687. Lady Katherine Perceval, Daniel's sister and Helena's sister-in-law, was at first surprised when she heard of the marriage, but as she wrote scornfully to her brother-in-law, 'by their management of themselves it might well have been supposed to have ended in that. I see they don't think well enough of it to bray, for I have had not long since a letter from her without the least mention of it'.[122]

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[119] Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 4 Nov.1682, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.122.

[120] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 11 Nov.1682, KAO U1713 D/5.

[121] Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 9 April 1685, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.151.

Although the Southwells and Percevals had reservations about other aspects of Daniel Dering's life, it was his status as a younger son, with few prospects, which made him most ineligible. Financial parity was the minimum expectation of heads of families in making matches, and Daniel's prospects certainly did not measure up to what Sir John might reasonably expect for his sister. Daniel's father, who had at one time visualised marriage to an heiress as a means of promotion for his sons, also found this marriage unacceptable. Partly no doubt because his close connection with the Southwells and Percevals made it necessary to consider their interests as well, but also because Helena's portion would not be enough to establish them, particularly if she were given the minimum allowed by law, as was threatened. This incident certainly illustrates the existence of ideas of love and romance in the seventeenth century, and their tenacity, however it also illustrates the intractability of financial requirements. It shows clearly the power of the head of a family, who could not only prevent his sister's marriage for as long as he lived, but could for several years seriously limit her freedom to write and receive letters, and to visit freely outside her home, or remain in her own home when she wished. In this case love, even enduring over several years, social parity and family friendship, were not enough to overcome the inequities of fortune.

OTHER CRITERIA:

The most encompassing requirement in planning seventeenth century marriages was parity. Parity of finance, as the case of Daniel and Helena shows, but also parity of social standing and class, of religion, age, and

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[122] Katherine Perceval to Robert Southwell, 7 Aug.1687, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, pp.189,190.

even temperament. William Gouge in Of Domesticall Duties devoted one section to 'equality of years between husband and wife', another to 'equlity of estate and condition betwixt those that are to be married together', and a third to 'equality of piety and religion'.[123] It was generally believed that an inequitable marriage was likely to be an unhappy marriage. This planning could be overthrown by personal attraction, or the lack of it, but it was a vital consideration to those searching for marriage partners for themselves or others.

Social parity was a primary requirement. In many cases it was inextricably bound to financial parity and status. An extreme example was related by Thomas Isham in his diary. The Earl of Sunderland's groom who made a runaway match with a gentlewoman was prosecuted by her parents, put in prison and hanged.[124] In many other instances social status was in tension with financial status. This applied particularly to matches made between gentry heirs or younger sons, and daughters of merchants. In his search for a second wife, Sir Justinian Isham noted in response to one possible match '...yet so great a fortune and good fame cannot induce me to make myself too cheap to the City.'[125] In this instance he did not mean that he rejected the match, merely that if he accepted it he expected the terms to be particularly favourable, to make up for other inequities - a somewhat ironic attitude when one considers that his own estate and status were based on his great grandfather's success as a merchant. But

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[123] William Gouge, Of Domesticall Duties. Eight Treatises (London,1626) pp.109-111.

[124] Isham, Diary, 20 July 1673, p.215.

[125] Justinian Ishams's endorsed reply on Letter XXVIII, 29 March 1653, Duppa, p.15. The match referred to is almost certainly one with the daughter of the late Sir John Gayer, Lord Mayer of London. Her portion was £10,000. She considered Sir Justinian's years and children obstacles to the marriage. [Dr Humphrey Henchman to Duppa, 12 Feb. 1653, Letter XXVIIB, Duppa, p.63; Endorsed reply of Justinian to Duppa, on Letter XXVIII, 29 March 1653, Duppa, p.65.]

the family's status had changed a lot in six decades. Others were more readily able to overcome this social fastidiousness, if the fortune offered was great enough. As we have seen, Sir Justinian's son after being offered at least two daughters of wealthy Londoners settled at last upon Mary, the daughter of Abram van den Bempde, a wealthy merchant of Dutch origin. After the death of Sir Thomas on the eve of his marriage, William, Lord O'Brien overcame any scruples he may have had, and married Mary with a dowry of £8000.[126] The marriage of Elizabeth, widow of the wealthy mercer Richard Bennett, to Sir Heneage Finch, Recorder of London and Speaker of the Commons in 1626, shows that a sufficient fortune could gild the pill of social inequality.[127]

For others, even money and influence could not overcome social inferiority. An interesting example of such prejudices, and the complex range of objectives in spouse selection, arose when Sir Ralph Verney, who had been imprisoned with Sir Justinian Isham in 1655, interested himself in matches for Isham's daughters, and suggested to him Henry Wright, the son of Cromwell's doctor.[128] Sir Ralph thought the doctor's son a match suitable in fortune and status, and even suggested that his knowledge of it and chance to pass it on was providential. He believed

> Very few in England can have greater choice of greater Fortunes, but money is not the thing he chiefly aims at in his son's marriage; yet where it can be spared, I find he expects a good proportion, according to what he settles... if you would be pleased to say your daughter shall have £5000, I am sure his son would soon attend you at Lamport, and then if you approve him, go directly into Suffolk [to Sir Justinian's daughters].[129]

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[126] Gyles Isham, 'Abram van den Bempde,' Notes and Queries, (Nov.1957) pp.461-463. This was apparently an unhappy marriage, Gyles Isham noted, 'Abraham Vanden Bempde was not the first rich father to seek an aristocratic marriage for his daughter, without troubling too much about her subsequent happiness!' [p.462.] But assessing the nature and extent of Mary van den Bempde's consent is impossible.

[127] Larking, Proceedings, p. xv.

[128] See Duppa, p.114.

The doctor was aiming at an improved social status for his son, but was not interested in making too great a financial sacrifice. Isham seems to have been prepared to consider the match, although it is difficult to guess how serious he was since it would have been impossible for him to contemplate a portion of £5000. Isham's daughters and Lady Denton seem to have been horrified at the possibility of such a mesalliance. John Stuteville, Isham's cousin, wrote to him to convey their feelings on the subject.

> Worthy Sir, Since your last came to my hands I have received reasonable good information concerning the parties mentioned in your letter... that the father is an able man in his way, having had long experience, and practice in it; and that he hath a very great fortune.... That the son is a tall, slender, handsome man, but somewhat black; very gallant, but civil withal (a quality rare enough in these times). Nay more, that he is religious too (a thing much pretended to, but little practised).... I should have been more inquisitive after them... but that I am commanded from my Lady [Denton] to let you know that not withstanding these abilities, and fortunes in the father, not withstanding all these splendours, civilities, etc. in the son, yet, that he is not a fit match for any of Sir Justinian Isham's daughters.... I do not find in your letter, or by any relation can I get anything of his original, and therefore fear he is but ex plebe, and allied perhaps to some near you, that may endeavour and further it. Truly sir, if he be so, I leave it to yourself to judge whether he be suitable for any of them. In these degenerating times the gentry had need to close nearer together, and make a bank, and bulwark against that sea of democracy, which is over running them. And to keep their descents pure and untainted from that mongrel breed which would feign mix with them.... I know a gentleman related to yourself, but a younger brother and every way far your inferior, who was offered a very considerable fortune with a wife, beyond either his dessert, or expectation. Yet because it was with a physicians daughter, the very thought of the glister-pipes did nauseate his stomach. And great is the discourse at this very time about a Norfolk baronet's matching with a doctor of divinity's daughter in Cambridge, and yet we know divinity is the highest, as physic the lowest of professions. Your daughters live contentedly and happily as they are, and... their desire is not yet to change their condition, but upon greater advantage, and preferment, than they are like to meet with here. A far less estate with more honour, would better

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[129] [Ralph] Verney to Justinian Isham, 9 April 1656, NRO IC 394.

> suit them, than so great a one without gentility; which (to use their own words) they account of for but a gilded pill, gilded in his fortune, but bitter in his extraction.[130]

Religious parity, meaning a similar concern for piety, or similar religious affiliations, was also an important basis for marriage. In the lists of qualities reported to prospective suitors, piety usually rated high. In his assessment of Dr Wright's son, John Stuteville emphasised the importance of religion 'which as it is the greatest tie between God and us, so it must be the greatest between husband and wife, and without which there is not that harmony in marriage as is requisite, and therefore ought very much to be regarded'.[131] Puritan families generally sought matches among those with similar spiritual commitments.[132] As Cliffe has shown there was a network of puritan marriages which strengthened religious and even political alliances.[133] The family of Sir Francis and Lady Joan Barrington was a prominent example of such an alliance. Lady Barrington numbered among her nephews Oliver Cromwell, John Hampden, Oliver St John and Edward Whalley. And the marriages of the Barrington children strengthened this alliance of 'puritan and like-minded families'.[134] However, the godly did not ignore more practical considerations. Puritans of the gentry class appear to have been just as concerned about social and financial parity as other members of their class, not withstanding messages from the pulpit to eschew worldly considerations.[135]

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[130] John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 12 Jan.165[6], NRO IC 353.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry, p.63,64.

[133] Ibid. p.68.

[134] Arthur Searle (ed) Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632 (London,1983) p.2.

[135] Ibid. p.64-68.

In 1616 Henry Sherfield married the widow of Henry Long of Whaddon. Eight years after his marriage he compiled a list of the expenses of his wife's children, and his own indebtedness since his marriage, in which he wrote, 'I would have it observed that I have a virtuous wife, who doth, I persuade myself, fear God, which I accompt my happiness', then he added, 'but if one should respect a worldly consideration only what might have most availed me, I well know that I might have raised more worldly profit by my match if I had married a wife who had been single without charge, without any portion at all'.[136] Contrary to the tone of this entry some measure of 'worldly profit' had almost certainly been Sherfield's objective in his marriage into the Long family, and others assumed that he had been successful in this. The marriage of Sherfield's stepson, Walter Long, was carefully planned to be extremely financially advantagous.

Even allowing for the difficulty in identifying 'puritan' and other shades of religious view, the religious criteria in spouse selection were complex, and marriage among 'the godly', or those of known piety was more important than specific religious affiliations. For example, when the Dryden family of Canons Ashby sought an alliance with the Ishams, and a marriage was planned between Elizabeth Isham and John Dryden one of the aspects which most pleased Sir Erasmus Dryden was that it was Sir John Isham's purpose 'to lay a sound foundation, namely that you will constantly keep in your house such a faithful minister as they shall like of, to instruct and govern you house'.[137] The Ishams, who became famous for their devotion to Anglicanism, were not puritan in affiliation in 1630. However, Elizabeth Ishams's jottings over a considerable period of time showed a great concern with religious issues; and her aunt, Elizabeth

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[136]Henry Sherfield's account of the expenses of his wife's children, 20 March 1622-23, HRO Herr. XXVI, 10.

[137]Erasmus Dryden to John Isham, 22 April, 1630, NRO IC 184.

Denton, was married to Paul D'Ewes the father of Sir Simonds D'Ewes. The undoubted piety of the Drydens and Ishams and of the two young people made the match appropriate, and when the negotiations broke down they did so over finance, not religious differences or tensions. Mary Bedford felt that God could bless her marriage to 'a wise man and one that feareth God'. If he had those qualities, she maintained she could be contented regardless of his estate. However, since she had just turned down someone of whom her family approved, because she believed she 'could not love him', the incident illustrates the fact that piety was just one of the aspects to be considered.[138]

Since marriages were made between families, as well as individuals, the seventeenth century was by no means unique in being a time when similarity of political interest and allegiance made a marriage alliance more acceptable. This was particularly so in the civil war period. A royalist like Sir Justinian Isham looked for a match for himself, and his daughters, among those who shared his sense of suffering during the Interregnum. He was suitor to Dorothy Osborne the daughter of Sir Peter Osborne, a fellow Royalist, and he married as his second wife the daughter of Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh who was famous for having given Charles I shelter after the gates of Coventry were closed to him. Yet in this, as in the consideration of any of the criteria for choosing a spouse, in the effort to find a desirable balance of qualities, the political differences, even between a royalist and someone who had fought for parliament, could be overlooked. So Sir Justinian was prepared to consider the proposal of Captain Jervoise, a parliamentarian commander, for one of his daughters, because of his admirable personal qualities, his frugality and good estate. The Captain failed to qualify, but chiefly

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[138]Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 29 Aug.1624, HRO Herriard 44 M 69, XLIII, 21.

because he was about twenty years older than Judith and Elizabeth Isham.

Demographers have shown that the traditional view, of large differences in age, with men in their late thirties marrying girls twenty years younger, cannot be maintained. It is true that in the upper classes the age difference appears to have been greater than among couples further down the social scale, but among the gentry too great a difference was held to be a disability. Recounting the recent and rather sudden marriage of their cousin Phillippa Carew to Colonel Beaumont, John Isham wrote to his brother Sir Justinian in 1693 that considerations of his inheritance 'swayed not a little and made fifty-seven years, which are owned, go down easier'.[139] It was particularly unacceptable that the bride should be older than the groom. In submitting to her father's dictum that she give up the man she loved, Elizabeth Isham agreed that she would 'incline to any of suitable years, approved goodness and civil behaviour'. But she added that she would rather remain single than 'marry any too young for me, especially six years'. Obviously there was someone specific in mind, probably Mr Haselwood who in October 1660 'was very desirous to be a suitor to her' and was 19 years old to her 24 at that time.[140] She gave as her reason 'my averseness to rule any man or his estate, and desire a man of wisdom and experience'.[141] This provides an interesting insight into the concept that age confers authority, which Gouge confirmed. He advocated an equality of years, but added that if there was a difference

> the excess of years be on the husband's part, for besides that, according to the ordinary course of nature, a man's strenth and vigour lasteth longer than a woman's, it is very meet the husband should be somewhat elder than his wife, because he is an head, a governor, a protector of his wife.[142]

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[139] John Isham to Justinian Isham, 3 Sept.1693, NRO IC 1490.

[140] Draft, Justinian Isham to [John Stuteville], on a letter from Richard Chaworth, 3 Oct.1660, NRO IC 500.

[141] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 3 Oct.1661, NRO IC 524.

After commending the example of Abraham who was ten years older than Sarah, Gouge was unable to cite an approved biblical example of any husband younger than his wife.

Miriam Slater found in her study of the Verneys that the 'compatibility of the couple was barely considered'.[143] But many gentry families did consider this aspect seriously in the planning stages. All the parents who gave their offspring the right of veto allowed compatibility of temperament to be a factor. The importance of such compatibility was certainly well understood, although this, along with other desirable characteristics, was vulnerable to expedience. Thomas Gataker wrote:

> If there be but a fat portion, or a fair outside, that is all they look to: the disposition of the party is scarce once enquired after. And so by this means, to please either their lascivious affections, or their covetous mind, they marry themselves oft to such a continual heart-sore, as neither the fat portion nor the fair outside is able to give them ease of.[144]

Bishop Duppa viewed Justinian Isham's search for a wife as 'that great business of choosing an help like to yourself'.[145] And when Isham did choose he was able to write, 'I praise God I have met with one that I hope will suit with me as not to have many desires very different from mine own. A quiet and cheerful life to ourselves is the utmost of our ambition'.[146] These are the rather temperate enthusiasms of a sober and scholarly man in his forties, but they certainly acknowledge a concern for

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[142]Gouge, Duties, p.110.

[143]Slater, Family Life, p.63.

[144]Thomas Gataker, A Marriage Prayer (London,1624), p. 20, 21.

[145]Duppa to Justinian Isham, 4th Jan.1653/4, Letter XXIVB, Duppa, p. 58.

[146]Endorsed reply of Justinian on letter XLIV, 28th Feb.1654, Duppa, p. 83.

compatibility. When reports reached the bishop of the temperament of Isham's new wife, he wrote to Sir Justinian of how pleased he was that his friend had found 'a lady, not only very good in herself, but suitable to your disposition, which certainly is the highest point of blessing which marriage can possibly afford you....'[147]

Neither were Duppa or Isham less concerned on behalf of others for whom they sought partners, particularly Isham's daughters. They looked for men whom they thought likely to be compatible, and then they gave the young people the chance to become acquainted and see if they would suit. In 1656 after the bishop had provided a great deal of detail about the estate and person of Captain Thomas Jervoise he left the matter to Sir Justinian, adding, 'your judgement, who best knows the dispositions of your daughters, and can more exactly weigh all circumstances than any stander by can do, will absolutely be your best guide, especially if God directs you in it'.[148] This parity of temperament was of course a part of 'liking', the consideration of which has already been shown to be important to most parents.

One last criterion should be considered. Marriage within the county was fairly likely, even after the development of the London marriage market in the late sixteenth century.[149] The obvious explanation for this was pragmatism and convenience. But for some parents, keeping their daughters within visiting distance after marriage was also one of the qualifying characteristics demanded of a prospective spouse. An outstanding example of this was the refusal of Sir Justinian Isham to give his consent to the marriage of his daughter Elizabeth to Sir Thomas

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[147] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 28 Feb.1654, Letter XLIX, Duppa, p.82.

[148] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 19 Oct.1656, Letter LXXXII, Duppa, p.130.

[149] B.G. Blackwood, 'The Marriages of the Lancashire Gentry on the Eve of the Civil War,' The Genealogists Magazine, XVI, 7 (Sept.1970) p.322.

Gardiner, because he was not able to sell up his property in Essex and move closer to Northampton. Early in the century one of the Ishams gave his daughter a list of reasons why he disliked the match she was contemplating. The first item on the list was 'he dwelleth far off and therefore not like I am to have that comfort of you as if you were placed near unto me'.[150] The constant visiting between members of gentry families settled not far distant from one another, is another indication of the importance of this qualification.

The ideal sought after in most gentry families was a balance of material, social and emotional factors. Not a marriage made for romance, but love in its proper place accompanied by a good portion; not merely a fortune, but someone of satisfactory rank and age who was personally attractive. Many letters discussing the attributes of suggested spouses illustrate this quest for balance. Thomas Jay's letter to Sir Justinian advising of a widow with much to recommend her is an excellent example of the priorities of matchmaking and the diligence with which such details were sought out and relayed. Mr Jay's information came to him second hand, from one who 'hath lived to know as Eminent of the sex as any we have', but he spared no pains to paint an attractive picture. First he noted that 'if parity, neighbourhood, and at least £5,000, were the inducements, you could be master of all with a mornings walk'. These vital facts related he went on in more detail:

> Her building is in height decently exalted, above the usual size... to this a straightness, and those members, that are for public view, are answerable ministers to the graces of alluring beauty, but for a checking modesty, admitting admiration not participation, her comportment is alike amiable, without sullenness, affable. When she speaks, one sees she thinks before, and those thoughts dressed in significant language, and as she would not conjugate with a medler, she is none herself... She is soberly religious, old English Christian.[151]

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[150] [ ] Isham to [ ] Isham, n.d. [early seventeenth century] NRO IC 3279.

In 1675 Sir Robert Southwell received a marriage offer for his 18 year old nephew. His reply illustrates his judgment about the balance of priorities he observed in looking for his nephew's bride and those qualities which he believed recommended his nephew:

> I have yours of the 30th of the last month, and I must and shall acknowledge your kindness therein whatever may come of the business you mention; but really, Sir, I am not able at present to make any fitting judgment upon the proposal, for you do not mention the age of the young lady nor her features, her parts, or endowments, nor the value of her estate, what it is or how or where it lies. All which I should understand before I can make any judgment or give you any competent answer. For although I know the descent of the lady to be very good and great and from some of the chief of nobles, yet I am not overmuch apprehended with that; for in my judgment I place the virtues and merit of the person in the balance before all that, although I have a very high esteem and veneration for all such persons of honour.
> And for my grandson [sic], Sir Philip Perceval, whom you enquire after, I may with freedom and truth tell you that I have very frequently exceeding good proffers of matches for him both in England and Ireland .... He was eighteen years old the 12th of January last,of a very graceful, comely feature, modest, free and exempt from all manner of vice whatsoever, of a mild and sweet disposition as can be desire. He has been well instructed in the schools, and since then has spent some time at Oxford, and is now lately returned to London, and there settled in Lincoln's Inn, where he reads and studies, and where his friends and relations intend to leave him for some years, and when he is well stocked and furnished with the learning of England, then to spend one year or less in travel abroad, having already the French tongue, and then to settle himself upon his own estate, which by that time, with God Almighty's blessing, will be considerable and enough to maintain a gentleman of good quality. His estate will be about three thousand pounds a year [152] he will come a very free and clear man into his estate.

For many however, when all they had to offer, and all they were offered was taken into consideration, all they could hope for was a 'trade-off'. Twentieth century variables are different, the trade-offs

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[151] Thomas Jay to [Sir] Justinian Isham, 5 March 1650/51, NRO IC 275.

[152] Robert Southwell to John Champante, 7 Dec.1675, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, pp. 38,39.

are more subtle, and the pressures slightly less, because the price of failure is not as high. But although many of the criteria for making a marriage have changed in the last three hundred years, the trade-off factor remains, and helps illuminate seventeenth century marriage making. Now the upwardly mobile executive's lifestyle may be traded for beauty, or money for social prestige, or perhaps intelligence for beauty. Through all there remain strong veins of expediency, social custom and tradition. Seventeenth century trade-offs worked in a similar manner, but were more openly admitted and negotiated. In the twentieth century the line between expediency and personal attraction is more difficult for the observer to draw than it was in the seventeenth century.

Thus, in what is probably a somewhat extreme example, Mary Bedford could marry Henry Sherfield little more than three months after the death of her first husband George Bedford.[153] She had six children and was probably pregnant at the time.[154] She was also the sole executor of her first husband, who had been a successful clothier in Salisbury, and she was to administer and receive the rents from his houses in Salisbury and certain leasehold lands, until her sons inherited at the age of 21.[155] Marriage to a lawyer who was well-known to her, who had conducted business for her husband,[156] and was a trusted member of the same parish church, must have seemed a satisfactory solution to what were probably frightening burdens. In her will, written five and a half months after her marriage,

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[153]Will of George Bedford, Feb.1607, HRO, Herr. XLIV, 16; Marriage settlement of Henry Sherfield and Mary Bedford, 30th April 1607, HRO Herr. XLI, 1.

[154]Probate will of Mary Sherfield, 17 Sept.1607, HRO, Herr. XLI, 2.

[155]Will of George Bedford, Feb.1607, HRO Herr. XLIV, 16.

[156]This cannot be proved because those Bedford papers pertaining to the period before 1607 may well have come into Sherfield's hands after his marriage.

while awaiting the birth of her seventh child Mary Bedford stated: 'And my desire is that my body be buried in the Parish Church of St Edmund where my said late husband lieth, as near as convenient may be to the place where he lieth.'[157] She had parents, sisters and brothers-in-law who continued to interest themselves in her welfare, and that of her children, but obviously she concluded that the security this marriage offered was desirable. In the marriage settlement which Henry Sherfield and Mary Bedford drew up, Sherfield gave securities for the payment of the legacies left to her children by their father, and undertook to 'nourish, maintain and educate' all the children out of his own charge. The care with which her children's interests were protected in the settlement illustrates Mary's priorities in the marriage.[158] Sherfield's motives are less obvious. Since George Bedford had been a prosperous clothier, with Mary his sole executor, and the eldest child was as yet only 15, and the estate would therefore be in Mary and Henry's hands, he may have anticipated that the marriage would be financially profitable.[159]

Another example of the equation which meant the best possible marriage in the circumstances, was the marriage of Frances Marsh to Dr William Turner. As his second wife she acquired a grown-up family and a husband many years older than herself. Bishop Duppa conceded the 'disadvantages

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[157] Probate will of Mary Sherfield, 17 Sep.1607, HRO Herr. XLI, 2. The significance of such requests, which were not uncommon, is hard to assess.

[158] Marriage settlement of Henry Sherfield and Mary Bedford, 30 April 1607. HRO Herr. XLI, 1.

[159] If this was the case he was disappointed because in April of 1612, two and a half months after the death of his wife, Sherfield estimated 'The whole estate which I had by my marriage, in money, plate, goods and good debts, amounted only to £3,101.9.8,' out of which there remained only £123.9.8 when the various legacies of the wills of Mary and George Bedford were paid. [Computation of Henry Sherfield's estate, 26th April 1612, HRO, Herr. XXVI, 3.] He also had the responsibility of six stepchildren and a baby daughter of his own.

in the match', but added 'yet there is a compensation for them by his great affection for her, and by a liberal jointure, of £200 per annum, which she with her small portion could not have expected'.[160]

Lesser trade-offs often occurred too - the daughters of Thomas Isham provide apt illustrations. Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, made a socially and financially advantageous marriage with Sir Anthony Denton. Her father increased her portion to well above £1,000 to make this possible,[161] but even so Denton was seventeen years older than she was. Thomas Isham felt unable to give such a large portion again. Susanna Isham accepted a different problem when she married Sir Martin Stuteville. The social status the marriage conferred was satisfactory, and Sir Martin was only twelve years older than his bride, but she was his second wife and he already had a son who was likely to inherit, greatly to the disadvantage of Susanna's children - which did in fact occur. The youngest Isham daughter, Jane, married a mere esquire of limited means. Since she married at 21, it is reasonable to suppose that she was guided by inclination, since there was certainly time for her to look further. John Ardys her groom was willing to settle a jointure of £200 per year on her in return for her portion of £1,000. Since his annual income was only £232.15.0, he must have considered her a very desirable bride.[162] This was perhaps because of their personal attachment for each other, or because of the value of the connection with the more prosperous and influential Ishams.

As the century progressed such trade-offs may have become less frequent, however, this would be very difficult to prove, and what is much

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[160]Duppa to Justinian Isham, 21 Feb.1655, Letter LXIV, Duppa, p.108, 109.

[161]Thomas Isham to Euseby Isham, [1601-1604] NRO IC 3636.

[162]Finch, Five Northamptonshire families, p.27.

more likely is that the attributes traded changed somewhat. As this letter written in 1682 illustrates very aptly. Sir Robert Southwell wrote to his nephew Sir John Perceval of the results of an investigation into a possible match for one of Sir John's sisters.

> I told you that as to birth and fortune... it is so far well.... For the relations there were some who might be valuable and of use. But when I consider the want of all education and a temper in your party that is not (by report) very desirable, I am at a great stand, for when I cannot... see some probable foundation for happiness, I dread going on.
> On the other side it is very true that the portion and the alliance are great temptations, but as my nieces manage their interests, they add little to their preferment; they too much publish their little love to Ireland, and as beauty does not abound, so they strive not to make any amends by the fame of good housewifery.[163]

In fact Helena made an ineligible love match, as we have seen, and Katherine married the son of Sir Emmanual Moore who 'though he is low in statue, and not so personable, because his shoulders are a little round, yet the vivacity of his parts, and the ingenuity of his disposition doth very sufficiently compensate that'.[164] The lack of stature and rounded shoulders were probably balanced against Katherine's lack of beauty, and, within himself, his vivacious personality and kindness balanced his lack of physique.

These instances of 'trade-offs', for the want of a more apt expression, are merely somewhat extreme examples of the way in which the criteria used in spouse selection worked. Beliefs about what constituted a good marriage were widely held, and in most instances the objective was the best balance of the desired qualities that the circumstances would allow. Naturally the wealthy and well-born enjoyed an advantage. And attributes such as beauty, piety, vivacity and kindness all went into the

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[163] Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 11 Sept.1682, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.118,119.

[164] John Perceval to Robert Southwell, 26 June 1683, Ibid. p.133.

scales on the right side. Advanced years, children from a previous marriage, and estates in 'unhealthy' parts of the country, weighed in the other direction. The aim was a balance which would please or at least satisfy all parties.

The relative weight given to the various criteria of spouse selection, and the modes of matchmaking varied greatly between families and individuals. The balance of qualities aimed for or accepted indicates value judgements of enormous scope which reflect beliefs about the purpose and expected quality of married life. And this variety of expectations and behaviour may very readily be observed in the marriages thus created.'

PART II

MARRIED LIFE

Relationships within marriage in the seventeenth century reflected the values and behaviour already seen in the process of making marriages. The heads of families, assisted mainly by their male relatives, made or approved matches on behalf of their offspring. Marriage took a woman from her father's control and authority to that of her husband.[1] The formation of marriages and marriage itself was male dominated. The pattern of behaviour in which men acted and women reacted was learned within the family during childhood; a new marriage merely continued a norm in which wives were expected to accommodate, submit and please. The amount of control women had over their lives and marriages was limited both in theory and reality.

The criteria of spouse selection emphasised by a particular family or individual influenced the tenor of the new marriage. Men who chose a young, submissive bride were likely to establish a very different type of marriage from those who chose a socially prominent, wealthy bride who might expect to make her voice heard. In the 1660s Dudley Lord North warned against marrying too rich a bride since it was likely to make her insubordinate.[2] Greater freedom to choose and the establishment of ties of affection before marriage often led to a marriage of mutual affection and companionship, but by no means always, as gloomy advice givers felt

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1 In general a woman also left her family's status for that of her husband. A wife's status could suffer derogation if she married a man of lower status; a man's remained the same. This explains in part the need for women to marry well. Women often continued to be identified by reference to the male members of their family of origin. Judith, the wife of John Isham, was identified on her tomb not only by her relationship to her husband, but also as 'daughter to learned William Lewin'. [Oswald Barron (ed) Victoria History of the Counties. Northamptonshire Families. Geneological Volume (London,1906) p.158.]

2 Stone, Crisis, p.616.

obliged frequently to reiterate. Contemporary belief that love, meaning a companionable and affectionate relationship, could grow after marriage was by no means entirely mistaken. Mercenary marriage proposals and negotiations could be followed by the development of satisfactory marital relationships. Margaret Dakin's three marriages, for example, present an impressive spectacle of self interest on the part of her husbands and their families. But her last marriage to Sir Thomas Hoby seems to have been one of shared interests, closeness and some affection.[3]

The seventeenth century abounded in advice about how married life should be conducted. Conduct books and sermons discussed authority, submission, male strengths and female weaknesses, and appropriate marital behaviour at great length. The following three chapters will consider these theoretical aspects of the marriage relation, and the reality of married life - the balance of authority within marriage, the significance of affection, and particularly the roles which the partners assumed within the marriage.

The letters exchanged during match-making and marriage negotiations provide in many instances sufficient evidence from which to draw confident conclusions about individuals, their motivation and activities during marriage making. A picture of married life is more difficult to recreate. Letters almost inevitably provide only fragmentary glimpses of everyday affairs and even familiarity with a large number of letters within a family may leave many conclusions speculative. Even when it is possible to make definite statements about the nature of a relationship or individual events the picture cannot be complete. Subtleties such as the precise location of power within a marriage are often too intangible for anyone to assess with confidence. However, this is not a reason for

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3 Dorothy M. Meads (ed) Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605, (London, 1930)

abandoning the attempt to understand how married couples related to each other in the seventeenth century. After all, how many of us would presume to claim a 'complete picture' of the marriages of our friends? Yet we could almost certainly make some accurate statements about the nature and quality of their relationship. These chapters will examine closely the relationships within a small number of marriages, and consider others more generally. The members of these families behaved in certain ways, some of which support widely held beliefs about marriage among the gentry in the seventeenth century, and some of which do not.

Marriage was advocated in the seventeenth century as a safeguard against sin, for the procreation of children and for companionship. Doubtless men and women entered marriage for all these reasons, but they also married because seventeenth century life was entirely based on, and arranged around, marriage and family life. Marriage not only secured the legal basis for inheritance but provided the environment for social and emotional support. It was the primary relationship of the seventeenth century, and to be married was the norm.

Within the families of the Ishams, Derings, and Sherfields, and their connections, the relationship between husband and wife was almost always the most important relationship within the family. It was seen as separate and unique within the family structure. The qualitative difference between the marriage relationship and all others can be seen in such remarks as that of Sir Edward Dering to his wife Unton in 1638: 'Remember my hearty love and service to my dear sisters, and my brother, and take to thy self the possession of the heart of thine own Edward Dering'.[4] William Whately wrote in his wedding sermon, A Bride-Bush,

> a man must love his wife above all the creatures in the world besides, so must the woman her husband... the wife is to have the highest room in the husband's heart, and she in his. No neighbour, no kinsman, no friend, no

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[4] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 7 Nov.1638, KAO U350 C2/60.

> parent, no child should be so near and dear unto the husband as his wife, none to her as her husband.[5]

Thomas Gataker too stressed that husband and wife were 'nearer than friends and brethren, or parents and children'.[6] The marital relationship was particularly likely to be unique in marriages in which affection and personal qualities had been important criteria of choice. Most marriages in these families were affectionate relationships in which the partners gave emotional support to each other. They shared domestic responsibilies, child-rearing and decision making, and they spent a great deal of time together.

However, even those partners who had a strong emotional attachment for each other did not expect the exclusive relationship of mutual dependence for emotional, psychological and intellectual support which is the expectation in most twentieth century marriages. Each marriage established a new nuclear family.[7] But marriage among the gentry took place very much within the larger family context, as is illustrated in letters written immediately after marriage when the new family member was referred to as 'my son' or 'my daughter', and might sign themselves 'your loving son' or 'your dutiful daughter'. These may be merely the cliches of respect, but there is also a very definite impression in these letters that new in-laws were involved very quickly in normal family activities.

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5 Whately, William. A Bride-Bush, or A Direction for Married Persons (London,1619) p.38. This edition was Whateley's considerably enlarged version of a 1617 edition of the marriage sermon which had been published from Whately's notes, but without his 'privity'.

6 Thomas Gataker, A Good Wife Gods Gift: and A Wife Indeed. Two Marriage Sermons (London,1623) p.5.

7 That the typical early modern household was composed of a nuclear family only rarely containing members of more than two generations has been firmly established, principally by the work of Peter Laslett and Richard Wall. [See: P. Laslett, 'Mean household size in England since the sixteenth century,' & Richard Wall, 'Mean household size in England from printed sources,' in Peter Laslett & Richard Wall (eds) Household and Family in Past Time, pp.125-203; Laslett, Family life and illicit love, Chap. 1; Laslett, The World We Have Lost.

For example, sons-in-law were often immediately commissioned with business transactions or the making of new marriage contacts for another family member. This rapid assimilation of the new family member was possible because by the time the bride or groom had been thoroughly vetted by the family group and a settlement decided upon, they did not need to be accepted gradually on the basis of individual personality and character, since the decisions about acceptability had already been made. The wide range of family approval made it possible for a new husband or wife to slip comparatively easily into a clearly defined role not only in their marriage but within the family of their spouse.

What made a successful marriage in the seventeenth century? This is probably an unreasonable question since it cannot be answered more specifically than to say a marriage was successful if it was satisfactory to both parties, and to their families. Certainly a strong patriarchal husband and father, who maintained his patrimony and was obeyed and cherished by a modest and loving wife, who was also an efficient housewife and godly mother, would fulfil the ideal. Miriam Slater has suggested that the very patriarchal marriage of Sir Ralph and Lady Mary Verney was a happy one because they shared similar expectations of what their marriage should be. Both believed Sir Ralph should make all the major decisions while Lady Verney looked after the tedious details., Neither expected that Sir Ralph would love his wife selflessly, but both seem to have expected that Mary would love her husband that way. And neither of them believed that she was his equal in any way.[8] It is possible that happy or at least satisfactory marriages could be built upon shared limited expectations of the marriage relationship. With the Verneys this seems to have been the case, but it cannot possibly have always been so. Sometimes the fortunate results of limited expectations were observed by

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[8] Slater, Family Life, p.64-71.

contemporaries. In January 1657 Bishop Duppa sent some details about a couple Sir Justinian Isham had enquired after.

> And certainly they are so far happy, that their dispositions and tempers in both of them seem to be alike... There wants that vigour in him, that is in his father, and his lady is so good as to be like him in it. There is nothing to complain of in either of them, but had the lady been matched with a livelier temper she might have been much improved.[9]

An indication of the success of a marriage and of the quality of a relationship was sincerely expressed affection, and the dependence of one spouse's happiness upon the continued health and happiness of the other. Using these criteria it is clear that there were husbands and wives whose shared expectations were for more equality and intellectual companionship than Sir Ralph and Mary Verney visualised, and that a variety of marriages which did not fulfil the ideal in all particulars were considered satisfactory by those most closely involved in them. The marriage of Bishop Brian Duppa and Jane Killingtree was one which illustrates a close identification of interests, and great affection for and valuing of each other. They shared and enjoyed mutual friends. Their respective relatives, particularly nephews and nieces, played an important part in their lives, probably partly because they had no children of their own, having married when Jane was 40 and Duppa 35.

A more significant illustration of the strength of the bond between them is Duppa's concern over his wife's health. In the 1650's Mrs Duppa was very ill on several occasions and the bishop's remarks in his letters to his friend Sir Justinian, whom he relied upon for comfort and emotional support, are very revealing. In September 1664 he wrote of the affliction he felt during her illness and described himself as 'flitting about like a shadow... an half dead man' without her. He added, 'I should not speak thus passionately of her, but that I commit it to a bosom that

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9 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 12 Jan.1657, Letter XCVII, Duppa, p.152,153.

hath the like affections'.[10] These comments suggest that while the bishop regarded this strong emotional attachment for his wife as acceptable and desirable, he did not think such depth of feeling within marriage was universal, or even common. In August 1656 he wrote to Sir Justinian that his wife's illness 'doth very much discompose me' and he was very grateful for Sir Justinian's deep 'sense of the infirmities of my dear wife'. During her illness he declined even welcome invitations being, as he said, 'but half myself' without her.[11] In June 1659 he was rejoicing in her partial recovery, and wrote to Sir Justinian,

> You could hardly have express'd more love to me.... than to rejoice with me for the recovery of animae dimidium meae. ['The half of my soul']. And yet the joy is not full, for there are still some relics and dregs of the distemper hanging about her.[12]

Later that year he wrote frankly, 'But my dear wife on whom my health much depends, is so often and so variously infirm, that I have great fears for her'.[13]

It would be hard to find a more apt testimony to a successful marriage than that which Bishop Duppa wrote in a letter to Sir Justinian at the age of sixty-six on the occasion of his thirty-first wedding anniversary.

> I take the more notice of the date, because it was the anniversary of my happy marriage and therefore a day never to be forgotten by me. For though I have received many blessings from God of all sorts yet among those that have concerned my happiness in this life, none can equal, or come near, the comforts which I enjoy in having had for so many years such a bosom friend, who hath so faithfully and so affectionately gone along with me through all the variations of my life and fortunes. Should I say so much to many in this world, they would not easily believe the sense which I have of it, for either they have chosen so ill that they cannot apprehend it, or are so soon weary of

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10 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 26 Sept.1654, Letter LVI, Duppa, p.97.

11 Duppa to Justinian Isham, two letters on the 26 Aug.1656, Letter LXXIX & LXXX, Duppa, 128-130.

12 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 7 June 1659, Letter CX, and note 1a, Horace, Odes, III, 8. Duppa, p.169.

13 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 20 Sept.1659, Letter CXII, Duppa, p.173.

> a good choice that they sour their marriage before they give it leave to ripen into so many years as mine has done. But writing to you, whom I have so long observed to make all relations good, I am secure that I can say nothing of this kind concerning my own condition, which you are not likely experimentally to make good in that happy choice which you have made.

He ended with a quote from Horace, 'Thrice happy are they who are united in an unbroken love'.[14] All of which gives rise to several questions: was the marriage of Bishop and Mrs Duppa typical or exceptional? Within the framework of ultimate male authority how did marriages actually function? How important were emotional bonds between husband and wife? And to what extent did they share their lives?

Before addressing these questions directly, we shall consider some of the demographic details relating to the duration of marriage to create an appropriate context from which to discuss marital behaviour, relationships and emotional experiences. Among the three core families in this study, for which sufficient data are available, the average length of marriage was 18 years. The average length of widowhood for women was 20 years and for men 19.25 years. Of nineteen marriages in the primary sample ten were broken by the death of the wife. Such averages diguise great statistical variation. For example, the lengths of marriages varied from three to forty-two years; one man married twice, and one three times, and two of the widows in the three core families remarried.

Lawrence Stone believes that over a third of all first marriages among the aristocracy between 1558 and 1641 lasted less than fifteen years, however, his figures also show that half of aristocratic marriages in that period lasted more than twenty years, and almost one fifth lasted over thirty-five years.[15] From a wider cross-section of the population in

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[14] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 8 Dec.1657, Letter XCV, and note 2, Horace, Odes, 1, 13, 17-18, Duppa, p.146.

[15] Stone, Crisis, pp.589,590.

Colyton, Devon, the mean duration of marriages between 1550 and 1699 was over twenty years, and, as among the aristocracy, about one fifth lasted thirty-five years or more.[16] These statistics correlate quite closely with the demographic facts of the small sample in this study. Remarriage was frequent. Wrigley and Schofield estimate that as many as 30 per cent of all those marrying in the mid-sixteenth century were widows or widowers. This proportion declined in a roughly linear manner to 11.27 per cent in 1851.[17] Of nineteen marriages used in this sample five were remarriages, which conforms approximately with the figures suggested by Wrigley and Schofield. Averages disguise great variations not only in the lengths of marriage and widowhood, but also in family organisation and emotional experience. An understanding of the context of shared demographic expectation and experience adds a vital perspective when the historian attempts to understand the dynamics of the behaviour and relationships within marriage in the seventeenth century.

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[16] Houlbrooke, The English Family, p.208.

[17] Wrigley & Schofield, Population History, pp.258,259.

CHAPTER 3 THE THEORETICAL BASIS OF MARRIAGE

As a background against which to consider the actions of husbands and wives in their family life it is necessary to consider the seventeenth century perception of what their roles should be. Society and the family were hierarchical and patriarchial, and the status quo was supported by a formidable array of authorities - religious, legal, medical, classical, and customary. Even political analogies compared the king and the commonwealth with the father in the little commonwealth of his family; the health of the former was believed to depend on the health and order of the latter. Belief in the inferiority of women and their necessary submission to men was fundamental to the concept of order in the family. Women were to be obedient, patient, silent and chaste, and their constant concern was to be the well being of husband and family. The ideal of mutuality and love within marriage, which was also supported by a variety of authorities, provided an attractive but somewhat contradictory counterbalance to those beliefs. This chapter will look at the theories that were intended to govern the relationship between husbands and wives, and begin an assessment, which will be continued in the following two chapters, of the extent to which these theories were accepted as a daily reality.

The strongest theoretical premise of patriarchy which directed relationships between men and women in the seventeenth century was the assertion of the inferiority and weakness of women, and the associated doctrine of the submission and obedience of wives. Even someone as generous in his appreciation of women as Bishop Duppa referred to them as 'being of a finer, and consequently a weaker temper'.[1] The protectiveness

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[1] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 24 March 1657, Letter LXXXVI, Duppa, p.135.

of fathers and husbands so often found in these letters as they attempted to shelter wives and daughters from worrying and unpleasant news, particularly of sickness in the family, has its roots not only in loving concern but in assumptions about feminine weakness. Wives had written early in the sixteenth century: 'We must remember that women are so feeble and weak of nature, that they neither in mind nor yet with the body can sustain nor bear that is heavy and grievous'.[2] This belief had ramifications which went far beyond protectiveness and concern. Wives had also noted that 'a woman is a frail thing, and of weak discretion, and that may be lightly deceived.'[3] He recommended that women's triviality and ignorance should be overcome by the guidance of their husbands. The assumptions that arise from this belief in female inferiority influenced most male/female relationships. For example, when he recommended a bride to Sir Thomas Isham in 1679 the Reverend John Eyre noted that she 'may prove a very endearing consort if well managed'.[4]

Following the death of his wife in 1639 Sir Justinian Isham received a letter of consolation from his kinswoman Lady Anne Mountagu. In Sir Justinian's reply his respect and admiration for Lady Mountagu warred with his doubts about women's mental capacity. After making it known that her letter of consolation meant a great deal to him, and attempting to out-quote her in scriptural texts, he wrote,

> Upon this I have often thought (be it spoken to the honour of your sex) that however men may deem women inferior in the more knowing parts of the mind, yet I see not why they should either bar them from having as good affections, or why such affections should not be in as high esteem as those so much cried up parts of the intellect. A woman we may remember there was, had much forgiven her, because she loved much, but we never find the likes said of any man for knowing much... spiritual graces are indeed as

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2 Ruth Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana, 1956) p.18.

3 Siegel, 'Milton and the Humanist Attitude Toward to Women,' p.48.

4 John Eyre to Thomas Isham, 13 Nov.1679, Diary, p.43.

> heavenly dews descending from above... and in those how many pious good women have been a thousand times more blessed than so many master wits even rabbis and schoolmen so elevated in their sublime speculations and neglecting that one thing necessary.
> I found out your knowledge of Pernassus as well as of Mount Sion and how you have drunk of the waters of Helicon as well as of the dews of Herman.... and as all flowers and verdure have their life from the sun so have your several graces their growth in you, and as the sun itself when it riseth in the high heavens such is your beauty in the ordering of your house: and here indeed you are in your proper orb.[5]

Sir Justinian greatly admired Lady Mountagu's 'humility, purity and modesty', he approved her works of charity toward the needy, her spiritual instruction of her daughters and sons-in-law, and her generous consolation of friends, but in spite of her learning Lady Mountagu's 'proper orb' was the ordering of her house. Sir Justinian's generosity of spirit, or desire to ingratiate himself,[6] led him to advocate that the affections and the spiritual graces of women be valued as highly as the intelligence of men, but he could not conceive of their intelligence being the equal of men.

Sir Justinian probably got what he expected in his wives. His first wife, Jane, was very young when she died, but since she gave birth to five children in the fifty-two months of their marriage it is certainly safe to assume that her concerns were chiefly domestic. Although in her letters her ideas are fluent and easily understood, the grammar and spelling are somewhat random, and a list of her books compiled by her sister-in-law after Jane's death seems to reveal that her intellectual activities were exclusively religious.[7] So it is unlikely that she shared her husband's

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5 Draft of Justinian Isham to Anne Mountagu, 10 Jan.1639/40, NRO IC 224.

6 The letter is in fact so effusive that in parts it gives the impression of being a literary exercise rather than a genuine letter.

7 NRO IC 5111. This small note has been catalogued as 'Lady Judith Isham's books', however, it is clearly written in Elizabeth Isham's hand and entitled by her 'A note of my Sister Isham books'. Her sister-in-law would be so named, not her own sister Judith, who was in

(Footnote continued)

very considerable scholarly interests.

When he married a second time Sir Justinian took care to choose a wife whose temperament and interests matched his own. Yet Lady Vere Isham does not seem to have been expected to share his scholarly pursuits any more than his first wife. Her letters give little evidence of scholarly education or interests.[8] It is perhaps hardly just to use the spelling and grammar of women's letters as an indication of their intellectual attainments, or the intellectual compatibility to be found within a marriage. But the lack of education which is clearly reflected in the letters of intelligent women must have significantly reduced the areas of communication open to married couples. For example, Bishop and Mrs Duppa obviously had a close marriage with many shared interests, probably even to some extent intellectual ones; but Mrs Duppa's writing style, although brisk and intelligent, cannot compare with the bishop's educated and literary style.[9] Lady Vere Isham was chosen as someone with whom Sir Justinian could live peaceably, not as an intellectual companion. Although he sometimes conveyed instructions to the childrens' tutor in letters to Vere she seems to have had a very passive role in the academic side of their education.[10] However, he shared his academic interests with the daughters of his second marriage as well as his sons, and educated them in the classics along with their brothers. Sir Justinian is far from being alone in having different expectations for his daughters than for his wife. In his will Sir Justinian made Lady Isham his executrix only if he died before Thomas was eighteen.[11]

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[7] (continued)
any case not Lady Judith.

[8] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 1 & 11 Feb.1658, NRO IC 448 & 452.

[9] See Duppa, passim.

[10] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 19 June [ ], NRO IC 4159.

It seems almost impossible that the wide range of activities which women competently undertook could have left belief in feminine weakness totally unshaken, at least on a pragmatic domestic level. Sir Justinian's example illustrates the inconsistencies to which men were vulnerable in their assumptions about weakness and inferiority. Individual men probably differed in their suppositions about the precise areas of their wive's and daughter's weakness. The writings of women such as Margaret Cavendish, first Duchess of Newcastle, Aphra Behn, Mary Astell and others, make it evident that some women saw the role they were supposed to adopt as stifling and unacceptable. However, in the letters of these gentry families there is no railing against such beliefs by women. Perhaps one would not expect to find in letters which could be made public within the family remarks which would disturb the men upon whose goodwill wives and daughters depended. However, the 'although I am only a weak woman' introduction to advice and instructions is very familiar. Such lip service to established modes of thought was often the password to independent thinking and behaviour. And although women usually conducted business through stewards, agents and male relatives, the instructions these men carried out were often the decisions of the women, not merely relayed instructions from the head of the family.

However, such independence and freedom was always fragile. In a patriarchal society it must always depend on the continued good will of particular men. If that was lacking the women in any level of society swiftly became dependent and almost powerless. At law every woman remained a feme covert and there were significant legal restrictions upon what she could do and decide independently. Wives who displeased their husbands could be subjected within the law to 'moderate correction' by beating. Even among the puritan writers of conduct books most felt that

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[11] Will of Justinian Isham, May, 1675, NRO IL 1404.

there would be circumstances which made such an action necessary.[12] William Whately expressed his preference for punishment by 'withdrawing from her the plentiful demonstrations of kindness, and fruits of his liberality, and by abridging her of her liberty, and the enjoyment of many things delightful', but correction with blows seemed 'too impious in him to do it, and too servile in her to suffer it'. How could a man, he asked, 'come to kiss and embrace the same person whom he hath laid upon with his fist, or with a cudgell? How doth he cherish her as his ownself, whom he thus approbriously putteth to grief and smart?' However, Whately continued the discussion with an important exception. If a wife continued intransigent, he wrote, 'I think the husband shall not offend in using a fool according to her folly, a child in understanding, like a child in years, and a woman of base and servile condition in a base and servile manner.'[13]

Women did follow Whately's prescript, and stay with harsh husbands. One example was Elizabeth, the wife of the second Lord Leigh, nephew of Lady Vere Isham. In July 1673 her mother, Elizabeth Temple, petitioned the Privy Council complaining of the hard usage of her daughter by her husband. Elizabeth's defencelessness was probably related to her extreme youth, both she and her husband had been under age when the marriage took place in 1669. While Lady Leigh was not friendless or entirely powerless, neither her mother nor the Privy Council had any better solution to offer

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12 Davies, 'Continuity,' p.68.

13 Whately, Bride-Bush (1619) p. 106-108. Davies found that only William Gouge and Henry Smith were opposed to physical correction of wives, but Robert Cleaver in his compilation, probably quoting Smith, also advised the wise husband never to smite his wife. 'A wise husband', he wrote, 'and one that seeketh to live in quiet with his wife, must observe these three rules: often to admonish, seldom to reprove, and never to smite her.' He also advocated that 'the husband must seek diligently to remove the occasion and stone whereat his wife stumbleth, and taketh occasion for grief'. [R[obert] C[leaver], A Godly Form of Household Government (London,1598) p.200,201.]

than her return to her husband.[14] The separation of husband and wife was an unacceptable solution to domestic discord, as can be seen in these comments from the Bride-Bush:

> If it be said, that some men are so violent, as the wife may be in danger to have her brains knocked out, and may she not refuse to dwell with such a one? The answer is: she may decline the present brunt, but she may not forsake the matrimonial society. She may fly to the Magistrate, and seek safety, with a purpose of returning upon such security, but she may not fly quite away from him, with the purpose of not returning.

In his explanation of why the wife may not leave Whately compared her to a soldier, and concluded,

> ...for how can one spend his life better, than in keeping the place where God hath set him, or die with more comfort than when he knowes that in loosing his life he shall find it, because he chooseth rather to loose it in doing his duty, than to save it by omission therof.

Not surprisingly, he added, 'better never to marry than to marry such a husband.'[15] Wives did separate from their husbands, but their economic and social dependence, and the weight of custom made it a difficult and extreme solution. The expectation that a wife's duty necessitates pious submission to brutality created great vulnerablility.

An entry in Thomas Isham's diary of 13 March 1673 provides a more commonplace example of insecurity.

> Mrs Lane sent my father a letter saying that her husband was out of his mind and had gone off to London and had spent £8 in a single night at Northhampton, though he had with him only his son Francis and a boy. He had assembled all the musicians and a great crowd of common people. She was therefore asking father's advice of the best thing to do.[16]

Mary Lane was powerless to prevent her husband going to London, or

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[14] Thomas Isham, Diary, p.110 note 13, p.196 note 4.

[15] Whately, Bride-Bush (1619) P.214.

[16] Thomas Isham, 13 March 1673, Diary, p.197. Mrs Mary Lane was the wife of Francis Lane, a third cousin once removed to Sir Justinian. The connection with the Lanes may have been kept up in part because Francis Lane had been a loyal supporter of the Stuarts. [Ibid. p.190, 192 note

(Footnote continued)

spending money the family could ill afford to lose. Her defence was to turn to a more reliable man for advice. This underpinning of vulnerability must have been a factor in every gentlewoman's life. It is obvious that some were more affected by the reality than others, and large numbers of letters make it plain that many women who were treated with kindness nevertheless internalised the theory of inferiority they were taught. Financial dependence was one of the realities which underscored vulnerability and feelings of inferiority. Few gentry women experienced financial independence, and virtually none could support themselves by their own work. Even those for whom adequate provision of maintenance, dower and jointure was made were usually expected to leave the administration of that money, and often its use, in the hands of fathers and husbands. Whether they wished for this arrangement or not patriarchal plans were difficult to override. This often placed them in the position of having to write begging letters for their own money,[17] and suffer the consequences of poor investments made with their funds, as Mary Isham found when she planned to marry Marmaduke Dayrell, and found that some of her dowry might not be accessible.[18] Some women made decisions about the investment or loaning of their own money, but without public banking facilities management of any sizeable amounts of money depended primarily on contacts and influence, and generally these were much more accessible to men than to women.

From weakness, inferiority and 'otherness'[19] it was a short, and

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[16] (continued)
16].

[17] Elizabeth Isham to her father Justinian Isham, 1 June 1658 & 8 Nov. [ ], NRO IC 463 & 472; Judith Isham to her father Justinian Isham, 27 Dec.1659, NRO IC 493.

[18] Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 28 Sept.1678, NRO IC 1130b.

[19] As feminists have noted of all periods of history, women were 'other'. In the diary of Thomas Isham, written when he was seventeen, there
(Footnote continued)

altogether logical step to the doctrine of female submission. It suited the age to continue to take St Paul's admonition enthusiastically and literally.[20] The main thrust of conduct books and published marriage sermons in the seventeenth century was the subordination of wives in the marital relationship. The extent to which the practice of most married couples from the gentry or any other class matched the theory is more doubtful. It is appropriate to consider the doctrine of submission as so ably set out by the puritan preachers, because their discussions expressed the widely held beliefs of the seventeenth century.

In A Bride-Bush William Whately undertook to show married persons the duties 'by performing whereof marriage shall be to them a great help, which now find it a little hell'. Husband and wife must govern the family together, wrote Whately,

> The man must be taken for God's immediate officer in the house, and as it were the king in the family; the woman must account herself his deputy, an officer substituted to him, not as equal, but as subordinate: and in this order they must govern, he by the authority derived unto him from God immediately, she by authority derived to her from her husband.[21]

According to Whately a woman's duty came under two heads: the first was to acknowledge her inferiority, the next to carry herself as inferior.[22] This was not to be mere deference but a genuine belief in the inferiority of her intellect and judgment. She was to achieve this by practising

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19 (continued)
appears an entry describing women as 'that other page of human life'. [Thomas Isham, 10 July 1673, Diary, p.221.]

20 St Paul's admonition had suited all ages. One of the earliest printed books in England, Caxton's Boke of Good Manners, translated from French and published in 1487, relied on the authority of St Paul and contained a chapter entitled 'How women ought to be governed', in which the author stated 'a woman ought to have reasonably two conditions that is to wit, shame of reproof, and dread of disobeying of her party'. [Boke of Good Manners, Chapter VI, quoted in Powell, p.103,106.]

21 Whately, A Bride-Bush (1619) p.89.

22 Ibid. (1619) p.189.

reverence and obedience, inwardly and outwardly, being 'meek, quiet, and submissive' in speech and gestures.[23] He wrote:

> Every good woman, must suffer herself to be convinced in judgment, that she is not her husband's equal (yea, that her husband is her better by far), without which it is not possible there should be any contentment, either in her heart, or in her house. Where the woman stands upon terms of equality with her husband... the very root of all good carriage is quite withered... woe to those miserable aspiring shoulders which will not content themselves to take their room below the head.[24]

Quoting 1 Timothy 2:11[25] Whately insisted that women must speak little and low before their husbands and men in general. He added,

> I know this duty goes against the hair: for where there is suddenness of wit, and scarcity of wisdom (as in the most of this sex comparatively) there is readiness to speak, and multitude of words; but amongst all wise-men, talkativeness of women (chiefly when it comes to loud and earnest words) hath been reputed a fault most of all in the husband's presence.[26]

The specific description of the 'loud and earnest words' so offensive to 'wise-men' seems to suggest that those women who had tired of speaking 'little and low' were finding submission in word and gesture a doctrine too difficult to practice.[27] This is confirmed by Whately's instruction that 'women must inure themselves to submissiveness of thoughts and speeches in their husband's absence, that they may the better practice the

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[23] Ibid. (1617) p.27,28,38.

[24] Ibid. (1619) p.189.

[25] 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.'

[26] Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.40,41.

[27] It is difficult to avoid comparisons with the twentieth century. The need for women to speak 'loud and earnest words' to be heard on an important subject is still a problem. The research of Pamela Fishman in 1977 indicates that in the private conversations of mixed sex couples women 'are required to be "linguistically available" to men; their own talk is not important. They are obliged to be the audience, the good listener, and to keep the conversation flowing.' Most topics of conversation introduced by the women were killed by a minimal response from the men. [Dale Spender, Man Made Language (London,1985) p.48,49.]

same in their presence, for custom in this thing hath great force'.[28]

Whately also found it necessary to include very extensive instructions on the proper way for husbands to go about obtaining reverence and obedience from their wives. Whately was of course in no way unique among the writers of conduct books and sermons designed to regulate the household. The prayer for the use of husbands which Gouge included at the end of Of Domesticall Duties begins: 'It hath pleased thy divine wisdom (oh invisible and incomprehensible Lord God) to set an especial stamp of Thine Image on sundry persons over others, and in particular on husbands over wives', and the prayer continues with requests for God's help in maintaining and using that authority.[29] Robert Snawsel demanded the total submission of wives, even to a drunken husband because 'it is sinful that the woman should usurp the man's authority'. To get this obedience from a rebellious young wife Snawsel advocated irrational mood changes on the part of the husband, beatings, advice from good women and threats of desertion.[30]

Whereas Whately ennumerated the duties of husbands first, William Gouge taught those of the wives first because 'wives for the most part are most backward in yielding subjection to their husbands'. And he went on to warn: 'though it may seem somewhat contrary to the common course and practise of wives, follow not a multitude to do evil'.[31] Gouge's astonishment when the women of his congregation at Blackfriars took exception to his application of the doctrine of subjection is well-known. Why some should judge him 'an hater of women' when he had merely been

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[28] Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.41.

[29] Gouge, Duties, Patterns of Prayers.

[30] Robert Snawsel, Looking Glass (London,1631) p.50,60,69,77,80, quoted in Davies, 'Continuity,' p.64.

[31] Gouge, Duties (1627) p.14.

giving instruction in the duties of married life, he could not understand.[32] This inability to appreciate the force of the women's protest indicates a dichotomy between the theory and practice of the doctrine of subjection, or perhaps a difference in the way it was perceived and accepted by men and women, or a difference between clergy and laity. There is no doubt that although the tenets of submission permeated society and were well understood, they were not universally practised. In a chapter entitled, 'A fond conceit, that Husband and Wife are equal', Gouge noted that 'contrary to the forenamed subjection... many wives... think themselves every way as good as their husbands, and in no way inferior to them'.[33]

Even at his most extreme Whately seemed to be stressing something that should happen rather than what was happening. He asked how far a wife must obey? The answer was 'to all things, so it be in the Lord'. She must go against her own wishes and do it cheerfully.

> Then it is laudable, commendable, a note of a virtuous woman, a dutiful wife, when she submits herself with quietness, cheerfully, even as a well-broken horse turns at the least turning, stands at the least check of the riders bridle, readily going and standing as he wishes that sits upon his back. If you will have your obedience worth anything, make no tumult about it outwardly, allow none within.[34]

The roles which women took up within their families made anything approaching complete submission or silence highly unlikely for most. As some commentators have observed, it is not necessary to preach submission at great length decade after decade to those who are already becomingly submissive.

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[32] Ibid. (1626) The Epistle Dedicatory.

[33] Gouge, Duties, p.159

[34] Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.42,43. Kathleen Davies notes that the 'metaphor of horse-breaking was a favourite one - it occurs in Bullinger, Smith, Gouge and Dod and Cleaver, but Whately was particularly fond of it'. [Davies, 'Continuity,'p.69.]

The puritan writers failed to deal adequately with the inconsistencies likely to arise from the demand for total obedience to God and total obedience to a husband. Whately's demand that a wife believe absolutely in her intellectual inferiority is inconsistent with his belief that for a husband to compel his wife to do something she thinks is contrary to God's word, even if she is mistaken, is to make her sin.[35] Gouge advised that a wife must disobey her husband if he commanded her to attend Mass or a stage play, to play dice, to prostitute herself or to sell with false measures. But then he pursued his argument on the same page by asking: 'What if a husband be an enemy of Christ: must such subjection be yielded to any enemy of Christ as to Christ himself?' The answer was: 'Yea, because in his office he is in Christ's stead, though in his heart an enemy. In this case will the wisdom, patience and obedience of a wife be best tried.'[36] Kathleen Davies feels that this inability to come to grips with such a real problem indicates that the conduct books were 'conventional texts for the market rather than serious attempts to tackle novel issues'.[37] William and Malleville Haller describe the admisssion that God communicated as freely with wives as husbands as 'the camel's head of liberty within the tent of masculine supremacy'.[38] It may also be a tacit admission of the gulf between theory and practice.

The husband too had his duties, but they were on the whole the responsibilities of superiority and authority. A husband was to protect his wife, to provide for and maintain her, to guide and reprove her, and also to love her and put her interests and requests before those of

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[35] Whately, Bride-Bush, (1619) p.116.

[36] Gouge, Duties, p.391. (This page number is a misprint in the 1626 edition and should be page 191.)

[37] Davies, 'Continuity,' p.70.

[38] Haller, 'The Puritan Art of Love,' p.252.

others. Gouge noted 'as the wife is to know her duty, so the husband much more his, because by virtue of his place he is the Image and glory of God....'[39] And he attempted to placate the women at St Anne's by showing them that for each of the wife's duties he had set out a corresponding duty for husbands.[40] Whately believed that 'more of every grace must needs be required of the man that is the stronger, than of the woman, that is the weaker vessel', and 'in all good things the husband should excel more, because his place is higher and more excellent'.[41] He taught that a husband sinned if he did not 'keep his authority... and maintain himself in that place wherein his Maker hath set him'. But this should be done by skill not force.[42] He insisted that husbands must use their authority, ruled by three principle virtues - wisdom, mildness and justice, and he included detailed advice for putting these principals into practice.[43] Gouge too recommended mildness and tenderness to husbands as they dealt with their wives.[44] Men were repeatedly told in the conduct books not to insist upon the uttermost of their authority. In his attempt to defend his stance on wifely subjection Gouge wrote:

> In a word, I so set down an husband's duties, as if he be wise and conscionable in observing them his wife can have no cause to complain of her subjection. That which maketh a wives yoke heavy and hard, is an husband's abuse of his authority, and more pressing his wives duty, than performing his own, which is directly contrary to the Apostle's rule.[45]

Thus the theoretical balance of authority in marriage was boldly set out

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[39] Gouge, Duties, p.120.

[40] Ibid. The Epistle Dedicatory.

[41] Whately, Bride-Bush (1619) p.30,31.

[42] Ibid. (1619) p.97.

[43] Ibid. (1617) p.21-35.

[44] Gouge, Duties, p.241.

[45] Ibid. The Epistle Dedicatory. Conscionable - equitable, just. [O.E.D.]

in conduct books and sermons. Plays and other literature supported these roles, often by ridiculing deviations from them. The conduct books and most other literature of the day delineated separate roles and duties for husband and wife, but they did not stop there.

Dominance and submission were not the only premises of married life. Whately wrote: 'The husband must rest his heart in his wife... The wife must settle her very soul upon her husband.'[46] And Gouge admitted that 'There are no unequals betwixt which there is so near a parity as betwixt man and wife.'[47]

MUTUALITY IN MARRIAGE

Husbands and wives were to be friends. Theirs was to be a partnership of mutual help and comfort. They were to know each other's minds and hearts, and support each other in trouble and infirmity. And the wife was to be an equal partner in all that her husband had.[48] In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas had called the affection between husband and wife 'the greatest friendship'.[49] The idea of mutuality in marriage was long established. In the fourteenth century the Knight of La Tour-Landry in his book of advice written ostensibly for his daughters, had praised marriage for company and protection.[50] From the beginning of the sixteenth century English writers

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46 Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.9.

47 Gouge, Duties, p.207.

48 Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.33.

49 Thomas Aquinas, In X libros ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum expositio, Bk.VIII, 12, ed. Raimondo M. Spiazzi (3rd. ed. Turin,1964) p.452, in John F. Benton, 'Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love' in F.X. Newman (ed.) The Meaning of Courtly Love (Albany, N.Y.,1968) p.21.

50 Davies, 'Continuity,' p.62.

commended marriage for mutual solace and help, and Cranmer included in the 1549 Prayer Book as one of the reasons for which marriage was ordained: 'The mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity'. Becon wrote in the 1560s:

> [Matrimony is] an high, holy and blessed order of life, ordained not of man, but of God... wherein one man and one woman are coupled and knit together in one flesh and body in the fear and love of God, by the free, loving, hearty, and good consent of them both, to the intent that they two may dwell together, as one flesh and body of one will and mind in all honesty, virtue and godliness, and spend their lives in equal partaking of all such things as God shall send them with thanksgiving.[51]

While the Christian church had never failed to portray the husband as the head of the wife, and most admonition seemed to involve the wife being the help and comfort of the husband, the church did not entirely neglect St Paul's instruction to husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church.[52] The writers of conduct books devoted considerable time and space to the way in which a man should love his wife. Gouge wrote that of the 'common-mutual duties' absolutely necessary to marriage love is the first. 'If they be not performed', he added, 'the end and right use of marriage will be perverted, and that estate made uncomfortable, and very burdensome'.[53] Whately had no patience with those 'most harmful and mischievous yoke-fellows that are ready to spy into the frailties of one another with an evil and malicious eye'. Rather husbands and wives should learn what upsets the other and avoid it, help and support one another rather than upbraid and disgrace.[54] Theirs should be a Godly

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[51] Thomas Becon, The Boke of Matrimony in Worckes, f DC xvi, quoted in Powell, English Domestic Relations, pp.26,27.

[52] Ephesians 5:25 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it.' Even this text supported male superiority since Christ is superior to the church.

[53] Gouge, Duties, p.131, 132.

[54] Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.12

companionship of spiritual equals. Religious priorities observed in choosing a wife and living with her should strengthen the marriage bond. Bishop Duppa wrote in 1654, 'Conjugal love built upon religion, is the house built upon the rock, which no storm of this world can shake'.[55]

There is of course a contradiction between the patriarchal demand for female submission and the desire for mutuality and companionship in marriage. Spiritual equality in particular might necessitate denial of patriarchal authority. Kathleen Davies feels that seventeenth century writers of conduct books took this contradiction in their stride.[56] This may be so, certainly they do not try to reconcile the two ideas. Why? Were they aware of the contradiction? Was this an issue such as the conflict between absolute obedience to God and to a husband which was too hard to address? Or is this a tacit acknowledgement that theory was modified by the pragmatism of everyday life? Baxter's life of his wife, Margaret, makes it clear that it could be the role of a godly wife to remind her husband of his faults and help him to correct them, as God gave her wisdom.[57]

In every day life individuals and families did what suited their needs and personalities. The individual in the stronger position, or with the stronger personality could dictate what was most 'suitable'; and the maintenance of family peace required much more tact and acquiescence on the part of wives than husbands. Gentry couples lived closely together and acted within a framework of well-understood principles, which were doubtless produced combatively in times of stress, and were considered

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[55] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 28 Feb.1654, Letter XLIV, Duppa, p. 82.

[56] Davies, 'Continuity,' p.60. Lawrence Stone [Family, Sex, and Marriage p.137] and William Haller ['Puritan Art of Love,' pp.247 and 250] also note some conflict between patriarchy and mutuality.

[57] Richard Baxter, A Breviate of the Life of Margaret, the Daughter of Francis Charlton... and Wife of Richard Baxter (London,1681) pp.70,71, as quoted in Leites, 'The Duty to Desire', pp. 389,390.

much less in times of domestic harmony.[58] In clashes of will or other crises, male authority was likely to be the ultimate reality. But in day to day life among gentry couples was mutuality more important than submission and authority? We need to explore how far the lives of men and women, husbands and wives, were also structured by personality and by the roles society designated for them.

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[58] James Johnson has argued that increased emphasis on the desirability of companionship in marriage is the contribution of the Puritan writers of conduct books. [Johnson, 'English Puritan Thought on the Ends of Marriage,' pp.429-436]. Kathleen Davies by showing that Puritan doctrines on marriage were not particularly original, and that many Puritan writers considered procreation the first end of marriage, has undermined Johnson's theory. [Davies, 'Continuity,' p.63]. Paul Siegel and William Haller place Milton in the tradition of puritan writing which exalted mutuality in marriage, but John Halkett maintains not only that there 'is no clear distinction between Puritan and Anglican teaching on marriage', but that Milton differed from the major Puritans, not only in his advocacy of divorce on the grounds of 'indisposition, unfitness, or contrarity of mind', but also in his understanding of matrimonial love. [Siegel, 'Milton, and the Humanist Attitude Toward Women,' p.42; Haller, "Hail Wedded Love", pp.79-97; Haller, 'Puritan Art of Love,' pp.235-272; Halkett, Milton and the Idea of Matrimony.

CHAPTER 4 MARITAL ROLES

In the seventeenth century gentlemen lived in the public spheres of university and Inns of Court education, national and country politics, scholarship, business and travel. They also lived in the private sphere of their families. Women shared the private sphere with husbands, fathers, brothers and sons, but touched only the periphery of the public sphere. They had little chance of public education, except in private girls' schools, no chance of a career, little part in politics, except behind the scenes, and they travelled less frequently and less far than the men in their families. Even in the private sphere of the family - the estate and the household - duties were divided between husband and wife. This chapter considers men and women in the domestic sphere and beyond. In assessing these roles much more attention is paid to women, since much more is already known about men.

THE DOMESTIC SPHERE:

As far back as Aristotle, and certainly further, women have been appointed to manage domestic affairs. That it is the man's duty to get, and the woman's to keep was an Aristotelian precept maintained by seventeenth century moralists.[1] In 1591 Henry Smith illustrated the separate duties of married people very aptly in A Preparative to Mariage:

> ...they must think themselves like two birds, the one is the Cock and the other is the Dam: the Cock flieth abroad to bring in, and the Dam sitteth upon the nest to keep all at home... for man's pleasure is most abroad and the woman's within.[2]

Thomas Gataker admonished in A Mariage Praier, 'choose thee an housewife'.

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1 Siegel, 'Milton,' p.48

2 Henry Smith, A Preparative to Mariage (London,1591) p.46, quoted in
(Footnote continued)

He believed that it was no shame for a woman to be 'housewifely' no matter how well born or how wealthy.

> For it is the woman's trade so to be: it is the end of her creation; it is that that she was made for. She was made for man, and given to man, not to be a play-fellow, or bed-fellow, or a table-mate, only with him, (and yet to be all these too), but to be a yoke-fellow, a work-fellow, a fellow-labourer with him, to be an assistant and an helper unto him, in the managing of such domestical and household affairs.[3]

The wives and daughters in the families in this study assumed the role expected of them - they assisted their husbands by caring for the domestic side of the family's affairs. Their sphere was in reality as well as theory separate. They functioned first as mothers and managers of their children and servants.[4] In 1698 when Elizabeth Isham was making plans to join him in London, Justinian wrote, 'I don't question but that you will leave good orders for managing the family in your absence'.[5]

All were involved with housewifery to some extent. Thomas Isham directed in his will that his wife should have 'what goods or stock she by her own housewifery and industry hath gotten.'[6] Most of these household activities were taken for granted and did not get a mention in ordinary letters, but those glimpses that we do get confirm what is already known of the types of activities which absorbed the time of gentry housewives, and the diligence with which they pursued them.[7] And they fulfil the precepts of the conduct-book writers. The food sent frequently to

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2 (continued)
Powell, English Domestic Relations, p.132.

3 Thomas Gataker, A Mariage Praier, or Succinct Meditations: Delivered in a Sermon on the Praier of Eleazor the Servant of Abraham (London,1624) p.18,19.

4 The role of parents is discussed in Part III.

5 Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, 19 March 1697/98, NRO IC 1574.

6 Will of Thomas Isham, 12 Dec.1605, NRO IL 1322.

7 Carroll Camden, The Elizabethan Woman. (Mamaroneck, N.Y.1975) Chap. V.

husbands and brothers in London is an indication that this was a particular concern of wives and mothers, and even sisters. For example, Elizabeth and Susan Isham, the wife and daughter of Thomas Isham, were notable cheese-makers, and their gifts of cheese were much appreciated by members of their immediate family and other relatives.[8] Such gifts as hare-pies, venison, and pigeons were regularly sent from country homes to London. Such housewifely tasks were performed not only by wives but by unmarried daughters. Sir John Isham's daughter Elizabeth kept house for him and her brother Justinian, and for some time Justinian's daughter Jane assisted her. A letter from Bishop Duppa to Justinian Isham reveals that the ordinary chores of the housewife were expected from gentry wives and daughters. When Jane was 16 years old the bishop wrote to thank Isham for his daughter's gifts to himself and his wife, and to compliment her father about her achievements in 'the art of hospitality'.

> We have here tasted both of the works of her dairy, and her pastry, and desire you would let her know, that if the firstfruits of her housewifery be so good, she need not despair of being an excellent guide to your family, and at last to a family of her own when your care hath guided her to it.

In a postscript he added: 'My wife [Jane]... is much pleas'd with the name of Jane, and begins now to be so much the more confident that all who bare the name must necessarily be good housewives'.[9]

Within the sphere of domestic concerns women could sometimes behave with more assertiveness than was usual elsewhere. The daughters of Justinian Isham's first marriage appear to have been careful not to put themselves forward; however Susanna felt able to recommend a cook to her father, since this was very much the sort of domestic concern relative to

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8 Nath[aniel] Isham to Thomas Isham, 22 Aug.1601, NRO IC 15; Thomas Isham to John Isham, 20 Aug.[1604], NRO IC 34.

9 Duppa to Justinian Isham. 19 Aug.1651, Letter XXI, Duppa, p.45. Similar references in Letters XXII and XXIVB.

women.[10] In 1672 Thomas Isham related in his diary a small but revealing incident which occurred on a family picnic outing to Northampton:

> Mother sent Lewis from the garden to fetch a man who sold glass dishes. When he had agreed with Mother over the price of several, she told him to put them carefully in a basket. But when Lewis was about to count out the money for them, the rogue said that he was giving him less than mother had agreed; but Mother refused to give him any more, whereupon he went home scowling.[11]

The incident reveals that Vere Isham was free to purchase items for household use quite independently, but that the servant, Lewis, actually handed over the money. It also illustrates that Lady Isham, who had a very proper attitude of deference toward her husband, certainly did not hesitate to rout a mere salesman.

Anything which pertained to keeping the family in good health or could be shown to be a part of a woman's loving concern for her husband and family, was also considered part of women's domestic sphere, and might entitle a wife to give advice and even direction. When she wrote to her husband in 1670 Vere Isham expressed concern over his health and advised him to stay away from cider and apples. 'I write this my dear,' she added, 'out of my great affection for you.'[12]

In the seventeenth century great interest in illness and possible cures was by no means exclusive to women, but women seem to have had virtually the entire responsibility for nursing or supervising the nursing of members of their families during illness. And where their actual physical care was not required they were expected to provide comfort and support. They were expected to be learned in the skills of the sickroom. Bishop Duppa wrote in 1655 to thank Justinian Isham for his recommendation of a doctor, but added, 'my wife hath been my best physician'.[13] This

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[10] Susanna Carew to Justinian Isham, 28 Dec.16[ ], NRO IC 4115.

[11] Thomas Isham, Diary, 8 June 1672, p.129.

[12] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 16 Jan.1670, NRO IC 661.

comment illustrates the situation well. Although there are several references to consultation with doctors in these letters, the primary and continuing responsibility for the sick rested with wives and mothers. The bishop's recommendation of the medicinal water which his wife distilled illustrates the role of women within their families, and the cures for which they discovered or inherited the recipes. While reassuring Sir Justinian that he was not one of those who thought that because a recipe would cure one thing it was good for everything, Duppa wrote,

> ...yet I must give this testimony to truth, drawn from thirty years experience, that I know not any thing of this nature that better helps the stomack, and more clears the heart from melancholy vapors, than this doth. And which is one commendation more, it is so perfectly innocent, that it hath all the virtues of strong water, and yet hath none of the dangers of it. My wife by her charity hath made it so known to her neighbours, that this sickly time they have exhausted her store, or else you might have been sure of a larger proportion.[14]

When Isham's small children were ailing the bishop wrote comfortingly, 'You are to expect of your young children that which is observed of new-made instruments, which will be hardly avoided, that they must not often be out of tune'. He gave some advice and then continued,

> ...but I persuade myself that your parts are not so destitute of learned physicians but that you have store of counsell, and yet some times some good woman my neighbour, out of the treasure of her experience may tell me more than a whole junto of them.[15]

Responsibilities to sickbeds and childbeds could be very constant for women, not only in theory but in practice. Lady Mary Dering wrote to her husband very soon after the death of her own young son that her cousin had been 'brought to bed' and 'so I am invited to be a gossip today', and in the same letter she wrote 'and tomorrow to my sister Finch, my cousin

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[13] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 21 Feb.1655, Letter LXIV, Duppa, p.108.

[14] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 9 Sept.1657, Letter XCII, Duppa, p.142.

[15] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 30 June 1657, Letter CII, Duppa, p.158.

Finch being ill and her husband, both of fevers; so I am forced to be at an expense more than ordinary'.[16] She made trips between London and Kent to be with her daughters in illness or pregnancy. When her daughter and grandson contracted smallpox Mary Dering went immediately to Kent 'in haste and grief' to be with them, and possibly in this case to offer advice, since seven of her children had previously recovered from smallpox.[17] Similarly, when Betty Southwell, who had been married for seventeen years, was seriously ill for twenty-two days her mother went from London to Gloucestershire 'in hope to contribute something by her care'. Two able doctors from Bristol were attending Betty, but her mother had spent weeks seeking the advice of doctors in London on her daughter's behalf.[18] When Rebecca Sherfield's daughter, Martha Knight, fell ill it was her husband's instant response to send for his mother-in-law.[19] Kate Dering went to be with her brother, Daniel, at King's Weston while he was staying there after being wounded.[20]

An indication that the responsibility for the family in illness rested with the mother, or in this case the grandmother, is evident in a letter from Sir Edward Dering to his son-in-law in which he wrote, 'As for your children and my daughter Knatchbull's they have been no small care for my wife, having been all ill, and that in the absence of their parents.' And all this in the absence also of either a doctor or surgeon, and in the midst of a house full of guests. Dering ended his letter not merely with

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16 Mary Dering to Edward Dering, [c.April 1657], KAO U350 C2/133. The word gossip in this context meant a woman's female friend invited to be present at a birth.

17 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 30 July 1681, KAO U1713 C/4.

18 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 13 Sept.1681, KAO U1713 C/7.

19 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry sherfield, 2 June 1624, & n.d. HRO Herr. XXXI, 31,32.

20 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 30 Nov.1680, KAO U1713 B/4.

news of the children's recovery but with mention of the longing he and his wife felt to see 'little Neddy' - apparently the only one of Southwell's children not with them at the time![21] It would seem that even this crisis of concern and work was so much an expected part of a woman's responsibilities that Dering and his wife had no wish to be relieved of the pleasure of their grand-children's company.[22]

The duties of the sickroom, and the comforts that wives and mothers provided while specifically belonging to the domestic sphere could erode patriarchal absolutism. Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, seems to have found himself reliant upon his wife's support when he was ill in a way which would sound familiar to many wives today. While Lady Dering was away supporting her ailing aunt he wrote from Surrenden, 'I am not sick I thank God: yet I am not very well... Be not troubled for (I hope) there is no cause. Yet', he added, coming to the heart of the matter, 'a little being ill without having thy society is troublesome'.[23]

Yet even during illness, when women often had such specific and often unpleasant responsibilities, attempts were made to shelter them from reality. In 1703 John Isham wrote to his brother from Ireland, 'I am very glad to hear Cousin Baggs and family are got well to Lamport. Her spouse complains of want of health since she left him, but that perhaps will be better concealed'.[24] Was such protectiveness caring concern or patriachal condescension? Certainly if she had been with her husband Mrs Baggs would have been expected to take care of him.

Just what women should appropriately involve themselves in depended to

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[21] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 24 July 1677, KAO U1713 A/47.

[22] In this instance the responsibility fell upon the grandmother in the mother's absence.

[23] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 10 Oct.1634, KAO U350 C2/47.

[24] John Isham to Justinian Isham, 16 Sept.1703, NRO IC 4227.

some extent on the interpretation put upon what the domestic sphere included. John Evelyn for example considered that husbands should not confide the deeper secrets of their estates to their wives, but that in an emergency wives may often give good counsel.[25] Yet the Knight of La Tour-Landry in the fourteenth century had assumed that his daughters would give counsel to their husbands and merely advised them to think carefully before they did so.[26] A general assumption about women's lack of involvement in any but a domestic sphere, and the comparative unimportance of that, can be observed in a comment made by Bishop Duppa in 1654. As a cautionary measure for a while during the Interregnum he had his letters addressed to his wife, but they were delivered late, and he attributed this to 'the feminine inscription; as being directed to a woman, it cannot be thought that there should be any business in the letter.'[27]

Any role for men within the domestic sphere in seventeenth century gentry families was restricted by the same conventions which limited their wives within these confines, and particularly by their outside responsibilities and pleasures. However, some men enjoyed considerable contact with their children.[28] Many men were involved to varying extents with the administration of household servants - their hiring and firing, their respective duties and their behaviour. Even the more mundane aspects of such administration could fall to their lot, particularly when their wives were absent. While Unton Dering was away visiting relatives her husband wrote, 'Phoebe [one of the servants] hath cried this day for a dead uncle: but I will take care of her also that she will not weep out

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25 Christ Church, Oxford. Evelyn MS 143,p26, quoted in Robert H. Michel, 'English Attitudes Towards Women, 1640-1700,' Canadian Journal of History, 13 (April,1978) p.49.

26 Davies, 'Continuity,' p.70.

27 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 29 Aug.1654, Letter LIV, Duppa, p.94.

28 See Part III.

her eyes'.[29] Because they were so often in London when their wives or sisters remained in the country gentry men were frequently called upon to assist in shopping for domestic items. In the 1680s and 90s Sir Justinian Isham found himself responsible for bringing home sugar, spice, oil, vinegar and pickles; not to mention his wife's mantu lined with lustring, a feather tippet, and stockings for his daughter.[30] Henry Sherfield, Thomas and John Isham, and Sir Edward Dering accepted similar commissions earlier in the century, usually for the purchase or payment of gowns for daughters and sisters.[31] The extent to which individual men involved themselves in the everyday life of their households was influenced by political and business commitments and personal preferences, and varied greatly. But even those who were chiefly at home were distanced from the performance or supervision of household tasks. Their interests and responsibilities lay outside the domestic sphere.

BEYOND THE DOMESTIC SPHERE:

What men could do outside their household in the seventeenth century was limited by status, wealth, ability and inclination; for gentlemen this left many opportunities. Since most history of the seventeenth century written during the last three hundred years has dealt with public aspects of men's lives it is unnecessary to enumerate all the responsibilities and career and work opportunities open to men. However, in order to illustrate the contrast of options available to men and women, some at least of the

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29 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 15 Nov.1639, KAO U350 C2/69.

30 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 2 March [ ], and 20 June [ ], NRO IC 4372 & IC 4381.

31 Thomas Isham to John Isham, 30 March [1604]. NRO IC 31; Taylors bill for gowns for Mary and Jane Bedford, 10 March 1618/19, HRO Herr. XXX 13; William Hart to Henry Sherfield, 17 Dec.1629, HRO Herr. XXX, 69; Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 22 April 1634, KAO U350 C2/42, 'For Betty's gown, I will consider on it.'

activities of the men in the Sherfield, Dering and Isham families should be mentioned. In educational opportunities, career choices, involvement in politics, travel and the creation of a wide circle of friends and acquaintances men had infinitely more options and choices than the women in their families.

In making his way in life as the son of a Wiltshire family of modest means, Henry Sherfield spent much of his life in London, and even when established as a lawyer he continued to practice from his chambers there. He served in the four parliaments between 1624 and 1629, and was Recorder of Southampton and Salisbury. In these positions and in his responsibilities as a Justice of the Peace he travelled a great deal and had a wide and influential acquaintance. By contrast, his wives seem seldom to have travelled to London, and to have visited and socialised chiefly within their families. The careers of Henry Sherfield's step-sons illustrate the difficulties faced by young men of the lower gentry in the attempt to establish themselves, but they also demonstrate how much greater were their options than those of their sisters. George Bedford, after many years of struggle, which took him to London, to Kent and to the Netherlands, eventually established himself in the business of madder production and inspection for the government.[32] Thomas Bedford was apprenticed to a grocer in London.[33]

Thomas Long became a tradesman in London,[34] and later served in the army and rose to the rank of colonel.[35] May [sic] Long aspired to sail with Sir Walter Ralegh or Sir Charles Snel.[36] And Walter Long, who became

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[32] Documents relating the George Bedford's career, HRO Herr. XXXIII, 1-46.

[33] Indemnity of Apprenticeship. 7 March 1626/7, HRO Herr. XLIII, 10.

[34] Thomas Long to Rebecca Sherfield, 4 Feb.1624/5, HRO Herr. XXXI, 39.

[35] John Burke & John Bernard Burke, Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Ireland, and Scotland (London,1841) p.320.

the heir and administered the family estate of Whaddon, was sheriff of Wiltshire and a member of parliament, and at the outbreak of the civil war raised a troop of horse. In 1647 he fled to France with Holles and others, and returned at the Restoration.[37] Henry Sherfield's nephew, Tristram Sherfield, ventured briefly as far afield as Newfoundland on business.[38] But for the Long, Bedford and Sherfield daughters marriage was the only career option.

Edward Dering, the first baronet, attended Magdalen College and was admitted to the Middle Temple. He was Lieutenant of Dover Castle and a member of the Long Parliament, and he raised a cavalry regiment for the king when war broke out. These, along with the administration of his estate, were Dering's responsibilities to his county and king; his recreational pursuits led to his creation of the Surrenden Library and recognition as one of the most prominent of the early seventeenth century antiquarians. Education and custom excluded his three wives from these duties and these recreational pleasures. His son attended Sidney Sussex College, and later Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was also admitted to the Middle Temple. He administered his estates at Surrenden Dering and after the Restoration he served consistently as a parliamentarian. He also held a variety of political offices, and his responsibilities obliged him to spend the years between 1662 and 1669 in Ireland. The diplomatic career of Sir Robert Southwell, Dering's son-in-law, took him to Lisbon and Brandenburg, and later both he and his son Edward served as Principal Secretary for Ireland. During most of Southwell's absences as ambassador

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36 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, n.d. HRO Herr. XXXI, 9; Account of Henry Long's Estate, 28 March 1617, HRO Herr. XVI, 8, includes: 'Item to Mr. Henry Sherfield as disbursed for May Long for his fitting out in his voyage to the East Indies and other expenses for him. £80,0.0.'

37 Burke, Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies, p.320.

38 Tristram Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 20 Aug.1610, HRO Herr. XLI, 10.

his wife remained at their home, or with her parents at Surrenden. Sir Edward, the third baronet, was a member of parliament, and in 1689 founded the 24th Foot regiment which he commanded. His brother Charles served as Auditor General of Ireland and Clerk of the Council in Ireland. Daniel Dering became a naval captain and later commanded the regiment of foot his brother had established. Their brother Robert was also a soldier who served in flanders.[39] Although better dowered[40] than the Long and Bedford daughters, women in the Dering and Southwell families had no career choices beyond marriage or remaining single and at home. One of Edward Dering's daughters and three of Southwell's remained unmarried.

The Isham family had established itself at Lamport in the late sixteenth century by the business acumen of John Isham. No such opportunities were open to women no matter how shrewd their business sense. Elizabeth Isham's consignment of the widow's jointure from her first marriage to her husband John as the capital to begin his business was the more typical and passive contribution expected of wives. John Isham's son, the squire Thomas, even though blind, actively administered his estates and was also a great reader of the classics and the works of the day. Perhaps his blindness necessitated the involvement of his wife and daughters in these activities, but the evidence does not reveal this. The best known representative of the Isham family in the seventeenth century was Thomas's grandson, Sir Justinian. Justinian Isham attended Christ's College, Cambridge, and the Inns of Court. He visited the Netherlands in his youth, and devoted much of his life to serious scholarly work. He was one of the earliest Fellows of the Royal Society and enjoyed his association with a number of the prominent churchmen and

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39 Robert Dering to Edward Southwell, 19 June 1697, KAO U1713 D/36.

40 £2500 for Katherine and £2000 for the other daughters. [Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 17 June 1682, KAO U1713 C/43.]

scholars of the time. He added to his house at Lamport, involving himself closely with the design and building, and after the Restoration he was a member of parliament. Few of these responsibilities or pleasures were shared with his wives, or with his sister Elizabeth, who seems nevertheless to have shared some of his scholarly aptitudes. And in spite of the fact that the two daughters of his second marriage shared their brother's tutors and received careful supervision of their impressive scholarship from their father, there was no chance that they could go on to the university as their brothers did.

Isham's son Thomas was one of the first to take a grand tour of Europe. Women did make trips to the continent, but such trips were usually undertaken as dependents of the men in their families. In 1679, for example, Mary Dayrell hoped to accept the invitation of her brother Sir Thomas Isham to visit him in Paris, and was confident of persuading her husband.[41] In 1677, while Sir Philip Perceval was travelling on the Continent his mother and sisters joined him. They settled in Saumur while he travelled in Italy, and later he joined them in Paris, and they travelled back to England together in March 1679.[42] Sir Justinian's second son, who became the heir at the death of Sir Thomas, was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, and Lincoln's Inn, and also travelled briefly on the continent. This Sir Justinian devoted himself chiefly to a parliamentary career. His younger brother, John, attended Christ's College, Cambridge, and the Inner Temple. He was admitted to the bar, and was later Under Secretary of State.[43]

Sir Justinian, the fifth baronet, also pursued a political career, and

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[41] Mary Dayrell to Thomas Isham, 24 April 1679, NRO IC 1179.

[42] H.M.C. Egmont Vol. p.viii.

[43] Venn, J. & J.A. (eds) Alumni Cantabrigienses (1922-7) Part 1, Vol. 2, p.452.

his brother Edmund, who became the sixth baronet, was a distinguished Doctor of Law, Fellow and Vice-President of Magdalen, Advocate of Doctor's Commons and Judge of the Admiralty Court.[44] The contrast between their full public lives, constrained in part by birth order and responsibilities to family and estate, but nevertheless encompassing very real choices, with those of their sisters, is very striking. Of four sisters who lived to maturity only one married. Although the three remaining occupied positions of some authority within a family of late marrying brothers, and seem to have passed their time enjoyably, their letters show them to have been women of shrewd perceptions whose abilities far outreached their opportunities.

However, within this strict division of spheres of influence and labour some women, in some families, in some circumstances, were able to redefine their responsibilities. If convenient or necessary the duties of caring for husband and children could include activities not strictly domestic. There are numerous examples from the seventeenth century of women who involved themselves in the administration of the family estates, both as wives and widows. Lady Joan Thynne and Lady Anne Newdigate were both notable for their efficiency. Two thirds of Sir John Newdigate's estates were assigned to his wife's jointure should he predecease her, which, as Vivienne Larminie states, could have been dangerous. But in this case

> ...not only did she choose not to reserve her dower rights exclusively for her own use, but she also positively added to the Newdigate estates, not only by annexing land she herself had purchased but also by an efficiency in running the estates and a devotion to their preservation which contrasted sharply with that of her husband.[45]

Joan Thynne's diverse activities not only included managing the large

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[44] Henry Isham Longdon (ed) The Visitation of the County of Northamptonshire, 1681 Harleian Society, Vol. LXXXVII (London,1935) p.253.

[45] Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' p.142.

household at Longleat, but also the estate during her husband's lengthy absences in London. She was proficient in financial and legal procedures, and defended her right to Caus Castle, which was a disputed part of her inheritance, both at law and by physically occupying and fortifying it.[46] Lady Brilliana Harley had much of the immediate responsibility for the Harley estate long before the more dramatic events of the civil war thrust exceptional responsibilities upon her.[47] Judith Barrington, the wife of Sir Thomas Barrington, also played a very independent role in administering both the properties which had belonged to her first husband and those of the Barringtons.[48]

There is little evidence among the Dering family papers of the active involvement of wives in estate duties. However, Edward Dering, the first baronet, expected both his wife, Unton, and his mother, to understand and act upon details of estate business of which he wrote to them.[49] However, it is unlikely that either had much independence to implement their own decisions since Sir Edward's father died only eight years before his son, and lived in the family home at Surrenden. We know from her later disputes with her stepson, who was the heir, that Unton Dering made decisions about the leasing of land and houses while she occupied Surrenden after her husband's death, and before her stepson began to lease it from her after the Restoration. Also, that she made and implemented

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46 Wall, Two Elizabethan Women, pp.xx-xxiii, Letters: 16, 21, 26, 28, 40, 50 & 56.

47 See for example: Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, 17 & 24 Feb., March & 3 March 1625/26, 8 April, 5 & 12 May 1626, BL Loan 29/72.

48 Sam Brown to Judith Barrington, 24 Feb.1634, BL Egerton 2646 f.74; Judith Barrington to Edmund Smyth, 29 July 1640, BL Egerton 2646 f.149; Richard Laseby to Judith Barrington, 12 July 1642, BL Egerton 2646 f.177; William Rowlands to Judith Barrington 19 July 1642, BL Egerton 2646 f.179; Katherine Chanerell to [Judith Barrington] 13 April 1643, BL Egerton 2646 f.192; ERO D/D Ba E9.

49 Edward Dering to his mother Frances Dering, n.d. KAO U350 C2/24.

decisions about her jointure lands, to most of which Sir Edward objected.[50] It is not possible to assess the precise extent to which Mary Dering, wife of the second baronet, was involved in estate decisions. But she was her husband's trusted confidant, and he made her the sole executrix of his will, in spite of the existence of five sons and numerous trusted male relatives.[51] This indicates that when it was appropriate she would have been expected, at the very least, to carry out his instructions.

Rebecca Baylie, who married Henry Long, and in middle life, Henry Sherfield, fulfilled within her life time all the roles traditionally open to women in the seventeenth century. She was successively daughter, wife, mother, widow and second wife, step mother, mother-in-law and grandmother. Throughout her life and its succession of changes she involved herself in a wide variety of activities, ususally with considerable independence of thought and decision. Her letters reveal no obvious modification of her independent behaviour after her marriage to Henry Sherfield. While still a widow Rebecca applied to Sherfield for advice as a family friend and their legal advisor, but she kept the reins of administration mostly in her own hands. Her brothers-in-law, Roger Martyn, Thomas Lovibond and William Allen, had been appointed feoffees to guard the interests of her children, but everyday decision making and organisation appears to have been her responsibility. Although her eldest son, Henry, was 22 when his father died and about 30 when he himself died, he seems never to have taken an active role in managing the estate or the Long finances. This is likely to have been as much dictated by his own indifference and irresponsibility as his mother's decision. However, even after Walter

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50 Unton Dering to her stepson Edward Dering, 21 Jan.[ ], n.d. [arch.1653], 7 Feb.1653/4, KAO U1107 C/20,21,22.

51 PRO PROB 11376 C/10357, quoted in full in Bond, Diaries, pp.208-210.

Long inherited the estate and began, with his step-father's help and advice, to repay debts and straighten out the family's tangled financial affairs, Rebecca still retained some control and certainly continued to advise. She wrote in April 1622, some months after Walter had inherited, asking Henry to make arrangements about leasing part of Whaddon and dealing with the sheep on it, as she felt that Walter Long was 'altogether unskillfull' in such matters.[52] She then gave details of what would be satisfactory from the point of view of Walter Long's interests. She admitted that she had no authority to organise this, but was sure that Walter would be grateful. Although she was asking Henry to enquire about the lease because he was at Whaddon at the time, the idea was very much her own, and the details of the possible arrangement were clearly at her finger tips.

It is apparent from letters written by Rebecca to Henry Sherfield before their marriage that her knowledge of the business of running an estate was extensive, and that she enjoyed her decision making role. In May 1614 she wrote regarding the possible sale of the Honour of Gloucester, which was in the possession of the Long family, and it is clear that she herself had been negotiating with possible buyers and their representatives, and that she was knowledgeable about the functioning of the Honour and its profits. She referred the matter to Sherfield in his capacity as the family's legal adviser who was also handling the matter with possible buyers.[53] In November 1615 she asked whether Mr Estcourt had accepted the stewardship of Peneford, because it was her responsibility to notify those effected by the decision.[54] It was also

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[52] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 7 April 1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 18.

[53] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 7 May 1614, HRO Herr. XXXI 43; Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 29 Nov.1615, HRO Herr. XXXI, 46.

[54] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 29 Nov.1615, HRO Herr. XXXI, 46.

Rebecca who, after her first husband's death, had given William Shipman the living at Whaddon and later leased some of his lands from him.[55]

Henry Sherfield's accounts during the early years of his marriage to Rebecca, and the volume of legal and financial materials in his possession which relate to the Long estates provide clear evidence that he firmly took over the legal and financial administration of the Long family's affairs after the marriage. However, since he continued to be consulted and give legal support and advice after Walter Long inherited, his role was probably dictated as much by the increasingly tangled and troubled state of the Long family finances as by Rebecca's desire to abdicate her responsibilities. This conclusion is influenced by the fact that Sherfield's legal knowledge greatly benefited both Rebecca and Walter, and by the fact that he was in the country only for short visits.

In many gentry families where the husband remained in London for long periods, most of the day to day decisons had to be made by the wife. In many instances not only was she on the spot to implement the action, but she was more familiar with the situation. There were apparently many aspects of household and farm management about which Rebecca Sherfield did not consult her husband. Her attitude and expectations about her role were unconsciously revealed in her letters by such incidental remarks as: '...and our affairs both in town and country are all well I praise God',[56] and '...though none of our affairs gave me any occasion more than ordinary nor no news worth the troubling you....'[57] Rebecca dealt with the payment and receiving of rents, the payment of some legacies,[58] and decisions about the sale of cattle.[59] She also appears to have had considerable

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[55] William Shipman to Henry Sherfield, April 1617, HRO Herr. II, 42.

[56] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, n.d. HRO Herr. XXXI, 9.

[57] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 19 Nov.1616, HRO Herr. XXXI, 3.

[58] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 13 Oct.1617, HRO Herr. XXXI,7.

independence in deciding which land should be sown, and when, on Henry Sherfield's lands as well as the Long estates. In October 1617 a dispute arose concerning some land she had already sown, which one of their tenants claimed Sherfield had let to him. Rebecca wrote to Henry 'if it be so I did much mistake, for I should not have been so unmannerly to forget my self so much as to set to sowing if I had known you had let it before, therefore good friend write me something of it before I go on any farther.'[60] Not only does this indicate some lack of communication, which in the context of other dealings between them was more likely to have been accidental than deliberate, but it certainly shows that Rebecca had felt no obligation to consult Henry over what sowing should be done. This and other incidents reveal that Rebecca interpreted the concept of wifely submission rather loosely.

Athough the 'business' side of their relationship was characterised by a considerable degree of independence on Rebecca's part, its chief characteristics were co-operation and shared information and advice. Neither could readily move independently. Henry depended on Rebecca for information about circumstances and incidents at home and for rapid implementation of instructions;[61] Rebecca depended on her husband for legal advice and frequently deferred to his decisions in matters she could have decided for herself. The precise balance of decision making and action was flexible and is now impossible to ascertain, and it is difficult to say which areas, apart from the legal, Rebecca felt belonged specifically to her husband. She does not seem to have consulted him any more or less over his own lands than over issues arising from the Long

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59 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 26 Jan.1616, HRO Herr. XXXI, 4.

60 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 13 Oct.1617, HRO Herr. XXXI, 7.

61 He could, and some times did, use his brothers in this capacity also, but never to the extent that he used Rebecca.

estates. A variety of incidents illustrate the complexity of their relationship, and the closeness of consultation between them.

When Henry Sherfield was elected Recorder of Salisbury in 1623 Rebecca's letter informing him of the event shows her satisfaction and identification with his success. She wrote '...you had many voices for you, I think indeed more than all the others which stood for it'. The letter also illustrates her efficiency in immediately discovering and relaying to him when his presence would be required.[62] When the need arose to hire a new coachman Rebecca looked for one in Wiltshire and passed on recommendations to Henry. The decision about whom they should ultimately hire was made in consultation.[63] In October 1617 Henry wrote to his wife telling her of his lack of success in selling his conies. She immediately made the best bargain she could - asking two shillings a couple, but accepting twenty pence as the best possible price. However, although she made this definite sale with all possible speed she sold only 'three score couple', saying that she would 'go no farther till I hear from you, and see how these prove'.[64] Both of them expected that she could competently take over this responsibility, and her hesitation was not to give her time to consult again with her husband, but to see how the sale she had made worked out.

Rebecca's ability was frequently demonstrated in the information she provided for her husband and the decisions she made. Late in 1616 she replied to a query Henry had made concerning the collecting and payment of money by competently listing the options open and then concluding '...whether of them you think fittest if you write to me shall be done good friend'. In asking Henry's advice about whether she should accept

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[62] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 Dec.1623, HRO Herr. XXXI, 26.

[63] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 1 June 1616, HRO Herr. XXXI, 1.

[64] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 20 Oct.1617, HRO Herr. XXXI, 8.

the £430 offered for a living or wait until he came home it is evident that her reason for waiting was that while they could get the £430 easily, more may be offered if they waited awhile.[65]

Rebecca may have deferred to her husband's decisions in the early days of their marriage because of the role he was playing in rehabilitating the Long family finances, but whatever the reason it is difficult to detect a pattern of things usually referred to him. She seems to have expected him to send instructions about such matters as the method of sending to London money raised from rents or bonds.[66] Such money usually went first to Rebecca no matter who had collected them and then she sent on to Henry what was not needed for the day to day running of the estates.[67] This applied to Long revenue, and the revenue from his own estates. The immediate expenses of the estates were controlled by Rebecca, but details of major income and expenditure were administered by Henry. On at least one occcasion Rebecca had to apply to Henry to discover if he had already made a rent payment being demanded of her.[68] This may indicate that Henry did not always notify Rebecca of those items of business which he considered to be his responsibility.

On other occasions Rebecca chose to deal herself with matters over which Henry could well have been consulted, in order to save him trouble. Typically she wrote: 'I pray and wish, you may like with what is done in it, if it be not well impute it to my not knowing what you would have done and to nothing else... I thought there was no need that you should have any more trouble.'[69] The thought that he may not entirely approve does

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65 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, n.d. [probably Sept.or Oct.1616] HRO Herr. XXXI, 9.

66 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 31 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 20.

67 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, n.d. HRO Herr. XXXI, 28.

68 Matilda Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3 Nov.1629, HRO Herr. II, 42.

not seem to have given her any cause to doubt her decision.

There are sufficient examples from the seventeenth century to make it obvious that the role assumed by Rebecca Sherfield was not atypical. And the lack of excuse or justification in her letters confirms this. Decision making which concerned her children was direct and unveiled, however in business matters her decisions were usually implemented through a variety of male agents - brothers-in-law, sons-in-law, and men employed by the Long and Sherfield families. It is impossible to tell whether she ever questioned this mode of achieving her intentions, but certainly the decisions she implemented were almost always those she concurred with, and often ones she had taken independently.

Jane and Susanna Isham, the two daughters of Thomas Isham, were similarly knowledgeable about estate business and financial matters, and they assisted when instructed and sometimes acted independently. In a letter written in 1604 Thomas Isham entrusted Susanna with the responsibility of conveying an urgent request for a loan to her brother-in-law, Sir Anthony Denton.[70] Jane wrote to her brother John while their father was still alive, 'if you have any business in the country I will do it for you'.[71] This could have meant only business considered appropriate to women, but other letters between John and his sisters indicate otherwise. Soon after their father's death, while Jane was still living at home unmarried, she wrote to John from Lamport about an offer for his wool, of between 24 and 26 shillings a tod. Mr Piman, who made the offer, asked Jane to write to John and communicate his answer as soon as possible, however, Jane wrote to her brother, 'we do hear that at Buckingham wool is at 27 shillings ready money, and therefore we told

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69 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 23 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 53.

70 Thomas Isham to John Isham, 20 April [1604] NRO IC 34.

71 Jane Isham to John Isham, n.d. [1601-1605] NRO IC 4357.

him that his price were too small'.[72] So although Jane notified John of the offer, she and her mother had already turned it down without consulting him. In a letter about the same time Susanna Isham sent her brother a detailed report of storm damage around the estate, and the repairs she and her mother and sister had authorised. She included the price being offered for fat cattle by the butchers who had visited Lamport, and the plans made to move the cattle.[73] In another letter Susanna sent John a detailed account of Sir Walter Montagu's actions and intentions in the long running legal dispute between him and the Ishams.[74]

It is not possible to gauge the precise boundaries of authority in estate business within Thomas Isham's family during the first decade of the seventeenth century; such assessments are difficult at any time when responsibilies are shared. John, Susanna and Jane were all unmarried, and the women were mostly at home at Lamport, while John was in London. The final authority involving large sums of money was John's, but his sisters often had more contact with people such as wool buyers, butchers, and cattle men, and more knowledge about the day to day affairs of the estate, and he not only took their advice but seems to have left many decisions to them. It may even be that he was somewhat distracted from the management of estates at this time by the round of activities his wooing involved. Their mother, Elizabeth Isham, had always been respected and trusted within her family for her domestic and financial management.[75] Moreover, she made loans to her son-in-law, John Ardes, and to many other family

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[72] Jane Isham to John Isham, [1606 or 1607] NRO IC 4347. Tod - a weight used in the wool trade, usually 28 pounds, but varying locally. [O.E.D.]

[73] Susanna Isham to John Isham, 'this present Saturday', n.d. [1606 or 1607] NRO IC 3698.

[74] Susanna Isham to John Isham, n.d. NRO IC 3699.

[75] Will of Thomas Isham, 12 Dec.1605, NRO IL 1322.

members.[76] Her authority in these areas may have been increased by the role necessitated by her husband's blindness, and it is possible that her increased role led to wider ranging responsibilities being permitted to Jane and Susanna. But in view of the roles of Rebecca Sherfield and Joan Thynne at that time it seems unlikely that the role of Thomas Isham's daughters was exceptional.

Even Lady Vere Isham whose role was far from independent, when compared with women like Rebecca Sherfield, was assumed to have a considerable knowledge about the estate, and to be able to pass on to the Lamport bailiff, John Chapman, the many detailed instructions she received from her husband about such matters as the collection of money, purchase of beasts, and the discovery of good tenants.[77] Vere Isham even ventured an occasional judgment of her own. In January 1671, after she had let Justinian know that she had passed on his messages to Chapman, 'as I have done in all your former letters', she noted that if it was left up to Chapman to find tenants there would be none because he preferred to have it in his own hands to stock and order, a possibility of which she disapproved.[78]

The direct involvement of women in estate business seems to have been greater earlier in the century. Rebecca Sherfield, Elizabeth, Jane and Susanna Isham, Joan Thynne and Anne Newdigate all had very direct

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76 'An obligation of John Ardes to Elizabeth Isham for money borrowed 1618' (£220), NRO IC 2118; Richard Tremyll to Elizabeth Isham, 30 July 1612, NRO IC 145(b), in this letter Richard Tremyll asked to be allowed to delay repayment of money lent by Mrs Isham. Will of Mrs Elizabeth Isham, 20 July 1621, NRO IL 1230. The will lists those with debts still outstanding one month before Elizabeth Isham's death: son-in-law John Ardes, cousin Sir Euseby Isham, sister-in-law Barbara Isham, cousin Augustine Isham, cousin John Ireton, cousin Elizabeth Buton, and twelve others.

77 Justinian Isham to Vere Isham, 7 & 24 Jan.1670/1, NRO IC 659 & 711.

78 Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 23 Jan.1670/1, NRO IC 665. John Chapman resisted the tendency at that time to let land rather than farm it directly. [Isham, Diary p.21].

responsibilites. After 1660 this direct involvement is less evident. Elizabeth Isham, who was the trusted and respected confidant of her husband, rarely refers to estate matters in her letters written in the last two decades of the century. The increasing importance of the steward in this period, as posited by Roger Hainsworth,[79] may have influenced this development. If the context changed in this way for women it probably created a less direct role in estate management for men also, so it need not be construed as a lessening of women's independence, although it certainly would have narrowed their field of activities.[80]

Clearly the extent to which women were involved in estate business was dependent on ability and personality, but also upon circumstances, the most important of which were the expectations of the head of the family, and his presence or absence. It seems to have been accepted as entirely appropriate for women to deputise for their husbands. What is useful or necessary usually becomes acceptable, and many families must have been very dependent on the ability of women to carry on independently. One of the most spectacular examples must surely be Lady Brilliana Harley's notable defence of Brampton Bryan during the civil war. The Countess of Sunderland, after her husband was killed at the first Battle of Newbury in

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79 Roger Hainsworth, 'Finding the interest: the role of the election agent in Stuart England, 1660-1714.' (A paper given at the 9th Conference of Australasian Historians of Medieval and Early Modern Europe, 24-28 Aug.1987.)

80 The right to manage an estate can not be equated with independence in other areas. For example, in the fifteenth century, Margaret Mauteby had little choice about whether or not she would marry John Paston, but during her marriage her actions in managing and protecting household and estate, althougth all done very specifically in the name of her husband, were both independent and extensive. [H.S. Bennett, The Pastons and their England (Cambridge,1922/1979) pp.27,62-66.] Lady Anne Clifford's role in later life in the administration of her estate contrasts most starkly with her role as a wife during her first marriage to Richard Sackville, Lord Dorset. [Katharine Hodgkin, 'The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford: a Study in Class and Gender in the Seventeenth Century.' History workshop journal, Issue 19 (Spring,1985) passim.]

1643, brought up her children and very successfully managed and preserved the family estates for her son.[81] Undoubtedly the war thrust responsibilities for estate management of a less conspicuous kind on many other gentlewomen. What became necessary for the support or defence of the family entered, at least temporarily, the sphere of domestic concerns.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the wives remained involved in estate decisions when their husbands were at home, since at those times few letters passed between them; but once again the situation seems mostly to have been influenced by circumstance. Henry Sherfield implemented estate decisions while in the country, in some instances at his wife's request if she was visiting family elsewhere. But in the balance of authority clearly there was little to be gained from him taking over entirely since as a lawyer and assize judge he would be regularly away from home. Sir Justinian Isham, on the other hand, in spite of being elected to parliament at the Restoration remained as much at Lamport as possible. And while there he took up the reins of estate management, employing the same men to conduct the business of the estate as he did when he sent his instructions from London.

The extent to which women were passing on instructions or making up their own must often have been ambiguous, particularly to observers; but although many women did behave independently the source of their authority was the head of the family, or the family's dependence upon them. There was no scope in the seventeenth century for a single woman to administer estates without the 'shelter' of male authority. Jane and Susanna Isham assisted their brother while he was in London. Abigail Harley took over the role of her mother after her death and acted on behalf of her father and her elder brother, and with their authority, while they were involved in politics.[82] A widow could strike a somewhat independent line, but only

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[81] Isham, Diary, p.24,42.

because cruel necessity had moved from her the male authority which she had proved herself willing to accept. The independence of widows acting on behalf of their children, for example in marriage negotiations, is well known. When widows remarried they usually retained considerable responsibility for the children of the first marriage; step-fathers often did not assume all the responsiblities of a father. This was clearly seen in both of Henry Sherfield's marriages to widows with children. Although his advice and help was sought and gratefully received, Rebecca Sherfield [Long] in particular retained the power of final decision in such issues as marriage and career choices. Lady Nicholas Strode had remarried, but it was she who successfully conducted the negotiations for the marriage of Elizabeth Cholmley, the daughter of her first marriage, to Sir Edward Dering's heir.[83]

Similar principles applied to political involvement in the seventeenth century. This was an exclusively male domain, yet the hierarchical society and the patronage system probably gave women some prominence in politics that they were not to have again until contemporary times.[84] Exchanging favours, requesting, appealing, intriguing and using influence on behalf of relatives, were functions of seventeenth century politics which could be performed by women as well as by men. Naturally the scope for women to be involved was not as great as for men, but upper class women, particularly widows, at times wielded considerable influence. In November 1622 John Judge, who lived near the Sherfields, sent his wife to request Rebecca Sherfield to request Henry Sherfield to be his friend in a

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82 Sir Edward Harley to his daughter, Abigail Harley, letters 2 Sept.1689 to 23 May 1695, BM Loan 29/66 (2).

83 Dering, autobiography, p.14 in Bond, Diaries, p.113.

84 Simon Adams notes the important role of personal patronage among the female Privy Chamber of Elizabeth. [Simon Adams, 'Eliza Enthoned? The Court and its Politics,' in Christopher Haigh, The Reign of Elizabeth (Basingstoke,1984) pp.73-77.]

dispute between himself and George Beech.[85] Such incidents of female influence and intervention on an almost domestic level are common to all ages. But the seventeenth century also provided examples of political influence and intervention by women at a more august level. In June 1658 while Sir Justinian Isham was under guard in Northampton, Bishop Duppa informed him that one of his women friends had 'made a journey' on behalf of Sir Justinian's freedom, but had discovered that the person she had hoped to move was much set against him.[86]

Edward Dering, the first baronet, married his second wife Anne Ashburnham in 1625, in part for the political benefit which would accrue to him because her mother was a kinswoman of the mother of the Duke of Buckingham.[87] Lady Elizabeth Ashburnham devoted herself effectively and enthusiastically to the advancement of all her family. Edward Dering became a baronet, a gentleman of the Privy Chamber, and gained the lieutenancy of Dover Castle. A long letter written in January 1626 by Elizabeth Ashburnham to her son-in-law illustrates her strong family orientation, her industry, her extensive contacts in government and society, and the extent of her efforts to get Dering elected to parliament:

> ... but I went my self to my Lord to present your service.... I also moved him for a burgess place. My Lord said, if he had known in time, you should have been served as soon as any.... After this, being not satisfied, I mustered the secretaries together, Packer, Nicholas, for the Cinque Ports, and the other new one.... Now there is

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85 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 11 Nov.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 23.

86 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 30 June 1658, Letter CII, Duppa, p.159. In note 3 Sir Gyles Isham speculated that the woman concerned might have been Lady Dysart, a friend of both Sir Justinian and the Duppas, or the artist Mrs Joan Carlile, who was a first cousin once removed of Anne Litcott, the second wife of John Thurloe, Cromwell's Secretary of State.

87 The extent of patronage among the relatives of the Duke of Buckingham was exceptional. See Roger Lockyer, Buckingham. the Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592-1628 (London,1984) pp.115-122, & passim.

> only one hope, which they will all watch to do you service in, that is if any be double returned, as perhaps some, not trusting only to my Lord, make means in other places... God send us good speed for your business! There shall be no failing in poor me to do you all the service and good I am able, who think I cannot bestow my care and love upon one more worthy, saving my quarrell that you will not leave the common title of Madame, in your particular love, to honour me with the name of Mother, who is ever affectionately yours, Eliza: Ashburnham.[88]

Lady Ashburnham's daughter, Lady Elizabeth Cornwallis, also used her influence on behalf of her family. In January 1642 Sir Edward Dering wrote to his wife criticising his kinsman, Sir John Darrell, who had not had the civility to visit 'my sister Cornwallis after she had knighted him.'[89]

Aristocratic and gentry women at times exercised the political influence in their family's gift. In his autobiography Sir Edward Dering related how he came to be elected burgess of East Redford in 1670.

> Sir Clifford Clifton being dead who served as burgess for East Redford in Nottinghamshire, and my Lady being my very good friend, and the interest of that town being chiefly in the family of Clifton and in my Lord Ogle now Duke of Newcastle, upon their recommendations... I went down thither... and was unanimously chosen their burgess.[90]

Sir Ralph Verney's decision to send his wife Mary to plead his case before the Committees for Compounding in 1646 was not an isolated one. His uncle's opinion was that 'women were never so useful as now' because 'their sex entitles them to many privileges'.[91] In Miriam Slater's judgment the use of women in these matters emphasises male beliefs about their innate inferiority - they were chosen not because of any competance but 'in the belief that the male committee members would be more indulgent

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88 Elizabeth Ashburnham to Edward Dering, Jan.1625/6, KAO U350 C2/7.

89 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 24 Jan.1641/42, KAO U350 C2/96.

90 Dering, autobiography, p.13, in Bond, Diaries, p.112.

91 Dr William Denton (probably) to Sir Ralph Verney, 30 Aug.1646, PUR VII, in Slater, Family Life, p.66.

with the helpless and incompetent creature before them'.[92] The behind scenes role which women had long played in politics, often with some success, indicates that this judgement about women's perceived incompetence should be accepted with caution. Conveying impressions of weakness and helplessness was not an innovative way of achieving an end. And it should be remembered that in such petitioning as Mary Verney was conducting her husband was also weak and helpless, and unable to enter England without being imprisoned for debt.

Edward Dering, the first baronet, discussed with his wife Unton political, legal and business matters, both their own business and sometimes that of people with whom Sir Edward had to deal in the course of his duties. For example, when he was away from Dover during his lieutenancy of the Castle he gave her detailed information concerning decisions made about the administration of the Castle. It would be interesting to know the extent to which she was expected to convey or confirm his instructions. She certainly seems to have had a close working relationship with the trusted Mr Kemp.[93] Sir Edward was defeated in the elections for the Short Parliament, and when he stood for election at the end of 1640 his wife threw herself whole-heartedly into helping him. Peter Clark claims 'she played a leading part in the fight, co-ordinating the election letters streaming into the Dering household at Surrenden, while Sir Edward was out in the country drumming up support'.[94] A letter she wrote at that time clearly reveals her activities and those of other family and household members on Sir Edward's behalf.

> You are beholding to my brother Percivall, who is very active and careful for you, both in sending, and in going

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92 Slater, Family Life, p.66.

93 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 20 March 1629/30, KAO U350 C2/25.

94 Peter Clark, English Provincial Society, from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640 (London,1977) p. 385.

> himself. So is honest Mr Kemp. I think they have secured all the gentlemen in the county to you. And wanting a letter to Sir Thomas Palmer, who as Mr Kemp said, is a material man, I presumed to frame a letter to him, and Mr. Kemp writ it, and conveyed it to him....
> Mr Kemp tells me the Dean [probably Isaac Bargrave who was married to Sir Edward's cousin Elizabeth Dering] professes to be earnest and real for you. You will take care for yourself to the Archdeacon and others when you are at Canterbury.

Unton felt able to point out an appropriate course of action to her husband. The reason she gave in the letter for their electioneering was one which validated her involvement - 'This will be a chargeable business, which we have no need on, but being only assumed for God's glory, it is not to be valued.'[95] Yet even though it was the Lord's work, and it was therefore her duty to be involved, she had Mr Kemp copy out her letter, presumably so its source was not readily observable.

Once Dering was elected his letters from London detailed the dramatic political events of which he was a part. The letters were a mixture of affectionate yearning for his wife, love for his children, and many domestic instructions; but he never failed to provide a great deal of political news. It is obvious from the letters that he expected his wife to have a complete understanding of the complex political situation. He sent her copies of his speeches and reports, and she reported to him on events in Kent. He particularly liked to share with her his own activities. He enjoyed being acknowledged as a leader for religious reform and reported to his wife in May 1641,

> We did appease and send away the citizens; and they did regard my advice as much, perhaps more, then any of the rest... many took me by the hand whom I knew not; many said to one another, "There goes Sir Edward Dering," "That is Sir Edward Dering," and "God blesse your worship," etc.[96]

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[95] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, Endorsed: '3 o'clock 1640', KAO U350 C2/82.

[96] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 20 May 1641, In Larking, Proceedings, p. 47.

When Sir Edward shifted his ground to support of the king he was delighted to pass on to Unton the report his sister-in-law Elizabeth Cornwallis gave him of the king's reception of his speech.

> '... the King gave it to the Prince's tutor to read to the Queen, and said he wondered they did print anything so good, and both their Majestys did highly praise it....' There are above forty-five hundred of that speech sold, and more in printing: never anything sold like that.

In spite of this seeming success there was sufficient honesty in Sir Edward's relationship with his wife which enabled him to add, 'I am almost tired out with swimming against the stream.'[97]

Unton Dering appears to have been a stronger character than her husband, but although she briefly took a prominent role during the election for the Long Parliament, her role could only be one of support for her husband's career. Lady Mary Dering, the wife of the second baronet, played her supporting role chiefly by entertaining a great deal. She and her husband seem to have been very gregarious and liked to have family and friends about them. Often they socialised with the family of Mary's sister and her husband Heneage Finch, Earl of Nottingham, and some of their family connections. This expanded the Dering's political contacts. But they also seem to have had a very considerable social circle beyond their family, many of whom were also political contacts. None of these supporting activities or roles for women was atypical or unexpected, but what is perhaps a little surprising is the extent of the political knowledge of these gentry women. Men expected their wives to understand the political details they reported, and when wives and daughters sent reports of elections or the state of the country in their area, they often showed themselves to be knowledgeable and interested.[98]

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[97] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 24 Jan.1641/42, KAO U350 C2/96.

[98] On 3 Sept.1673 Judith Isham wrote just such a letter to her father about the expected results of the coming election and the divisions in Suffolk. [NRO IC 766].

To be interested, knowledgeable and helpful was a relatively small role, but it was the only one that seventeenth century gentlewomen could play. Even women such as Joan Barrington, who was the focus of a puritan political 'connection',[99] and Brilliana Harley and Judith Barrington, who were well-informed and strongly politically motivated, were mostly limited to informing, encouraging and supporting the men in their families. Women's political roles were comparable to the role of the active and well-informed wife of a politician today, with no chance of a direct political role for themselves. Their status sometimes gave them some influence, but few gentry women had access to patronage in the way some aristocratic women did; and that influence which they had could only be used to move men, who had all the tangible political power. As in every sphere, from domestic to religious to business, whatever independence of action and influence was possible for women, the ultimate 'yea' or 'nay' lay with men.

Although such a remark must be made cautiously, because the evidence about ordinary gentry women is still limited, most of the women in this study were much less passive than they were urged to be from the pulpit or than popular knowledge perceived them to be.[100] Within very restrictive parameters there was a great deal of variety - a lot depended on

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[99] Searle, Barrington Letters, p.2.

[100] In her discussion of the extremely independent and wide ranging responsibilites of Margaret Paston in the fifteenth century Ann Haskell has theorised that by conforming in the places where women's behaviour was specifically prescribed - being married, chaste and obedient - gentry women were relatively free to do as they wished, or as family responsibilities required. 'A considerable amount of liberty within marriage was earned by conformity to the ideal in general, as this kept society's eyes on center stage, so that reality, on the side lines, might proceed.' Haskell believes that since in the fifteenth century gentry husbands spent much of their time in London the ability of women to function independently was absolutely essential. [Ann Haskell, 'The Paston women on Marriage in Fifteenth-century England.' Viator, Vol. 4 (1973) pp.462,466.] It seems likely that this formula of 'conformity' still functioned to some extent in the seventeenth century.

individual personality and circumstances. Without doubt rigid definition of separate spheres and roles limited women's choices and decreased their power by defining most areas of influence as outside their competence; but it is also apparent that individual women using the definition of their sphere as care for family stretched the definition to its limit.

An outstanding example of a gentlewoman who appears to have risen above expectations of submission, and confining definitions of separate spheres, is Lady Judith Barrington. She was an intelligent, well organized and forthright woman. Although she referred some actions to her husband for his decision, the interpretation of much that came first to her, and decisions about it, she usually carried out herself. There is no hint of submission in her correspondence with her husband, particularly once the civil war began and she was relaying to him impressions and instructions from the local area. As noteworthy as her confidence is the total lack of apology or explanation for her actions. The times were exceptional, but it would seem that circumstances emphasised rather than changed the balance of authority in the Barrington marriage. This balance was created by Judith's personality, circumstances, and probably her husband's affection for her.[101]

Slater's claim that 'upper-class women, once they had provided the necessary heirs, had few vital contributions to make to the marriage',[102] must be regarded with great caution, and cannot be accepted as a generalisation. In assuming that the opportunity for the husband to find sexual satisfaction outside the marriage and the possibility that servants could take over mothering duties made women redundant, she totally underestimates the role of maternal affection and commitment, and the

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[101] At the time of their marriage Barrington was said to be so in love with her that he would accept any conditions she insisted upon. [Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry, p.65.]

[102] Slater, Family Life, p.73.

magnitude of the supervisory role in households with servants. She also denies the importance and even existence of mutuality, companionship and affection in marriage, and ignores the generally held belief in shared responsibility for child rearing. She is probably correct in her assumption that the double-standard in sexual relations undermined the sense of self-worth of upper-class wives; the acceptance of the principle is denigrating to women - even those who do not personally experience its effects. But her conclusion that a man who has sexual relations with someone other than his wife therefore no longer needs or wants his wife in a sexual, or any other, capacity is a dubious assumption; and the fact that in theory at least in the seventeenth century sexual licence was a sin in either sex should not be ignored.

In spite of the greater freedom of men, the activities within and beyond the domestic sphere which were undertaken by gentry women were vital to the successful maintenance of their families. Wives were undervalued in theory and often in reality, but at the very least contemplation of the loss of a wife sharpened perception of the value of her contribution. In January 1588 when Richard Rogers contemplated the possible death of his wife he listed the likely results of such a loss:

> First, the fear of marrying again, dangerous as second mar[riages] are...
> Foregoing so fit a companion for religion, housewifery, and other comf[orts].
> Loss and decay of subst[ance].
> Care of household matters cast on me.
> Neglect of study.
> Care and looking after children.
> Foregoing our boarders...
> Fear of losing friendship of her kindred.
> These are some.[103]

Clearly Barbara Rogers's role was chiefly domestic but she made her husband free to study and carry out his duties as a minister, and she also

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[103] M.M. Knappen (ed.) Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward (Chicago, 1933) p.74.

added to their prosperity by tending their 'substance', and by taking in young theology students as boarders. Thus, although Rogers' diary makes little mention of his wife we know that her role within the family, although almost entirely confined to the domestic was vital to the family's prosperity. When she died Rogers replaced her, in spite of the dangers of second marriages, by marrying a capable widow.

In 1668, thirty years after the death of his first wife, when Sir Justinian Isham wrote a letter of comfort to a friend, he placed priority on his daughters' loss of their mother.

> There are none of your friends and acquaintants more truly sensible of your late affliction than myself... God knows the time was when I lost the wife of my youth and my only son [at birth], and seldom gave my blessing to those little children remaining without eyes full of tears, as knowing no greater worldly misery than for such tender ones, and especially of their sex, to be deprived of a Mother and so good a Mother.[104]

Isham's perception was probably sharpened by his retrospective awareness of his daughter's needs. Sir William Bromley similarly valued the role of his wife, Ursula, a younger sister of Lady Vere Isham. Above her jointure he left her £100 yearly 'for the maintenance and breeding of my two daughters (being desirous they should live and remain with my said wife through a great experience I have of her piety, prudence and discretion)'.[105]

The extent of control over the family estate given to widows in their husbands' wills is not merely an indication of affection, it is also an acknowledgement that their wives were competent and could be trusted to fulfil these responsibilities. The appointment of both Lady Mary Dering and Rebecca Sherfield ahead of adult male heirs and other sons has already

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[104] Draft letter of Justinian Isham to [ ], written on a letter dated 28 Sept.1668. NRO IC 618.

[105] Information from the Warwickshire County Archivist, 4 May 1956, quoting the Baginton registers, as quoted in Isham, Diary, p.102, note 17.

been mentioned. Such appointments in wills, the variety of roles some women assumed, and the companionate marriages of many couples, calls into question Slater's claim that 'both the value system and legal arrangements tended to make the father/eldest son relationship the strongest and most intense in the family'.[106] The wills of most of the married men in the families in this study made wives the sole executrix or one of the executors.[107] A particularly interesting example is the will of the Reverend George Downing, Chancellor of Lichfield diocese. Mr Downing made his wife, Judith, the sole executrix and beneficiary of his will, and the will was made twenty months before the marriage took place.[108]

Since male and female roles were so clearly defined in the seventeenth century it is interesting to look at some women who broke out of the stereotypes - even if only a small distance. Bishop Duppa's letters to Sir Justinian Isham mentioned their mutual friend Mrs Joan Carlile who was an artist, married to Lodowick Carlile, the playwright. Mrs Carlile was a painter of some repute, and in a letter written in November 1653 Duppa informed Sir Justinian that the family intended to remove from Richmond and go to London 'where she means to make use of her skill to some more advantage than hitherto she has done'.[109] To some extent the family followed the dictates of Mrs Carlile's career. Five years later the bishop told Sir Justinian that the Carliles were 'in a declining condition

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[106] Slater, Family Life, p.32.

[107] However unless the will includes specific details of administration which demonstrate this trust, or the wife is made executrix when it might more reasonably be expected that a male heir fulfil the role, the designation as executrix may not have the force sometimes assumed. In a will made in 1644 Sir Justinian Isham made his four daughters aged between 9 and 6 1/2 his executors. In 1644 Sir Justinian's father Sir John, and his trusted older sister, Elizabeth, were still alive. [Will of Sir Justinian Isham, 20 May 1644, HRO, IL 1626.]

[108] Isham, Diary, p.104, note 26, 235, note 27.

[109] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 1 Nov.1653, Letter XXXVI, Duppa, p.74.

(for painting and poetry have shut out of doors providence and good husbandry), but they carry it out handsomely and with good mean'.[110] The exceptional nature of her role seems to have been accepted calmly by the Duppas and their friends, and various Royalists had cause to be grateful that the Carlile family took them in as lodgers during the Interregnum.[111] Perhaps the bohemian nature of their occupations made her independent role more acceptable.

Another very different example of an independent woman is found in the diary Thomas Isham kept as a boy. The Haslewoods of Maidwell were neighbours of the Ishams, and Lady Haslewood was a strong-minded woman who brought up Sir William's children from his first marriage and also their cousins.[112] A revealing incident is related in the diary in January 1653.

> Chapman of Draughton, being in drink... said that Sir William Haslewood had no one in his house but sodomites and whores. When this was told to Lady Haslewood she ordered him to be turned out of his house, and two or three of them hauled him out and, seeking their opportunity, attacked him, giving him such a beating that he is not expected to live.[113]

Thomas makes no further comment on Lady Haslewood's assertiveness, and in an even more interesting incident we observe her reactions to the assertiveness of a woman from a lower social class.

> We heard that Anthony Cable of Maidwell went to Kettering and came home drunk late at night, and when he tried to kiss his wife she spurned his drunken embraces; she struck him so hard with her fist that she nearly felled him to the ground. Lady Haslewood said that there should be a riding celebration according to custom, and when she heard it Mrs Cable said she was willing to ride. But [Sir] William Haslewood would not permit it on account of Cable's loyalty to him, which had many times been put to the test'.[114]

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[110] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 12 Jan.1658, Letter XCVII, Duppa, p.153.

[111] Ibid. p.33.

[112] Isham, Diary, p.27.

[113] Ibid. 5 Jan.1673, p.179.

[114] Ibid. 20 Sept.1672, p.155. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and

(Footnote continued)

The dynamics of the incident are revealing: Lady Haslewood seems to have been the most offended by Mrs Cable's unnatural behaviour, and Mrs Cable perfectly ready to acknowledge her behaviour. In the end the riding was prevented because Sir William valued Anthony Cable's loyalty and did not wish to see him shamed, as he would have been if his wife's treatment of him had been publicly rebuked. Assertiveness in this instance at least was less acceptable in a woman from the lower social class. Another example of a woman who stepped out of role was the wife of Edward Saunders, squire of Brixworth, and like the Cables a neighbour of the Ishams. Saunders was a most improvident man and was eventually obliged to mortgage his property to his father-in-law. When his wife died she left the property to her son, Francis, 'without the intermeddling of my said husband, as if I were sole and unmarried'.[115] The will stood, because some years later Saunders son actually ejected him from the Brixworth estate.

Some women defied the stereotype in these ways, but most conformed. For gentlemen whose personalities were ill-suited to authority and responsibility the restrictive roles of the seventeenth century must also have been a confining burden, but if they chose well they could leave much to a wife, and to agents and stewards. But women who found submission difficult, and many did, were in a much more intractable position. A few husbands might allow a measure of independence, but such independence, except for widows, was a gift, not a right. In this hierarchical society of clearly defined roles, and strongly held beliefs about the inferiority

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[114] (continued)
Culture in Early Modern France (London, 1965/75) Chapter 5, 'Women on Top'; and Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and the "Reform of Popular Culture" in Early Modern England,' Past and Present, no.5 (Nov.1984) pp.79-113.

[115] Ibid. p.69, note 4.

of females and their appropriate subordination to all males, how did gentry marriage function? What was the nature of emotional commitment and expectations between husbands and wives?

CHAPTER 5 HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Many of the unanswered and debated questions about the nature of the relationship between husbands and wives in the seventeenth century concern the strength of emotional bonds between them. Were most marriages cold and distant, were they warm and affectionate, or perhaps somewhere in between where marital love was of a very different quality from that found in modern marriages? The evidence of the families in this study is that although the expectations of what marriage would bring and what it should be were different from those in the 1980s, the husbands and wives in most marriages were held together not merely by dynastic ties but by strong emotional bonds and commitment to each other as individuals.[1]

Whether through the influence of the Puritan preachers, the concept of the 'new woman' gained from Christian humanism,[2] social change, images of courtly love changed from amour courtois to amour bourgeois, or simply the continuing expression of ideals about Christian marriage, companionable marriages of mutual love were accepted as an ideal, and often as a reality, by the beginning of the seventeenth century. Throughout the century there were many gentry marriages in which the husband and wife were bound together by strong emotional ties. None of the marriages in the families in this study for which there is a solid amount of evidence,

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1 Miriam Slater emphasises 'the patriarchal and authoritarian character of family life', and believes there was 'a low priority on the psychological and physical gratification of the partners'. She agrees with the way Professor Stone 'accurately and unsentimentally sees marriage in this period as "an institutional device to ensure the perpetuation of the family and its property"'. Both stone and Slater minimise the amount of freedom couples had to reject, and even choose, a partner on the basis of 'liking', so it is not surprising that they therefore underestimate the quality of the subsequent marriage. [Slater, 'The Weightiest Business,' p.25; Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, pp.612-617.]

2 Siegel, 'Milton', pp.42-53.

were cold and loveless, but that does not mean that such marriages did not exist. It may be that companionable marriages increased in number as the century progressed, although this would be hard to prove. But it is certainly impossible to see the development of strong emotional bonds within a marriage as an innovative development of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, as writers such as Stone and Trumbach have suggested.[3]

To place the rise of domesticity, romantic love and affectionate relations between spouses and within families so late in this century seriously underestimates the individualism of preceding decades (at the very least), and the value some individuals, and some families, placed upon love and emotional ties throughout the century. Study of the processes and criteria of spouse selection clearly demonstrated that marital love was expected and valued. Although questions remain about how frequently love existed before marriage, it was certainly considered appropriate and necessary to decline a partner if one were convinced that love could not grow after marriage. William Gouge believed it was wrong to remarry if one still loved the former spouse, this would undermine the success of the new marriage, since one could not love the new husband or wife rightly.[4] The conviction that life would be better if there was warmth and affection between married couples was strongly held, and though some were prepared to forego such affective ties for other benefits, love remained an ideal. William Whately wrote in a Bride-Bush:

> For love first their hearts must be united as well as their bodies, else their union will prove more troublesome than can be imagined. Love is the life and soul of marriage, without which it is a most miserable and uncomfortable society, and no better than a living death. This makes all things easy; the want of it makes all things hard. Where love is abundant it makes a supply of

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3 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, Chap. 8. Trumbach, The Rise of the Egalitarian Family.

4 Gouge, Duties, p.132.

> all other wants; where that is defective, it breeds a like defectiveness in all other duties. Love seasons and sweetens all estates; love breaketh and composeth all controversies; love overruleth all passions; it squareth all actions; it is in a word the king of the heart... a pleasing combination of two persons into one home, one purse, one heart, and one flesh. But to praise love, or prove it needful, were a needless labour, the voice of the world speaks for it, and accounts the match more miserable than death itself, in which love is not used as the match-maker, yea, as a match-keeper too.[5]

The family letters of the Sherfields, Longs, Derings and Ishams reveal that almost all marriages in these families were companionable and affectionate. And the partners spent a great deal of time together, or bemoaned the fact that they were kept apart. There is no evidence of serious marital conflict or hostility within the marriages of family members. They observe it occasionally in others, and incidents which went beyond the normal irritations of family life may well have existed, but if they did they would appear to have been of comparatively short duration, and do not surface in the surviving correspondence. The overwhelming impression is of comfortable marital and family life - not necessarily the dynamics of romance, but certainly evidence of deep affection and commitment. Three marriages in particular will serve to illustrate the quality of married life in the seventeenth century, two are from the first half of the century and one from the latter part. There is one from each of the main families of the study, and each of them was affectionate and loving. These three marriages have been chosen because of the substantial number of letters surviving.

Early in 1616, after a somewhat rocky courtship, Henry Sherfield, puritan lawyer and widower with one daughter and six step-children, married Rebecca Long, widow and mother of eight. The marriage seems to have been a happy one. Most of the children established close and lasting ties with each other and their new parents. Rebecca attended effectively

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5 Whately, Bride Bush (1619) p.31.

to the many activities which Henry would otherwise have had to delegate to others while he was in London, and there is no question that the incorporation of Henry Sherfield into the Long family was a great benefit to them financially and in terms of legal and personal advice. The relationship between Henry and Rebecca remained an affectionate one, and the greatest regret of Rebecca's life seems to have been that they spent so little time together. In her letters she often despaired over the length of the legal terms which kept him in London, and rejoiced as they drew to an end. In 1618 she wrote to him 'my thoughts were never more to you then they have been since we parted. I hope to leave so much thinking of you by seeing of you shortly.'[6] Henry also wished they were not so much apart, as is seen in a letter which Rebecca wrote in October 1622 in response to his letter telling of his safe arrival back in London, and apparently showing some frustration at being there,

> ...you are now once more settled in your old lodging, but not with so good contentment of mind as I could wish... you bear not the discontent of it alone... I have ever borne as great a part with you, as so near a yoke fellow as I am to you might do, and hath ever, and doth still wish with my heart, that your occasions were not such, but that I might have more your company.[7]

Rebecca's attitude was regret not resentment of Henry Sherfield's absences during the legal terms and the sitting of parliament. She wrote in June 1624,

> My best and best beloved friend, You wrote to me by this bearer that you envied his happiness in coming to Sarum, and you could not, but I do as much envy now that he shall see you and so long enjoy your company before I shall, if the parliament should hold long when it doth begin.

Then she added that if that happened he would not be troubled by her absence because she would 'turn Londoner', for it would not be in her power to remain patient for longer than the term. She wished the term

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6 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 19 June 1618, HRO Herr. XXXI, 16.

7 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 14 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 19.

ended 'for many reasons, but this one is noted by others, that I enjoy much better health when you are at home than when you are absent'. She concluded, 'I could wish if it might be that our living might be more together, but God's will be done'.[8] In spite of her impatience to be with him there is in her letters no sense of blame attaching to Henry. She perceived this as his role within their marriage, and also as his fulfilment of the role God had ordained for him. This made acceptance of the situation easier.[9]

Although as the years progressed the salutations of Rebecca's letters became a little less exuberant they remained loving. These greetings may not be in any way exceptional early seventeenth century phrases, but since they are characterised by their variety they are worth mentioning as an indication of affection and marital love: 'Dearest on earth', 'My dear and ever dearest', 'My best beloved of all on earth', 'My hearts's best joy', 'My dearest beloved', 'None but God so dear', 'My very best friend', 'To my best and I desire no better', and 'My best comfort of this life'.[10] These are not the cold greetings of disinterested attachment, neither did Rebecca use them casually. In December 1622 she greeted Henry 'My long desired friend', and continued, 'for the obtaining of my desire I have now sent the coach for you... that... after so long absence of hours we may unite to both our comforts'.[11]

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8 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 2 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 31.

9 Brilliana Harley's letters to her husband reflect this same tension - the desire to be with him, but acceptance of the importance of his role in parliament. [Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, letters between 11 Feb. 1625/6 & 26 Feb. 1641, BL Loan 29/72; letters between 30 Sept. 1625 & 18 May 1633, in Thomas Taylor Lewis (ed) Letters of The Lady Brilliana Harley (London,1853) pp.1-7,33.]

10 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 1 June 1616, 14 Nov.[1616], 19 Nov.[1617], 25 June [1617], 3 Feb. 1617, 19 June 1618, 31 Oct.1622, n.d., 5 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 1, 2, 3, 6, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 33.

11 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 Dec.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 24.

The letters between the two were affectionate, and often written only as a chance to reaffirm love and affection though no news or business items had arisen. They were also frequent and regular, particularly in the early years of their marriage. The frequency of Henry's letters is probably as clear an indication of his affection and concern as is possible in the absence of any of those letters. Letters appear to have been exchanged at least weekly, and more frequently if a likely bearer appeared. In February 1617 Rebecca wrote in great concern 'I have not heard from you by letters or by any one that saw you since our man came from you, I have sent the town over to all that I could hear from London'. To her great relief she received a letter from him the next day just before she dispatched a messenger to London to enquire after him. Within a week she had received two letters from him which she felt made amends for his previous worrying silence - which we then discover had been all of eleven days long.[12]

To Rebecca Henry had become the greatest joy of her life.[13] As problems with her children or estate arose he was her constant support throughout their married life. In June of 1618 Rebecca suffered great grief and shame, almost certainly over the imprisonment of her eldest son in the Fleet. She coped by relying on her husband's love and advice, and her belief that God had sent these 'corrections', and she should make proper use of them. She attempted to find solace by visiting her daughter and son-in-law at Greenham, as she frequently did anyway, but her grief so upset her daughter that she felt obliged to leave. She wrote to Henry '...neither being from home nor coming to home can elde me any comfort, but only God and yourself.'[14] In spite of the fact that Henry was in

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[12] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3, 6, & 10 Feb.1617, HRO Herr. XXXI, 12, 11, & 10.

[13] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 13 Oct.1617, HRO Herr. XXXI, 7.

London during most of this crisis she relied on him for emotional support and spiritual advice. She wrote to him on June 11:

> I received a letter from you at Elliot's return from London, which letter of yours relates to me your continual love and tender affection, in giving me to know that if it lay in you there should be no means wanting to free me of these sorrows and crosses which are befallen me, which I do as faithfully believe it as you have written it. And do with all my heart give my God most hearty thanks for the blessing he hath sent me in yourself... And now to you my dearest on earth, I do return you my true thankfullness, for the good and Godly admonitions and counsels you wrote, how I should apply these crosses, and what use I should make of them. Which God grant for His Sons sake, that I may truly see wherefore and from whom these corrections are sent, and in seeing of them I may make such true use of them as may be best pleasing to God. And then I know in the end it will turn to the best for me, that I may so do. Remember me good friend in your prayers to God, to whom I shall never forget you in mine....'[15]

It was not only Henry Sherfield's emotional support which comforted Rebecca, but also their shared beliefs. The advice he gave her was the advice she would have heard from the pulpit, and would have given to herself; that Henry wrote letters of counsel as well as comfort to her meant that he was caring for her as a husband should. The thing which most prevailed with her against her 'sad discontentedness' was the thought of his return home at the end of term.[16]

Henry wrote to Rebecca of his 'continual love and tender affection', and she wrote after six years of marriage, '...of all worldly employments I never take the content as when I have been employed in writing the remembrance of my love to you, or in reading of yours commended to me....'[17] Rebecca's concept of a true marriage can be seen in a letter

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[14] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 14 June 1618, HRO Herr. XXXI, 15. 'Elde' - obsolete variant of yield. [O.E.D.]

[15] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 11 June 1618, HRO Herr. XXXI, 14.

[16] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 19 June 1618, HRO Herr. XXXI, 16.

[17] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 11 June 1618, 3 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 14, 20.

she wrote to her husband in October 1622,

> ...and for the time that is alotted us for our being together, that we may live in His fear, truly loving one another, desiring and endeavouring all things that may increase it, and to shun all things that may any way impair it, which I wish and shall ever endeavour to the utmost of my power to have it so.[18]

Rebecca approved this ideal of wholehearted commitment to her partner's good and happiness, which conforms very well to the expectations expressed by the conduct book writers, but her letters indicate that she also offered loving affection.

The marriage of Edward Dering, the first baronet, and his third wife Unton was one of considerable equality of influence and authority within the family, and of great mutual affection and passion. It was 'romantic' in a way readily understood by the modern mind, but always within the bounds of the seventeenth century family. The Dering's pursuits were those typical of the seventeenth century gentry. Unton's activities were focused chiefly on the family, both her own nuclear family and the families of the siblings, aunts and cousins to whom she was closest. Dering was involved in the administration of Dover Castle in the early years of their marriage, and in the events of the Long Parliament and the war toward the end of their marriage, but Lady Dering was consulted by her husband, and strongly involved in these wherever possible.

The aspect of their married life which is of greatest interest is the nature of their feelings for each other, and the way in which their relationship functioned. By far the most effective way to illustrate this is once again to quote directly from a number of letters.[19] Sir Edward usually addressed his letters: 'To My Best and Dearest, the Lady Dering...', 'To My Best and Dearest Friend, the Lady Dering', or upon

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[18] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 14 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 19.

[19] All but one of the letters which are still extant are from Sir Edward.

occasion, 'To My Dear Numps of Surrenden'. Lady Dering endorsed the letters simply 'My Dearest', and Sir Edward endorsed hers 'My Numps'.

The letters begin with affectionate cliches, but their variety and extravagance seem to underline their sincerity. To list a few: 'My True Love', 'My Dearest Joy', 'My Dearest Jewel', 'My Dear Sweet Heart', 'My Dear Numps whose affection is my joy, and whose love I do and will equal, though I acknowledge it very great'.[20] The way Sir Edward ended his letters was even more revealing: 'My dear love I am heartily weary of being here without thee and do wish with the same ardency of affection that thou hadst in thy sweet arms thine indeed, Edward Dering'; and again, '...ever love the heart and bid welcome the hand of thine as thou desirest Edward Dering'.[21] He frequently referred lovingly to Unton as his 'chain', and in a letter to her from London in April 1634 he wrote, 'My sweet Numps goodnight, and wish me the dear and precious chain belonging to Thine own poor solitary husband in thy absence, Edward Dering'.[22] Other letters he concluded: 'So with due remembrance I rest, as ever thine vowed and constant...', '...thy sweet and cheerful society is a happiness that only my hope can feed on at this time. God send us happy meeting, which is endeavoured to be hastened (though not yet affected) by your love of Thy true and most faithful Edward Dering'.[23] One of his most

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[20] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 9 Feb.1632/33, 15 Feb.1632/33, 10 Oct. 1634, 11 Nov.1637, 28 March 1633, KAO U350 C2/ 35, 36, 47, 51, & 38. To be able to quote such a variety of affectionate salutations from two different marriages may seem to imply that this was always the case, but this would be misleading. Many couples were less imaginative and more bound by the accepted phrases of the day. However, such conformity does not necessarily imply that their relationship was less affectionate. For example, Elizabeth Isham, whose relationship with her husband was very loving, usually began her letters with no salutation, addressed Sir Justinian as 'Dear Jus' in the body of the letter, and signed herself 'your affectionate loving Spouse, E Isham'.

[21] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 13 Feb. & 27 Sept.1632, KAO U350 C2/36 & 32.

[22] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 22 April 1634, KAO U350 C2/42.

frequently favoured endings was 'Thine, thine, thine alone, Edward Dering'.

One notable aspect of the affection between Sir Edward and Lady Dering is that there appears to have been no diminution of feeling as time went by. Those letters written toward the end of Dering's life show just as much affection and passion as those written at the beginning of the marriage fifteen years before. In October 1641 Dering wrote, 'My Dear and My Comfortable Numps, My happiness is (for the greatest part of it in this world) circuited in the same sphere with thine.'[24] The affection in the marriage was not one sided. In a letter written to her husband in 1640 Unton concluded, 'I present thee with my heart's love, and vow it thine, whilst there is breath in Thy faithful Numps.'[25] And in a letter written in March 1640 Sir Edward wrote, 'My Ever Dear Numps, Thy precious and hearty letter I received with that ardor that it was written', and added, 'I thank thee for the length of thy welcome letters, wherein I confess that I cannot equal thy love, Thine more and more if possibly....'[26]

Whenever possible Sir Edward and Lady Dering remained together, whether at Dover Castle, or at home at Surrenden Dering, where they seem to have been happiest. During those times when circumstances kept them apart - usually his business in London, or her visits to sick or childbearing relatives - they both seem to have suffered greatly by the separation, longing to be back together, and visiting each other as frequently as possible. In a letter written five months after their marriage Sir Edward wrote from London to Unton at Dover Castle, 'I am

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23 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 10 Oct. & Dec.1634, KAO U350 C2/47 & 49.

24 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 22 Oct.1641, in Larking, Proceedings, p. 55, 56.

25 Unton Dering to Edward Dering, '3 o'clock 1640', KAO U350 C2/82.

26 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 18 March 1640, in Larking, Proceedings, p.42-44.

resolved to break from here with what speed I can. For I never stayed here more unwillingly... No business can so divert my thoughts but that my soul longs to return to thee'.[27] In March 1630 Sir Edward wrote from Rochester on his way home to Dover, 'My Dear Heart, I am thus far well returned, and wish myself at the Castle where my heart hath with thee, and in thee, full contentment'.[28] Three years later in a letter which was the second in two days he told her that he could not hope to be home for ten more days 'though my absence so long from thee do grieve my heart'.[29] The pressure they both felt on being apart did not lessen. In 1634 he wrote, 'My Dear Heart, This absence of mine is in all the circumstances of it the most grievous of any', and he ended the letter, 'Dear Numps bear my absence patiently or else come chide me here, but truly, chiding will not mend me, for my utmost endeavour is to be with thee, which I have some hope shortly to effect, in the best contentment, of thyself and thine own self, Edward Dering'.[30]

Clearly being apart pleased neither of them. In July 1641 he wrote, 'My Dear Love, Our absences are equal griefs, whether so much the easier or the greater I cannot well resolve'.[31] During the Long Parliament when Unton had planned to visit her husband in London, he wrote, 'I had so strongly received hope of seeing thee here that it troubles me now to lose my joyous expectation'.[32] When apart the Derings exchanged letters every few days, and sometimes every day. Typically Dering wrote in December 1634, 'Dear Sweet Heart, I wrote one letter about Sunday or Monday by Mr

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[27] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 19 Nov.1629, KAO U350 C2/23.

[28] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 20 March 1629/30, KAO U350 C2/25.

[29] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 9 Feb.1632/33, KAO U350 C2/35.

[30] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 1 July 1634, KAO U350 C2/44.

[31] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 22 July 1641, KAO U350 C2/94.

[32] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 24 Jan.1641/2,KAO U350 C2/96.

Raworth. It is now Wednesday, and this interim gives me little occasion, but that I would let slip none to let thee hear from me'.[33] And in February 1632, 'My True Love, Yesterday's letter you have I hope received. I have little else to write, nothing of my business'.[34]

Few historians, even those who see only very limited affective ties in family life before the late seventeenth century, question the existence of some exceptional relationships, but the evidence from the families in this study indicates that the relationship of Lady Unton and Sir Edward Dering was not exceptional, and stands out mainly because of the number and the intimate quality of the letters which survive. Not all the couples in these families were as passionate and romantic as the Derings; many whose attachment to each other was very strong were more temporate in their expressions of affection. For example, Rebecca Sherfield's conclusion to one of her letters to her husband is a more typical expression of married love in the early seventeenth century, '...so in as true love and tender affection as ever came from the heart of any creature on earth I commend my love to you....'[35] Such expressions do not read like empty formalities, and even when there are few such expressions in the correspondence of a married couple it would be unwise to interpret their absence as indifference, coldness and distance.

In July 1683 Sir Justinian Isham and Elizabeth Turnor made a prudent choice of each other in marriage. Elizabeth would not have been permitted to marry for love alone, neither is it likely that she would have thought to do so; and Sir Justinian could not ignore the need to establish his family's finances more firmly by a wise marriage. However, he took time

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[33] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, Dec.1634, KAO U350 C2/49.

[34] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 9 Feb.1632, KAO U350 C2/35.

[35] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, n.d. [probably Sept./Oct.1616], HRO Herr. XXXI, 9.

in making his choice and a loving and comfortable marriage was the result. This marriage rewards study as an example of great mutuality in which a much loved wife, who was a woman of intelligence, equable temperament and strength of character, enjoyed a status of considerable equality. This role was facilitated by the prolonged absences of her husband during the sittings of parliament, but it was also influenced by the character of husband and wife, and their affection for each other.

Shorter, Ariès and Slater would not expect to find a marriage of this kind even late in the seventeenth century; Stone and Trumbach expect to observe only individual examples as a beginning of the changes toward domesticity in the eighteenth century. But the evidence of the letters of Sir Justinian and Lady Isham is that they saw themselves and their lifestyle as unexceptional in every way. They were happy, and Lady Dering rejoiced in 'the great character' her husband had acquired 'of a good husband', but they assumed that other families should function in a similar way.[36] Once again the reason why so much can be known of Elizabeth Isham and her husband was the constant separations caused by his public responsibilities. There were times when Elizabeth stayed with Isham in London,[37] but she considered the country life better for her large family, and generally chose to remain at Lamport, in spite of the loneliness she felt. Following one of his invitations to come up to London she wrote,

> ...I know not how to accept it, there is so many prudent considerations that urge my stay, as a great family, small children unfit to travel and not convenient to leave behind, for if I go them thats left are three times the number. My absence will but little lessen the charge here and treble yours in town. These excuses are so just that you cannot but agree with me that I am much more necessary here than in town, and as for the want for your company, kind letters must help supply, which will partly mitigate the loss of my Dear Jus.[38]

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[36] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 15 Jan.[1689/90], NRO IC 4363.

[37] Richard Richardson to Justinian Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4496.

Such letters, which demonstrate Elizabeth Isham's calm good sense and acceptance of the pattern of her life, might seem to imply a controlled and even tepid affection between this couple. For example, she left it to her husband as 'a man of affairs' to decide when it was convenient for him to come home, and when he should return to London, even adding in one letter 'I should be sorry to see you uneasy by too long a stay, which would abate much of the satisfaction your company always brings to your poor loving spouse'.[39]

But these extracts convey only one aspect of their relationship. Elizabeth was always most anxious to receive letters to reassure her of Sir Justinian's safe arrival in London and of his continued health, and because 'there is nothing that can so effectually abate the tediousness of the days and nights as reading and contemplation of your letters, which will bring your Idea often to my remembrance, though there needs not that to do it'.[40] And so Isham did in fact write very constantly. When he returned to London on the 2nd December 1697 he wrote immediately, 'in persuance of my Dear Besses desire this is to assure her I am come safe to town'. Since he added that he was too tired and hungry to go nearer and see the fireworks it is obvious that his first thought and responsibility was to write to his wife.[41] He wrote again two days later and concluded his letter, 'I long to hear how my poor Bess does and I hope she will hold out notably till the appointed time, for you may assure yourself I am Your ever affectionate and loving spouse, J Isham'.[42] Letters were exchanged

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[38] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 13 Feb.[arch.1688], NRO IC 4362.

[39] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 3 Feb.1699, NRO IC 4213.

[40] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 26 Oct.[ ], NRO IC 4383.

[41] Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, 2 Dec.1697, NRO IC 1555.

[42] Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, 4 Dec.1697, NRO IC 1556.

at least weekly, and both were apprehensive if there was a delay.[43] Often the letters contained only reassurances of continued health, safety and love.

Isham also kept her in touch about other matters: instructions about estate business, town gossip and political news.[44] Lady Isham wrote brisk, matter-of-fact reports about affairs at Lamport, news of the children and details of their social life in the country, and sometimes advice, particularly about her husband's health.[45] Sir Justinian was always anxious to carry out whatever commissions he could for his wife, he wished for her company in London when they were apart and sent her gifts, particularly of books, which he knew she greatly appreciated.[46] A letter to Elizabeth concludes, 'I can think of nothing more but that I am ever yours, J Isham'.[47] Elizabeth's feelings for her husband were most evident in her wishes to have him with her: 'I know everybody uses their endeavours to have your company as long as possible they can, but when they importune you consider poor me who languishes in your absence and shall receive no real content till you come'; '...do not let trivial affairs my Dear Jus detain you longer in town than you promised, for now I shall begin to count by minutes, and a disappointment will be worse to me than all the tedious time of your absence'; and more simply, hoping that business in town 'will not keep you long for methinks I want you much'.[48]

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43 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 9 May [ ], 11 Jan.1689/90, 11 Dec.1703, 11 Nov.[ ], NRO IC 4376, 1432, 4223 4385; Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, n.d., NRO IC 4731.

44 Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, 15 Jan.1697 & 4 Jan.1697/8, NRO IC 1542 & 1563.

45 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 7 June [ ],20 June [ ], 10 Dec. 1698, 23 Nov. [ ], NRO IC 4212, 4381, 1601, 43674.

46 Elizabeth Isahm to Justinian Isham, 28 Feb.[ ], 20 June [ ], 23 March 1699/1700, 3 Feb.1699/70, NRO IC 371, 4381, 4214, 4213; Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, n.d. [after 1696], NRO IC 4732.

47 Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, 15 Jan.1697, NRO IC 1542.

When Justinian was with the Princess Anne in 1688, Elizabeth was in great fear, and she wrote,

> 'Tis not imaginable for you, my Dear Jus, to conceive with what joy I was seized with [sic] at the receipt of your letter. The assurance of you being in good health, and the little probability of the enemy's nearer approach to you were such delightful and satisfactory news that I may say in my whole life nothing was ever more agreeable to me.

She hoped he might soon be home

> For my time can pass but melancholy away while you are absent, but 'tis for the public good and I must be contented, but, my Dear Jus, forbear not to let me hear as often from you as possible, which will partly mitigate the trouble that your absence brings to your Affectionate and loving Spouse, E Isham.[49]

The letters which passed between Sir Justinian and Lady Elizabeth Isham lacked romantic effusions, rather they were the measured, temperate communications of a solid, affectionate marriage of thirty years duration. The deep emotional commitment was supported by similarity of temperament and shared ideals of political and family responsibility. There is no evidence in any of their letters of discord between them. Sir Justinian maintained a very close tie with his brother John, who shared many of his political and family interests, Lady Isham remained close to her father and brother, and their children were important to both of them, but throughout their married life their primary commitment was to each other, and they saw their relationship to each other as the basis of their family's life. When Elizabeth died in 1713 Sir Justinian was devastated. Writing to his son, Justinian, of the glowing inscription he had composed for her monument in Lamport church, he said,

> What I have said of her everybody that knew her must own to be exactly true, though at the same time can't but acknowledge it comes far short of what she deserves, which I am very sensible of, it being impossible to express all

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[48] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 9 May [ ], 20 Dec.[ ], 13 May [ ], NRO IC 4376, 4389, 4377.

[49] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 6 Dec.[1688], NRO IC 1431.

her good qualities in so small a compass.[50]

The family letters of the Sherfields, Derings, and Ishams provide some detail of over a dozen other marriages within those families. The evidence of these marriages, and those of family friends and connections, while less substantial, seems to confirm rather than deny the existence of close emotional ties between marriage partners. A brief review of all the marriages within these families about which a reasonable amount may be known is appropriate, since it provides a sample which cannot be said to have been selected to support a pre-determined point of view.

The pragmatic reasons for the marriage of Henry Sherfield and Mary Bedford about three months after the death of her first husband, have been discussed. No letters between Henry and Mary survive from the five years of their marriage, and nothing conclusive can be said about the success or happiness of the marriage. They had only one living child, a daughter, Matilda. However, there can be no doubt of Henry's great grief and distress at his wife's death a week after giving birth to a son in January 1613. He wrote a draft letter to his father-in-law informing him of the death of the child and warning of his wife's weakness, and another letter telling him of her death. Henry's confusion, perplexity and grief are evident in every line of those two letters. Two days after her death he wrote to her father, William Hodson,

> Good Sir, I am enforced to send you the worst and most unwelcome news, concerning yourself and me that ever came within my knowledge, which is that my loving wife, your daughter, is dead, and with her a goodly manchild which was taken dead from her on Saturday last, after two days most grievous travail. I have small comfort to be the Relator of that unhappy news, but because by that accident not only myself is much perplexed, but also a great many poor children are left motherless, in whom I assure myself you have a fatherly regard. I have therefore pressed myself to write thus much.

In the postscript he asked Hodson to let 'our good friends' know of the

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[50] Isham, Diary, p.52.

event, 'it being displeasant to me to write more letters of this nature'. For the meticulous and conscientious Sherfield this was an admission of great perturbation.[51] A further indication of Sherfield's distress can be seen in the discrepancies between the letter he sent to his father-in-law and the draft letter which he had prepared before his wife's death. In the draft he stated that the child lived until Friday, and in the letter that it was born on Saturday.[52]

No letters which reveal anything of the marriages of Henry Sherfield's Bedford step-children survive, but we do know that Mary Bedford was not prepared to marry a man she could not love, so it is not unreasonable to speculate that within the family the ideal of marital affection was valued. However, it is also possible that the meagre resources of the Bedford family may have prompted marriages for more pragmatic reasons. Mary and Henry Sherfield's daughter, Matilda, married a man of her father's choosing, but not against her own inclinations. No letters between them exist, and apart from Robert Ramsay's delight over the birth of a son, and greetings sent from his wife and son,[53] there is little to indicate the nature of the relationship between Matilda and Robert Ramsay. In a letter written to her father three years after her marriage Matilda grieved about a rift which had grown up between her husband and her father. Matilda referred to her husband as 'Mr Ramsay', she wrote that 'it was a good while before I could get of him what was the matter', and she asked her father not to tell her husband that she had written to discuss the matter.[54] The letter is one which readily lends itself to the

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51 Henry Sherfield to William Hodson, 11 Jan.1612/13, HRO Herr. XLVI, 3.

52 Draft letter of Henry Sherfield to William Hodson, [9 Jan.1612/13], HRO Herr. XLVI, 2.

53 Robert Ramsay to Henry Sherfield, 16 July 1631 & 10 Sept.1632, HRO Herr. XLI, 4 & 6.

54 Matilda Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3 Aug.1633, HRO Herr. XLI, 7.

interpretation that this was a cold and formal marriage with little communication between the couple, but such a conclusion would be arguing from a lack of evidence. All of Matilda's few letters were very stilted, and it would seem writing did not come easily to her. The use of a formal mode of address was customary at the time, and common within the Sherfield and Long families. It is impossible to say whether Matilda and Robert's marriage was formal and distant, or whether the use of language made it appear so. Henry Sherfield's marriage with Rebecca Long, which began when Matilda was a very small child, would have provided an example of an affectionate marriage with strong emotional bonds, which she may reasonably have expected to imitate.

There is sufficient evidence about the marriages of four of Rebecca Long's children to make assessments of their married life worthwhile. Walter Long's marriage was chiefly motivated by the need to restore the family finances, but from the limited evidence that survives it would appear that Mary Cocks and Walter were able to build a contented family life with their own nuclear family and their respective families of origin.[55] The marriage of Martha Long and Roger Knight was an affectionate one in which Martha's wishes appear to have been important to her husband. In common with many husbands and wives, but contrary to advice from the pulpit about the use of nicknames, Roger Knight called his wife Matt. Their prosperous household at Greenham welcomed frequent visits from family and step-family members, and both Martha and Roger involved themselves conspicuously and enthusiastically in the affairs of their relatives.

Another daughter, Mary married Timothy Wade when she was 24 and they

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[55] Walter Long to Rebecca Sherfield, 12 Feb.1624/25, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 16. Within the Cocks family there was a bitter dispute over the wardship of Mary Cocks sister. Some of the family sided with Walter and some with his brother-in-law. [Walter Long to Henry Sherfield, 20 March 1629/30, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 22.]

seem to have chosen each other. Their marriage also seems to have been an affectionate one, and Timothy Wade frequently referres to his wife in letters as Mall. They lived in London, and kept a very open house for the various members of their families living or visiting the capital. They were always in close touch with Mary's mother, Rebecca Sherfield, and the other family members, and Wade kept his step-father-in-law and brothers-in-law informed of London news and developments. There is no mention of any unhappiness between them in the family letters, but what level of marital contentment was expected or accepted it would be speculative to say. In 1630 Timothy Wade suffered very serious financial reverses and those lands which had been set aside for Mary's jointure were sold to meet debts. Her family were concerned about this loss of security for Mary and her children,[56] but although this doubtless caused stresses in the marriage it is not possible to ascertain whether Wade approved of the selling of these lands, whether undue pressure was placed upon Mary to consent, or whether both drew together in the attempt to rescue their family. When Rebecca Long married Sir Richard Rogers in 1624 this was a love match made with the wholehearted approval of Rebecca's family. Little can be deduced about the subsequent marriage, except that once again mention of visits by and to them seem to portray them as contented.

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of the marriages of the Sherfields and Longs was the speed with which the new member was completely accepted into the family unit. They were immediately referred to as 'my son' or 'my daughter', they greeted and referred to parents-in-law as 'mother' or 'father', and referred to brothers and sisters-in-law as 'my brother' or 'my sister'. This was not unusual in the seventeenth century, but the roles of married persons within this family group seem to have been particularly well defined. Most of the

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[56] Roger Knight to Henry Sherfield, 24 March 1630, HRO Herr. XLII, 10.

wives in the Sherfield and Long families referred to their husbands in letters as 'Mr', the husbands referred to 'my wife', and sometimes used affectionate nicknames. These modes of address used in letters do not necessarily reflect modes of address in speech, but they may be an indication of the patriarchal structure of deference within these marriages. Married family members, although living at some distance from one another, including some in London, visited each other frequently, exchanged letters, gifts, news and advice, and used their contacts on each other's behalf. And the newly married members were immediately included in this family network and these behavioural patterns. Detailed statements about the type of emotional bonds between husbands and wives in the family may not be possible, but it is possible to state that the four marriages here discussed were regarded as satisfactory by other family members, and the commitment involved a far greater emotional investment and concern for each other's well-being than mere family solidarity.

Although there is ample evidence from which to assess Sir Edward Dering's marriage to his third wife, Unton Gibbes, few but the bare facts are known about his first two marriages. Dering married Elizabeth Tufton when he was 22 and she 18; she died two years later. John Bruce claimed that the marriage was not beneficial to his worldly prospects and therefore deduced that it 'was probably entirely one of affection'.[57] However, since it brought Dering the influential contacts of his wealthy father-in-law, Lord Tufton, later the first Earl of Thanet, and of his mother-in-law, who was a daughter of Thomas Cecil, the first Earl of Exeter, the eldest son of Lord Burghley, it seems likely that his values in choosing a wife were at least socially and politically astute. This was certainly so in his second marriage to Anne Ashburnham, whose mother was a kinswoman of the countess of Buckingham, the favourite's mother.

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[57] John Bruce, Preface in Larking, Proceedings, p.ix.

When writing to Anne Sir Edward addressed her affectionately. In his one surviving letter to her he wrote, 'Good Sweet Heart, I have nothing to write but that I am (I thank God) well here'. And then he did in fact write only three more meagre sentences, ending 'Remember my duty etc.'[58]

In apparent contrast, a letter written to his third wife, Unton, in September 1632 began similarly, 'My Good Sweet Heart, I can write nothing more than that I am well (I thank God) here', but he proceeded to write three more loving paragraphs, which included pleased anticipation of her expected arrival in London and discussion of an apparently romantic exchange of half a ring.[59] It may be asking too much of the evidence when the correspondence with Anne is so limited, but it would seem that possibly Sir Edward (who wrote well and frequently, both scholarly works and personal letters) could think of little to say to his second wife. This not only conveys something more about the relationship between Sir Edward and Lady Unton Dering, but also emphasises the fact that generalisations cannot be made about the quality and nature of marriages, even the marriages of the same person. Whereas it is clear from many letters, that he shared with Unton a great deal of detail about personal, political and business matters, the only letter from Anne which survives includes only details of her illness, a wish for his return to her, and purely domestic concerns. However, the letter is couched in affectionate terms, as her husband's was. She wrote, 'Dear Heart, I was very glad of the letter you sent me, and should be much gladder of yourself'. She signed herself 'Your one true loving wife', and in a postscript called him 'sweetheart'. And the letter makes apparent the fact that Anne has only just left London to come into the country because of the advanced stage of her pregnancy.[60]

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[58] Edward Dering to Anne Dering, 25 April 1627, KAO U350 C2/14.

[59] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 27 Sept.1632, KAO U350 C2/32.

However, the letter also makes clear that, although Anne was suffering from a serious cough and was very heavily pregnant, Sir Edward remained in London pursuing his political ambitions. This contrasts with his great concern for Unton over a fall she had, even though he had been reassured of her continued health even at the time he received the news. He wrote that he was 'infinitely better satisfied by hearing so much from thy own hand. For which escape I have thanked God on my knees, as I ought'.[61] The quality of the relationships of these two marriages appears very different, but the differences may have been created more by Anne's youth and the brevity of their marriage than by lack of affection. Dering's struggles to establish himself in political office which kept him from home, may have been acceptance of responsibility, and not neglect of his wife. Or the impression of lack of warmth may simply be a false one created by a lack of evidence.

The marriage of Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, and Mary Harvey was a very successful and affectionate one. Although they had ten children who lived to maturity, they were a couple who liked to be together as much as possible, even when this meant taking their family with them to London, or as far away as Ireland.[62] During the many years in which Dering held public office many of his letters were written from Surrenden Dering in Kent, where his object was very clearly to be with his wife and family. At times he made trips of just a few days to London.[63] When he had to reside in London for any length of time it was important to Sir Edward that his wife be with him. It was worthy of comment when she

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60 Anne Dering to Edward Dering, 1625, KAO U350 C2/9.

61 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 15 Feb.1632/33, KAO U350 C2/36.

62 While Sir Edward was one of the Commissioners to execute the Act of Settlement in Ireland between 1662 and 1669 two of their daughters were born and died in Dublin. [Geneological table, Bond, Diaries.]

63 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 26 July 1675, KAO U1713 A/39.

was absent. Writing to his son-in-law in March 1682 he said, 'I am here all alone, my wife came not with me.'[64] On another occasion he wrote wryly that if he had known the ship taking his daughter and son-in-law to Ireland would be delayed, 'I might have kept my gossip at home a week longer'.[65] Throughout their married life Sir Edward and Mary Dering liked to socialise together, whether at home at Surrenden or in London. They visited friends and family constantly, and entertained family members in particular for visits as long as they could be persuaded to make.[66] They went on holiday together to Epsom wells, and took Tunbridge waters at home together.[67] The choice to be together is one which underlines the quality of this marital relationship. On one of the occasions when they were apart Mary wrote, 'I wish myself with you with all my heart'.[68]

There is enough evidence to make assessments about the marriages of five of the children of Sir Edward and Lady Mary Dering. Sir Edward, their heir, made a love match with Elizabeth Cholmley in 1677, and their marriage remained a loving one. In August 1689, just two months before he died while commanding the regiment of foot he had founded, Sir Edward wrote , 'My Dearest Betty, I have wrote to you almost every post since I left London... write as often as you can... Yours while I am, Edward Dering'.[69] The eldest daughter of the second baronet, another Elizabeth, also made a love match at the age of fifteen with Sir Robert Southwell. Elizabeth and Southwell were sometimes parted by his diplomatic career,

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64 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 23 March 1681/2, KAO U1713 B/37.

65 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 31 March 1681, KAO U1713 B/51.

66 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 28/29 June 1675, KAO U1713 A/34.

67 Dering, autobiography, p.16 in Bond, Diaries, p.114; Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 27 Aug.1681, KAO U1713 C/6.

68 Mary Dering to Edward Dering, n.d. KAO U350 C2/133.

69 Edward Dering to Elizabeth Dering, 4 Aug.1689, KAO U1713 C55.

but some of the most significant letters in the Dering collection result from the fact that Elizabeth went with her husband to Ireland, leaving their two sons with their grandparents at Surrenden. Elizabeth also joined her husband during part of his term in Lisbon. In 1671 her father wrote to Sir Robert of Elizabeth's poor health, and added, 'we see she will never be perfectly well but where you are present', and four years later, when she was very ill Dering wrote, 'It is a great affliction to her and to us that you are absent'.[70]

Perhaps the clearest indication of the depth of the relationship between Sir Robert and Betty Southwell can be seen in his response to her prolonged illness and death. Both Sir Robert and her parents exerted themselves endlessly consulting doctors and attempting to relieve her suffering. When she died in 1682 at the age of 33 Southwell was almost inconsolable. In response to a letter from him two weeks after her death, his father-in-law, Sir Edward wrote

> ...your note upon the anniversary day [of the wedding of Sir Robert Southwell and Betty Dering on 26 January 1664] did not miss my observation, but he that gave her then to you, and before that to me, hath now taken her from us both, but he hath taken her to himself, there is comfort sure in that. And if a good man be said to live twice because he can reflect with comfort upon his past years, she that is buried is not lost, since her memory is not only precious to us her nearest relatives, but revered even by all that knew her, as a great example of virtue and prudence. I hope you will find comfort in your sweet young family.[71]

Only three days later Dering wrote again, and his letter seems to have been occasioned by the violence of Southwell's grief.

> I nothing doubt but my beloved Betty as she was fixed in your heart while she lived, so she is after death in your memory and surely the kind and affectionate rememberance of our friends, is the most precious monument in the world. I can hardly bring myself to wish you to forget her but for your sake and your children's, I do wish those

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70 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 22 Sept.1677, 13 Sept.1681, KAO U1713 A/27, C/7.

71 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 28 Jan.1681/2, KAO U1713 C/13.

> thoughts of her may be more of love than grief. Your little ones will serve for diversion, the first step to consolation.[72]

A year later Sir Robert wrote to his father-in-law reflecting more calmly upon his grief:

> I must never forget who left this world, and what I lost upon this melancholy day. It was the calamity of this day which changed the nature of many preceding ones, which I had thought severe: but this made me consider them only as favourable preparatives to bear a heavier stroke.
> Her memory, and the tracing of her in these parcels she hath left me, are my chiefest delight and I can hardly forbear to be unequal to them as they falter on their paths. I hold up the pattern of her virtues to them, as the best way for them to become patterns themselves, and I thank God I have not very much in this particular, that clouds my hope.[73]

Charles Dering had been prepared to establish himself by a rich marriage in his youth, and at the age of 35 he married the widow of the fifth Lord Blayney. Thoughout the almost thirty years of their married life he continued to refer to her as 'Lady Blayney'. However, these facts indicate neither the certainty of affection in the marriage nor the certainty that it was lacking. Charles approved of romance and passion in marriage;[74] whether he achieved this for himself is not certain. His younger brother, Daniel, certainly put a premium on romance and passion, and married Helena Perceval against the wishes of both their families. Unfortunately, Daniel died after only five years of marriage, leaving Helena to the kind of financial struggles that their families had visualized. Katherine Dering also married for love, but Sir John Perceval was an eminently suitable choice. Sir John was only 20 when they married. He appears to have been a husband solicitous of Katharine's comfort and well-being, and their brief married life was mostly spent together at the

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[72] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 31 Jan.1681/2, KAO U 1713 C/14.

[73] Robert Southwell to Edward Dering, 13 Jan.1682/3, KAO U1713 C/24.

[74] Charles Dering to Edward Southwell, 18 Sept.1716, KAO U1713 D/53.

family home at Burton in co. Cork.

Another marriage of choice by both partners was that of Mary Dering and Sir Thomas Knatchbull. They and their family socialised very happily with Sir Edward and Lady Mary Dering and other members of the family, both during the first ten years of their married life spent in London, and later when they returned to Kent to live. This seems to indicate reasonable family and marital contentment. As with the Sherfield, Long and Bedford families, the married members of the Dering family and their children remained in close contact with each other, and visited often. They discussed problems, illnesses and deaths, and rallied to each other's assistance; there is no intimation of marital discord in the correspondence. It would seem that the expectations of marriage held in the Dering family were on the whole met. Of course this does not rule out the possibility that these expectations were readily met because they were low.

Many of the Isham marriages throughout the century were motivated by practical considerations, which may have influenced the nature of the relationship between husband and wife, but need not have precluded the growth of emotional attachment. Sir John and Sir Justinian were both cast in a patriarchal mould, their strong sense of family and marital responsibilities included the duty of exercising authority. But this did not exclude the duty of loving. Soon after their marriage in 1607 Judith Isham wrote to her husband John, 'I myself wanting nothing but thy company, which I should miss though I were in paradise, therefore give me leave to intreat you to make hast...'[75] Sir Justinian's first marriage was brief, and he sincerely mourned his first wife. A letter from her illustrates both affection and deference. It begins, 'My Heart...' and ends, 'So desiring God to bless us and ours and to bring thee safe to me

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[75] Judith Isham to John Isham, 29 Nov.1607, NRO IC 109.

again, which time if I could hear would rejoice my heart, I still remain thy obedient wife, Jane Is.'[76]

The evidence of his marriage to Vere Leigh lends itself to more than one interpretation. In letters between Justinian and the members of her family almost every mention of his wife concerns her pregnancies, the birth of her children or her illness. The letters between Justinian and Vere were far from effusive. Lady Isham almost invariably signed her letters 'your most faithful wife' or 'your most faithful and loving wife', she greeted her husband as 'My Dear' and occasionally 'My Dear Heart', and Sir Justinian also began his letters 'My Dear', and ended them 'most affectionately yours'. Their letters express almost nothing of personal feelings, beyond regret that they are apart. However, in the diary their son Thomas kept as an adolescent they are seen at home, much in each others company, sharing activities with their children, constantly visiting together in the neighbourhood, and entertaining at home. Vere Isham disliked their separations. She wrote, '...the time of your absence hath been thought very long by me, it being very uncomfortable to me to have you so long at so great a distance from me'.[77] In 1670 after receiving news of her husband's returned health Lady Isham wrote,

> ...truly my dear I do partake and suffer with you in all your troublesome and painfull distempers, having been in a continual fear and affliction for you since you went from hence, for surely to a loving and good wife, if her husband were in health, it would be grief enough to be so long and often absent from him, as I have ever been most unhappy in.[78]

And when they were apart the Ishams wrote very frequently. In a letter written on the 9th January Vere refers to her husband's letters to her on the 3rd, 5th and 7th;[79] in January 1671 Sir Justinian began one of

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[76] Jane Isham to Justinian Isham, n.d. [before March 1638/9], NRO IC 4815.

[77] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 19 June 16[ ], NRO IC 4159.

[78] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 23 Jan.1670, NRO IC 665.

his letters, 'My Dear, Though I hope my letter came to you last night by the post, yet now you are by the fire this also may not be unwelcome...'[80] This marriage exemplifies at least one of the possible outcomes of patriarchy. Sir Justinian was a kind and loving man whose concept of his role nevertheless set a distance between himself and his wife. This was almost certainly exaggerated in the case of his second marriage by the fact that he was already 42 when he married Vere. However, the judgement of both Sir Justinian and his astute friend and confidant, Bishop Brian Duppa, was that Isham had chosen his wife carefully and successfully. Both regarded this marriage as a model of success which others could profitably imitate.[81]

The marriages of two of Isham's daughters from his first marriage also illustrate aspects of the patriarchal family. Susanna's marriage to Nicholas Carew was arranged by her father and took place when she was 19 and her husband only two years older. The couple liked each other well enough to marry, and the evidence of their life together is that they established a stable and not unloving family environment, marred by Carew's frequent illness. Elizabeth Isham was prevented from marrying the man she loved, but she also established a stable relationship with her husband, Sir Nicholas L'Estrange. However, her frequently expressed wish for the company of her twin sister, Judith, may indicate that her relationship with her husband was not her most significant emotional bond. Mary Isham, Susan and Elizabeth's half-sister, was more fortunate in her choice - which she made herself for love. Her relationship with her husband, Marmaduke Dayrell, remained very happy, but extremely short,

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79 Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 9 Jan.[ ], NRO IC 4161.

80 Justinian Isham to Vere Isham, 14 Jan.1670/71, NRO IC 710.

81 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 26 Sept.1654, Letter LVI, & 8 Dec.1657, Letter XCV, Duppa, pp.97,146.

because she died of small-pox only seven months after their marriage. The marriage of Sir Justinian, the fourth baronet, and Elizabeth Turnor was unshakably happy and contented, as we have seen.

The majority of these relationships must be categorised as loving and affectionate, and many of those which appear more aloof probably do so mostly because of the lack of evidence. Unless couples were particularly extravagant in their expressions of affection or dislike, it takes a considerable number of letters to build up a picture of the marriage. When there are only a few letters the most immediate impression is likely to be of a lack of warmth. On the basis of marriages about which a good deal is known, shortage of evidence may mean just that, and not necessarily lack of affective ties between husband and wife. In 1979 Alan Macfarlane wrote critically of 'the frequent tendency to interpret lack of evidence as lack of feeling. Silence', he wrote, 'cannot be treated as synonymous with apathy or hostility'.[82] The problem of silence remains, but the seventeenth century voices recently heard do not lack emotional substance.

The existence in this sample of so many loving relationships throughout the century gives the lie to those who maintain that deep emotional bonds between husbands and wives began to be the norm only late in the seventeenth century. There is enough evidence to demonstrate that such 'affective individualism' was a more frequent basis for marriage than loveless matches for financial gain. There is no room for claims such as Shorter's that the last two centuries have seen 'the demolition of individual emotional isolation and the locking together of souls'.[83] It is doubtful whether the contrast between the last two centuries and the two which preceded them is as great as Shorter believes - there have

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[82] Macfarlane, 'The Family, Sex and Marriage in England,' p.116.

[83] Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family, p.16.

always been both loving and unloving marriages, and there always will be.

The views of Stone, Trumbach, Shorter, Ariès, Slater and others must be questioned not only because of the many examples of companionate marriages, but also because of the nature of the evidence they use. The impression of distance and formality gained from many letters and other documents can be misleading. Stone himself suggests that the question arises 'whether what appears to be a growth of affect may in fact be no more than a growth in the capacity to express emotions on paper'.[84] Although writing style was individual, and varied considerably in all periods of the seventeenth century, generally the salutations and endings of letters were more formal and deferential early in the century, and less stereotyped and more individualistic as the century progressed. Obviously the complete acceptance of expressions such as 'your dutiful and obedient wife' indicates something very important about the society, but equally, complete acceptance waters down the individual use of such expressions. Some people used such expressions without thought, others were more discriminating. In forty-one letters written by Rebecca Sherfield to her husband after their marriage in 1616, only once did she call herself 'your obedient loving wife'. Marrying as a widow in her early forties she chose to end her letters as 'your ever loving wife'.[85] Writing style and even hand-writing also became less stiff as the century progressed. As women in particular became better educated and wrote more their letters appear more relaxed. This does not necessarily mean that their relationships with those they were writing to were also warmer and more relaxed.

The work of Keith Wrightson, Ralph Houlbrooke, Roger Hainsworth,

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84 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.13.

85 Joan Thynne ended her letters in the first year or so of her marriage 'your obedient wife', after that she used variations of 'your ever-loving wife'. She may have been expressing a change in her relationship with her husband, even if unconsciously. [Wall, Two Elizabethan Women, passim.]

Vivienne Larminie, and others has brought the debate to the place where the burden of proof now lies with those who wish to portray the seventeenth century as an emotional wasteland.

The likelihood of mutuality and companionate marriages was increased by practical circumstances as well as by ideas and emotions. The shared duties and responsibilities of husband and wife, the need for the wife to act in her husband's place in his absence, and the physical closeness of family life in gentry families in the country, all contributed. Among the landed classes the preservation of the family fortune was always the major priority, particularly for the head of the family. But women were not excluded from this. In theory and in practice they were expected to contribute. In the gentry class, not only their dowries but also their housewifery went toward the preservation and improvement of the family's status. The head of the family had of right the controlling decision about the use of the family patrimony, and in theory a wife was permitted to contribute only a modest amount of solicited advice. But in practice many wives administered the family estates during the absences of their husbands with a fair degree of independence. Most of the wives in these families expected to be consulted on a variety of issues major and minor. Duties such as child-rearing were enjoined by moralists as a shared responsibility, and were so in fact.

The extent to which husbands and wives chose to be together in shared leisure activities is some indication of the mutuality and companionship of their marriage. It is possible to know a great deal about the recreations of the gentry,[86] and it is evident that there were a number of sports, scholarly pursuits and pleasures from which women were excluded, but there were many more activities which men and women shared. Sir Edward Dering, first baronet, and Sir Justinian Isham were both men who

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[86] Christina Hole, English Sports and Pastimes (New York,1949/1968).

devoted a great deal of time to scholarship. A letter to Sir Edward from his second cousin Sir Roger Twysden illustrates very well the male world of politics and scholarship in which wives played only a small part. In December 1639 Twysden wrote to Dering hoping for his support for the Treasurer, and discussing other political issues important to them both. He invited Sir Edward to visit him at Roydon, and made his invitation as attractive as possible:

> We shall beguile the time in reading, walking, and somewhat else that will beguile it; and I doubt not but to give you such reasons for the Treasurer's election as shall with willingness persuade you to interest all your friends. I cannot in this winter dead season seek my lady's company, to whom we desire to be remembered, and in some better time of the year shall hold ourselves favoured if she will look on us... If you take so much pains as to visit your affectionate cousin, pray bring your history of William Thorne, and I will show you an old MSS sometime of the same Abbeys, containing many pretty Miscellaneas, writ about Edward III his time, out of which perhaps Thorne took some part of his history.[87]

Reading and study were diversions which made country life more enjoyable. In a letter written to persuade Sir Thomas Isham to spend some time at home in the country Gilbert Clerke assured him he would find his home as good as any in the world, especially if he would 'take delight in reading a little now and then' for his 'diversion'.[88] Bishop Duppa commended Sir Justinian Isham on having advantages 'more than others of your quality which live about you, and know not what to do with themselves in a rainy day'.[89] Such scholarly pursuits were less usual among women, but reading, although a solitary pursuit, could also be important to women, particularly as the century progressed, and it often became a shared interest. Lady Vere Isham, although no scholar, shared some of her

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87 Roger Twysden to Edward Dering, 26 Dec.1639, Larking, Proceedings, p.2,3.

88 Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4532.

89 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 29 March 1653, Letter XXVIII, Duppa, p.64.

husband's reading interests in the early years of their marriage. In December 1664 she sent Bishop Duppa her thanks for 'your Prayer Book and Virgil'.[90] Few things pleased Lady Elizabeth Isham more than the gifts of books her husband sent frequently from London, she wrote, 'you have been entertained I perceive with a new play which I suppose will be shortly printed, if you would send it me, and any new thing else that comes out I should take it kindly'.[91] Thus even at a distance Lady Isham was able to share with her husband some of the pleasures of the theatre which he enjoyed in London. In the years following the Restoration the theatre was a pleasure shared by many gentry men and women, in spite, or may be because of, its bawdyness. In 1690 John Isham wrote to his brother about Mr. Dryden's new play, and added, 'the Queen was there the day before and it's like to take very well, having much bawdy in't...'[92]

Both Sir Edward and Lady Mary Dering participated in some of the musical and literary circles of their day. Mary Harvey had attended school with Katherine Philips, nee Fowler, the poetess who became known as 'the matchless Orinda'. This acquaintance provided Mary, on a small scale, with the kind of friendships that men made so effectively at the universities and the Inns of Court. In this case the acquaintance extended to her husband, and the Derings were associated with Orinda's society called 'the Official Order of Friendship in the Kingdom of Feminine Sensibility'; and Sir Edward was given the pseudonym 'the noble Sylvander'. In 1655 Henry Lawes, who had been Mary Dering's music teacher dedicated his Second Booke of Ayres to her and included four of Sir Edward's poems which Mary had set to music. The Derings continued their

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90 Endorsed reply of Justinian Isham to Duppa, on letter of 5 Dec.1654, Letter LX, Duppa, p.102.

91 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 9 Nov.[ ], NRO IC 4384.

92 John Isham to Justinian Isham, 23 Oct.[arch. 1690], NRO IC 2255.

association with salons in which many of the members were women after the Restoration.[93]

Music was often a shared family pleasure. Thomas Isham, in his diary, mentions a visit the family received from Mr Jackson, 'the musician who used to live with us', and 'the Daventry musicians' who came to the family home in 1671 for six days between Christmas and New Year, 'being hired to practise their skill'.[94] And in August 1672 they were visited at Lamport by a Venetian with a 'marine trumpet which had one string which he plucked'. Thomas and his family were fascinated by the instrument and he added in his diary 'by moving the bridge he can imitate the human voice, the lute, the guitar, the cornet, the trumpet, the horn and the fife'. Sir Justinian gave the musician five shillings and offered him twenty shillings a week if he would stay on. Eventually Thomas owned one of the instruments himself and took it up to Oxford with him.[95] Thomas also played the lute which was apparently much enjoyed by his friends.[96]

In sporting pursuits such as hawking, bull and bear-baiting, wrestling, cock-fighting, coursing hares and even fishing, men enjoyed their pleasures together and women were not included. However, some women showed a surprising knowledge of the sports, and were not necessarily excluded because of their greater sensitivity, as this letter from Susanna Isham to her brother John illustrates:

> Your greyhounds were challenged this meet by a Lincolnshire gentleman, but yours was the best, they courst the hare into a cony hole where she was digged out and set on foot again, and courst again so long until the greyhounds could not kill her when they had taken her. So they took the hare from them and keep her alive at Mrs Gascoyns for a merriment and will make so good a course

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93 Bond, Diaries p.4,5.

94 Isham Diary, 9 June 1672, p.129; 26 & 31 Dec.1671, p.71,75.

95 Ibid. 27 Aug.1672, p.145. A marine trumpet was a monocord played with a bow, probably the oldest known bowed instrument. [p.146 note 46.]

96 Isham, 'Historical and Literary Associations of Lamport', p.24.

still as will try the best dog in this shire.[97]

Horse-racing was popular in the mid-seventeenth century in Northamptonshire. While some of the men of the upper classes actually rode,[98] women also attended, and these were occasions for socialising. Mary Isham mentioned to her brother in 1677 that she and her mother had visited Lamport 'in order to the horse race at Rothill where we met some two or three of our London acquaintance...'[99] Fairs were enjoyed by the whole family. Thomas Isham's Diary mentions the Northampton, Brixworth and Boughton fairs.[100] And later in the century Thomas's sister-in-law, Lady Elizabeth Isham, and her family, were still enjoying the pleasures of the Brixworth fair.[101]

The most common recreational activities of gentry families were visiting relatives, friends and neighbours, and being visited by them. They entertained each other for short and for lengthy visits, they dined in each others houses and relaxed together conversing, listening to music and playing bowls or perhaps cards. And it is clear from a number of letters, and from Thomas Isham's diary, that families dined together when they were entertaining and when they were alone. In December 1672 Thomas Isham wrote, 'Mr Charlett came and got so merry that he fell down from the table in the midst of the ladies, so that no one could help laughing'.[102] The Ishams entertained the local clergy, learned men who visited or lived in the vicinity, a vast array of cousins and other relatives, and various members of the community who were not of the gentry.[103] Sir Edward

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[97] Susanna Isham to her brother John Isham, n.d. [1601-1605] NRO IC 3692.

[98] Isham, Diary, 11 April 1672, p.99.

[99] Mary Isham to Thomas Isham, 13 Sept.1677, in Isham, Diary, p.41.

[100] Ibid. 9 Sept.1672, p.151, 12 May 1673, p.207, 24 June 1673, p.218.

[101] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 9 & 29 May 16[ ], NRO IC 4376, 4379.

[102] Isham Diary, 26 Dec.1672, p.177.

Dering, the second baronet, and his wife kept an enthusiastic open house for relatives and friends whether in London or in Kent. As they socialised in this way gentry families and their friends were fond of outings to places of interest, to towns and fairs, and of walks together. They enjoyed indoor pastimes and games, only a few of which are mentioned in these letters. In 1677 Vere Isham and her daughter, Mary, enjoyed playing 'Gammon' with visitors to their home,[104] and although gambling losses were disastrous to Vere's son, Sir Thomas,[105] card playing seems to have become increasingly popular in gentry homes in London and in the country. Both Sir Justinian Isham and his wife Elizabeth enjoyed playing cards with friends.[106]

Early in the eighteenth century letters from Edmunda Isham add attendance at balls to the pleasurable activities which men and women shared.[107] Although such activities certainly left plenty of scope for husbands and wives to go their separate ways, they seem most frequently to have socialised together at such events. However, although there were few places where women went that men did not also go, there were quite a number of places such as gambling establishments, coffee houses and taverns which were not frequented by gentry women. John Isham wrote to his brother Justinian from the Rainbow coffee house and from 'P. Tavern'.[108] Men were also more mobile. Sir John Parsons told Sir Thomas

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[103] Ibid. 7 Jan.1672, p.75.

[104] Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 2 Dec.1677, NRO IC 1065.

[105] Gilbert Clerke to Thomas, n.d. [1679-1681], NRO IC 4538.

[106] Justinian Isham to Elizabeth Isham, 15 Jan.1697, NRO IC 1542; Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 23 Nov. & 10 Dec.1698, NRO IC 4367, 1601.

[107] E[dmunda] Isham to her brother, 29 Jan.[after 1722], 11 Sept.[1730-37], NRO IC 2517, 4936.

[108] John Isham to Justinian Isham, 14 June [arch. 1690], 18 Oct.[arch. 1690] NRO IC 2261, 2254.

Isham that he could not come to Oxford to see him because he 'took a ramble out into Sussex to Petworth, Chittister, and Portsmouth', and added, 'I was also in your country...'[109] John Isham also went 'rambling' in the counties near London when the mood took him in March of 1690,[110] and Mun Turnor planned a month's holiday in Flanders in 1690.[111]

Women lacked this freedom, but in the latter part of the century married couples and families frequently holidayed at the spas, particularly Bath and Tunbridge. Sir Robert and Betty Southwell frequently spent their time together in Bath, Sir Nicholas and Lady Carew were there in 1674,[112] and John Isham wrote to his brother from Tunbridge in 1699.[113] Husbands and wives and families sometimes travelled considerable distances together to socialise and holiday. Although the recreational activities changed through the century, for instance card playing and dancing became more popular, spas were established as holiday places, and some sports declined in popularity, the main recreational pursuits of the gentry revolved around visiting and entertaining throughout the entire century. There is an impression from the correspondence of the families in this study that socialising was more among family and kin early in the century, and broadened to include neighbours and friends as the century progressed. But as yet this remains speculation. What is certain is that this socialising was an activity mostly shared by husband and wife when they were together in London or in the country, this remained a constant throughout the century, and is a significant indication of mutuality in marriages. It was well understood

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[109] John Parsons to Thomas Isham, 27 Sept.[ ], NRO IC 935.

[110] John Isham to Justinian Isham, 11 March 1689/90, NRO IC 1445.

[111] Henry Higden to Justinian Isham, 6 March 1689/90, NRO IC 1444.

[112] Dolly Long to Justinian Isham, 8 Sept.1674, NRO IC 841.

[113] John Isham to Justinina Isham, 30 Aug.1699, NRO IC 1616.

that once a person was married the focal point of their existence became their own home.[114]

Thomas Aquinas believed that the friendship between husband and wife was increased by delight in the act of generation.[115] Protestant preachers wrote strongly against the Romish heresy of celibacy, and some wrote approvingly of frequent, cheerful 'matrimonial meetings'. The ideal of mutuality in marriage was strengthened, as following St Paul, the writers of conduct books and marriage sermons confirmed that each partner had equal right to initiate and enjoy physical love within marriage, and no right to deny their partner.[116] Whately wrote that neither husband nor wife could deny the other 'without grievous sin'.[117] Gouge believed that a husband should 'delight in his wife entirely'.[118] And he recommended Solomon's advice in Proverbs 5:18,19 - '... rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love'. He added that the hind and roe had been chosen because of all animals they were the most enamoured of their mates 'and even mad again in their heat and desire after them'. Gouge also recommended the Song of Songs as a pattern of love. 'Read the Song of Songs', he wrote, 'and in it you shall observe such affection manifested by Christ to his Spouse, as would make one think he did... even err in his love and dote on her.'[119]

Although the Puritan ministers disapproved of lust, even within marriage, and believed that chastity was a Christian duty; there can be

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[114] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 1 Nov.1653, Letter XXXVI, Duppa p.73.

[115] Aquinas, In X libros, in Benton, 'Clio and Venus,' p.21

[116] 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

[117] Whately, Bride-Bush (1619) p.14.

[118] Gouge, Duties, p.208.

[119] Ibid. pp.208,209.

little doubt that they believed physical love to be a pure and essential part of married life.[120] Whately even recommended coming together with prayer, which would, amongst other things, keep husband and wife from growing weary of one another.[121]

There is little trace in the seventeenth century of the complex of sexual neuroses and ambiguities about women's sexuality which were to plague later ages. At least up until the last quarter of the century women were assumed to be as enthusiastic as men about sexual relations, if not more enthusiastic, even voracious, and therefore admonition about the need for chastity in women before and during marriage received a very high profile. The godly disapproved of illicit sexual activity, as the church always had done. But it would seem that regarding sexual indulgence as a sin to beware of because both men and women were all too likely to fall into it with alacrity may have been less repressive than the belief that good women had no interest in the sordidness of sex. The sexual double standard which has been a basic premise of most societies is certainly relevant to an understanding of gentry marriages in the seventeenth century, particularly during the lengthy periods when husbands found themselves in London without their wives or families. However, clerical prohibitions and particularly the physical closeness of family life, may sometimes have limited the feasibility of illicit sexual activities.

The correspondence of the families in this study is almost devoid of sexual content. Those few references available show a comfortable acceptance of sexuality within married life; for example, wives were frequently referred to by their husbands and others as 'bedfellows'. Sir Euseby Isham writing to his cousin Thomas in 1605 ended his letter '...

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[120] Frye, 'Conjugal Love', passim; Haller, 'The Puritan Art of Love', passim; Haller, "Hail Wedded Love", passim; Leites, 'The Duty to Desire', passim.

[121] Whately, Bride-Bush (1617) p.43.

with my loving commendations to you and my good cousin your bedfellow, I leave you both to the tuition of the Almighty'.[122] Charles Dering wrote to his nephew, Edward Southwell, soon after his second marriage in 1716,

> You might very justly have expected an acknowledgement of yours of the 1st. Inst. sooner, but when I consider that I robbed your Lady of some kisses by writing even that short letter (as I had your own word for it I did) I concluded she might be the looser too by your reading the answer to that epistle, and therefore I thought... to defer my writing until I might reasonably suppose that the violence of your passion might be a little abated.[123]

The close and affectionate relationship of Sir Edward Dering and his wife Unton was also one of passion. When absent Sir Edward wrote to his wife that he longed for her 'bedfellowship'. He wrote in May 1632, 'Dear sweet bedfellow, I would thou hadest my staff for the day, and my hand for every night',[124] and some years later while she was away visiting her family, and he was apparently sharing his bed with one of his children he wrote '...my little bedfellow, (though the same flesh and blood) is not so pleasant to me as my beloved chain'.[125]

How close the literary representation of marriage and of women - whether in conduct books, Platonistic poetry, Shakespearean drama, humanist philosophy, or works of satire and commendation - was to real life is difficult to assess. There can be no doubt that the influence of powerful stereotypes and moralistic advice was considerable, but theory still left room for great variety in practice.

In reality the way men and women behaved, and particular marriages functioned, was greatly influenced by the age, abilities and personalities of both partners, and by their expectations. The number of examples which

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[122] Euseby Isham to Thomas Isham, 3 Oct.1605, NRO IC 50.

[123] Charles Dering to Edward Southwell, 18 Sept.1716, KAO U1713 D/53. Charles Dering was 60 and Edward Southwell 45 in 1716.

[124] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 3 May 1632, KAO U350 C2/29.

[125] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 7 Nov.1638, KAO U350 C2/60.

could be cited to illustrate this point is almost limitless. When individuals, their marriages and their family lives, are examined closely, their experiences are revealed to be impressively diverse. At the very beginning of the century Elisabeth Isham, who married Sir Anthony Denton, proved a very independent and pragmatic person. Her forthright attitudes and confidence in later life, when as a comfortably established widow she created a home for her four nieces, was not created by her widowhood or age, but was a part of her personality. Vere Leigh, on the other hand, appears to have been comparatively unassertive during her married life, but in widowhood much more independent and assertive, toward her children in particular. Marriage to an older man who had well-developed patriarchal ideas about the role of a wife was an important influence.

The close-knit family life created by Mary Harvey and Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, was influenced by their expectations of what marriage and family life should be. Sir Edward's inclination toward family life may have been influenced by the emotional deprivation of his own childhood after the death of his mother, and by the fact that he married young. And the establishment of patterns of family living was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that, in their early married life during the Interregnum, Sir Edward took no public activities outside the family and developed a taste for family living.

Any attempt to give a total answer about the balance of authority and power within marriages generally, or in specific marriages in the seventeenth century, is doomed to failure. Although some of the mechanisms and cultural determinants which purported to govern marriages in the seventeenth century were very different from those of the twentieth century, the dynamics of marriages then were just as diverse and unique as they are now. Assessments of this aspect of marital relationships are impressionistic, as such assessments would be about contemporary marriages. However, some observations may and should be made.

Undoubtedly, as has been repeatedly observed in this paper, the ultimate authority was male, but affection and mutuality created a somewhat more equal distribution of power. The marriages of Henry and Rebecca Sherfield, Sir Edward and Lady Unton Dering, Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet and his wife Mary, and Sir Justinian and Lady Elizabeth Isham were all relationships about which a considerable amount may be known, they were very affectionate, and the opinions and decisions of these wives carried a great deal of weight. An example of the weight that affection had in the balance of power can be seen in a letter from Mary Dayrell, which she wrote to her brother, Sir Thomas, in reply to his invitation to join him in Paris, soon after her marriage.

> I do heartily wish myself with you, and I am certain Mr Dayrell would not think much of going into France if with me, so that I may safely say the change in my condition is no hindrance of my accepting this kind offer of my Dearest Brother. Mr Dayrell being the most obliging and the best husband in the world...[126]

As was well understood in the seventeenth century, and has been observed already in this paper, age discrepancies also influenced the balance of authority in marriage. In marriages such as those of Sir Justinian Isham and Sir Robert Harley, who were in their forties, to much younger women, the weight of authority, at least to begin with, was with the husband.[127] Since theorists thought this was where authority should

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[126] Mary Dayrell to Sir Thomas Isham, 24 April 1679, NRO IC 1179.

[127] Such a balance of authority did not rule out strong affection. Brilliana Harley's letters to her husband are very explicit in their yearning for his presence and expressions of affection: 'I desire to see you more than you can guess at'; 'Believe me, I think I never missed you more than now I do, or else I have forgot what is past'; '...reserve the remembrance of my love, of which you have not a part but all....' Brilliana's letters possibly also convey a slight indication that she believes her love for him greater than his for her: 'Alas! my dear Sir, I know you do not to the one half of my desires, desire to see me, that loves you more than any earthly thing'. However, this may be her way of dramatising her expression of love. [Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, 1 April 1626, BL Loan 29/72; 5 Oct.1627, Letter IV in Lewis, Letters, pp.3,4; 28 April 1626, BL Loan 29/72; 4 Dec.1629, Letter VI, Lewis, Letters, pp.4,5.]

be, they disapproved of marriages of younger men to older women. Individual personality was obviously very important, as was intelligence, since an intelligent woman could use the cliches of submission while manipulating the realities of power. And in the interests of the efficient running of the family, women's voices were heard. When Sir Justinian Isham was involving himself in the marriage of Lady Jane Garrard's eldest son she wrote to thank him, and stated in the letter, 'his father will give him possession of all his estate, I have prevailed with him so to do'.[128] The context of Lady Garrard's letter implies that she may have persuaded her husband somewhat against the interests of their younger children, but in an instance of this sort it is impossible to know whether Sir John Garrard yielded to his wife's pressure or the desirability of his son's possible match.

Lady Vere Isham's letters reveal some of the subtleties of the balance of authority between herself and her husband. When she made plans to visit an oculist in London Sir Justinian was 'not very willing' for her to join him in the city. On that occasion she gave up her plans very readily. In 1670 when Sir Justinian again discouraged her from travelling up to London she wrote,

> Holland [a servant who often went with Sir Justinian] said in his letter to Katherine [Lady Isham's servant] that you have arguments sufficient to hinder my journey, which I [would] have taken kindly from you, if you had mentioned them in your own letter to me...

Not only did Lady Isham resent this second-hand retailing of information and feel able to administer a mild rebuke to her husband, but she also went up to London the next month.[129] The letters of Lady Vere Isham and many other women make it clear that in small issues at least the dynamic of

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[128] Jane Garrard to Justinian Isham, 18 May 1668, NRO IC 601.

[129] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 14 & 25 Feb.[ ], 19 Feb.1670, 29 March 1670, NRO IC 4157, 4164, 670, 673.

authority within the family operated in a manner perfectly recognisable to contemporary spouses. Lady Isham's servant, Katherine, left her employment and then wished to be taken back. After considering the promises that Katherine made about how well she would now serve Lady Isham wrote to her husband,

> Now if we could be sure that what she promises she would perform, I had rather take her than a stranger, and I hope so had you, and if you please to like of it, let us make trial of her for one year more. But if you do not approve of it I shall not take her again, though I believe she will be much better than ever she was.[130]

One might conclude that Sir Justinian would have the last say in this issue, and he was perfectly capable of doing so, but it is also apparent that Lady Isham expected her judgment to be taken into account. A letter from Lady Elizabeth Isham to her husband during the disturbances of 1688 revealed a similar acceptance that the last word would be her husband's, but those before would be hers.

> I hope my continuance here [in the country] may be without danger, but however, if you think it necessary to remove I will certainly do it, though with a very ill will, for I know not how to leave the children nor can I carry them conveniently, therefore pray do not lay your injunctions on me without there be necessity, and if there is occasion I shall as readily as you do what is most expedient.[131]

Seventeenth century society accepted without much question male authority at home and abroad; but it also expected marriage to be an efficient working partnership, in which the partners were joined by emotional as well as dynastic ties. Women had a great deal of knowledge and authority within the household, and sometimes outside household affairs, their husbands and the other men in their families were usually realistic enough not to neglect their contribution. Within these somewhat conflicting expectations the dynamics of marriage, and of family life varied greatly.

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[130] Lady Vere Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 8 June 1672, NRO IC 754.

[131] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 6 Dec.[1688], NRO IC 1431.

PART III

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

This section of the thesis examines the family life of individual households, within the context of the larger family. It is appropriate to examine family life essentially within the nuclear family because the nuclear family - mother, father and offspring - provided the primary physical location and sense of identity for individual family members in the seventeenth century.[1] The word 'family' was used in several ways in these collections of correspondence, but seldom to imply an extended kin group. It was commonly used of an entire household, including servants, and sometimes could refer to the servants rather than the family members. For instance, Sir Edward Dering noted in his account book, 'My daughter Southwell, her children and family came to lodge with me.'[2] However, the most consistent use of the word was to describe a nuclear family. In a letter to Justinian Isham, Bishop Duppa referred to 'a family so near to your heart as your daughter's is',[3] thus identifying Susanna Carew's family as distinct from her father's. And when providing news from home to Sir Thomas Isham in Rome, Gilbert Clerke wrote, 'your relations are in very good health and all your own family....'[4] With only a few exceptions individuals of the gentry class physically lived within a nuclear family,[5]

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1 That the basic family structure of the early modern period was the nuclear family is now well established. See above p.117 fn.7.

2 Account book of Sir Edward Dering, April 1680-1683, KAO U275 A3.

3 Duppa to Justinian Isham, [10 Nov.] 1657, Letter XCIV, Duppa, p.144.

4 Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 21 July [ ] NRO IC 4537.

5 The exceptions were children, almost always male, who were away at school, university, or the Inns of Court, or serving apprenticeships. Those who experienced the longest absences were younger sons. Only in the Long and Bedford families and the Isham family in the first generation of the seventeenth century were girls absent in service or

(Footnote continued)

and identified with the nuclear family, not only in a dynastic sense, but psychologically and emotionally. Ties between parents and children, and between most brothers and sisters in all the families in this study were very strong.

Family size and structure are important basic considerations from which to begin a discussion of relationships within families. The size of families, the frequency of death in the family among children and parents, the age at which children were deprived of their parents, and husbands and wives of their spouses, and the ways families re-formed in step-relationships, naturally had enormous significance on the functioning of the family, and the emotional bonds which developed between the family members. Hollingsworth estimated an average family size of between five and seven children among the aristocracy in the seventeenth century,[6] and Wrigley and Schofield estimated from twelve reconstitution studies that cumulative marital fertility among the general population was 7.03 liveborn children between 1600 and 1649 and 6.92 children between 1650 and 1699.[7] According to Wrigley and Schofield, in the years between 1600 and 1649 an average of 250 of every 1000 boys died before the age of ten, and 224 of 1000 girls, 142 of the boys died before the age of one and 123 of the girls. In the years between 1650 and 1699 the figures were even higher: 264/1000 boys died before they were ten and 256/1000 girls, 154 of the boys died as infants and 133 of the girls.[8] The average family size in those families in this study about which accurate details of all children is known, was 10.78 children, of whom an average of 7.42 lived to

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[5] (continued)
staying with relatives in London.

[6] Hollingsworth, 'The Demography of the British Peerage', p.29-45.

[7] Wrigley & Schofield, Population History, p.254.

[8] Ibid. p.249.

maturity. The child mortality rate was approximately 24 percent.[9] In assessing life experience within families the life expectancy of adults is also vital. Wrigley and Schofield have suggested on the basis of data from twelve parishes, that during the seventeenth century the life expectancy of women at thirty was a further 29.25 years, and for men of thirty it was a further 29.1 years.[10]

As with all statistics these figures disguise the very wide variety of actual experience. Family size varied between one and seventeen children.[11] In some families there were no childhood deaths, whereas in Mary and Edward Dering's family all but one of their last six children died as infants. In other families several children died in their twenties. Several families included relationships with step and half brothers and sisters. And in one family there were grandchildren older than the youngest children in the family. Clearly the experience of each individual and each family was unique. Many factors shaped that experience, and death was a very significant factor.

Henry Sherfield's two marriages brought him a family of fourteen stepchildren and one daughter of his own. Consequently this was a family in which all the children had lost one parent, and six of them were living in a household in which their only blood relative was a half-sister. Sir Justinian Isham also married twice. His family of small daughters were cared for partly by his unmarried sister, and mostly by his widowed aunt, Lady Elizabeth Denton, who created a family for them consisting of herself, the four girls and an unmarried nephew. After fourteen years as a widower Isham married again, and his second family existed very

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9 See below p.283.

10 Ibid, p.250.

11 In the Isham family in the sixteenth century Euseby Isham and his wife Anne Pulton had twenty children in twenty-one years. [NRO IL 1621.]

separately from the first. Another example of dramatically changing family structures is the family of Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, who was the father of seven children by three wives. His first two wives each died after three years of marriage, and his third marriage was broken by his own death at forty-six, when his children were aged between 19 and 8. However, by contrast Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, and Sir Justinian Isham, the fourth baronet, married only once and established very large, stable and affectionate families. The fact that all these families, even the composite stepfamily of Henry Sherfield and the family of Lady Denton and her nieces, functioned as small discrete family groups, and households, even while including some members not usually considered nuclear family members, confirms the priority of the nuclear family structure.

Because this study has made its primary focus the nature of relationships and emotional experience within the family, kin relationships have not been included. However, although this omission concedes the difficulty of assessing the emotional ties between family members and their more distant kin, this is not meant to imply that the kin network was not vitally important. In a recent article David Cressy has emphasised the importance of kinship ties and obligations in seventeenth century families,[12] and the evidence of the families in these studies supports his findings. Although the strength and nature of these ties, and the kinds of obligation they entailed are very difficult to quantify, there is much evidence of their importance. In his brief diary kept between October 1685 and April 1686 Sir John Perceval received visits from a wide circle of kin, ten different cousins are mentioned in the six month period.[13] In the two years of his adolescent diary Thomas Isham

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[12] David Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England,' Past and Present, no.113 (Nov.1986) pp.38-39.

noted visits from uncles, aunts, and at least thirteen people whom he designated 'cousin', or in one case 'father's cousin'. Several of these 'cousins', as traced by Sir Gyles Isham, turn out to be very remote relatives. An indication of the likely obligations of kinship is given in Thomas's entry on the 12th March 1672, 'A young man was here who came to our house and said his name was Isham. Father told him he would help him when he had more reliable information about him'.[14] Sir Justinian Isham was apparently prepared to accept the obligations of kinship towards someone previously unknown to him if a relationship could be proved. When Mrs Lane applied to Sir Justinian Isham for advice and assistance she did so on the basis of her position as the wife of one of Justinian Isham's third cousins.[15] Family letters confirm such expectations of obligation, for example, Charles and Daniel Dering expected their brother-in-law, Sir Robert Southwell, and later his son, to assist them in their careers. However, it is my impression that the social and supportive significance of kinship ties were more important than specific ties of obligation.

The structure and strength of individual kinship ties are comparatively unpredictable to the historian. Some members of the wider kin group may enjoy close ties, while others, just as close or closer in blood relationship, appear to have only the most distant contact. This appearance is somewhat influenced by the survival of evidence, but it is nevertheless true that strong kinship bonds between family members were more infuenced by compatibility and shared interests than by specific relationships. A most apt example of this is found in the relationships of Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, whose closest ties were with his

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13 H.M.C. Diary of the First Earl of Egmont, Vol. III, 1739-1747, Appendix III, 'Journal' of Sir John Perceval, pp.352-373.

14 Isham, Diary, 12 March 1672, p.93.

15 See above p.129. Isham, Diary, p.190. Sir Gyles Isham has worked out this complicated relationship.

brother-in-law, Heneage Finch, and his son-in-law, Robert Southwell. Both of these ties were created through the women in the family, which appears to be another frequent characteristic of kinship ties. Thus the nuclear family must always be considered within the context of the wider family.

The following two chapters will look at the expectations and responsibilities of parenthood, the experience of birth and the attitudes it revealed, and the role of wet-nursing and the appropriateness of its use as a measure of parental attitudes. The nature of the relationship between parents and children will be examined, and the position of those family members sometimes assumed to be peripheral to the functioning of the nuclear family - younger sons, unmarried women and stepchildren - will also be considered.

CHAPTER 6 PARENTS AND CHILDREN

PARENTHOOD:

William Gouge began his discussion of the duties of parents by stating:

> The fountain of parents duties is love.... For great is that pain, pains, cost and care, which parents must undergo for their children. But if love be in them, no pain, pains, cost, or care will seem too much. Herein appeareth the wise providence of God, who by nature hath so fast fixed love in the hearts of parents, as if there be any in whom it aboundeth not, he is considered unnatural.[1]

From this beginning Gouge proceeded through many pages about proper nurture, prayer and care for children. While advice books stressed the duty of children to reverence, obey and submit to their parents, and of parents to instruct and discipline, the need for love and nurture was also made clear. For Gouge this care and responsibility began as soon as the mother 'perceiveth a child to be conceived in her womb'. Neither was the responsibility hers alone, he added that 'Husbands also in this case must be very tender over their wives, and helpful to them in all things needful, both in regard of that duty which they owe their wives, and also of that they owe to their children'.[2]

Even assuming that advice was only rarely heeded in its specifics, the tone of Gouge's concern begins to undermine historians' claims of indifference toward very young children. The duties enjoined upon parents towards their children, from infancy and throughout their lives, were directed at their children's well-being. The frequently given advice to avoid over indulging children may indicate that many children were

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1 Gouge, Duties, p.282.

2 Ibid. pp.285,286.

indulged rather than repressed by their parents; after all, there is little need to reiterate warnings about what people are not likely to do.[3] The wisdom or otherwise of the advice, personal as well as medical, is less significant than its intention, and parents were left in no doubt that it was their duty to love their children, to care for them physically, to prepare them for life in this world and in the next, to provide sons with an education and where necessary a career, and to do their utmost to make a good match for all their children.

The nature of the relationship between parents and children is a particularly hard one to assess without prolonged observation of their interaction. Many actions lend themselves equally well to different interpretations, and others have such complex motivations that in fact they may be motivated at the same time by seemingly opposite intentions. For example, there is a fine line between stern discipline that springs from loving concern and that which is autocratic. And even some autocratic behaviour may be well intentioned. Acceptance of responsibility in finding an appropriate spouse may reflect concern for the child or concern for family status, sometimes the difference is obvious, often the two are intertwined, and to make a judgement about the relationship between the parent and the child we need to assess which component is uppermost. Great expenditure of effort in the promotion of a career for a younger son may indicate affection or a stern application to parental duty - or more likely both. A good education may be planned so a child can be given the opportunity to relish scholarship for himself, or so he can have a secure future, but it may also be intended to promote family interests and preserve the family's public image.

The difficulty of assessing relationships between parents and children

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[3] Stone puts the opposite interpretation upon such advice. [Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.167.]

from evidence concerning marriage and career plannning or discipline does not mean that those areas should not be assessed - on the contrary. However, there are some more readily used indicators. It has seemed to me that close involvement with, and concern about, the details of a child's everyday life - in infancy or adulthood - is a fairly certain indication of concern. If this is accompanied, in childhood particularly, by whimsical enjoyment of the child's antics, and pride in their achievements, it seems to denote affection. And the response children make to parents, unconsciously, or in remarks in adulthood, is also a significant indication of the type of bond existing. Mutual trust must also be a powerful indicator. None of these observation points can function alone, and in the context of the seventeenth century family, as with any other, assessments can only be made if there is some evidence, preferably a great deal, in most or all these areas.

The responsibilities of the early modern family were more diverse than those of the modern family. Ideally the seventeenth century family gave support in education, care during illness, provision of a wide social milieu, and in the search for suitable marriage partners and career success. In fulfilling these functions the family may appear to have neglected the emotional support believed to be provided in the twentieth century family. It would be interesting to know to what extent the strong sense of belonging to the family, which even most struggling younger sons and neglected unmarried daughters felt, provided emotional support. How was and is emotional support given? Is it stronger for being conscious? Is it likely to be enhanced or diminished by a more collective lifestyle with less scope for individualism?

Examples of conduct which has been judged unacceptable, and typical, have been accumulated by historians presenting a negative view of parental behaviour in the seventeenth century. That some children were treated abominably cannot be denied, but so are some children in the twentieth

century. The fact that some children were badly treated by distant and severe parents in the seventeenth century, and that many parents in the twentieth century are caring and indulgent toward their children, cannot be used in the way writers such as Shorter and de Mause do to argue for a progression toward more loving and caring parenthood. Firstly, it seems likely that it is only lack of knowledge which prevents us from also saying that many parents in the seventeenth century were loving and indulgent, and secondly, neither greater formality nor the belief in the necessity for strict discipline need indicate a lack of love and care.

Sir John Isham's comment about his grandfather, who died in 1596, illustrates the role of personality and cultural expectations in shaping parental behaviour.

> Of nature he was choleric, yet very soon pleased, awful to his children, yet loved them dearly, though they being present with him he seldom shewed them a familiar countenance as some fond fathers do to their children. Yet they departing from him to London to the Inns of Court, or to Cambridge, where they were brought up, he would turn his head aside and weep bitterly, so tender was his affection towards them.[4]

It may be a further indication of the influence of cultural expectations that Sir John wrote, and then crossed out, the second sentence in this quotation. The use of expressions such as 'the child' or 'the boy' may also be misleading. Children were referred to in this or similar ways many times in the letters of these families, and only very seldom can indifference be inferred when these remarks are placed in the context of the other facts known about the parent's attitude to the child. A typical example is Elizabeth Isham's comment in a letter to her husband '...as for the child he is ill still, but I hope the worst is past....'[5] Lady Isham was a calm and restrained person, unlikely to panic over a child's

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4 An account of his family, assumed to be written by Sir John Isham, NRO IL 1621M.

5 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 11 Jan.[1689/90] NRO IC 1432.

illness, yet greatly grieved and distressed by the death of a child.[6]

One potentially misleading aspect is the collective responsibility for children, even within nuclear families. Children belonged to the family in a dynastic and also a personal sense. The responsiblity for their welfare rested with the family as a whole. This fact can give rise in the minds of some historians to suspicions of neglect and lack of affection by individual parents. However, if this judgement is to be made it must also be made of twentieth century parents who share child-care and minding with grandparents, aunts, crèches or schools. Mothers certainly had a well defined role in the care and raising of children. Expectations about the potentially self sacrificing nature of a mother's love were common currency then as they are now, however, expectations of primary or exclusive nurture by the mother were greatly reduced by the assumed role of the family, including grandparents, siblings, nurses and servants. The attitude that parents, especially mothers, must spend every minute with their children is not one which belongs to the gentry in the seventeenth century. But the absence of such an attitude usually should not be interpreted as indifference and neglect, but as collective responsibility for children.

Thus mothers were able to be away from their children for considerable lengths of time without any imputation of neglect. When Vere Isham visited her parents at Stoneleigh in 1659 she left at home at Lamport her two daughters aged 4 and 3, and her son, the highly valued Isham heir, who was almost 2. She wrote to her husband, 'I cannot be quiet in my mind until I hear how you and my little ones do...', but added that if the children were well she would stay on. A few days later her maid fell ill and Vere's father wrote to his son-in-law to say that he had encouraged

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6 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 18 & 20 Jan.[ ] NRO IC 4364 & 4365.

her to stay on until the maid recovered.[7] When Edward Dering, the first baronet, was in Dover as Lieutenant of the castle the children of his first and second marriages were at times left with their grandparents at Surrenden Dering.[8] When Betty Southwell accompanied her husband on a lengthy visit to Ireland it was perfectly unexceptional for them to leave their one year old son with his grandparents, where he was welcome and well cared for within the family.

Elizabeth Isham also left her very young children behind at Lamport when she visited her husband in London, and relied on members of the household for regular news of their health and progress.[9] Some children also spent a good deal of time with their fathers. Sir Edward Dering, at times had his children with him in London when they were quite young. Elizabeth seems to have spent considerable time with her father, and away from her stepmother. Harry also spent time with his father in London without his mother, as early as 2 years of age.[10]

The use of these examples is not meant to imply that there were no absences of upper class parents from their children which occurred through indifference and neglect. And some absences which were unavoidable may have been damaging to the children's development, and the parent's peace of mind. For instance, Lady Elizabeth Cornwallis, who waited on the queen, wrote in February 1642 to compliment her brother-in-law, Sir Edward Dering, on the king's response to his book of published speeches, and added '... they say the Queen is presently going for Holland, and I have not seen some of my bairns this two years. God help me, but it 'tis a

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7 Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 7 & 11 Feb.1658/9, NRO IC 4158 & 452; Thomas Leigh to Justinian Isham, 12 Feb.1658/9, NRO IC 453.

8 Edward Dering to his mother, Frances Dering, n.d. KAO U350 c2/24.

9 R Gould to Justinian Isham, 26 March 1688, NRO IC 1420.

10 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 1 July 1634, KAO U350 C2/44.

time of all affliction to all', and later in the letter she added, 'I was one night in town, and thought to asseen Betty, [Sir Edward's daughter and her niece] but could not, nor my own little bairn neither'.[11] But the evidence in these families seems to show that when parents and children were separated, as was acceptable, considerable attention was paid to the care of the children. In 1671, when her eldest child was 17, Vere Isham made very careful provision for the care and supervision of her children while she and their tutor were away. She wrote to her husband, 'Mr Baxter will be constantly with the children till Mr Richardson return'.[12] This reflects not only her care, but also the Isham's absolute trust in the tutor, Mr Richardson.

The circumstances parents found themselves in with regard to their families varied greatly. Often the very diversity of the roles open to men, and their responsibilities as heads of their families, placed limitations on their activities as fathers. Henry Sherfield is a particularly apt example of this. He was Recorder of Southampton and of Salisbury, a Justice of the Peace for Wiltshire, he practiced law from chambers in London, he was a member of parliament in four parliaments, and he was involved in some estate and business activities. The irony of his absorption with this variety of occupations and activities was the limitation which they placed upon his family life.

It is evident that Sherfield looked forward to those times he was able to spend at home with his wife and family, and that at times he resented returning yet again to London.[13] He was a man who sent or brought presents for his children and grandchildren,[14] and when absent from family

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[11] Elizabeth Cornwallis to Edward Dering, 3 Feb.1641/42, Surrenden MS., in Larking, Proceedings, p. xliv. MS 'barns'.

[12] Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 22 May 1671, NRO IC 728.

[13] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 14 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 19.

gatherings was missed not only by his wife but also by his stepdaughters, sons-in-law, and grandchildren. After visiting her eldest son and his family in October 1622 Rebecca wrote to Henry, ' You cannot be forgotten with us for poor Hod taketh occasion of everything to speak of his grandfather'.[15] Yet his role within the family, while appreciated, was severely limited and only occasionally touched the intimate details of family life. This limitation was chiefly caused by his absences, but also by the concept of his role as father and stepfather held by himself and other members of the family. He seems to have been restricted chiefly to the business affairs of the family. It appears that he responded to almost all the demands for legal aid and advice by his brothers, stepsons, sons-in-law and even by distant kin, and saw them as part of his responsibilities as head of the family.

Sherfield took an active and often crucial role in the marriage negotiations of his daughter and stepchildren, particularly the step-daughters. He was particularly fitted for this by his legal expertise, but he was motivated by his interest in their well-being, and not merely by a sense of duty. His interest on their behalf was greatly appreciated, but it seems also to have been expected of him as a part of his function within the family. He administered the legacies of his stepchildren, at times to the detriment of his own finances. Sherfield also involved himself extensively in efforts to forward the careers of his stepsons. This was particularly so with George Bedford whom he assisted repeatedly over the years. He purchased Littleton estate for his stepson Henry Long

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[14] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 26 Jan.1616, 10 April 1621, HRO Herr. XXXI, 4, 17.

[15] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield. 10 April 1621, HRO Herr. XXXI, 19. There seems to have been a particularly close relationship between 'Hod' and Henry Sherfield, on another occasion Rebecca referred to him as 'your boy Hod'. [Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 25 May 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 30.]

in an effort to encourage him to settle down; he contributed about £2000 to Walter Long's finances in order to help him secure an advantageous marriage; and he increased the portions of some of his stepdaughters from his own resources.[16] He was also involved in more mundane family activities such as paying for and conveying new gowns from London for his daughter and stepdaughters.[17]

Every year there was more business which kept Henry Sherfield from home,[18] and made it less possible for him to join closely in everyday family events. During the legal terms he boarded in London, and in his later years he rented a house. Yet in spite of visits from his stepchildren this seems to have been essentially a bachelor establishment, changing to a family home only on those occasions when his wife stayed with him in the capital with their daughters. Thus Henry Sherfield's life was defined and circumscribed by gender and his role as head of the family, which ironically restricted his opportunities for close participation in many of the activities of family life. His relationship with his family was far from uncaring, and clearly his efforts on behalf of his daughter and stepchildren were a major part of the concerns of his life, yet a superficial study of the relationship could lead quite easily to an impression of distance and indifference.

The situation Henry Sherfield found himself in contrasted with that of his wife. Rebecca spent almost all her time with her children when they were young, she expected to do this and enjoyed the company of her daughters in particular. The settlement at the time of her marriage to

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16 Account of expenses, 20 March 1622/23, HRO Herr. XXVI, 10; Rebecca Sherfield to Henry sherfield, 14 Nov.[1616] & n.d. HRO Herr. XXXI, 9 & 2.

17 William Hart to Henry Sherfield. 17 Dec.1629, HRO Herr. XXX, 96; Taylors bill for gowns for Mary and Jane Bedford. 10 March 1618/19, HRO Herr. XXXI, 13.

18 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield. 14 Oct.1622, HRO Herr. XXXI, 19.

Sherfield stipulated that her daughters by her previous marriage were to remain with her, although there was no similar mention of the youngest child, Robert.[19] We know from the accounts which she sent Henry about his daughter Matilda that she expected to contribute to the girls' education in needlework, reading and writing.[20] And she wrote to Henry that she wished to keep Till with her for company rather than see her go away to school.[21] When the children were older she wrote with pleasure of their company with her, and she greatly enjoyed her very frequent visits to her daughters and sons-in-law. Yet as they reached maturity she seems to have been happy for her daughters and stepdaughters to visit family and kin away from home for long periods of time, and to leave them at home when she herself went on visits. She maintained a comfortable and loving relationship with her daughters and sons-in-law and their children.

Rebecca Sherfield concerned herself actively in her children's marriage plans, particularly the appropriateness of any proposed spouses. She had strong ideas about the importance of her sons being placed with masters, and was prepared to have them leave home at an early age for this purpose. Her eldest son, Harry, and also the third son, May, both excited her anger by their improvident behaviour, and she did not scruple to condemn it in the strongest language. She referred to Henry's 'want of wit or grace or both' in the course he had taken. And May, who left his master and wished to go to sea, she called 'a rogue and a masterless dog, to the displeasing of God, to the shame and grief of me his mother, and his own ruin at the last'.[22] It is apparent that she believed that it was

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[19] Marriage settlement between Henry Sherfield and Rebecca Long, 23 March 1615, HRO Herr. XLV, 1.

[20] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 26 Jan.1616/17, HRO Herr. XXXI, 4.

[21] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 28 Jan.1622/23, HRO Herr. XXXI,25.

her right as their mother to be obeyed. Although she thought it wicked and unwise for May to go with Sir Walter Ralegh she urged Henry Sherfield to help him go because 'his ungodly course of living here, where I cannot but daily hear of it, must be much more grief to me than his absence can be'.[23] So she was capable of viewing her children's behaviour from the point of view of her own comfort. The crosses caused by their behaviour she did not consider an acceptable aspect of motherhood.

The Derings, later in the century, illustrate a different emphasis in family life, in which the father was more intimately involved in family life. There can be no doubt that Mary Dering had the immediate responsibility, with the help of nurses and servants, for her seventeen children, and her grandchildren when they visited. The letters between her husband and son-in-law also make it apparent that she enjoyed the relationship she had with her children. However, her husband, Sir Edward, visualised his role in the family in the patriarchal terms of the seventeenth century, and assumed overall responsibility for all members of the family. In his case this resulted in a much more intimate relationship with his children and grandchildren than Henry Sherfield enjoyed; and his physical presence with them was in part responsible for this. He negotiated his children's marriages, arranged his sons' education, held himself responsible for the financial independence and careers of his younger sons, and throughout their lives took an intimate and advisory interest in the health of his children and grandchildren, and the pregnancies of his daughters.

The Derings also loved to surround themselves with their family - sons and daughters, sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren. The family

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[22] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 14 Nov.[1616] & n.d. HRO Herr. XXXI, 9 & 2.

[23] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 14 Nov.[1616] HRO Herr. XXXI, 2.

members who had left to set up their own homes were urged to come to Surrenden Dering as frequently as possible. And the constant 'good company' gave their parents enormous satisfaction. They seem to have believed that nothing could do their family more good than to be together in the country with 'good air, and good company, and peace at home....'[24] In 1677, as he was leaving London for Kent, Sir Edward informed his son-in-law with undisguised satisfaction that his eldest son and his wife, Elizabeth, Elizabeth's mother Lady Nicholas Strode and her husband, 'and many others' were arriving at Surrenden. And he added,

> ...after they have been there a fortnight, which is the most they will be persuaded to stay, and we have had a week to sweep the house, I hope it will be well filled again, with your family and Sir Eliab Harvey's, and as many other of our old friends as we can get together.[25]

Their daughters remained within the family home until they were married and their younger sons also seem to have been well content to make Surrenden Dering, or the family's London house, their home, until their careers made this impossible. This is hardly surprising, it was a totally family-oriented household, where the large group, often including very young children, ate sociably together. They visited and dined with friends together, and received visitors frequently.

Edward and Mary Dering's commitment to their children continued unabated into adulthood, as they concerned themselves with their careers, their character development, their patriotism - or suspected lack of it in the case of Edward and Daniel - and their health. Daniel received many letters of advice from his father on how to be sensible about maintaining his apparently delicate health at sea. Even when there was no illness, but merely some possibility of less than robust health Dering kept himself well informed about treatments, and wished to know any new details. When his

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[24] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 26 July 1675, KAO U1713 A/39.

[25] Edward dering to Robert Southwell, 30 June 1677, KAO U1713 A/35.

daughters Mary and Betty, and Betty's husband Robert Southwell, were in Bath in June 1677 he wrote to his son-in-law,

> I should be glad to hear that the Bath were of benefit and advantage to you and all that are with you. But I know they do not agree well with our Betty, and for Mall [Mary], I did always think bathing more proper for her than drinking. I hope... you will find out a proper method and with some patience of expectation come home sound and perfect.[26]

Three months after his daughter had given birth he wrote to his son-in-law, 'Dear Son, We long now with as much impatience to receive news from you of Betty's health as we were before covetous to give it to you from hence.'[27] In January 1681 Dering wrote that news of Betty's illness left himself and her mother 'in great trouble'.[28] And in March that year he wrote to his son-in-law, 'we are now very unquiet and shall be so till we hear of your safe arrival at King's Weston and how you find poor Betty there, upon which our happiness doth entirely depend'. In spite of his immense satisfaction over the coming marriage of his daughter Katherine to Sir John Perceval, he added, 'all seems to me but fleeting air, or the joys of a dream which vanish as soon as we are sensible of them, if she do not live to divide them with us'.[29] Of the eight troubles which he listed in 1681 as making the last half year the worst in his life one of the troubles was his son's debts, one was the illness of his daughter Betty, another was finding his son Daniel employment at sea, and one was that the rumours about his son's disloyalty were bringing him into disrepute.[30]

Thus in their positions as heads of their families both Sir Edward

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[26] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 30 June 1677, KAO U1713 A/35.

[27] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 30 Sept.1673, KAO U1713 A/28.

[28] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 15 Jan.1681, KAO U1713 B/19.

[29] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 1 March 1680/1, KAO U1713 B/29.

[30] Account Book of Sir Edward Dering, April 1680-1683, entry Oct.1681, KAO U275 A3.

Dering and Henry Sherfield had some latitude in choosing what their role would be, and their choice defined to a considerable extent the roles of their wives and children. They provide two widely differing examples of seventeenth century approaches to the paternal role, and authority in the patriarchal context. Neither they nor their families seem to have questioned this authority or the responsibilities which went with it. It becomes apparent from the letters of the Sherfield, Dering and Isham families that there was considerable variety between families and within families in the way children were treated. However, in spite of the variety there is a consistent picture of strong emotional bonds between parents and children, great love for children, and almost unremitting care and effort on their behalf. There is very little evidence of indifference, emotional distance or neglect, even toward very young children; in fact care and concern often began at or before the birth of a new baby.

BIRTH:

The correspondence of these families makes it plain that the issues of pregnancy and birth were of great importance not only to mothers, but to both prospective parents, and also to grand-parents, family members and friends. And pregnancies and births, even of those unconnected to the family, were constant and important news. References to pregnancies, miscarriages and births in Thomas Isham's diary, which he kept between the ages of 13 and 15, are most prolific, and range from the birth of a son to the Queen of France to details of any local women from gentlewomen to tenant farmers' wives.[31] These concerns were in no sense separate from the every day events of life, and discussion and queries about pregnancy,

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[31] Isham, Diary, p.121,63,67,71.

miscarriage and birth are found in letters dealing with a wide variety of other topics. Many references reflect the wish for children, and matter-of-fact acceptance of the processes of pregnancy and birth.

One of the most significant aspects of the correspondence of these families about birth and the arrival of new babies is that most of the comments which rejoice over births and look forward to more are from the male members of the families. It may be the nature of these collections, but it is nevertheless true that there is a noticeable lack of such enthusiatic comments by women. In contrast, their letters deal with such aspects as support of their female relatives giving birth, the circumstances of a birth, the health of the mother and infant, and concerns over naming, choice of godparents and baptism. And they share with the male members of their families comments giving thanks for safe deliveries.

Lady Vere Isham's male relatives and friends were particularly enthusiastic about her pregnancies, and their comments aptly illustrate such attitudes among men in the gentry class. Only four months after their marriage a friend wrote to Sir Justinian commenting on the birth of a daughter to his niece, and added 'I hope it will be no unfriendly wish to wish your lady in the same condition'.[32] A month later Lord Thomas Leigh wrote to his son-in-law, thanking him for the 'excellent news' that his letter had brought of his daughter Vere's pregnancy. This had turned Leigh's 'wishes into prayers for a blessing on our hopes which I trust the Almighty will in due time effect to all our comforts'. He added that if they did not soon visit him he would come to Lamport 'for I shall extremely desire to see how well a great belly becomes my daughter....'[33] In May 1656 Isham wrote to his friend Lady Dolly Long, 'My wife shows big again and I thank God (though in these destructive times) He hath yet

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[32] G Wentworth to Justinian Isham, 4 Jan.1653/4, NRO IC 332a.

[33] Thomas Leigh to Justinian Isham, 13 Feb.1653/4, NRO IC 336.

granted me to Build, Plant and get Children'.[34] At that time Isham had six children and Vere had given birth to two children in the previous nineteen months, however, these children were all girls. This pregnancy must have miscarried as the next child, Thomas, was not born until eleven months later. Just before the birth of Thomas, Bishop Duppa wrote to Sir Justinian, 'I am very glad to hear that your noble Lady is still in the breeding condition, so fast that you are likely to have a new supply of olive branches around about your tables'.[35] In March 1659 Christopher Leigh, Vere's brother, wrote to Isham on his father's behalf enquiring after his sister's health, and 'whether as yet she be quick with child'.[36] She was, and John was born on 4th August. Leigh's use of 'as yet' may be quite accidental, but the letter would seem to reflect an almost obsessive interest in Vere's child-bearing, since her last child had been born only seven months before, and she had given birth to four children and had at least one miscarriage in the five and a half years of her marriage. When Christopher Leigh wrote almost ten years later he referred to 'my dear sister who may happily by this time be eased of her burden to the joy of us all; the intelligence whereof would be most welcome here'.[37] The enthusiasm had abated somewhat since Vere had by that time given birth to five sons as well as her two daughters.

Correspondence which refers to the various aspects of child-bearing reveals as much about attitudes to the mother as it does about attitudes to the infant. Pregnant women, particularly when their health was poor, were often the objects of much worried concern from husbands, and also

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[34] Draft reply of Justinian Isham on a letter from Dolly Long, 3 May 1656, NRO IC 356.

[35] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 1 March 1657, Letter C, Duppa, p. 156.

[36] Christopher Leigh to Justinian Isham, 27 March, 1659, NRO IC 484.

[37] Christopher Leigh to Justinian Isham, 23 Sept.1668, NRO IC 617.

among parents, family and friends. In spite of the fact that his wife had survived seventeen births Edward Dering, the second baronet, was constantly concerned about the welfare of his pregnant daughters. In June 1682 Dering and his wife Mary were planning a five day visit to Lady Dering's cousin Sir Eliab Harvey and his family, but decided instead merely to dine with them and return to London because their daughter Mary Knatchbull 'being so lame and ill and indisposed with her great belly' they 'could not be satisfied to be long from her'.[38] When his pregnant daughter Catherine was crossing to Ireland, Dering was concerned that the motion of the ship would be 'more than ordinary trouble to a great belly'. And he wrote instructing her husband not to travel on to his family estate of Burton, co. Cork, but to await the birth in Kinsale.[39]

The concern the families felt during the stress, discomfort and ill-health that attended pregnancy sometimes excused women from expected duties. Nicholas Carew wrote to his father-in-law, 'My wife presents her duty to my Lady and yourself whose overgrown Belly will not permit her to do it so often as she would'.[40] And in July 1668 Christopher Leigh wrote reassuringly to his brother-in-law, 'My Lord and Lady are very glad to hear of yours, my sisters and all yours health... my sister's condition needs no apology for not writing, and nothing less expected here....'[41] Susanna Carew's family and friends were worried when she contracted an ague during her pregnancy since, as Bishop Duppa wrote to her father, 'she cannot seriously intend the delivery of herself from it, that she should prejudice the delivery of that which is so dear to her'. The bishop added, 'I should

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[38] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 8 June 1682, KAO U1713 C/40.

[39] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 27 May & 17 June 1682, KAO U1713 C/35 & C/43.

[40] Nicholas Carew to Justinian Isham, 29 July [ ] NRO IC 4405.

[41] Christopher Leigh to Justinian Isham, 31 July 1668, NRO IC 613.

look upon it as a greater miracle that a woman should be delivered of one child than that she should be delivered from twenty diseases'.[42]

Such concern for the life and health of mothers was entirely appropriate since maternal deaths were sufficiently frequent to cause anxiety to all who were closely concerned. Lawrence Stone has stressed how serious the risk of death in childbed was in the seventeenth century.[43] However, in a recent article Roger Schofield claims that the risk was much less than has previously been supposed. He suggests a maternal death rate of 1 per cent (10 per 1000 births) for much of the period before 1750. Since a woman would have an average of 6 or 7 children, according to Schofield, she ran a 6 to 7 per cent chance of dying in childbed at some time in her 'procreative career'. Since she also ran a risk of between 7 and 16 per 1000, depending on her age, of dying from causes other than childbed, he speculates that women may have considered death in childbed 'such a rare event that there was little risk that the tragedy would befall them'. Schofield comments on the fear of childbirth 'amounting to dread' that Macfarlane noted on the part of Ralph Josselin's wife, but adds, that since such detailed diaries as Josselin's are rare 'we shall never know whether Mrs Josselin's apprehensions of the dangers of childbirth were typical or not'.[44] In reaching these conclusions

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42 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 14 Oct.1657, Letter XCIII, Duppa, p. 144.

43 Stone states that in 3 out of 4 marriages among the squirarchy which were broken by death within the first 10 years this was the death of the wife. [Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, pp.79,80.] He also calculates that among the aristocracy in the seventeenth century the chance of the wife dying first was more that double that of the husband, 'almost 1 in 4'. [Stone, Crisis, p.590.] Although he believes that childbirth was the main cause of death among these women, Stone does not state that it was the only cause.

44 Roger Schofield, 'Did the Mothers Really Die? Three Centuries of Maternal Mortality in "The World We Have Lost",' in Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith & Keith Wrightson (eds) The World We Have Gained. Histories of Population and Social Structure (Oxford,1986) pp.259, 260,232. Another interesting example of human behaviour and expectations at odds with the facts arises out of another aspect of

(Footnote continued)

Schofield falls prey to one of the traps of demographic history - expectation of logical human behaviour based on statistical calculations; he also underestimates the extent to which women expressed their fears of childbirth in letters and diaries.

Sara Mendelson's study of Stuart women's diaries led her to the conclusion that 'women's anxieties about pregnancy and childbirth form a leitmotif which appears in various guises throughout their diaries and memoirs'. She found that they were apprehensive about the pain of childbirth, and many expressed their fears of dying in childbirth.[45] Examples of such very real and realistic fears of childbirth appear in published diaries and collections of letters. Maria Thynne, for example, had her portrait painted during her last pregnancy fearing, correctly, that she would die in childbed.[46] Ralph Josselin wrote, 'My dear wife, after many sad pains and sadder fears, in respect of the unkindness of her labour, was yet through God's mercy, delivered of her tenth child'.[47] There are several letters in the present collection which reveal such fears. Lady Elizabeth Isham, the wife of the fourth baronet, was an extremely calm and rational woman, who appears to have reacted to most of

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[44] (continued)
Schofield's research. Recent research shows that women in the third trimester of pregnancy, and those who have recently given birth are more vulnerable to infection. Using this fact Schofield has posited a 'pregnancy associated immune deficiency syndrome' which may have accounted for the highter incidence of maternal mortality in large cities where the risk of infection was greater. [Ibid. p.254.] It is interesting that some women in the seventeenth century seem in fact to have regarded pregnancy as a protection against infection. Dolly Long wrote to Justinian Isham '...this epidemical disease having very lightly assaulted me: a great belly ever proving an exemption from all other maladies....' [Dolly Long to Justinian Isham, 28 Sept.1657, NRO IC 442.]

[45] Sara Heller Mendelson, 'Stuart women's diaries and occasional memoirs.' p.196, in Mary Prior (ed) Women in English Society 1500 - 1800 (London, 1985).

[46] Wall, Two Elizabethan Women, p.xxxii.

[47] Macfarlane, Josselin, p.84,85.

the crises in her life with great restraint. She wrote to her husband while awaiting the birth of her fifth child,

> I hope in a fortnight more you will so order your affairs as to give her a visit who impatiently longs to see you. For seriously and without dissimulation, I am not perfectly well and much worse than usually I used to be... pray my Jus, pardon me for being thus earnestly solicitous, for did you but apprehend the fear I am in lest I should see you no more you would acknowledge my request but just, and easily par[take of the] feelings of your affectionate spouse. E.I.

Only three days later she apologised for too eagerly pressing him to come down, explaining that when she wrote the letter she was 'indisposed and in a very melancholy humour... though I am now reasonable well'.[48]

While acknowledging the reality of such fears not everyone sympathised with them. After telling Sir Justinian Isham about a Mrs Fraser, who had died in childbirth in spite of lodging in her midwife's house, Bishop Duppa wrote, 'I would not have your young Lady hear of this part of the catalogue of mortality, for women in her condition are too apt to kindle their fears from precedents of this kind'.[49] The advice was probably wise considering the nature of the news, and the fact that Vere Isham was expecting her first child,[50] and the bishop's slightly patronising tone is perhaps not surprising in an elderly and childless man. In 1653 Richard Chaworth wrote to Sir Justinian Isham,

> I am summoned to Drycott, my niece being ready to lie down next week, who with her service remembered to you in her last letter (which looks like her last will) humbly begged the religious education of her Jenny of us with many such mortified passages which troubled me not a little but that I hear from some tis the fashion for women in her condition to bequeath to others what they hope (by being their own executors) to enjoy themselves.[51]

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48 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 27 & 30 Nov.[c 1690] NRO IC 4386 & 4387.

49 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 11 April 1654, Letter XLVI, Duppa, p.85.

50 Schofield found that over the three centuries he studied the overall maternal mortality rate for first births was 39 per cent highter than the overall rate. [Schofield, 'Did the Mothers Really Die?' p.255.]

In spite of such scepticism, fears of death in childbirth were not unrealistic. Two women in the three core families studied here died in childbirth, and the deaths of kin and acquaintances were reported. Jane Isham, Justinian's first wife, died at the age of 25, three weeks after the birth of an eight-week premature son. Since her marriage in November 1634 she had given birth to five children including one set of twins. This meant that the average birth interval had been 13.83 months. It was not unusual for upper class women to die after such multiple pregnancies in quick succession.[52] Mary Sherfield died in 1612 after giving birth to her eighth child, the second fathered by Henry Sherfield. None of the birth intervals between her children had been less than eighteen months, but her first child had been born twenty years before so she was no longer a young woman.

The issue of the extent of family limitation in the early modern period is by no means resolved. And yearly pregnancies such as those of Jane Isham may seem to cast doubt on the contentions of Noonan, Schnucker and Biller that methods of contraception, particularly coitus interruptus, were well known.[53] However, in Jane Isham's case letters relating to the pregnancies of Justinian Isham's second wife, Vere, and the longing for an heir, not only by Sir Justinian but also by his relatives and friends, make

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51 Dr Richard Chaworth to Justinian Isham, 1 Nov.1653, NRO IC 328. Chaworth was a nephew of Bishop Duppa and the niece mentioned here is Isham's friend Dolly Long.

52 Dorothy McLaren, 'Nature's Contraceptive, Wet-Nursing and Prolonged Lactation: The Case of Chesham, Buckinghamshire, 1578-1601.' Medical History, Vol. 23 (1979) p.428,429.

53 J.T. Noonan, Contraception (Cambridge 1966) pp.200-230; Robert V. Schnucker, 'Elizabethan Birth Control and Puritan Attitudes.' The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Vol. 4 (Spring,1975) pp.655-667; P.P.A. Biller, 'Birth Control in the West in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries.' Past and Present, no. 94 (February,1982) pp.3-26.

it clear that no attempt at contraception would have been likely before a son was born. The two largest families in this study belonged to couples with very close emotional bonds - Sir Edward and Lady Mary Dering and Sir Justinian, the fourth baronet, and Lady Elizabeth Isham. We know that the Derings were often concerned about the health of their daughters when they were pregnant, and that Sir Edward was greatly concerned about establishing so many younger sons and daughters well, so it seems likely that they would have limited their family if they had found a reliable or acceptable form of contraception. There is only one allusion in these collections of letters which may imply that contraception was practiced. In 1617 Sir Martin Stuteville wrote to his mother-in-law, Mrs Elizabeth Isham, inviting her to be the god-mother of his daughter. He explained, 'I did forebear in my wife's former childbirths, to make this request unto you hoping to have one born in a more seasonable time for your travel; but since I expect this to be the last, I cannot now defer it longer'.[54] Since Susanna Stuteville was only 37 it was unlikely to be certain that she would have no more children unless deliberate action were taken.

Another indication of the possible use of contraception may be the greatly increased birth intervals sometimes found toward the end of a sequence of births, for example, in the families of Henry and Rebecca Long, Thomas and Elizabeth Isham, Justinian and Vere Isham and Edward and Mary Dering. However, these larger intervals could also be caused by the decreased fertility of older women. Very small families, particularly if the size is apparently restricted after the birth of an heir, may also be an indication of an attempt to limit fertility. Thomas and Elizabeth Isham had only four children, and the youngest was born four years and two months after an heir had been born. John and Judith Isham had only three children, and the heir was the youngest child, and Edward and Unton Dering

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[54] Martin Stuteville to Elizabeth Isham, 13 Jan.1616/17, NRO IC 150.

had only four children. The evidence for contraception in these families is very slight, but adds some facts to the current speculation on this issue.[55]

The risks and fears associated with childbirth were combated to some extent by the support of female relatives. Sara Mendelson has suggested that these 'sociable childbed gatherings' supporting a woman in labour 'became a means of equitably distributing her terror to the rest of her female acquaintance'.[56] Numerous letters attest the importance of this support, which often began days before the baby was due. About 1612 Susanna Stuteville wrote to her sister-in-law, Judith Isham, 'God hath bestowed a great belly upon me since you were here and I do look me in June, at which time if I might have you both here I should think my pain the less'. The letter expressed her distress that the death of her sister Jane had 'utterly deprived' her of the support she needed from a sister. In a post-script she added, 'I pray write me word whether you have a great belly or not',[57] which may be an expression of the possible support of a shared experience of pregnancy and of the fears associated with birth. In 1609 Sir Justinian Lewyn sent profuse apologies to Sir John Isham that he and his wife and sister had not been able to come on 'our promised journey' to his sister's childbed.[58]

A further indication of the great importance attached to helping at a birth was that Unton Dering spent time with her sister who was awaiting

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55 E.A. Wrigley, 'Family Limitation in Pre-industrial England,' Economic History Review, Vol.19 (1966) pp.82-109; Wrigley & Schofield, Population History, pp.254-6; Roger Schofield, 'English marriage patterns revisited,' Journal of Family History, Vol.10 (1985) pp.220. Schofield believes that before the 1870s at least there is almost no evidence that fertility was restricted after marriage.

56 Mendelson, 'Stuart women's diaries,' p.197.

57 Susanna Stuteville to Judith Isham, [c.1612] NRO IC 4612.

58 Justinian Lewyn to John Isham, [Jan.1608/9] NRO IC 4684.

the birth of a child in 1639, in spite of the fact that at home her husband was coping with an outbreak of measles amongst their own children.[59] A month before the birth of Betty Southwell's second child, her mother, Mary Dering, was ready to go up to London and be with her. It is evident that emotional rather than actual physical support was intended, because when arranging his wife's accommodation in London Dering wrote to his son-in-law, 'pray provide a lodging as near you as may be, and if you can in one of those houses which have a back door in your yard....'[60] At the time she was making these plans to support her daughter Mary Dering had a two and a half year old son herself, had just buried a one year old daughter a month before, and was a few weeks pregnant with her seventeenth child, so the decision would not have been made lightly.

It is difficult to estimate how long before the birth this support was required, and in fact it seems to have been dependent upon individual personality and health. In 1673 while Betty was awaiting the birth of her third child her mother planned to be with her about three weeks before the birth, but expressed her willingness to put forward her plans by two weeks if she were needed.[61] The Isham sisters, Elizabeth L'Estrange and Susanna Carew, depended upon each other and their sister Judith during childbirth, and on these visits their brothers-in-law also visited.[62] The practice continued throughout the century. In 1686 John Isham wrote to his brother, Sir Justinian, that their mother intended to leave for home in about ten days 'by which she will nick it pretty well I believe for a Gossip'.[63] Sir John Perceval's eldest sister, Katherine, returned with

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59 Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 15 Nov.1639, KAO U350 C2/69.

60 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 22 Aug.1671, KAO U1713 A/11.

61 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 27 May, 1673, KAO U1713 A/17.

62 Nicholas Carew to Justinian Isham, 3 June 1668, NRO IC 606.

her husband, Sir William Moore, to the Perceval family home of Burton for two months before the birth of her son in December 1685.[64]

Some women wished for the support of their husbands during childbirth, and to others it was less important, and individual women seem to have felt differently about it on different occasions, perhaps influenced by the amount of support they were receiving from other family members. Jane Isham wrote quite contentedly to her husband Justinian telling him of her preparations and hoping that she would provide him with a son. She was supported by her sister-in-law, Elizabeth, her husband's aunt, Lady Elizabeth Denton, and her midwife, and there is no indication in the letter that she felt the need of her husband's presence.[65] Isham's second wife, Vere, returned to her family home to have her first child, and Isham was not with her when it was born.[66] However, when she was expecting her second child it became very important to Vere Isham to have her husband with her. Unfortunately he was imprisoned in St James Palace as a royalist at the time with little hope of release. Vere wrote to him that she could not help but grieve for his absence even though she knew it did her harm in her present condition, and she added,

> I being now within three weeks of my time and having so little assurance of your coming, make me fear that if I should not see you before my time is expire [sic] it will go very ill with me. In your former letters you did assure me you would desire for your own particular release and that you would labour very hard to be with me shortly, which words did very much comfort me. I pray you my dear if you love me be in the same mind still and do not stay for a general [discharge].[67]

Other friends and relatives also assumed that it was appropriate for a

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63 John Isham to Justinian Isham,, 4 June 1686, NRO IC 2252. Justinian and Elizabeth Isham's daughter Vere was born in June 1686.

64 H.M.C. 'Journal' of Sir John Perceval, Appendix III, p. 361.

65 Jane Isham to Justinian Isham, [before March 1638/39] NRO IC 4815.

66 Charles Leigh to Justinian Isham, 21 Sept.1654, NRO IC 347.

husband to be with his wife at this time. In 1656 Lady Elizabeth Denton wrote to her nephew, Sir Justinian Isham, 'the condition your Lady is in I know will not admit of your absence from her, I shall ever pray for her safe delivery and if it please God to send you a son it will be a joy to me to hear of it'.[68] A letter from his wife's aunt to Edward Dering, the first baronet, after the birth of their first son, illustrates the tension between the fear and pleasure associated with the birth of children. It also seems to indicate that in this instance at least her husband rather than Unton Dering's female friends and relatives provided support for her.

> I desire by these lines to witness my thanks to you for your care to impart that welcome news, which I much longed to hear of, and do reserve with infinite joy. I do partake with you in thankfulness to God, that after so great danger it hath pleased him to bless her with a son. I know it will take away much of the remembrance of her pain, being requited with the love of a husband that is so truly sensible of it. I forebear to write unto her at this time, but rather to give you assurance how happy I think myself that the comfort and society of her friends is supplied in your love.[69]

And even more significantly, a letter of Lady Elizabeth Isham's seems to imply that her husband would actually be present at the delivery. She wrote, 'for if you be here by Christmas or three or four days before I hope you will be in time enough [to] hold my back'.[70]

Concern was also felt by family and friends for the new mother during the dangerous post-natal period. Jane Isham, as we have seen, died three weeks after the birth of her premature son, in 1639. In 1617 Lady

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67 Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 16 Sept.[1655] NRO IC 4839.

68 Elizabeth Denton to Justinian Isham, 9 Dec.[1656] NRO IC 4322.

69 Lady Dorothy Unton to Edward Dering, 30 June 1632, KAO U350 C2/30. This letter represents what, on the basis of these collections, is a typical response to birth by women. The letter even leaves ambiguous whether the 'welcome news' is the child's birth or the safe delivery of the mother. And in the letter Lady Unton notes that she has commanded a friend now in London 'to see my niece and bring me word of her perfect recovery'.

70 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 3 Dec.[ ] NRO IC 4743.

Elizabeth Denton who was supporting her sister Susanna during the birth of her child wrote to her mother, 'My sister is now reasonable well, but she hath been very ill and hath had some fits of an ague'.[71] In the days just after giving birth even writing a letter might be considered too great an effort for a woman to make. Five days after the birth of a daughter Lady Elisabeth Isham wrote to her husband 'I received both yours Dear Jus and am much rejoiced that I was not chid for writing too soon, but it did me no manner of harm, and I am very well'.[72]

A letter written by Judith Isham after the birth of a niece illustrates the continuing danger to mothers after childbirth, and also her attitude to the baby.

> The last week my sister was safely delivered of a daughter, we hope she went her full time though she was deceived in her reckoning. It sucked very well at first but after 3 days it changed and turned black, that we feared it would not live, so it was presently christened, the name is Jane. It is now better and sucks again, and my sister I thank God is in a reasonable good condition, having a very quick labour, but is so weak after it that we dare not take her out of her bed till it please God she gather strength....[73]

Almost exactly a month after the birth of her son, Robert, Lady Brilliana Harley wrote to her husband, 'I thank God I am reasonable well but I have not had the strength yet to go out of my chamber'. The next day she was able to report, 'I have been so far as the parlor to give God thanks with my family'.[74]

Women usually observed a lying-in period of a month, and coming out of

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[71] Elizabeth Denton to Elizabeth Isham, 13 Jan.1616/17, NRO IC 151.

[72] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 21 Nov.1696, NRO IC 1539.

[73] Judith Isham to Justinian Isham, 23 April 1666, NRO IC 583. Linda Pollock has observed that during the time covered by her study (1550-1900) the death of a newborn infant was generally mourned less deeply than the death of a child even a few months older. [Pollock, Forgotten Children, p.141.]

[74] Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, 11 & 12 May 1626, BL Loan 29/72.

the chamber in good health at the end of that time was cause for rejoicing. Charles Leigh wrote in 1668 to Sir Justinian Isham, '... my wife and I do heartily rejoice in my sister's safe delivery, wishing her a happy coming out of her chamber'.[75] In 1689 Lady Vere Isham wrote to her son thanking him for the welcome news of the birth of his third son, and heartily wishing Elizabeth, his wife, 'a good time in her lying-in and a happy going out of her chamber'.[76] After the birth of his daughter Betty's first child, Rupert in 1670, Sir Edward Dering wrote to his son-in-law rejoicing in the safe delivery of a son and added, 'and I hope it will please God to perfect the good work, by sending her a happy childbed also'.[77] After Betty gave birth to a daughter in 1673 he wrote, 'I am very glad to hear our Betty goeth so well forward, I hope she will go as well through the whole journey, as she hath done so far'.[78] And a month after the birth he was still concerned that the journey from London to Surrenden would be 'too great a journey for Betty to come in a day so soon after her lying in'.[79] In June 1668 after her sister Susanna had given birth Judith Isham wrote to her father, 'My sister Carew recovers strength and hopes to go out of her chamber at her month'.[80]

Some at least of the likely effects of post-natal depression were understood in the seventeenth century. Just over a month after giving birth Susanna Carew 'was so ill that she apprehended herself in a consumption'. However, her sister wrote to their father that 'her doctor encourages her having a better opinion of her condition. She was weaker

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75 Charles Leigh to Justinian Isham, 30 Sept.1668, NRO IC 619.

76 Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 28 Dec.[1689] NRO IC 4175.

77 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 24 May [1670], KAO U1713 A/46.

78 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 8 July 1673, KAO U1713 A/19.

79 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 4 & 5 Aug.1673, KAO U1713 A/22.

80 Judith Isham to Justinian Isham, 24 June 1668, NRO IC 607.

than usual so long after childbed....'[81] In this instance although there appears to be no doubt that Susanna Carew was not in good health, she herself took a more pessimistic view of her case than her doctor. A similar state of depression is indicated by this letter of enquiry after the health of his sister-in-law, Vere Isham, by Lord Tracey:

> My Lord and Lady, are most desirous to hear if your Lady's strength increase since her lying-in, fearing that her fancying the swelling in her throat may hinder her health; in respect that my brother Charles tells them that she conceives it worse than it was, which his Lordship saith is a symptom of melancholy: therefore my Lady hopes that you will hold to your first resolution, as not to permit any new treatment to be tried, but that nature should have its course.[82]

Miscarriages in the seventeenth century were often a danger to maternal health, and individual miscarriages were fairly widely discussed. Thomas Isham noted in his diary on the 18th December 1672, 'Lady Haslewood has had a miscarriage but is not in any danger'. The next day he noted, 'Father sent Lewis to Lady Banbury's to see her, as she has had a miscarriage and is quite ill, but now she is getting better'. On the 24th December, he wrote, 'Mother sent Lewis to visit Lady Haslewood: she is much better'.[83] This openness of discussion is also reflected in letters. Sir Thomas Dayrell, a friend of Justinian Isham's wrote to him, 'I am sorry for your young Lady's miscarriage, God may return her many....'[84] And when Isham's daughter Susanna Carew miscarried in 1657 Bishop Duppa wrote,

> I am troubled with you and for you: but since it is only an untimely branch that is lost and the stock remains entire, your joy may well countervail your sorrow, for there is time enough for her to bring you many branches more.[85]

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81 Judith Isham to Justinian Isham, 30 July 1668, NRO IC 612.

82 Tracey to Justinian Isham, 28 Nov.1660, NRO IC 504a.

83 Isham, Diary, p.175,177,

84 Thomas Dayrell to Justinian Isham, 16 July [ ] NRO IC 490.

The letter's practical rationalisation of the disappointment of miscarriage is based on the importance of lineage - there will be other children, and the assumption, often made even in twentieth century society, that a miscarried child will cause little grief.

If there were doubts about grief caused by miscarriage, there were few doubts about the dangers. In June 1673 Elizabeth L'Estrange wrote to her father, '... my sister recovers strength again after an ill miscarriage about Easter....'[86] Thus her health was still a cause for concern at least two and a half months after the miscarriage. Betty Southwell who was seriously ill for a long time and suffered several miscarriages tried a number of remedies against miscarriage without success. In 1681 Dr Rugeley diagnosed her miscarriages and other complaints as symptoms of scurvy. The remedy he suggested was to 'have her take opium, for there is no danger in it as long as the pain', but she was advised not to take it when she was at ease 'by reason she might sleep too much'.[87] The concern felt over miscarriages caused speculation about their cause. Mary Dering wrote to her son-in-law in March 1682 reporting that Mick Harvey's wife had miscarried due to a nightmare.[88]

Although historians of childhood have found examples of unwanted children and distress caused by the large numbers of children in a family, there is no evidence of that kind in these letters.[89] There was certainly fear and disquiet about the dangers of pregnancy and birth, but in spite

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85 Duppa to Justinian Isham, 10 Nov.1657, Letter XCIV, Duppa, p. 44.

86 Elizabeth L'Estrange to Justinian Isham, 12 June 1673, NRO IC 776.

87 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 18 Jan.& 17 March 1680/81, KAO U1713 B/20 & B/33.

88 Mary Dering to Robert Southwell, 11 March 1681/2, KAO U1713 C/22.

89 It needs to be noted that most of the letters in these collections which directly reveal attitudes to the arrival of children were written by men.

of that, the children were wanted. Obviously this applied particularly to heirs. Thomas Isham noted in his diary on 6th May 1672,

> Lady Nicholls had a son, which gave its father, Edward, incredible joy and gratification. The same day some men were brought before Father for stealing a tree from Sir Edward Nicholls's wood, known as Shortwood, but in his joy at the birth of a son, he withdrew the charge.[90]

At the arrival of his first grandchild Sir Edward Dering wrote to the child's father:

> I never paid money more willingly than I did to the messenger that brought your letter. The greatest concern I now had, is safe in the harbour... [the health of his daughter] I long to see the young gentleman, and shall hope for that happiness on Saturday. All his uncles and aunts are here with me, and overjoyed at the preferment he hath brought them to that venerable title. How much more then must I be joyed of that of a grandfather...[91]

The eldest uncle was 20 and the youngest one year old. Three of the Dering's own children had died in 1666, which may also have influenced their rejoicing.

Younger children were also looked for and welcomed. When Sir Edward's second grandson arrived in 1671 the parents planned to name him Edward. Dering expressed his willingness to put his name at the young man's service, but urged the parents to feel free to place the honour elsewhere if they thought fit because, he said, 'I can stay till the next come, for now we hope such opportunities will return often upon us'.[92] In December 1689 Sir Edmund Turnor wrote to his son-in-law, Justinian Isham, 'The good news of your being well come home and of my daughters being well and safe brought to bed of a boy adds to my joy and makes our Xmas very near perfect and complete'.[93] This was Elizabeth and Justinian's fifth child

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90 Isham, Diary, 6 May 1672, p.109.

91 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 24 May [1670], KAO U1713 A/46.

92 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 11 Sept.1671, KAO U1713 A/13.

93 Edmund Turnor to Justinian Isham, 26 Dec.1689, NRO IC 1442.

and third son. The letter is very typical of the letters family members wrote to each other welcoming the birth of children in these families, and several similar ones have already been quoted in other contexts.

WET NURSING:

The correspondence of these families contains comparatively little about maternal breast-feeding and wet-nursing, but the heat of the arguments about the significance of wet-nursing makes it important to discuss those examples which exist.[94] Evidence cited by those historians who interpret wet-nursing as generally reflecting a callous unconcern about infants and small children makes it apparent that there were occasions when indifferent parents were able to so dispose of their infants, but as more evidence about the seventeenth century family becomes available it is increasingly evident that such behaviour was very much the exception. In the seventeenth century wet-nursing was the custom among the upper classes.[95] Upper class mothers breast-feeding their children excited comment, by no means all of it approving. Even in the Newdigate family, which Vivienne Larminie found 'idealised' maternal breast-feeding there was some adverse comment. In a letter written to Lady Newdigate early in the seventeenth century Sir william Knollys commented,

> I should like nothing that you play the nurse if you were my wife. I must confess it argueth great love, but it breedeth much trouble to yourself and it would more grieve you if sucking your own milk it should miscarry, children being subject to many casualties.[96]

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94 Badminter. The myth of motherhood; Houlbrooke, The English Family, pp.133,134; de Mause, 'Evolution of Childhood,' pp.34-36; Mount, The Subversive Family, pp.121,122; Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.31.

95 Valerie Fildes states: 'In the 1500s and 1600s women from the upper classes and educated classes who chose to breast-feed were exceptional....' [Valerie Fildes, 'The Age of Weaning In Britain 1500-1800,' Journal of Biosocial Science, Vol. 14 (!982) p.235.]

96 Warwickshire County Record Office, CR136B240, in Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' p.224,225.

It cannot be inferred that all parents who conformed to the prevailing fashion and employed wet-nurses were indifferent toward their infant children. The comparatively recent fashion of bottle-feeding rather than breast-feeding is an indication of the strength of custom. Keith Wrightson has very aptly referred to the 'inertia of custom' in this regard, and has warned that we know too little about nursing in general 'to support the weight of inferential interpretation which has been placed upon the practice'.[97] Dorothy McLaren has suggested that only rarely were wet-nurses brought into the home even among the wealthy.[98] However, there are many references to wet-nursing in the families studied for this thesis which indicate that such a practice was not at all unusual.[99]

Wet-nursing allowed mothers to be separated from their children. But the evidence of these letters suggests that this was often in order that the infant could remain in the country, where it was widely believed the air was healthier. Undoubtedly this was usually convenient for the parents, but it does not necessarily imply neglect, and the children often remained in the family's home or with grandparents in the country. Jane Isham's careful planning before she gave birth provided for the provision of a wet-nurse well known to her. She wrote to her husband, 'I have my midwife now with me and I think I have concluded with good Garrit of old to be my nurse'.[100] Another letter, written to her unmarried sister-in-law who was responsible for the household at Lamport in Jane Isham's absence, makes it clear that although the nurse would eventually

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[97] Wrightson, English Society, p.108.

[98] McLaren, 'Nature's contraceptive,' p.427.

[99] Patricia Crawford quotes the examples of Mary Henry, Alice Thornton and Sir Simonds D'Ewes who brought the nurses of their babies to their homes. [Crawford, 'The sucking child,' p.33].

[100] Jane Isham to Justinian Isham, [before March 1638/39] NRO IC 4815.

take the baby to her home she was at that time closely supervised at Lamport. Jane Isham asked her sister-in-law for details of the situation

> that I may send directions about nurse Garrit who I sware doth trouble herself about frivolous matters, and one that I should mistrust her care of my child, which I pray tell her I did not nor shall not, without she now give occasion by her fretting away her milk and desiring to go home before I can be satisfied there is no danger. Which if she has any conscience she will not.[101]

If the hypothesis about the contraceptive effect of lactation is correct,[102] it is evident that all four of Jane Isham's daughters must have been wet-nursed, since they were born only twelve and fifteen months apart. However, none of the daughters died in infancy. Lady Elizabeth Isham wrote to her husband after the birth of her eleventh child, 'I have been forced to put the child out [to] nurse for Luke's wife fell sick and another in the house could not be quickly found'.[103] Clearly most of Lady Elizabeth Isham's children were nursed within the household.

Letters giving details about the health of infants and the reasons for weaning them make it clear that wet-nursing was often closely supervised, with the wet-nurse within the household and the interests of the child foremost. Evidence from the family of Sir Edward and Lady Mary Dering illustrates this particularly clearly. In May 1671 one-year-old Rupert was staying with his grandparents while his parents were in Ireland. Lady Dering wrote to her daughter giving details of 'Rupey's' health and antics and added,

> I observe your commands as to his diet, but he sits at the table and hath his pudding and artichokes and puree, but one night he made us good sport for he took a line of mutton by the rump and pulled it about like a little cannibal, but did not so much as lick his finger... as for

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[101] Jane Isham to Elizabeth Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4344.

[102] Dorothy McLaren, 'Nature's contraceptive,' passim; Dorothy McLaren, 'Marital fertility and lactation 1570-1720,' in Mary Prior (ed) Women in English Society, pp.22-53; Macfarlane, Josselin, p.83.

[103] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 21 Nov.1696, NRO IC 1539. This child, Susanna, survived infancy and died in 1726 aged 29.

> his nurse he is indifferent without he be a hungry, but he is not very fond of the breast as most children are of his age.[104]

Very obviously Lady Dering was familiar with all aspects of her grandson's eating habits. A year later Edward Dering wrote to his daughter and son-in-law about their eight month old son Ned, who was with the grandparents in the country. He detailed Ned's ailments - a cough, fever and 'stoppage of the stomach, which makes him draw his breath short' - and said it was his and his wife's opinion that the child should be weaned. The nurse, Mrs Jones, had admitted that she had little milk, and Sir Edward was convinced 'that little she hath cannot be very good'. Since Mrs Jones had stated that Ned's mother intended him to be weaned about the present time the grandparents awaited Betty's instructions, but if his health failed to improve they intended to go ahead and act upon their own judgement. Dering stated in his letter 'you may be sure he wants no care here, nor shall do...', and toward the end of a long letter about Ned's health and weaning he wrote,

> Looking over my letter I apprehend I have given you more fear for the child than there is reason for, for he is in truth much better these three days past than he was before, upon a glister and such other things as my wife hath ordered him...[105]

Lady Mary Dering wrote to her son-in-law in August 1674 that she felt it would now be easy to wean her thirteen month old granddaughter, Nelly. The child was staying with her grandmother in the country, and it is evident from Lady Dering's letter that she was familiar with the precise state of Nelly's health and the nurse's milk. However she waited to observe the wishes of her daughter in the matter.[106] The fact that the

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[104] Mary Dering to Betty Southwell, 23 May 1671, KAO U1713 A/5.

[105] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 28 May 1672, KAO U1713 A/16. Mrs Jones was to continue to be employed as the child's dry-nurse. Ned lived to old age.

[106] Mary Dering to Betty Southwell, 18 Aug.1674, KAO U1713 A30. In

(Footnote continued)

Derings preferred to wait for their daughter's instructions about weaning is an indication of the special, but not exclusive, responsibility that the mother had toward a young child. It also shows the clear involvement of parents, and in this case grandparents, in the decision about when to wean.[107]

Alan Macfarlane's discussion of the age of weaning, in his study of Josselin's family life, stresses variation between classes and within families, and quotes examples which varied between eight and a half months and 3 years.[108] Valarie Fildes has placed the age of weaning in the seventeenth century at about 14 months early in the century, falling to about 10 months toward the end of the century. The discussions of weaning in the letters in these collections make precise dating difficult, but they seem to indicate an age of weaning at about one year. Rupert Southwell appears to have weaned himself at about 12 months and his brother Edward's weaning was being considered at 8 months.[109] When her first child, Edward, was 16 months old Brilliana Harley wrote to her husband,

> Ned is well, but was in danger of being weaned, for the last night his nurse was very much out of temper being inclined to an ague: and he lay in my chamber from her: but this day she is well, and if it prove to be an augue, he shall be weaned and I hope God will bless to him the food which man lives by....[110]

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[106] (continued)
discussing weaning this letter states, '...she is not yet weaned but tis very easy to do for nurse did bitter her breast....' This was a common method used in the process of weaning. [See Crawford, 'The sucking child,' p.35.]

[107] Valerie Fildes believes that it is unclear how much influence the parents had over the decision to wean wet-nursed children, clearly their influence was decisive if the child was wet-nursed in the household. [Fildes, 'Weaning,' p.233.]

[108] Macfarlane, Josselin, p.87.

[109] See below KAO U1713 A/5 & A/16.

[110] Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, 21 March 1625/1626, BL Loan 29/72.

Almost three weeks later she reported that both Ned and his nurse were well and she proposed to wean him after Easter.[111] This evidence confirms Fildes suggestion that weaning took place for a variety of reasons such as the birth of a new baby, lack of milk, the health of the child, and even the preference of the child.[112] It would seem that even wet-nursed infants might be weaned when a new baby arrived. A letter from John and Mary Brokett to Justinian Isham wished him and his wife 'joyful in a brave younker to your pretty angel who we are sorry must lose her teat....'[113]

The evidence of these families is that among the upper gentry throughout most of the seventeenth century maternal breast-feeding was rare. Although Lady Vere Isham seems generally to have employed a wet-nurse, she nursed her last child, Henry, herself.[114] It may be that after giving birth to eight children in fourteen years Lady Isham intended to use the contraceptive effects of lactation. In a letter eulogising his mother after her death one of the the things Sir Robert Southwell honoured her for was that 'she was my nurse at first'.[115] These examples stand out as exceptions within the Dering and Isham families, as most of the children were wet-nursed. Maternal nursing may have been more common in the Bedford and Long families, which were lower gentry, but there is no indication about this. Whatever the variety of care for infants mentioned in these letters there is certainly no evidence of callous indifference, and a great deal of evidence of careful provision for their welfare, and

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[111] Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, 8 April 1626, ML Loan 29/72.

[112] Fildes, 'Weaning,' p.234,233.

[113] John and Mary Brokett to Justinian Isham, 6 Aug.1636, NRO IC 213. Younker - young man or child. [O.E.D.] MS teat - 'tett'. Jane Isham was 1 year old in August 1636.

[114] Vere Isham to her son Justinian Isham, 26 Nov.[ ] NRO IC 4194. Thomas Leigh to Justinian Isham, 28 Sept.1668, NRO IC 618.

[115] Draft letter of Robert Southwell to Mary Dering, 14 July 1679, KAO U1713 A/56.

the provision of wet-nurses was a part of that care.

CHILDHOOD:

Among the families in this study the investment in children went far beyond their health and physical needs. There is little support for Stone's claims about the sixteenth and seventeenth century stress on domestic discipline and 'the utter subordination of the child', nor is there evidence of 'the general psychological atmosphere of distance, manipulation and deference' which he described.[116] Both parents and grandparents expected to enjoy the company and diversions of their small children. Lady Elizabeth Isham wrote to her husband of their small daughter, 'Mis is wonderful pretty company and all my delight till you come'.[117] Edward Dering wrote to his son-in-law, 'I am glad Rupey is so good company.'[118] And when Edward Southwell was a small child his grandmother wrote to her son-in-law, 'I do not question but Neddy gives you great diversion.'[119] Parents also expected to indulge their children with gifts. Many letters from Elizabeth Isham to her husband contain references to gifts for their daughter: 'Mis is much pleased with her Pippit and loves papa mightily'; 'My girl being by as I write does much importune me to remember you of her Babees and fine things that she expects'; and in a somewhat more exasperated tone - 'The Girl bawls at me to desire you to send John to the Feathers upon Ludgate Hill for a

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[116] Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.171,117.

[117] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 7 Dec.[ ] NRO IC 4388. This letter also makes clear that in spite of the enjoyment Elizabeth found in the company of her infant daughter it did not compare with the pleasure of her husband's company.

[118] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 22 Aug.1671, KAO U1713 A/11. Rupert was almost 18 months old.

[119] Mary Dering to Robert Southwell, 18 Aug.1674, KAO U1713 A/30.

shilling worth of wigs, and to send them down: for a quiet life I am fain to do as she bids me'.[120] Although the use of pet names for children is by no means conclusive evidence of an affectionate attachment to children, or a lack of formality in parent-child relationships, the very widespread use of such nicknames in every family group encountered indicates a trend in that direction. A large percentage of these names continued through life, so they were not merely infant diminutives.

Further evidence of the strong ties between parents and children is the way it was taken for granted that news of the welfare of their children would be of paramount concern to parents. When one-year-old Rupert Southwell was left with his grandparents at Surrenden Dering while his parents went to Ireland, Mary Dering wrote to her daughter,

> I know nothing can be so pleasing to you as to hear of your son and of his improvements, truly I bless God he is as well as you could wish, and is so strong as that he raises himself up in his little coach, without the help of his hands, and stands up while it goeth. Only his strings is tied to the back of the coach.

She reported that 'he hath variety of nurses, but I think I have his favour most'. At the end of the letter she added, 'I forgot to tell you, that he sings to his own dancing, so you can see by him the genius of the family'.[121] In a letter four days later Dering reported to his son-in-law that little Rupert was well 'and lively as you can desire'.[122] And a month later he noted, 'Rupert thrives very well, the sleep he wants in the night he takes out in the days, and [loses] none of his flesh for it, so that by God's blessing we doubt not of delivering him safe to you again when you call for him.'[123] News of older children was also sought.

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[120] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 25 Jan.[1689/90, 14 March [ ], 28 Feb.[ ] NRO IC 4366, 4378, 4371. MS 'wiggs'. A wig was a kind of bun or small cake made of fine flour. [O.E.D.]

[121] Mary Dering to Betty Southwell, 23 May 1671, KAO U1713 A/5.

[122] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 27 May 1671, KAO U1713 A/6.

Matilda Sherfield was about 8 when her father married Rebecca Long, and her stepmother's letters constantly informed Sherfield of Till's welfare and progress.[124]

The Dering family is an example of one in which considerable informality was the norm, and affection was openly expressed. There was a great deal of concern for the health and welfare of young children, considerable pride in their achievements, and wry enjoyment of their antics. Parents and grandparents had a great deal to do with individual children, from supervision of their wet-nursing to involvement in the early stages of their education. In the Dering correspondence, attitudes toward children are most clearly illustrated by the treatment of the children of Sir Robert and Lady Betty Southwell by their grandparents, because so many of the letters which were written by Sir Edward Dering to his son-in-law include references to the grandchildren. Allowance must be made for the fact that grandchildren are never in quite the same relation as children, but in this case one of the Dering's own children had been born only a year before the eldest grandchild, and two were born after, so it is likely that their attitudes and expectations were close to those of parents, also the letters express very clearly the assumptions that most family members seem to have taken for granted about children.

The Derings dearly loved to have their grandchildren with them. The visits of the grandchildren were encouraged for the sake of their health, but also for the pleasure of the grandparents, and the children themselves. Dering wrote to his son-in-law,

> little Neddy laughs all day and sleeps all night, so that this place is like to agree very well with him, which makes us long for the time when Rupey and the two young ladies will

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[123] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 24 June 1671, KAO U1713 A/8.

[124] The letters seldom mentioned Rebecca's own younger daughters who were also with her, which seems to indicate an assumption on her part that news of his daughter was more important to Sherfield than news of his stepdaughters. [See below - chapter 7.]

do us the honour to share the good air with us.[125]

On his arrival at Surrenden from London a few weeks later Dering noted that he was made welcome 'but should have been more if I had brought Rupey and little Betty with me', and he added, 'When ever you are willing to share them, we shall be willing to receive them.'[126] In July 1675 Sir Edward wrote to his son-in-law, 'I can hardly make my wife comprehend the reasons why you did not suffer me to bring down my grandchildren with me....'[127] In 1682, when the Derings did not have the company of their grandchildren in the country, Dering wrote, 'I have not mentioned your little ones of late, but I never forget them'.[128] And later that year he wrote expressing his appreciation for a portrait of Neddy.[129] Other parents too expected that grandparents would be interested in even very small children, Jane Isham wrote to her sister-in-law, 'I pray present Frokin's duty to her one danfather as she calls him'.[130]

Parental interest could also take the form of pride - in good behaviour and childish milestones, or bravely endured pain. When Robert Southwell recounted the fortitude of his young son, Sir Edward responded as a most satisfactory grandparent, 'I am much concerned for my dear Rupey, the inflammation it seems was very violent, and I perceive he had more courage to endure the operation than I should have had to look

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[125] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 2 March 1674/5, KAO U1713 A/31.

[126] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, Tuesday [May/June 1675], KAO U1713 A/29. At least one of the Southwell children was already in the country with her grandmother.

[127] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 13 July [16]75, KAO U1713 A/38.

[128] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 6 May 1682, KAO U1713 c/31.

[129] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 14 Oct.1682, KAO U1713 D/3.

[130] Jane Isham to Elizabeth Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4344. 'Frokin' was probably Jane, who was less than three and a half at this time.

on....'[131] The indulgent grandfather wrote in 1673, of three year old Rupert,

> I should be very glad to receive a letter from Rupey, and though it were as you call it in a hieroglyphical way I should spend as much time about it, and find as deep mysteries in it as Kircher hath done in those upon the Columnar Trajan's. I never meant little Neddy should be excluded from the invitation, and hath provided for them both in the best manner we can.[132]

And when Rupert was just past his third birthday there was another anecdote:

> The last adventure of Rupey was on Saturday when being in Nan's closet and breaking some of the little baubles there, his grandmother asking him why did you break this thing, he replied, why did not you look after me?[133]

The Southwell's first daughter was named Helena after Robert Southwell's mother. Her grandfather's comments at the time of her birth show an awareness of individual potential. 'I am very well pleased with the name of my young grandchild Helena, and pray to God she may prove as good a woman as she is for whose sake she bears that name.'[134] When Helena was three months old Sir Edward again commented rather coyly about her potential as an individual within the limited seventeenth century concept of femininity. After commenting on the importance of 'Rupey' and 'little Ned' he said of the baby Helena, 'something too must be reserved for the fair unknown to begin to speak to her in the language of romance, as forseeing that her beauty and perfections will one day be the subject of history and poetry both'.[135]

Children were expected to add to the happiness of a parent. Writing

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[131]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 8 July 1673, KAO U1713 A/19.

[132]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 14 July 1673, KAO U1713 A/20.

[133]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 26 Aug.1673, KAO U1713 A/24.

[134]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 8 July 1673, KAO U1713 A/19.

[135]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 30 Sept.1763, KAO U1713 A/28.

after the death of his brother-in-law and great friend Heneage Finch, Earl of Nottingham and Lord High Chancellor, Sir Edward Dering noted of his life that there was

> no man more happy in a great estate, the highest employment, the favour of his prince, the love of the people, and above all men living happy in his children all grown or growing up to his full content in every respect.[136]

The closeness of the relationship between the brothers-in-law was based on concurring interests and values, and this list of attributes represents those things which were also most deeply valued by Dering. It was also assumed that the relationship with one's children would provide consolation in grief. Two weeks after Betty Southwell's death Dering encouraged his son-in-law,

> I hope you will find comfort in your sweet young family, and that you will be happy to see those young plants answer the goodness of the stock from which they spring and the care and pains also of the culture and discipline bestowed upon them.[137]

And three days later, '...your little ones will serve for diversion, the first step to consolation....'[138]

Joseph Illick in his study of child-rearing in England and America in the seventeenth century agrees with John Aubrey's comment that 'in those days, fathers were not acquainted with their children'.[139] Most fathers, Illick claims, 'chose not to know their children', they chose instead 'silence, aloofness, a cold civility rather than showing emotion outwardly'. Rather surprisingly Illick then illustrates his point with more examples of loving (but supposedly exceptional) fathers, than cold

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[136] Account Book of Sir Edward Dering, April 1683 - 9 June 1684, KAO U275 A4.

[137] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 28 Jan.1681/2, KAO U1713 C/13.

[138] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 31 Jan.1681/2, KAO U1713 C/14.

[139] John Aubrey, Brief Lives (London,1950) XXXIV, quoted in Illick, 'Child-rearing,' p.312.

and aloof fathers.[140] Many of the examples already discussed undermine this position, and the Dering-Southwell correspondence reveals a very intimate and detailed involvement of the fathers in the daily lives of their children. Sir Edward's reports to his daughter and son-in-law on his grandsons were often quite detailed and illustrate a first hand knowledge of their affairs. He wrote in August 1673 to Southwell,

> Rupey is well as is possible, his colour good, stomach good, eateth very often, but not much at once, sleepeth well, and, which is the most news, was very quiet yesterday at church. Ned is lively, merry and well, with his feet a great deal, and hath another tooth cut. He hath had one crying fit on Tuesday last and was like to go away with it, I suppose it was by holding his breath, for he was very well [ ] until he fell into it, and soon after he came out of it, but looked pale for a day or two.[141]

Two years later Sir Edward wrote to Sir Robert,

> Here we are all well. Miss Helena as well as any, she eateth her meal well, runs about a little, is free from the rising in her stomach which troubled her at her first coming, drinks to me three [ ] days at the table which I take for a great favour. All the fault I can find with her, is that I can by no means persuade her to eat strawberries or gooseberries... but stewed prunes are a constant banquet to her.[142]

In September 1682 Sir Robert Southwell noticed an unevenness in the growth of his nine year old daughter's breasts. He mentioned his concern to his father-in-law who wrote back, 'As for Nelly's breast my wife makes nothing of it, it being a thing usual, and that which appears when they are young and lean, is not visible when they are older and more in flesh.'[143] The role of fathers in the Dering and Southwell families does not appear to have been exceptional. Walter

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[140] Ibid. p.315,316,337,338 note 39.

[141] Rupert was 3 and Ned 2 years old. Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 4,5 Aug.1673, KAO U1713 A/22.

[142] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 28-29 June 1675, KAO U1713 A/34.

[143] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 28 Sept.1682, KAO U1713 D/1.

Long's correspondence with his mother in 1625 reveals his familiarity with the temperament and physical ailments of his small children.[144]

The processes of education in the seventeenth century convey considerable information about parental attitudes and the circumstances in which children lived their lives.[145] In both these respects there was great variety within gentry families, and the implications of parental intentions are sometimes difficult to assess. Edward Dering wrote in his autobiography:

> At 6 I was put to school to a barbarous tyrant at Hethfield. Soon after removed to Mr Farnaby in London. The year following to Mr Craig at a private school at Throwley and in 1637 to Mr Copping at Woodford in Kent, and from thence I went to Sidney College in Cambridge....[146]

The harshness of Dering's early education did not last long and it seems likely that since he was soon removed from that environment these 'barbarous methods' were not approved by his father. Certainly there can be no doubt of Sir Edward's desire that his son get a good education. But what were his intentions in this? He found the cost of his sons' education very heavy, and when his sons, aged twelve and eight, were attending private school in 1634 Dering wrote to their stepmother,

> The charge for my boys here grows importable to me, for beside the twenty five pound there are payments of six pounds more; and they are also at present destitute of all apparel and linen and hats etc. Since Michaelmas they have had thirteen pairs of shoes....[147]

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[144] Walter Long to Rebecca Sherfield, 12 Feb.1624/5, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 16.

[145] Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry, Chap. 5; David Cressy, 'Educational Opportunity in Tudor and Stuart England.' History of Education Quarterly. Vol.16 (Fall,1976) pp.301-318; Richard L. Greaves, Society and Religion in Elizabethan England (Minnepolis,1981) Chap. 8; Ruth Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century (Illinois,1929); Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' Chap.5; Stone, Crisis, Chap. XII; Lawrence Stone, 'Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900.' Past and Present. no.42 (Feb.1969) pp.69-139.

[146] Dering, autobiography, p.10 in Bond, Diaries, pp.108,109.

[147] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 22 April 1634, KAO U350 C2/42.

Was this education to benefit the family, to make the child a useful subject or to encourage him to enjoy the delights of education for its own sake? The answer in the Dering and Isham families was almost certainly all three, which made their stress on education particularly emphatic. The heir was to be prepared for his role; as Thomas Isham wrote to his son at the Temple during the first decade of the century, 'you shall understand I send you thither not to trifle out time, but to learn somewhat to do yourself and me good therein another day....'[148] Younger sons were educated chiefly to be useful to themselves. In both the Dering and Isham families education was regarded as the duty of the upper classes, and also as a pleasure.

The early education of very young children in reading and writing and religious principles was often the responsibility of the women in the family. When Rupert Southwell was four Mary Dering, his grandmother, wrote to his father, 'I think Rupey looks as well as ever, but very hard to come to his book.'[149] When Ned Harley was 5 years old his mother asked her husband for a little Bible for him since 'he begins now to delight in reading'.[150] Rebecca Sherfield taught her daughters reading and writing and domestic skills,[151] and in an indenture made four years after their marriage Henry Sherfield made Rebecca responsible for his daughter if he should predecease her - 'to instruct and govern her in the fear of God and good manners'.[152]

The education of the children of his second marriage was one of the

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[148] Thomas Isham to John Isham, 20 Feb.[ ] NRO IC 3630.

[149] Mary Dering to Robert Southwell, 18 Aug.1674, KAO U1713 A/30.

[150] Brilliana Harley to Robert Harley, 4 Dec.1629, Letter VI, Lewis, Letters, p.45.

[151] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 26 Jan.1616/17, HRO Herr. XXXI, 4.

[152] Indenture, 27 Dec.1620, HRO Herr. XXVII, 1.

main preoccupations of Sir Justinian Isham's life. His opportunities to educate the daughters of his first marriage had been disrupted by the death of their mother, the turbulence of war, and the preponderance of time they spent in his aunt's home; but he planned to educate Mary, the first child of his second marriage, 'as well as I can'.[153] Even while his children were very small Isham tried to mould their minds. He wrote to Bishop Duppa in 1660,

> ...when the folly and madness of the age would over-set a man with grief, rather than too much torment myself, [I] represent the mutability of it to my children who cannot yet read, but see in a piece of paper lapt into several formes, now a cap, then a boat, then a cock, and all in an instant as 'twere with a puff, and yet the same paper still.[154]

By 1669, when the oldest children were aged between 15 and 10, they were getting a very thorough education, mainly in the classics, but not neglecting subjects such as mathematics, algebra, music and dancing. After a visit to Lamport in that year Dr William Dillingham[155] wrote to Sir Justinian, 'I return many thanks for my kind reception in your little Academy, which hath made me remember Cambridge,... My humble service and love to yourself, your lady and all your little Academians....'[156]

A very large amount of correspondence exists detailing the type of education Sir Justinian planned for his children, and the way the plans were put into practice. Although Thomas's diary details an amazing number of sports and leisure activities for which he and his brothers had time, their father expected their study to be regular and diligent, and he was

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[153] Draft of Justinian Isham to Dolly Long, on a letter of 24 Oct.1654, Letter LVIII, Duppa, p.100.

[154] Justinian Isham to Duppa, 10 Jan.1660, Letter CXIV, Duppa, 177.

[155] Dr William Dillingham had been a Fellow (1642) and Master (1653-62) of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, until he was deprived. [Isham, Diary, p.82, note 11.]

[156] William Dillingham to Justinian Isham, 8 Sept.1669, NRO IC 648.

certain it would be enjoyable to them. His letters promising the arrival of new books, usually classical authors, are very much in the tone of a high treat.[157] He encouraged his sons to write to him carefully in Latin, and when he was absent he often had them send their uncorrected work to him in London. The children replied in much the same vein with reports of their progress. It is impossible to judge the extent of his children's genuine pleasure in their studies, but their letters although sometimes stilted are never cowed, and they were obviously eager to please their father. Thomas wrote to his father in 1670 that they would not be wanting in 'industry and diligence', 'of which we hope to give you a proof at your return; than which nothing is more desired by us'. Justinian wrote four years later that they were delighting in Virgil, Seneca and other authors whose writings they had recited to him when he was with them, and he added that he believed the news his father most preferred to hear of them was that they were progressing well in their studies. Two months later he wrote that he hoped he and his brothers would be able to meet the expectations formed of them, but added that sometimes the expectations were too great.[158]

Sir Justinian had written in a letter of advice to his eldest daughters in 1642 that they should concentrate their study on 'prayers, meditations, and such like holy treatises' rather than 'knotty disputes'. He had urged them to keep their hearts upright and their affections towards God unfeigned since 'your sex is not so capable of those stronger abilities of the intellect, to make you so learned and knowing as men ought to be....'[159] It is difficult to know to what extent his views had

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[157] Justinian to Thomas Isham, 14 Feb.1670/71, NRO IC 717.

[158] Thomas Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 4 Jan.1670, NRO IC 658; Justinian Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 28 Jan.1673/4 & 8 April 1674, NRO IC 803 & 770.

[159] Justinian Isham advice to his daughters Jane, Elizabeth, Judith and

(Footnote continued)

changed in the years since he wrote that, but Mary and Vere, the daughters of his second marriage, shared their brothers' tutor and became accomplished students. However, their achievements, Mary as 'an excellent Latinist' and Vere 'learned beyond her sex and years in mathematics and algebra',[160] attracted attention in part for their singularity, whereas their brothers, Thomas, Justinian and John gained a less surprised approval, and were also able to continue their study at university.

Both Sir Edward Dering and Sir Robert Southwell had taken their own education seriously, and they worked to provide Southwell's heir with a solid education. His academic endeavours were encouraged, for example, when Ned was 11 years old Sir Edward wrote that he was 'much pleased with Neddy's poetry' and intended to 'sometimes give him occasion to exercise that talent.'[161] It was characteristic of the Dering and Southwell families to give as much encouragement as possible to the learning of their young sons.

Vivienne Larminie, while observing the haphazard way in which tutors were chosen in the cases of Colonel Hutchinson, Simonds D'Ewes and Richard Baxter, observed the care with which the Newdigates chose.[162] The Derings, Southwells and Ishams also chose with care - not only good scholars but men to whom they could trust their children. When his grandson Neddy was ten years old Sir Edward Dering wrote to the boy's

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159 (continued)
Susan, 22 Oct.1642, NRO IC 3415.

160 Isham, Diary, 10 Sept.1672, p.153; D.N.B. (Compact Edition) p.1054. Mary Isham's skill in latin was widely known and praised, and Vere's skills in mathematics and algebra were actually noted on her tombstone. Very few gentry women in the seventeenth century received the kind or quality of education which Justinian Isham gave these two daughters. Ralph Verney, for example, noted of his daughter Peg, 'being a girl, she shall learn not latin, so she will have more time to learn breeding hereafter; and work too'. [Slater, Family Life, p.137.]

161 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 13 June 1682, KAO U1713 C/41.

162 Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' p.290.

father, 'I should be glad to hear you had got a tutor in your mind for Neddy, he is so very forward for his time, that if he keep up to it and grow out you may well expect something extraordinary from him'.[163] While a suitable tutor was being found, Southwell taught his son himself and, as the grandfather commented, 'with some pleasure too, the rich soil promising a large return for all your industry.'[164] Dr Tillotson and Dr Burnet were both consulted over the choice of a tutor for the promising child, and Dr Burnet advised employing a plain scholar until Neddy was twelve.[165] The tutor of the Isham children, the Reverend Richard Richardson, met Sir Justinian's rigorous standards, but was also loved by his students.[166] And he remained the family's trusted friend and adviser throughout his life. When Justinian and Thomas went up to Oxford their father entrusted them to Dr John Fell whose letters show his concern for their welfare. He wrote to Thomas, 'I must always remember how at the time your good father brought you to my care, it pleased God to call him out of the world; so that I look upon you as his legacy....'[167]

Three letters from the tutor of Edward Dering, later the second baronet, illustrate the expectations of Edward's father and the comprehensive nature of the tutor's responsibilities - from supervision of learning, to allowing him to be out of commons because 'it seemeth he did not like the diet, and I was loath to hold him to it against his will',[168] from fires in his charge's rooms and the purchase of a new gown, to his

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[163]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 26 April 1681, KAO U1713 B/39.

[164]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 5 May 1681, KAO U1713 B/41.

[165]Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 10 May 1681 & 14 May 1681, KAO U1713 B/42 & B/43.

[166]Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 25 Feb.[ ] NRO IC 4164.

[167]Isham, Diary, p.37,45.

[168]Richard Minshull to Edward Dering, 12 March 1639/40, KAO U350 C2/75.

health and moral welfare and the frequency of his letters home. Richard Minshull was Edward's tutor at Sidney Sussex College in 1640. His position was one which required a balancing act between his own ideas and duties to learning, the interests of his pupil and the instructions of Sir Edward, who was himself something of a scholar. Soon after Edward's arrival, when he had favourably impressed the Master, Dean and Lecturer of the college at his initial examination, Minshull wrote,

> What you expect of me I shall carefully endeavour to perform, and will show him all kindness that is requisite to encourage in his studies; your letters shall be my partial instructors, and when need is I will give you notice of such particulars as you desire.[169]

Letters written in March and July 1640 continue to reflect this delicate balance between Edward's interests, his father's credit, and probably his tutor's livlihood. Minshull wrote to Sir Edward:

> ...in him there is that hopefulness, as that I doubt not he will be your greatest comfort. It shall be my study to frame him to your mind and therein I trust to show myself, what I am, Yours to do you any service Rich: Minshull.

> ...for the commendations which I have given him heretofore I may still continue them, not without addition, and I make no question that his orderly and studious courage will deserve the like, which I shall endeavour to promote for your comfort and his credit....[170]

Thus education in these gentry families was preparation for the well-being of the family, but it was also an expression of concern for individual children. Even those parents like Justinian Isham and Robert Southwell who put great stress on the value of education did so with their children's needs in mind, and, at least in the years before university, left a great deal of time for the recreational activities of childhood.

Although it is unlikely that one would find many references to punishment or discipline in family letters, what evidence can be gleaned

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[169] Richard Minshull to Edward Dering, 31 Jan.1639/40, KAO U350 C2/74.

[170] Richard Minshull to Edward Dering, 12 March 1639/40 & 13 July 1640, KAO U350 C2/75 & C2/79.

from the letters of these families supports Linda Pollock's finding that the majority of parents in the seventeenth century did not inflict harsh physical punishment upon their children.[171] In 1617 in the Sherfield family we find reward rather than punishment being used as motivation. Rebecca wrote to Henry in London about the progress of his 9 year old daughter, 'Till is grown a very good maid, and stays within, and implies her needle very hard, which deserves something from you to be sent her'.[172] Sir Edward Dering wrote to the father of his fourteen month old grandson more than fifty years later, 'For the rod you speak of I know but two justifiable occasions to use it, one is when they play at fire and the other when they will not take their wormseed, and I do not hear any of them laid to his charge.'[173] These are very small bricks in the wall of argument against the contentions of historians such as Ariès, Stone and Illick that physical punishment was widespread and brutal within seventeenth century families.[174] However, this remark about Matilda matches other inferences which can be made about the attitude of the Sherfields toward their younger children and grandchildren, and the Derings too, appear to have been far from repressive. In fact Robert

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[171] Pollock, Forgotten Children, pp.144-156, 199-202.

[172] Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 26 Jan.1616/17, HRO Herr. XXXI,4.

[173] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 22 Aug.1671, KAO U1713 A/11.

[174] Ariès, Centuries of Childhood, pp.247-254; Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, pp.167-170; Illick, 'Child-rearing,' pp.312,337. Neither Morgan or Demos in their studies of family life in New England found evidence to support this thesis. Morgan maintained that 'there is no proof that seventeenth century parents employed the rod more freely than twentieth century parents', and in fact he believed that Puritan parents placed their children in other families because they were afraid of spoiling them by too great affection. [Morgan, Puritan Family, pp.103,77.] Christopher Hill pointed out in his review of Stone: 'The vigour of the preachers propaganda on behalf of patriarchal authority over wives and children, and of breaking children's wills, suggests that such attitudes were by no means so universally accepted as they would have wished'. [Hill, 'Essays in Bibliography and Criticism LXXX.' p.461.]

Southwell wrote of his father-in-law, 'He is an indulgent father, and has smarted for it in some cases, and I fear will do so in more, for his sons will not part with that government which they were too long and too easily allowed to bear'.[175] However, Southwell never considered this indulgence a disqualification for leaving his own children with the Derings for protracted visits.

Sir Justinian Isham's counsel to the daughters of his first marriage seems to indicate that he encouraged conformity by the moral pressure of religious precedent and argument, and by grieved disapproval over inadequate behaviour.[176] When his second son went up to Oxford in 1674 Isham wrote to his tutor, Dr John Fell, that 'not withstanding the usual liberty now given, I favour the ancient and severer way of education'.[177] But in the very large correspondence that refers to the various activities and expectations about their education there is no indication that this 'ancient and severer way' involved the physical punishment of his sons or daughters. However, their letters do reflect fear of his disapproval, so he certainly expected to mould their behaviour and be obeyed. The motivation for discipline in these families was generally similar to that expressed by William Jefferay (1591-1675) in his diary. When one of his daughters fell in love Jefferay felt that she had 'a new understanding of our love and care for her... she sees how our correctings, even (tiresome or needless seeming), were in love, to cure a fault, or a weakness that should grow to one'.[178]

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[175] Robert Southwell to John Perceval, 12 Jan.1682/3, H.M.C. Egmont Vol.II, p.125.

[176] Justinian Isham advice to his daughters Jane, Elizabeth, Judith and Susan, 22 Oct.1642, NRO IC 3415.

[177] Justinian Isham to John Fell, IC 845, quoted in Isham, Diary, p.36.

[178] John Austin (ed) Journal of William Jefferay, Gentleman. A Diary that might have been (Providence,1889) p.133, quoted in Pollock, Forgotten Children, p.146.

One of the strongest arguments which is put forward against the existence of the kind of emotional attachment between parents and children that this chapter has described is the comparative absence of grieving by early modern parents. The argument rests, firstly, on the claim that the high mortality rate of children caused parents to avoid an emotional investment in them,[179] and secondly, on statements made by parents in the early modern period which seem to reflect this lack of feeling.[180] The high death rate cannot be doubted. Wrigley and Schofield place the infant and child mortality rate in the twelve parishes of their study at approximately 25 per cent in the seventeenth century, and Hollingsworth suggests a mean rate of child mortality under the age of 15 among the English peerage in the seventeenth century as 33.5 percent.[181]

Statistics from two generations of Derings, one of Southwells, and four of Ishams within the seventeenth century, for whom numbers of live births and deaths are known, illustrate a similar pattern of mortality. Of 72 children born, 13 died under the age of 5, and 17 by the age of 15,

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[179] Stone states that '...to preserve their mental stability, parents were obliged to limit the degree of their psychological involvement with their infant children'. [Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.70.] Shorter, Pinchbeck and Hewitt also support this view point. In a recent article Peter Laslett discuses some untenable inferences from demographic data, a conspicuous example of which he considers 'the claim that since babies died so easily in the past, parents invested little of their love in a new-born child'. Such conclusions he stresses 'are inconsistent with the anthropological evidence, with conclusions of psychologists on parenting and the development of children, with a great deal of the literary and epistolary evidence left behind by the very persons who are supposed to have displayed the attitude. Demographic "fact" is not familial "fact".' (He warns that literary sources too are inferential.) [Laslett, 'The Character of Family History,' p.272.]

[180] Macfarlane in his review of The Family, Sex, and Marriage has dealt very convincingly with Stone's inappropriate use of sources such as notes of funeral expenses in account books from which to deduce feelings about the death of children. [Macfarlane, 'Studies in the Philosophy of History,' p. 116.]

[181] Wrigley and Schofield, Population History, p.249; Hollingsworth, 'The Demography of the British Peerage,' p.36.

which gives a mortality rate of 23.61 per cent. How were parents affected by these deaths? There are statements of various kinds by parents in the seventeenth century which make them appear indifferent to the fate of their children. For instance, Sir James Long wrote to Sir Justinian Isham about mid-century,

> I had attended you myself before this time had not the long and dangerous sickness of your humblest servant, my wife, and a longer and certain death slowly expected to our little Petersham girl required my continual attendance. My wife, God be praised, is come abroad again so that when God should please to dispose of the girl I shall not fail to kiss your hands....[182]

In 1706 John Isham wrote to his brother after the death of his three-and-a-half month old daughter, 'We had of late great hope of your god-daughter's recovery, but the convulsion-fits returning it pleased God to take her from us last night'. The letter immediately continues, 'I hope the good news from Spain....'[183] It is difficult to assess the significance of such statements without knowing the personalities and circumstances involved; the erratic survival of evidence and the probable difference between spoken and written expressions of grief make extreme caution advisable.

However, even if the statements of these two men, and other similar remarks are taken at face value, and understood to imply emotional distance from infants and small children, it would be dangerous to extrapolate a norm from these two examples. When the death of children is mentioned in the letters of these families most of them contain expressions of very real grief. Such an example is the death of Elizabeth and Justinian Isham's fourth child less than a month after he was born. His death was at least partly caused, as his mother noted, by 'a cursed blister that was put on the child's back' to draw the 'stuffing' from his

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[182] James Long to Justinian Isham, n.d. NRO IC 4674.

[183] John Isham to Justinian Isham, 10 Sept.1706, NRO IC 3727.

head. Elizabeth wrote on the 18th January 1690,

> In my last I gave you to understand how ill poor Mun was and now I must acquaint you that he's dead. Thursday morning at three of the clock died my dear boy, the loss of him afflicts me the more because I really think the child was perfectly murthered....

Two days later she wrote, '...since I have buried my boy nothing but melancholy thoughts possess me, and when I reflect how strangly I lost him the very rememberance renews my grief'.[184]

Although such authors as Stone discuss christian beliefs about death, and concede that people like Ralph Josselin and Mrs Alice Thornton were sustained by 'an all-consuming faith in the promise of an afterlife',[185] they do not take into account sufficiently the extent to which this belief modified behaviour, and the expression of belief. What appears to be a lack of unrestrained grieving, of the kind which became acceptable in the eighteenth century,[186] is assumed by them to be evidence supporting their assertion that the seventeenth century lacked strong affectionate relationships between parents and children. However, the psychological and emotional power of the belief that children who had died were now at peace in heaven should not be underestimated. Almost certainly this belief mitigated grief in many cases, and even more certainly, since to grieve excessively implied spiritual doubt, it muted the written expression of grief. All seventeenth century expressions of grief must therefore be understood within this context, and in the context of a society less given to the description and discussion of personal emotional upheavals. This is clearly evident in Mary Dering's letter to her husband following the death of their son,

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[184] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 15, 18 & 20 Jan.[1689/90] NRO IC 4363, 4364 & 4365.

[185] Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, pp.211-215.

[186] Ibid. pp.246-249.

> My Dear, I am very sensible of the loss of my sweet child, but considering his gain I should think I should love myself better than him if I should wish it otherwise than the Almighty has ordained it. If it please God to spare the rest we may be contented. My dear mother had many such trials, God give me grace to make a right use of them.[187]

Since the Derings had a close and loving relationship with their children, to assess the implication of this statement of grief outside the expectations appropriate to the time would be most misleading. Submission to God's will was made a constant lesson in part because the distress of grief was well understood. Bishop Duppa wrote to Sir Justinian Isham after the death of his sister Elizabeth,

> Because near and domestic examples of this kind are apt to have a greater influence upon us, and not only leave sorrow for what is lost, but a fear of losing more, you will have need of renewing daily that great lesson of Christianity, of resigning all that is dear to you into His hands....[188]

When Sir Justinian had his longed-for heir, after the birth of six daughters and the death of a son at birth and one daughter at the age of twenty, Duppa wrote, 'God having given you an heir unto your family, you should not set your heart too much upon it, but look upon it as such a blessing, which must cheerfully be parted with when the donor shall call for it....'[189]

Belief in heaven was a comfort; submission to God's apparently inscrutable giving and taking away was more difficult. Dolly Long wrote to Justinian Isham in 1655, 'James hath of late been so very ill, that he hath given us great fears, and though now we have hopes, yet the mother of Dear Jeney dare have no confidence of such rich jewels which are fitter for heaven, than your very humble Servant'.[190] In another letter she

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[187] Mary Dering to Edward Dering, n.d. KAO U35 C2/133.

[188] Duppa to Justinian Isham, [25 April] 1654, Letter XLVIII, Duppa, p. 87.

[189] Duppa to Justinian Isham, 30 June 1657, Letter CII, Duppa, p. 158.

wrote to Isham of her 'abundant sorrows', not only over 'the sudden death of my fine little boy' but also because she was 'mourning the anniversary of my dear Jeney's death'. In the letter she added, 'I dare not attempt that which your great philosophy, and great Christianity presents hourly better to you'.[191] Isham's well-known piety and his aptitude in writing letters of spiritual comfort limited Lady Long's ability to express her grief more fully, even though her correspondence with Isham was in most areas remarkably uninhibited.

Sara Mendelson has observed the struggle between the urge to mourn and the need for outward conformity to religious orthodoxy in women's diaries in the seventeenth century.[192] This struggle is very obvious in letters from Sir George Wentworth and his wife to Justinian Isham, and was clearly not confined to women. Wentworth wrote on the 4th December 1653,

> Sir, by my wife's command I answer yours of the 18th and indeed there is a great charity, and a no less measure of friendship in your expressions, yet our loss was great, and considering the joy we took in her life, we had need of earthly comforts, to remain with us for our heavenly change and this duty is delivered by your hand which as Christians as well as friends exceedingly oblige us to your goodness; we are now retiring our sorrow for our dear child, and though she [ ] were too good for us, yet so she cannot be for Him that now enjoys her, in whose blessed arms she hath already begun an eternal happiness, the best consideration and the highest comforts that parents can busy their thoughts withal.[193]

It was not until the 28th December that Wentworth's wife wrote,

> Sir, I find you have compassion for me in the loss of my dear child, whose ascension from me was very grievous, though I yield obediently to her happy exchange, yet I find the frailty of our nature, hath much to wrestle with when we are separated from the delight of our eyes....[194]

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[190] Dolly Long to Justinian Isham, 3 May 1655, NRO IC 356.

[191] Dolly Long to Justinian Isham, n.d. NRO IC 372.

[192] Mendelson, 'Women's diaries,' in Prior (ed) Women In English Society, pp.197,198.

[193] G[eorge] Wentworth to [Justinian Isham] 4 Dec.1653, NRO IC 330.

[194] Lady Wentworth to [Justinian Isham], 28 Dec.1653, NRO IC 332.

CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO PARENTS:

There are comparatively few responses to parents from very small children, and naturally those which exist were relayed through adults. However, even if they are for some reason what one adult thinks another adult would wish to hear, they still reflect expectations of responses between parents and children. Jane Isham wrote to her husband, 'My Lady Denton remembers her love to you and so doth your sister. Little Frokin her duty and flings you a kiss, who with her waddling by me hath caused me often to blot'.[195] Fifty years later Lady Elizabeth Isham's letters reveal a similar affectionate bond between father and daughter. She ended one letter to her husband - '...my girl longs to see you, as does your affectionate spouse'; and another - 'My girl bids me acquaint you that she loves you and wants you and will go to London to see you if you wont make haste down. She with talking of you passes away her time, and I with thinking'.[196]

The letters of older children were often stilted and formal and it is difficult to assess the nature of their attitudes to their parents from them; their statements as adults are a more reliable indication of their relationship. Elizabeth Isham aged fourteen wrote formally to her father 'my earnest desire is to express how much I study to show myself to be your obedient daughter'.[197] As a widow when she set up house in London with her twin sister, she wrote to her father, 'I shall be very glad if your health and occasions permit you to come that I may have the happiness to wait upon yourself and my brothers....'[198] The daughters of Sir

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[195] Jane Isham to Justinian Isham [before March 1638/39] NRO IC 4815.

[196] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 2 March [ ] & 26 Oct.[ ] NRO IC 4372 and 4383.

[197] Elizabeth Isham to Justinian Isham, 6 July 1650, NRO IC 285.

Justinian's first marriage, although not as close to him as their half brothers and sisters, regarded him with more than merely filial respect, and looked forward to his company. Mary Isham, eldest daughter of the second family, was somewhat more uninhibited in her affection. Telling her brother Thomas that she and her mother looked forward to being in London with them the next week she added, 'my father and yourself being the most dearest and delightfullest objects that I can have in that place'.[199] When financial disaster struck Mary and Timothy Wade, Mary's brother-in-law wrote to encourage Henry Sherfield to share the knowledge of the disaster with his wife so she could support Mary, for, he wrote, 'I know no friend my sister hath so near her as is her own mother, nor anyone that can yield her more comfort than she in this her great affliction'.[200] When Mary Knatchbull and her husband took a house in London it was right next door to that of her parents - to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned. Sir Edward commented that 'Mall and her tribe are very good neighbours and very near, for there is but a door between us, and that commonly open'.[201] This continued close contact seems indicative of a strong and affectionate family bond felt by the Derings and the Knatchbulls.[202]

Letters written at the time of a parent's death need to be assessed carefully since they may be written as part of the proper rituals of death. However, the feelings expressed in some of these letters were

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[198] Elizabeth L'Estrange to Justinian Isham, 24 June 1674, NRO IC 835.

[199] Mary Isham to Thomas Isham, 23 Feb.1674, NRO IC 811.

[200] Roger Knight to Henry Sherfield, 24 March 1630, HRO Herr. XLII, 10.

[201] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 8 Nov.1681, KAO U1713 C/11.

[202] One gains an impression of warmer relationships between fathers and daughters than between fathers and sons, but this impression may be produced by a greater willingness on the part of daughters to express their feelings; or it may simply be the bias of these collections of letters. It remains only an impression, but an interesting one.

unequivocal. Charles Dering's letter to his brother-in-law describing the days before his father's death give clear evidence of a closeknit and mutually affectionate family.[203] John Isham's letters following the death of his father Thomas were very formal and expressed satisfaction about his father's religious life and the comfortable end he made. However, a draft letter to his brother-in-law entreats him 'that your wisdom and discretion may so temper the affections of my sorrowful sister that grief may not have so much power over her as to hurt her in any sort'.[204] And when Sir Anthony Denton replied to the news of his father-in-law's death he wrote, 'My wife doth take it exceedingly heavy....'[205] Thus it would seem that John's reference to 'our loving and kind father' was more than a mere formality, and the family grieved his loss very sincerely.

A letter written by Sir Robert Southwell to his mother-in-law at the time of his mother's death is a most significant illustration of his affection for his mother, and also of those qualities of motherhood most prized in the seventeenth century.

> I have the unhappy news of my mother's death which is the most sensible affliction I can have. She was in the whole [ ] of her life a most [ ] mother unto me. She was my nurse at first, and my good steward at last. She early instilled into me the true principles of my religion, and in memory of my deliverance from a sickness she fasted one day a week for thirty-five years together. This and much more she was to me, and what she was unto others let her ever good works praise her. Your ladyship had always so much kindness and respect for her that it is some ease to my heart to impart my grief unto you, and since she is gone to heaven where she little needs any [ ] of mine, I shall in gratitude pay your ladyship the reverence that while she was in this world I was [ ] to her, and greater than which I shall never desire from any of mine.[206]

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[203] Charles Dering to John Perceval, 4 July 1684, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, pp.139,140.

[204] Draft letter of John Isham, [Dec.1605] NRO IC 3488.

[205] Anthony Denton to John Isham, 14 Dec.1605, NRO IC 60.

[206] Robert Southwell to Mary Dering, 14 July 1679, KAO U1713 A/56.

The preponderance of evidence from the Sherfield, Long, Dering, Southwell and Isham families does not support the view that has been taken by Ariès, Shorter, Stone and others. Stone's comment that 'the value of children rises as their durability improves....'[207] is totally unacceptable. It would be difficult to find evidence in these family letters that children were not valued or that their deaths were of little consequence. Neither is there support for Aubrey's comment that until the post-revolutionary generation 'the child perfectly loathed the sight of his parents',[208] which Christopher Hill and others seem to have accepted at face value. These families were maintained by family loyalties, ties of interest, and belief in family duty, but their primary bonds were emotional. The evidence supports the findings of historians such as Keith Wrightson, Linda Pollock and Patricia Crawford. Roger Hainsworth has investigated provision for, and attitudes toward, daughters and younger sons, and the continuing affection and concern, and the assiduous effort on their behalf which he has identified is confirmed within the families in this study.[209]

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[207] Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p.420.

[208] Christopher Hill, Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England (London,1964) p.447.

[209] Roger Hainsworth, 'Fathers and Daughters: Patterns of Marriage and Inheritance Among the Later Stuart Gentry.' (Unpublished paper); Roger Hainsworth, 'Manor House to Counting House: The Gentry Younger Son in Trade in the Seventeenth Century,' in Frank McGregor and Nicholas Wright (eds) European History and Its Historians (Adelaide, 1977)

CHAPTER 7 THE PERIPHERAL FAMILY

YOUNGER SONS:

There were few more poignant contrasts within seventeenth century families than that between the heir and younger sons. As Joan Thirsk has pointed out, younger sons were singled out for special 'comment and commiseration' in seventeenth century literature, and some writers even speculated in the 1650s that the civil war and the continuing unrest were aggravated by the resentment of the gentry's younger sons.[1] There were examples of younger sons achieving wealth and success beyond the heir,[2] but often the younger sons, while more or less retaining their own social status, began a slide downwards for their descendants. The patronage system in politics, and the pervasiveness of influence in social and political life in the seventeenth century made it essential that the family gain and preserve wealth and prestige, and create and maintain useful contacts with kin and friends. To do this, wealth and influence were concentrated in the head of the family. By allowing the family to maintain or increase its position in this way influence was theoretically available to other members of the family. Did the system work? Was this influence used on behalf of other family members?[3]

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1 Mark C. Curtis, 'The Alienated Intellectuals of early Stuart England.' Past and Present, no.23 (1962) pp.25-43; Roger Hainsworth, 'Manor House to Counting House,' pp.66-74; Joan Thirsk, 'Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century,' History, Vol. 54 (1969) pp.359,373; Slater, Family Life, pp.34-45.

2 Richard Newdigate's career as a lawyer was so successful that he continued in it after he inherited, and he was able to revive the Newdigate fortunes. [Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' pp.209-211.]

3 John ap Robert in his Apology for a Younger Brother, published in 1618 and reprinted four times by 1671, contended that primogeniture continued because it was believed to preserve the family name and make it possible for one person to support other family members, but Robert also considered that it did not in fact fulfil either of these

(Footnote continued)

The evidence of the letters of the Long, Bedford, Dering and Isham families is that in general fathers, motivated by their affection for all their children, did their best to make the system work. However, having accepted the necessity to preserve the family patrimony, they were in reality not always able to do enough to rescue their younger sons from derogation. And not every head of family fully accepted his responsibilities. Henry Long, for example, behaved completely irresponsibly in the years following the death of his father, and crowned his follies by being put in the Fleet for debt. After Henry's early death, however, Walter Long inherited, and his accession saw an immediate change - he made a highly profitable marriage, assumed responsibility for his family's debts, and became involved with the marriages and careers of his siblings.[4]

Some heads of family accepted responsibility only for a favoured few - perhaps their own nuclear family, or relatives to whom they were close. Just as women were always vulnerable to the ultimate exercise of male authority in the seventeenth century, so too were other family members. Although the duty to accept and exercise patriarchal authority and responsiblity was clearly enunciated, the interpretation of that duty was in many circumstances very individual. It could be fulfilled by protecting the patrimony and minimising the claims of daughters and younger sons, or it could be fulfilled by attempting to provide reasonably for all. By no means everyone who hoped for assistance from the head of the family received it, and promises of help and threats of withdrawal of help were powerful means of patriarchal control.[5]

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[3](continued)
functions. [Thirsk, 'Younger Sons,' pp.364,365.]

[4] Henry Sherfield's 'consideration of his gain or loss by marriage to Rebecca Long, 20 March 1622-23, HRO Herr. XXVI, 10; Notes on Covenants to be performed by Walter Long, 14 Dec.1621, HRO Herr. XXXIV, 5.

An illustration of how the system was supposed to work can be seen in the attitude revealed in a letter from Lady Unton Dering soliciting her stepson's help on behalf of her sons. Although she was not personally on good terms with Sir Edward, the second baronet, she saw no reason why this should influence his duty to his half brothers.

> Though I have no encouragement to presume in my own interest to pursue my desires of any trouble to you, yet having confidence you have natural affection, and ambition to honour your family all virtuous ways, and though the glory of it be in you, yet these branches may (by God's blessing) give some lustre, as the smaller stars to the greater light; in the hope whereof, I do continue my entreaty that you will please to go on in endeavouring the well disposing your fatherless brothers, to whom you are now in that relation also. I apprehend your appearance for them will be a great encouragement, and an obliging them to their best deservings, such respect they have been bred in to you, as I know they highly value your love and good thoughts of them, and 'tis likely will invite better regard towards them too.[6]

The second baronet, did in fact exert himself tirelessly on behalf of all the members of his family. Maurice Bond believed that 'entries in Dering's various diaries and account books suggest that care both for his children and for his more distant relatives was the first claim on his attention and resources'. He concluded that 'In the last resort he lived within his family rather than in political or literary circles....'[7]

Sir Robert Southwell also accepted the duties and responsibilities that the head of the family was expected to shoulder. Apart from responsibility for his own family of six children Southwell accepted responsibility for the education and up bringing of his sister's two sons,

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5 This form of patriarchial control is well illustrated in Philip Greven's study of the way in which fathers controlled their sons in the community of Andover in Massachusetts. [Philip J. Greven,jr. 'Family Structure in Seventeenth Century Andover, Massachusetts,' in Michael Gordon (ed) The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective (New York,1983)

6 Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 12 March 1649/50, KAO U350 C2/103.

7 Bond, Diaries, p.3.

Philip and John, following the death of their father when they were very young. And after the death of his nephew, John, he accepted the responsibility for his sons, and also to a considerable extent for John's widow, who was also his sister-in-law. In Southwell's case the shouldering of his duties toward family members went far beyond duty to great affection, considerable provision and planning for their lives, advice and concern. Sir Robert's son Edward seems to have been a similar man to his father. His uncles, two of whom were not much older than himself, were able to count on his support in their careers, and even at times gifts of money. In a letter Charles Dering wrote to his nephew Edward Southwell in August 1703 he referred to his 'exemplary piety', and in requesting his assistance for the bearer of the letter added 'I hope much from your generosity to the distressed be it of either sex ....'[8]

Although many younger sons strugged desperately to survive, regretted their lot, and blamed the system, they do not seem to have considered the possibility that the system could be changed.[9] And while it seems likely that Miriam Slater's findings about the self-serving nature of the ties within the Verney family are correct, the relationships within the families studied for this thesis do not reflect the same value system. These younger sons certainly sought out influence which could be used for their benefit, but they do not seem to have jostled for position and sacrificed each other to manipulate and gain good will in the way that Slater found that the Verneys did.[10]

Younger sons were only seldom sacrificed as unimportant, although at times this certainly happened. Usually there was much concern over their

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8 Charles Dering to Edward Southwell, 26 Aug.1703, KAO U1713 D/38.

9 Thirsk discusses the ideas for change in the system of primogeniture put forward by the Levellers, and others such as Champianus Northtonus and William Sprigge. [Thirsk, 'Younger sons,' pp.369-373.]

10 Slater, Family Life, pp.31-45.

future, and considerable planning and effort on behalf of individuals, not only as they reached maturity, but sometimes throughout their lives. Sons from these families became merchants, grocers, lawyers, soldiers, naval officers, scholars and clergymen, and held political offices of various kinds. The amount of family effort a younger son needed for survival varied from one individual to another, and there was also wide variety in the degrees of success among younger sons. Success depended, as it did for the heir, on circumstances, character and luck. Heads of families could not contemplate making dangerous inroads on the family's status to better the lot of younger sons, but generally in these families they went as far as they possibly could in providing for their daughters and younger sons. Difficulties were more likely to arise with the accession of the heir whose concern was often primarily for his own sons, rather than his brothers or his father's brothers, who might still be somewhat dependent. As the strict settlement developed later in the century the provisions for younger sons were better protected from depredations which might be attempted by heirs.

Obviously treatment of younger sons varied from family to family, and even within families. In her study of the wealth of the Ishams Mary Finch included a very full discussion of the wretched fate of Richard and Henry Isham, the younger sons of John Isham, the founder of the Lamport branch of the family. In her assessment of the various bases of 'the increasing prosperity and the social advancement of the senior line of the Ishams', Finch concluded that it had 'been purchased at the expense of the junior branches of the family, who became "poor relations"'.[11] In his determination to maintain the viability of the compact and efficient sheep-farming unit he had created at Lamport John Isham provided for his younger sons by rent charges, leases, or large cash payments.[12] Henry

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[11] Finch, Five Northamptonshire Families, p 30.

received £110 when he finished his apprenticeship, an annuity of £20 for sixty years, and at his marriage 200 marks and 20 marks a year until his parents' death. Richard received an annuity of 20 marks per year at the age of 19, and when he married he was leased a messuage and land in Lamport for the life of the surviving spouse, and his annuity was changed to £30 per year.

In comparison with the prospering estate of Lamport which Thomas inherited, financial provision for Richard and Henry was meagre. Both had large families which they were not able to support, and they lapsed into debt. Only one of Richard's daughters and one of his sons married, and his grandson became a grocer. All of Henry's daughters married, however, one married a mercer.[13] Henry became so desperate that in order to pay debts he was obliged to give his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Isham, six silver spoons as security. In a letter to her discussing his current state of indebtedness he described himself as 'a man castaway, not having anything wherewith to help myself, nor wife, nor children....'[14] In 1603 Henry forfeited his annuity to his cousin Gyles Parslow by defaulting on a debt, and Richard's relatives had to pay debts totalling £660 on his behalf.[15]

However, John Isham's provision for his sons was not as meagre as appears at first glance. Thirsk states that he did his duty by his other sons; Henry was apprenticed to a mercer, and Richard was educated at Cambridge and the Middle Temple'.[16] Is this a fair assessment of Isham's

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12 Ibid. p.24.

13 Ibid. p.30.

14 Henry Isham to Mrs Elizabeth Isham, n.d. NRO IC 3688.

15 Mr Fulnetby to John Isham, 13 Dec.1607, NRO IC 110; Martin Stuteville to John Isham, 13 May 1608, NRO IC 120; Finch, Five Northamptonshire Families, pp.29,30.

16 Thirsk, 'Younger Sons,' p 363.

provision for his sons? His own father had five sons - Gyles, Robert, Gregory, Henry and John. Gyles was educated in the law, which was to be useful to him as the heir; Robert was sent to Cambridge where he received his M A and became a priest; and the three youngest were all educated carefully until being bound as apprentices in the Company of Mercers. All three became successful merchant adventurers, and in a memoir John Isham's grandson recalled that his grandfather liked to relate that he had from his father only 20 nobles 'but he multiplying these little sums of his own and his wife's by his prudent foresight and skill in his trade, did in short time grow in countenance and estimation....'[17] G.D. Ramsay, in his study of John Isham as a successful mercer and merchant adventurer, claims that at the time of his death at 38 Gregory Isham was probably already among the twenty or thirty richest men in London.[18]

With these examples in mind it is not unreasonable to assume that John Isham believed he was setting his sons on the road to prosperity. He certainly established his younger sons much better than his father had been able to provide for him. All three of his sons were enrolled as members of the Mercers' Company, Henry served his apprenticeship and Richard had a good education. Ramsay points out that it was not Isham's fault that his sons 'showed no bent for commerce and preferred to vegetate in the country - in the case of the two younger sons, in mean circumstances'.[19] It is not adequate to say that Richard and Henry Isham were sacrificed for the family, in fact their father made provision for them which should have been sufficient to establish them. It is impossible to say whether they failed because they did not wish to work,

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[17] Account of his family assumed to be by John Isham, n.d. NRO IL 1621M.

[18] G.D. Ramsay John Isham. Mercer and Merchant Adventurer (Northamptonshire Record Society,1962) p xix.

[19] Ramsay, John Isham, p.lxxxii.

or because they lacked aptitude. Their later letters convey an attitude of dependence, but this could be because they were already seriously demoralised. Finch has stressed the neglect of Henry and Richard by their brother, Thomas, and nephew, John; and there can be no doubt that they made no attempt to increase the provision for them, nor did they behave particularly generously toward them. However, assessed within the terms of the normal functioning of primogeniture their behaviour was less unreasonable. If Henry and Richard were assumed to have been given their chance, and had failed, to what extent should successive heirs hold themselves responsible for their rescue? Thomas and John drew the line after they had made some loans, guaranteed others, and paid some debts, but they expected where possible to be repaid.[20] The plight of Henry and Richard Isham was pathetic, and their brother and his son seem not to have been as generous as they might have been, but it is impossible to know the extent to which their plight was caused by their own decisions. Certainly they were not callously sacrificed by their father.

George Bedford, who was a prosperous clothier of Salisbury, aimed at a more equal distribution of his estate among his children. His heir, William, was to receive at the age of 21, three houses (which were leased to tenants at the time the will was written) plus £200. John and Thomas were each to receive a house and £200, and George, who was the third son, was to receive the lease of a parcel of land containing meadows, pastures, arable land, orchards and gardens, plus £150.[21] Mary Bedford left each of her children an additional £100 in her will,[22] The Bedford correspondence

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[20] Thomas Isham to John Isham, 23 June [1604] NRO IC 38; Richard Isham to John Isham, 14 Oct. [after 1605] & n.d. NRO IC 3695 & 3696; Mr Fulnetby to John Isahm, 13 Dec.1607, NRO IC 110; Martin Stuteville to John Isham, 13 May 1608, NRO IC 120; Finch, Five Northampshire Families, p.29,30.

[21] Probate will of George Bedford of Sarum, clothier, 5 Feb.1606/7, HRO Herr. XLIV, 16.

reveals very little about the subsequent careers of William and John, but a great deal about the career of George Bedford, and something about the youngest brother Thomas. Although Sherfield wished to send Thomas Bedford to Oxford, Thomas preferred an apprenticeship, and he was bound an apprentice for eight years to John Hodges, a grocer and alderman of the city of London.[23]

George Bedford's struggles to establish himself are very well catalogued in a series of about forty letters which he wrote to his stepfather, Henry Sherfield.[24] In 1614, when George Bedford was 16, George Mynn was paid £45 to accept him as his apprentice.[25] In February 1623 Bedford went to the Low Countries to cultivate madder in partnership with Mynn and his stepfather. Illness, lack of money and privation of various kinds, dogged Bedford's attempts to establish the business in the Netherlands, and then he came to believe that Mynn was attempting to change the terms of the deal they had made and cheat him. In 1625 Sherfield helped his stepson break the partnership with Mynn, and Bedford struggled to make a success of 'procuring madder from beyond the seas and implanting and husbanding thereof, and also in the trade of sowing and husbanding of cole and rape and making the same into oil' in Appledore in Kent.[26] They also sought the right to trade in madder and prohibit all

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22 Will of Mary Sherfield, 17 Sept.1607, HRO Herr. XLI, 2.

23 Lawrence Pocock to Henry Sherfield, 29 Dec.1624, HRO Herr. XLIII, 8; Indemnity of Apprenticeship, 7 March 1626/7, HRO Herr. XLIII, 10; Thomas Bedford's Discharge of debts, bonds, etc., under wills of his late father and mother, 29 Sept.1627, HRO Herr. XLIII, 11. In this discharge Thomas Bedford is designated 'gent', which confirms Hainsworth's assertion that going into trade was not a derogation of status for a gentleman's son. [Hainsworth, 'Manor House to Counting House,' p.68.]

24 HRO Herr. XXXIII, 1-46.

25 Account of monies paid by Henry Sherfield, 1613-14, HRO Her. XLIII, 1.

26 Cancellation of partnership, 1 June 1625, HRO Herr. XXXIII, 22.

others from dealing in it. Eventually after many years of struggle to establish himself in the madder business Bedford obtained a position in which he was responsible for testing madder for the abuse of putting sand in it. The most notable feature of these letters is Bedford's extreme vulnerability and dependence on Henry Sherfield for money, and on Sherfield and others for their influence on his behalf. In 1624 he referred to his 'slavish subjection' to Mr Mynn, and in 1629 in order to stress how diligent his efforts to establish himself had been he said he had been prepared to travel to Virginia, St Christopher or Barbados.[27] It took George Bedford from the beginning of his apprenticeship to the age of 35 before he was established with any degree of security.

By his third marriage Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, had two sons. Although there was already an heir who was the son of his second marriage he attempted to treat the eldest son of the third marriage in some sense as an heir. He left Harry extensive lands,[28] and sent him to Cambridge to gain an education fitting to a landed gentleman. Although Edward, the second son of this marriage, was also left some land, he was apprenticed to a merchant.

Trade seems to have been one of the most popular and accepted careers for younger sons of the gentry. Social mobility between merchants and gentry was very great indeed, and the lines of demarcation far from sharp in the seventeenth century. The apprenticeship of Ned Dering had been widely approved and worked toward by Sir Edward, the heir, and several other friends and relations. Mr Rich required £200 on the day he took

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27 George Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 10 Oct.1624 & 11 Sept.1629, HRO Herr. XXXIII, 19 & 31.

28 See Edward Dering's Second Household Book, 1652-1685, 'Lands sold by my father', p.38,39, in Bond, Diaries, Note 11 p. 5. In considering the appropriateness of such a gesture Dering may have been influenced by the continuing residual existence of gavelkind in Kent. [C.W. Chalkin, Seventeenth-Century Kent (London,1965) pp.55,56.]

Ned, and other expenses of clothing, diet and board were involved, all of which his mother, Lady Unton Dering, felt would 'break' her. Nevertheless she informed her stepson that whatever wants she had to suffer, her sons should 'not be neglected in a fit education, worthy their father's sons.'[29] This provides an indication of the repectability of apprenticing a gentleman's son to a merchant, and of the effort and sacrifice involved - not that Lady Dering was one to minimise the sacrifices that she was making. As Hainsworth has pointed out 'parental hostility or indifference did not drive sons from their home haphazardly to seek their fortunes in London.... Careers in trade had to be negotiated and financed'.[30]

At the time his apprenticeship began Ned was almost seventeen. Although very favourable reports had been obtained about his master before Ned was apprenticed to him, he appears to have been a severe man. Three years into his apprenticeship Ned complained of his master's 'harsh and barbarous usage of him, using continually base revilings of him, and drawing his knife at him swearing he would stab him'. The episode is revealing of the possible conditions under which a well-born and well protected younger son might have to labour. But more interestingly it becomes evident from the letter his mother wrote requesting the head of the family to use his influence to discover the truth of the situation and remedy it, that there was concern that Ned may have exacerbated the situation by taking 'too much liberty' and so provoking the master. She wrote,

> I pray God he may humble himself to his present condition. I am afraid (and so have taken notice to him) that he is a little too high for so young apprentice... I pray God give him grace, and wisdom to govern himself in so great and various temptations, as that wicked place presents to youth.

His mother considered that taking more liberty than he was allowed would

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[29] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 12 March 1649/50, KAO U350 C2/103.

not only be just cause for his master's anger, but a continuing inconvenience to Ned. She therefore begged her stepson, the heir, not only for his aid on his half brother's behalf, but also for his counsel and advice because 'youth hath not always the best considerations'.[31] Obviously it was not always easy for a gentleman's son to adjust himself to being an apprentice, even if his best interests were ultimately to be served. In this case Edward was at the beginning of a successful career as a Hamburg merchant, and he was knighted in 1680.[32]

Sir Edward Dering, the second baronet, held himself responsible for the marriage arrangements of his children, and career opportunities for his sons. He expressed himself as willing to accept the office of a Commissioner of the Privy Seal in part 'to give some countenance to my children who now began to grow up'.[33] And in making an accounting of his financial status in 1679 he considered it one of his chief worries that his four younger sons were unprovided for.[34] This was in spite of the fact that his youngest son was only ten, and he had obtained the reversion of the auditorship in Ireland for one of them, had used his influence to gain a lieutenancy in the navy for another, and had established another at Oxford. It is evident that responsibility for finding suitable careers for his sons and aiding them in their progress weighed heavily upon Sir Edward. The Dering estates had been plundered during the early months of the civil war, and although the second baronet had been able to avoid the

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30 Roger Hainsworth, 'Manor House to Counting House,' p.67.

31 Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 7 Feb.1653/4, KAO U1107 C/22.

32 Basil Duke Henning (ed) The Parliamentary Diary of Sir Edward Dering 1670-1673 (New Haven, 1940) p.xi; Account of the Dering Family, n.d. KAO U1713 D/55.

33 Dering, autobiography, p.13, in Bond, Diaries,p.111.

34 ~~Sir~~ Edward Dering's Second Account Book,1683-1684, p.22, in Bond, Diaries, p.28.

composition payment of £1000 levied on his father he was greatly in need of the income he received from office holding after the Restoration.[35] In March 1681, when Daniel had gone on holiday with friends to France, Sir Edward commented, 'I see no present prospect of employment for him, and think he may be as safely idle in any part of the world as in this city'.[36] In his son's absence Sir Edward busied himself successfully about obtaining Daniel's promotion to Captain.

Each of Sir Edward's younger sons received £1000 in his will,[37] and was established in some kind of career, but all of them lived lives of considerable difficulty. Dering relied on office holding for the principal part of his own income,[38] and it was to office holding that he turned as a method of support for Charles, the eldest of his younger sons. In November 1678, when Charles was 22, Sir Edward obtained for him the reversion of 'the auditor's place in Ireland'. Thus after the death of the incumbent the office was to go to Sir Edward and then to Charles.[39] However Charles' situation was far from settled, and Dering wrote in his diary in 1680 that getting a good wife for Charles was the 'best way of settlement I can think of, he being too old to take to any profession'.[40] Charles endeavoured to put this aspiration into practice by pursuing an

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35 See Edward Dering's Account Book 1680-1683, 19, as quoted in Bond, Diaries, p.28.

36 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 1 March 1680/1, KAO U1713 B/29.

37 Copy of will of Edward Dering, the second baronet, 24 Feb.1682/3, KAO U1713 D/7.

38 Whereas Edward Dering's income in the 1650s was chiefly from rents and varied between £500 and £900 per annum, his position as Commissioner of the Treasury (1679-1684) brought him between £1,200 & £1,920 per year. [Bond, Diaries, p.6.]

39 Charles II to the Duke of Ormond, 9 Nov.1678, KAO U173 A/52, & Dering, Autobiography, p.10, in Bond, Diaries, p.114.

40 B.M. Add. Ms. 33892, f.617, as quoted in Sonia Anderson, The Dering-Southwell Correspondence, KAO U1713 Z1, p.ii.

heiress nicknamed the 'West Indies'. According to Sir Edward's diary the plan fell through when it was discovered that she was not sufficiently wealthy. Charles continued to live at home with his parents in London, where he was in a position to build up useful contacts. He seems to have carried out some commissions for his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Southwell, and others, and to have lived a social and enjoyable life. However the frustration about his relatively unresolved future may have contributed to the unpredictableness of his temper. He was wounded in a brawl over right of way in the street in 1682.[41] And it seems that this was no isolated incident as virtually every letter his father wrote about the incident and Charles' quite rapid recovery referred to the wish that it be a warning to him for the future - 'I am not out of hopes that if he recover this mischance he may be the better and live the longer for it.'[42] (However in 1685 he killed a man in a backstage duel.)[43]

In 1689 at the age of 33, Charles gained the office of auditor general in Ireland and he moved permanently to Ireland, married Margaret, the widow of Lord Blayney in 1691, and seems to have lived a settled and hard working, though somewhat straightened, existence. In addition to the office of auditor general of Ireland, Charles Dering was a commissioner for administering forfeited lands and revenues, and in 1696 he became second secretary to the lords justices.[44] His position when he lost that office in May 1697 illustrates a younger son's plight. In a letter to his nephew Edward Southwell, who was Chief Secretary for Ireland, he deeply regretted the inability of those whom he had counted on to keep the office for him. And pointed out that his 'depending condition' made it essential

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[41] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 29 April 1682, KAO U1713 C/28.

[42] Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 4 May 1682, KAO U1713 D/30.

[43] Anderson, Correspondence, p.ii.

[44] Ibid.

for him to get some other office. He wrote early in May 1697 that he had decided to ask Lord Romney for the place on the council he had offered him the previous year. 'I would be glad of it,' he added, 'though for a man that has a family to provide for it will not do much'.[45]

Vital as the patronage system was for everyone in seventeenth century politics it was of overwhelming importance to the younger son teetering on the edge of economic and social decline. Late in May 1697 Charles wrote to Edward Southwell,

> In Mr Pultney's last letter he writes me word that he has my Lord Romney's promise to write to the king that I may be of the Council which I never desired so much as now, because it will be a mark that my friends intend to do something for me here after....

In the same letter he added, 'If there should be a vacancy in the Commission of the Revenue no man in Ireland would more willingly supply it than myself....'[46] In the next month Charles Dering was appointed an Irish privy councillor. He wrote to Edward Southwell at that time of another plan to increase his families security, 'What at present I would aim at is that I might add my two boys' lives to my patent and if not two, one of them, which would be a support to my family in case any accident should happen to me...'[47] His son Charles succeeded him as auditor general in Ireland in 1719.

The relationship between Charles Dering and his nephew Edward Southwell was for Charles largely a dependent one, created in part by Edward Southwell's financial and social security as head of his family, but mostly by his position as Principal Secretary for Ireland, in which position because of his relationship to Charles Dering he might reasonably be expected to use his influence on Charles' behalf. Nevertheless the

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[45] Charles Dering to Edward Southwell, 6 May 1697, KAO U1713 D/22.

[46] Charles Dering to Edward Southwell, 25 May 1697, KAO U1713 D/23.

[47] Charles Dering to Edward Southwell, 19 June 1697, KAO U1713 D/24.

relationship between them was a friendly one, at times very much the older uncle (15 years older) and younger nephew. The apparently clearcut economic and social status of an heir was entangled with the familial relationship.

In the later seventeenth century the navy was becoming an acceptable, although not easy, profession, for a gentleman. Daniel Dering was at sea by the age of eighteen.[48] His father used his influence to get him the position of lieutenant to the captain of the third rate frigate Fortune. In July 1681 his father's position at court again aided his promotion, this time to captain of the fourth rate frigate Dover. Although his father's influence was important, as a younger son Daniel obviously felt it incumbent upon him to take every chance that offered to assist his own career. In 1678 when he was nineteen he wrote to his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Southwell, from Leghorn welcoming the prospect of war with France as it may bring promotion, particularly if Southwell would use his influence on his behalf.[49] Once his career at sea began Daniel corresponded consistently with his brother-in-law. Since Southwell's family was such an integral part of the Dering family they knew each other well, but the purpose of the correspondence was certainly the hope that Southwell would exert influence on Daniel's behalf. The relationship between the brothers-in-law was a strained one at times, and Southwell's opinion of Daniel was not high, but it seems almost certain that Southwell used his influence to help obtain Daniel's captaincy in June 1681. In October of that year Lady Mary Dering wrote to her son-in-law thanking him for his love to all her family and in particular 'to poor Daniel, who I hope will always pay his duty and acknowledgement as long as life. This year you have been as his good angel and sure we are very sensible of your

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[48] Daniel Dering to Robert Southwell, 10/20 Dec.1676, KAO U1713 A/45.

[49] Daniel Dering to Robert Southwell, 16 Feb.1678, KAO U1713 A/49.

favours'.[50] Was it the tensions of a relationship which depended not only on family affection but on patronage which made it difficult for Daniel to relate comfortably to his brother-in-law? Or was the model of patronage so accepted that it was unlikely to cause strain?

During his career at sea Daniel was plagued by fevers and accident which caused his parents great anxiety. Thus his father wrote in 1682,

> I am meditating with myself whether these violent distempers which he hath oftentimes had, be the effects of his own want of care and caution, or whether they be indications that the element hath some enmity and malignity to his constitution, if so, it were necessary to think of some other course, though the inconvenience be so great as nothing but his health can at all induce me to it.[51]

The expense and trouble of finding another career was something that Sir Edward did not wish to embark upon, so he sent Daniel a great deal of good advice about his health, and made enquiries about the healthiness of the ship he was sailing on. Soon he was able to write that he had received a letter from Daniel which 'gives me the best assurance I had had a long time. I do write often to him, and have some hopes he will begin to be wise'.[52] While he lived Sir Edward took a very close interest in Daniel's career and activities, he always knew where he was, what his orders were, and the state of his health. The correspondence between father and son was frequent, and Daniel seems to have visited his parents whenever his career allowed. This naval career may not have been an entirely satisfactory one, but there was no neglect of Daniel's welfare on his father's part, although he certainly was limited in what he could do for his third son financially. This concern may indeed indicate mere patriarchal duty, but it is my judgement on the basis of a large number of

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50 Mary Dering to Robert Southwell, 21 Oct.1681, KAO U1713 C/9.

51 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 19 Feb.1681/2, KAO U1713 C/19.

52 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 30 March 1682, KAO U1713 C/25.

letters that duty and great affection worked together as Sir Edward's motivation.[53]

In January 1682 Daniel Dering fell ill in Ireland and had to be nursed in his brother-in-law's house for thirty-six days in bed, and then for some time as a convalescent. His father wrote repeatedly for the total of the moneys discharged on Daniel's behalf. It is an indication of the financial fragility of a younger son that even after having been at sea for five years and a captain for six months his father found it necessary to assume the responsibility for the £20 debt due to his illness.[54] Daniel's poverty and lack of prospects were one of the factors making him ineligible to marry where he wished. In his career efforts he turned to the army, at one time holding the commission of lieutenant-colonel in the 24th Foot, a regiment first raised by his eldest brother in 1688; and eventually returning to convoy duty in the Irish channel. Family interest in Daniel continued throughout his life. His eldest brother left him a life interest in an estate in Hythe.[55] But when he died a month before he reached the age of 33 he left his wife and three children in circumstances which were far from easy.

The motivation for some career decisions is far from clear, for example, although one of the sons of Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, was apprenticed to a merchant, none of the second baronet's sons went into trade. Yet there were a number of successful merchants in his wife's family, the Harveys, and in his own family, who not only provided an example of what might be done, but may also have been able to accept the

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53 Edward Dering's letters of this time make note of many naval accidents, which may be an indication of his concern about the dangers of Daniel's career.

54 Edward Dering to Robert Southwell, 18 Feb.1681/2 & 1 June 1682, KAO U1713 C/18 & C/39.

55 Will of Edward Dering, third baronet, 26 Dec.1687, KAO U274 T49.

sons as apprentices. Was it Sir Edward's decision that his sons should seek their fortune in the navy, the army and in office holding? Or was this the decision of the sons who resisted the idea of going into trade?

John Dering was given the chance of an Oxford education and graduated with an M A in 1684; he spent at least part of his career in the army, serving with the 8th Horse.[56] Robert Dering, the fifth of Sir Edward and Lady Dering's surviving sons, also pursued a career in the army. Two of his letters written in 1697 from Flanders where he was a captain of dragoons in camp near Brussels illustrate his situation very well. At the time he was 28, a married man with one child and another expected, his wife was in Flanders with him, staying at Ghent. The letters were written to Edward Southwell who, although his nephew, was only three years younger than Robert. The two had been brought up together through much of their childhood, and knew each other well, as is confirmed by the informality of the letters.[57] It is evident from the letters that Robert's position was financially very precarious. Promotion was almost impossible without money, and he missed gaining command of a troop in his regiment for the lack of the £500 his rival was able to pay. He expressed himself as very dependent upon 'the interest' of his friends to help him in the condition he was 'falling into'. And while he was very grateful for the present of 100 gilders which Ned had in 'real kindness' sent him, he was making plans to come to England to see what could be done to improve his position and make him less dependent upon the interest of 'those thats now in favour'. In his dependent position he saw his wife and child as 'heavy baggage'.[58]

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56 Anderson, Correspondence, p.ii.

57 Robert still used the pet-names of childhood for Ned and his sister Nellie. This could be an indication of the increasing informality of the latter end of the seventeenth century. However, at about the same time Charles Dering, who was older, usually referred to his nephew by such titles as 'Dear Cousin', 'Dear Nephew', and 'Dear Kinsman'.

58 Robert Dering to Edward Southwell, 19 June & 21 June 1697, KAO U1713

(Footnote continued)

The contrast between the heir and younger sons is clearly illustrated in the will of Sir Edward Dering, third baronet. The will was written in 1687 when Sir Edward and his wife Elizabeth had three sons and one daughter surviving. In providing for the future of the younger sons he gave Daniel £1000, to be raised if necessary by the sale of part of the estate of Eastbridge, and £40 per year, and he gave William those proceeds from the sale of the estate of Northwood not used in paying his daughter a portion of £1500, and £30 per annum. Presumably William was expected to get more than £1000 since both Cecilia and Daniel had £40 per year. The most interesting aspect of the will was that if any of the sons died before the age of twenty one the £1000 charged on Eastbridge was to be void, and the surviving 'younger son' was to have only the remainder of the sale of Northwood plus the £30 per year 'and no more'.[59] Sir Edward wished to preserve as much of his estate as possible to his eldest son and his heirs.

Dependence is the most conspicuous characteristic of the younger sons in the Dering family. Sir Edward accepted responsibility for his younger half-brothers in their youth, but they seem to have been successfully independent in adulthood. In the early stages of their careers the sons of Sir Edward, second baronet, were dependent not only on their father, but also their brother-in-law, Sir Robert Southwell. And later Edward Southwell used his influence on behalf of Charles and Robert. The contrast between the possibilities open to the heir as opposed to younger sons becomes very clear in these letters, but they also illustrate the strength of patronage within families, and the Southwells' highly developed sense of responsibility to their relatives by marriage. In the

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[58] (continued)
D/26 & 27.

[59] Will of Edward Dering, third baronet, 26 Dec.1687, KAO U274 T49.

Dering and Southwell families those in positions to do so usually interested themselves on behalf of others in the family, including the heir.

The Isham family did not have to deal with the issue of younger sons for two generations in the mid seventeenth century. Thomas Isham had only one son, and Sir John in turn had only one son. That son, Sir Justinian, remarried in order to provide himself with an heir, and had six sons in his second family. By the time Isham made his will in 1672 only five sons were still living. He gave to the oldest of the younger sons, Justinian, £2000 to be paid at age 24, and an annuity of £100 per year for life. John, Ferdinando and Henry were to receive £1500 each and an annuity of £100 per year. Their maintenance was to be £30 per year until the age of 14, £60 per year until 17, and their annuities were to be paid from the time they were 21. Sir Justinian bequeathed all his personal goods, and the revenues of all his lands except the two main estates, Lamport and Shangton, to be employed in raising legacies and annuities for his daughters and younger sons. If necessary the lands were to be sold to raise the money.[60]

No doubt in part because of Isham's passion for education, he intended all of his sons to receive a university education. Justinian attended Christ's College, Oxford, and was admitted to Lincoln's Inn in March 1677. John attended Christ's College, Cambridge, and became a Fellow before being admitted to the Inner Temple in November 1685.[61] Ferdinando, who was less academically able than his brothers, was given a choice by his mother between going to the university or going to London to became a

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[60] Will of Justinian Isham, second baronet, 20 Dec.1672, Codicil, May 1675, NRO IL 1404; Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 21 Sept.[1678] NRO IC 4429. This letter reminds Thomas of certain details of the will and in doing so amplifies some of his father's intentions.

[61] NRO IC 3984.

merchant.[62] Ferdinando chose to become a merchant, however, he died at 20 years of age, before he was able to establish himself. Henry attended Christ's College, Cambridge, where he received his M A before his death at the age of 21. Once again we have the example of a father providing for his younger sons as generously as he could without impoverishing the heir, and planning their futures in the way he visualised as being most effective.

In spite of Isham's undoubted affection and highly developed sense of duty toward his younger sons there was, right from childhood, a marked contrast between the heir and his younger brothers. When Thomas was born Bishop Duppa wrote to his friend giving thanks that now God had given him 'a corner stone to cement and strengthen the rest of your family'.[63] When Justinian was born seventeen months later the Bishop wrote that this was 'a double evidence' of God's favour, since now if one branch should fail Isham could have the comfort to say 'another branch takes its place'.[64] Initially at least this second son's value was as a replacement heir. In childhood there appears to have been more pressure upon Thomas to perform, and to share with his father the details of his and his brothers' progress. Even the existence of his diary is evidence of this. It was begun when he was 13 and written in Latin as part of his education, and as a way to inform his father of events at home. He was also expected to learn about the management of the estate, and from an early age was responsible for conveying to his mother or to Chapman the instructions and decisions of Sir Justinian about the estate.[65] But the relationship

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62 John Isham to Thomas Isham, 29 April [1681] NRO IC 4426; Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 3 May 1681, NRO IC 1246. These letters seem to imply that Vere Isham had the right to guide the career decisions of her sons, and merely inform Thomas, the head of the family, of it.

63 Bishop Duppa to Justinian Isham, 24 March 1657, Letter LXXXVI, Duppa, p.135.

64 Bishop Duppa to Justinian Isham, 16 Aug.1658, Letter CIV, Duppa, p.160.

between the father and his heir was not all weight and responsibility, and their correspondence demonstrates that Thomas enjoyed a closer relationship with his father than his brothers did. A letter to Dr John Fell, who was to be Thomas's tutor, illustrates the relationship. Isham wrote,

> My being at London last winter and most part of the spring was some hindrance to me in sending my sons to Oxford as I intended; and having then and since had my eldest son continually with me I know not now well how to let him go from me. But my second son... I think to send thither about Michaelmas next....[66]

The contrast became much greater when Sir Thomas inherited in March 1675. Letters from Justinian and John, who were only seventeen months and two-and-a-half years respectively younger than Thomas, while not obsequious, make it clear that they were to some extent dependent on the heir's generosity,[67] and were therefore prepared to agree to his suggestions, and thank him carefully for his 'kindness and liberality'.[68] A letter from Justinian after he had been involved in a brawl and was forced to flee to Paris is even more revealing of his dependence in this exceptional circumstance.

> I have writ three or four letters to you since my being here, but not having the happiness to hear from you again I much scruple the recoil of these. I should be extremely glad to hear both concerning your health, and also how those fellows do in London, which cannot be but a daily trouble and disquiet to me, [those wounded in the incident]... it is impossible Dear brother for me to

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65 See for example: Justinian Isham to Thomas Isham, 5 March 1669, 29 March 1670, 23 Feb.1670/1, NRO IC 639, 673, 719; Justinian Isham to Vere Isham, 24 Jan.1670/1, NRO IC 711; Isham, Diary, 18 Nov.1671, p.63; John Isham to his brother Thomas Isham, 11 Feb.1674, NRO IC 807.

66 Draft letter of Justinian Isham to [Dr John Fell] on a letter of 24 June 1674, NRO IC 835.

67 Their £60 grant of maintenance was probably insufficient to live on comfortably without other gifts, and the ambiguity of their father's will, leaving them without maintenance between the ages of 17 and 21 would have made them particularly vulnerable.

68 John Isham to Thomas Isham, 30 June & 6 Oct.1675, NRO IC 925 & 937; Justinian Isham to Thomas Isham, 18 Sept.1677, NRO IC 1024.

> express gratitude enough for your great love and kindness that you have always showed to me, and especially this time,... for my lodging is very uncertain, finding every place so extreme chargeable, that though I am ashamed to beg of you any more yet I am afraid I can never live here without your kindness,...[69]

Sir Thomas on the other hand had left to travel in Europe in October 1676, and in spite of pleas to come home, accept his responsibilities, and most of all, to be more frugal, he continued to travel, mainly in Italy, until August 1679. He spent lavishly on various works of art and furniture, and when he returned home lived extravagantly in London.[70] His death in 1681 may have saved the family's financial viability, because although his father had entailed the estates of Lamport and Shangton upon 'the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. sons' and it was not within Thomas's power to alienate them, he had plunged himself and his family deeply into debt by the time of his death.[71]

The death of Sir Thomas immediately changed Justinian's dependent role, and also placed at the head of the family someone more prepared to accept the responsibilities attached to the position. Letters in the period following the death of Thomas make it clear that Justinian was not educated to the position, and he was fortunate to have the Reverend Richardson and Gilbert Clerke who were prepared to continue to act for him as they had for his brother, and work to make him more knowledgeable.[72]

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69 Justinian Isham to Thomas Isham, 7 Oct.1680, NRO IC 1277.

70 A stream of letters from Reverend Richard Richardson and Mr Gilbert Clerke, who were acting as his agents at Lamport expressed their great affection for Thomas, and their concern about his extravagance and neglect of his family and estate. Most of these letters are found between NRO IC 4427 and 4563.

71 Reverend Richard Richardson to Thomas Isham, 20 June 1678, NRO IC 1101; Indenture, 9 June 1680, NRO IC 1156. This Indenture conveys those estates set aside to pay the legacies and annuities of Thomas Isham's brothers and sisters to Christopher Catford. He is to have what is left after the legacies and annuities are paid as security for £6000 owed to him by Thomas Isham.

72 For example: Gilbert Clerke to Justinian Isham, 20 May 1682, NRO IC

(Footnote continued)

Most of the younger sons in these families did not do very much better than survive. Ned Dering, who became a prosperous merchant, was an exception, and so was John Isham, the younger brother of Sir Thomas and Sir Justinian. The reasons for John's success rested in his character, which was very determined, his personality which was brisk and pragmatic, his very considerable intelligence, and his good education and good fortune. His father had ensured that his education was excellent, and with the help of Sir Thomas and others he became a Fellow of his College in 1681, in spite of attempts by others to thwart him.[73] It had been his father's intention that John become Rector of Lamport, but although he submitted to this wish while still an undergraduate, he eventually changed his mind,[74] and successfully pursued a career in the law and public office. After being admitted to the Inner Temple in November 1685 John Isham became a barrister in 1691, and began to aim at public office. Although it took him some time to establish himself, and he was obliged along the way to accept such positions as one in Ireland hearing claims in the wake of the Irish rebellion of 1690, he was eventually Under Secretary of State under the Earl of Nottingham between 1702 and 1704.[75]

John Isham's financial position was improved by the death of Ferdinando and Henry, and their portions were divided, at their mother's discretion, between John and Justinian, who were by that time the only

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[72] (continued)
1328; Reverend Richard Richardson to Justinian Isham, 18 May 1685, NRO IC 1389.

[73] John Isham to Thomas Isham, 29 May [1679], 24 May 1680, 27 May [1681], NRO IC 4588, 1250, 4445.

[74] John Garrard to Thomas Isham, 20 Sept.1678, NRO IC 1155; Gilbert Clerke to Thomas Isham, 28 Sept.1678, NRO IC 1130; John Isham to Thomas Isham, 26 Feb.1679, NRO IC 1164; John Isham to Justinian Isham, 2 Aug.1698, NRO IC 1590.

[75] NRO IC 3984; Alumni Cantabrigienses, Part I, Vol. 2, p. 452; Numerous letters from Ireland dated around 1700 are located at around NRO IC 4206.

living children. The division of this money caused tensions between the brothers, since Justinian had four children himself to make provision for by that time.[76] However, these disagreements were shortlived, and the relationship between the brothers was a most amicable and equal one. As John remarked in one letter, 'I care as little for sending compliments as I believe you do for receiving them'.[77] Even while John was still dependent upon Justinian for the payment of his annuity and the use of his influence, gestures of deference were absent from his letters. This may have been influenced by the fact that they had both grown up as younger sons, and since Thomas did not die until Justinian was 23 and John 21, the balance of authority in their personal relationship did not greatly alter. John expected to be useful to his brother, he gave him the benefit of his legal and political expertise, and constantly supplied him with useful political and court information from the capital when Justinian was in Northamptonshire,[78] and in return he expected his brother's support wherever reasonable. In a letter written in August 1693 John urged his brother to improve the acquaintance he already had with 'the Lords' he had mentioned, because it 'can do neither of us any hurt, and no one can tell what occasion he may have for the favour of men in great stations'.[79]

Their relationship illustrates several aspects of family life: the closeness of sibling ties, in spite of vastly different lifestyles - Justinian a married man with a large family, and John who chose to remain

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76 Vere Isham to Justinian Isham, 30 Dec.[1689], 3 March [1689/90], 26 March [1690] NRO IC 4189, 4192, 4186. Since the only certain evidence of this discord is found in Vere Isham's letters, and she was obviously glad to act in some sense as an arbitrator, she may well have over estimated the strength of their disagreement.

77 John Isham to Justinian Isham, 20 Sept.[ ] NRO IC 2265.

78 John Isham to Justinian Isham, 22 Sept.1687, 23 Oct.[1690], 26 Dec.[arch:1691], 26 Sept.1693, NRO IC 1416, 2255, 2265, 1494.

79 John Isham to Justinian Isham, 29 Aug.1693, NRO IC 1487.

single until he was 46; and the functioning of a younger son to benefit his family of origin and his expectations that the head of his family will also use his influence on his behalf. When he died at the age of 88 John Isham left his manors and lands in Sussex to his nephew Dr Euseby Isham. Since Euseby was at that time at least third in line for the baronetcy it is reasonable to assume that John intended to benefit a younger son. However, both the fifth and sixth baronets died without issue, and Euseby's eldest son became the seventh baronet.

The contrast between the lives of the heir and younger sons is in some ways not sharply drawn. Younger sons during their youth, and throughout their lives, did not necessarily lose status in their relationships with other members of their families, or their peers. They participated in the social round of the well-connected gentleman - hunting, visiting relatives and friends, dining out and socialising with influential people, travelling abroad, enjoying plays and so on. Neither did they lose status if they were successful in their careers in trade or public office, as Ned Dering and John Isham were. Everyone in seventeenth century society was dependent upon patronage, even the heir, so this aspect of the dependence was a matter of degree. However, there was a desperation in the use of influence necessary for survival of a younger son which is absent in the main in the use the heir made of the same resources. Since the aim of the gentry in the seventeenth century was to perpetuate their line in wealth and security, sacrifices which might endanger that objective were inappropriate - even in the interests of a well loved younger son. But the evidence of these families is that in the main this did not reflect a lack of concern, affection or effort on behalf of younger sons.[80]

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[80] Hainsworth's study of the interconnections between the manor house and the counting house, and his examples, particularly from the Lowther family, confirm this assertion. [Hainsworth, 'Manor House to Counting House,' passim.]

UNMARRIED WOMEN:

Seventeenth century attitudes to single women were shaped by a number of deeply felt and largely unchallenged attitudes about women and singleness. For example, teachings about the submissiveness of wives, and by inference the control of women by men; the protestant and particularly puritan elevation of marriage and suspicion of celibacy; and patriarchal ideas which viewed marriage as the basis of the family and the commonwealth, and defined singleness as potentially morally and socially disruptive. As Stenton has commented, '...no teaching was directed to the praise or encouragement of independence in a woman, even in an unmarried woman.'[81] This ideological framework, and the economic and social realities of the early modern era would seem to leave little space in society for single women. Yet during the seventeenth century 10 per cent or more of women who grew to adulthood may not have married.[82] In spite of this comparatively high proportion of unmarried women their place and role within patriarchal society was very ill defined, and somewhat precarious. Many single women from among the gentry, whether single only until they married, or remaining single, led restricted, quiet, and dependent lives which lacked variety.

For women in the seventeenth century no other way of life offered the status and security that could be found through marriage. There was no

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81 Stenton, D. The English Woman in History (New York, 1977) p.117. See also: Olwen Hufton, 'Women Without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century.' Journal of Family History. Vol.9 no.4 (Winter 1984) pp.355-376; R. Wall, 'Woman Alone in English Society.' Annales de démographic historique (1981) pp.303-316; Susan Cotts Watkins, 'Spinsters.' Journal of Family History. Vol.9, no.4 (Winter,1984) pp.310-325.

82 Wrightson, English Society, p.68. Wrightson bases this estimate on A.D.J. Macfarlane, ' The regulation of marital and sexual relationships in seventeenth century England with special reference to the county of Essex.' (unpub. M Phil. thesis, University of London, 1968.) and he stresses that such estimates are very approximate.

notion that a single woman could exist socially or economically outside her family circle or some other associated household. Consequently there is no need to speculate about why women married. Since within the social sphere, and even at law, all women were understood to be married or about to be married, no social stigma attached to the temporarily single woman even in her late 20s. A second category of single women in the seventeenth century to whom no social stigma was attached were widows. The financial independence of some widows, particularly those who were young and had no children, made them very attractive matches, and the correspondence of these families has many recommendations of likely widows and their probable worth. Many widows married to suit themselves and did so very happily, although their reasons were often more pragmatic than romantic. But the numbers of those widows who did not remarry makes them a significant component in the single population. This group was moreover, much more independent than any other single women, and less controlled by men.

A third category of single women were those who went by what Mary Astell called 'the dreadful name of Old Maid.'[83] This group is probably of greatest interest because so little attention seems to have been paid to them - then or now. Their lives are generally assumed to have been dull, unrewarding and unfulfilled. But this was not always true, particularly among the women of upper gentry families. The image that has been created has been greatly influenced by the deep rooted idea that what happens to women is merely a consequence of what men decide, and that all women wish to marry. By implication a woman left single has been discarded by men or at the very least cannot be regarded as quite normal. This negative image was also coloured by the position of single women

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83 Mary Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, p.102, quoted in Stenton, The English Woman, p.224.

among the lower orders whose singleness was perceived as socially disruptive and who were frequently treated savagely by the law and society.[84] The status, dignity and personal comfort of individual single women varied greatly, but their literary image, and probably also their public image seems to have been one of inadequacy and frustration.

In every area parental control over a daughter was greater than over a son. Although the opportunities for younger sons in gentry families were limited, their range of opportunities far outstripped those available to their sisters. Daughters, as previously noted, remained more financially dependent than their brothers. Fathers and elder brothers often administered their finances, even when the money belonged to the women themselves. Even the surprising mobility of the unmarried daughter on a round of visits to relatives and kin, which at first glance seems to add interest and variety to life, could just be evidence of someone being pushed from pillar to post. Judith Isham lived most of her life with her great aunt Lady Denton at Stow, in Suffolk, but she frequently visited the Isham family seat at Lamport in Northamptonshire, and her married sisters in Surrey, Norfolk or London. Judith was financially independent and was a welcome and much invited guest at a variety of other houses.

Mary Bedford's plight was quite different. She too spent a great deal of time away from the family home in Salisbury, staying with her grandfather in Winchester, and her stepsister and her husband in Wiltshire. In a letter to her stepfather requesting permission to leave her grandfather's house, and begging him to let her know where she might best go next, it is very evident that for Mary mobility was not the same as independence. Mary concluded her letter, 'And thus I am in a strait and know not what to do, which maketh me shed many a bitter tear: but I

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84 Robert H. Michel, 'English Attitudes Towards Women, 1640-1700,' Canadian Journal of History, 13 (April,1978) pp.55-58.

desire God to dispose of me to his glory'.[85]

The potential comfort and dignity of a young woman not yet married was greatly influenced by the closeness of ties within her family, and her financial independence. Permanently single women of the lower gentry were usually at a serious disadvantage because of lack of financial independence which tied them to the benevolence or otherwise of family and kin, and frequently gave them a life as mere hangers-on. This seems to have led to a greater reluctance on the part of these women to remain single, and conversely greater willingness to accept marriage with a social inferior. For example, Jane and Mary Bedford received only £250 under their father's will, and a further £100 from their mother.[86] It was most unlikely that this amount provided them with any possibility of financial independence.

Women were also often sabotaged by their own and society's belief that their condition was temporary and they were in a sense waiting for life to begin. Thus one receives the impression that apart from the consideration of potential suitors nothing of moment was felt to be happening in their lives. There are several letters from Rebecca Sherfield's daughter and stepdaughter to their father in London; the letters contain only news and instructions from their mother - 'my mother saith'- which, considering the fact that their mother wrote by the same post suggests that the daughter's lives were less than exciting, or at least that they perceived them as not of any interest to their father.[87]

Women remained unmarried for a variety of reasons - many of them

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85 Mary Bedford to Henry Sherfield, 25 May 1623, HRO Herr. XLIII, 19.

86 Probate will of George Bedford of Sarum, 5 Feb.1606/7, HRO Herr. XLIV, 16; Will of Mary Sherfield, 17 Sept.1607, HRO Herr. XLI, 2.

87 Matilda Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3 Nov.1629, HRO Herr. II, 32. Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 3 Nov.1629, HRO Herr. XXXI, 41. In her letter Matilda specifically stated 'I have no news to write of at this time....'

outside their own control - but some women simply chose not to marry because they were disinclined even in the face of society's expectation that all women did wish to marry. In 1655 while rejecting the match-making overtures of Dr Wright on behalf of his cousins Judith and Elizabeth Isham, John Stuteville wrote to the girls' father,

> Your daughters live contentedly and happily as they are, and (if they be not burdensome to you, as they are not to my Lady) their desire is, not yet to change their condition, but upon greater advantage, and preferment than they are like to meet with here.[88]

This letter not only illustrates possible reasons for remaining single - the unattractiveness of the proposed partner or contentment with the present life style - it also implies that the prospect of becoming 'burdensome' to the family could be a pressure toward marriage. When she was 24, Judith Isham wrote earnestly to her father, requesting that she be permitted to remain single.

> ...although a quiet single life be most agreeable to my own inclination, yet finding myself not able utterly to resolve against the other, (lest I lay a snare upon myself and be tempted) therefore I shall submit to your will and pleasure, humbly beseeching you that what time can possible be granted me I may have to prepare for it, and give myself some reasonable satisfaction in the person I must live with all my life.[89]

Her twin, Elizabeth, after the heart-break of her aborted relationship with Sir Thomas Gardiner, also wrote asking to remain single, or at least not be made to marry the man her father had in mind for her.[90]

For women in the seventeenth century marriage was a career which conferred status by admitting them as fully as possible into patriarchal society. Marriage also provided a defined place and role. To be neither

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88 John Stuteville to Justinian Isham, 12 Jan.1655[/6], NRO IC 353. Justinian's daughters resided with their great-aunt, Denton, and John Stuteville, rather than with their father.

89 Judith Isham to Justinian Isham, 12 Nov.1660, NRO IC 503.

90 Elizabeth Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 3 Oct.1661, NRO IC 524.

male nor attached to a male in seventeenth century society, was to suffer an automatic reduction of status. But to lack the focus of one's own household and the compensatory satisfactions of children meant that a single woman was deprived not only of status but of the role and place assigned to women. Women who could assume some part of that place or role, or who lived in predominantly female households, had the best chance of living fulfilled lives. And if they had chosen to live unmarried they were less likely to be afflicted by the malaise of waiting for life to begin at marriage.

Abigail Harley, the daughter of Sir Edward Harley, began to be a strength in the Harley household from an early age, she took over much of her mother's role after her death when Abigail was in her 20s. She began from at least that time, if not earlier, to assist in the administration of the estates of Brampton Bryan on behalf of her father, when politics kept him in London. And she continued in a similar role when her brother, Robert, inherited. She conveyed instructions to the agent, but she was also directly responsible for many complex and significant administrative issues. Robert Harley's wife and children lived at Brampton, as did Abigail's sister Martha before her marriage, and also at least one female cousin, and at different times a variety of other relatives, often widowed aunts. On the frequent occasions when Sir Edward was not there Abigail was in fact, if not in name, the head of the household, and was treated as such. When Robert's wife, Elizabeth, died after only five years of marriage, Abigail looked after the three children at Brampton most of the time, and continued to do so after he remarried.[91] In December 1719 on her birthday her brother Robert wrote a letter to her which provides an insight into her roles, and the way she was valued.

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91 Edward Harley to his daughter Abigail Harley, letters between 25 Sept.1689 & 17 [July] 1694, BL Loan 29/66 (2).

> I must give vent to my thoughts upon occasion of the return of the twentieth of December. It is common and natural to wish on these occasions many happy years to come, but it is a peculiar happiness, my dearest sister, that I look back with pleasure at the time we have spent together through our childhood, youth and grown estate. Every stage of life you have filled with endeared affection... For your love and care you [ ] to my dear children, to your example and instructions they owe the utmost thankfulness. These are great benefits I received from you, you have also made yourself a partner in my sufferings and was a true comforter in time of need...

He ended the letter with the hope that 'the budding hopes of my dear maid may receive the advantage long of your society and the improvement of your instruction'.[92]

In the many letters to her she was treated with great affection and with respect, and as time went on she became an almost matriarchal figure, particularly to the nephews and nieces she brought up, who wrote to her constantly as adults, sometimes by every post. Although it may be in part an opinion influenced by the nature of a collection of letters which are all directed to one person, it is evident that Abigail Harley was a vital focal point in a large family with strong ties of affection and family loyalty.[93] Many letters concerned politics and business, in both of which

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92 Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, to Abigail Harley, 20 Dec.1719, BL Loan 29/67 (5).

93 Edward, Lord Harley, to his aunt, Abigail Harley, 1710-1725, BL Loan 29/66 (4); Edward Harley, son of Abigail Harley's brother Edward, to Abigail Harley, 1711-1724, BL Loan 29/67 (1),(2); Elizabeth Harley, to her aunt Abigail Harley, 1703-1713, BL Loan 29/67 (3); Henrietta Harley to her aunt, Abigail Harley, 1713-1724, BL Loan 29/67 (4); Abigail Hay to her aunt, Abigail Harley,1708-1723, BL Loan 29/68 (1) - (8); George Hay to his aunt by marriage, Abigail Harley, 1709-1718, BL Loan 29/68 (9),(10); Elizabeth Harley to her sister-in-law, Abigail Harley, 1691, BL Loan 29/67 (4); Sarah, wife of Edward Harley, to her sister-in-law, Abigail Harley 1715-1720, BL Loan 29/67 (7); Sarah Harley, Countess of Oxford, to her sister-in-law Abigail Harley, 1695-1717, BL Loan 29/67 (7); Thomas Harley to his niece, Abigail Harley, 26 June 1690, BL Loan 29/67 (7); Thomas Harley to his cousin, Abigail Harley, 1713-1716, BL Loan 29/67 (8); Anne (Stephens) Pye to her cousin, Abigail Harley,1685-1706, BL Loan 29/69 (1),(2); Robert Pye (son of Anne Pye) to his second cousin, Abigail Harley, BL Loan 29/69 (10); Grace Thynne to her cousin, Abigail Harley, 1699-1724, BL Loan 29/69 (10).

her family's interest and her own experience made her well informed. Single life seems to have been genuinely satisfactory for Abigail Harley, but this was due in part to her personality, and in part to the fact that she lived within a very closely knit patriarchal family and fulfilled recognisable roles within it. It seems likely that her singleness gave her greater freedom than her two married sisters enjoyed, possibly helped by the fact that the household she ruled over was usually almost entirely female. And it was a household where there seems to have been a great deal of collective responsibility, particularly in the care of children, even when their mother was alive. Her independence and role within this religious and politically involved household was almost certainly exceptional, but her life does show a possible alternative to the stereotyped 'old maid' of the seventeenth century - an alternative which may have been more common than has previously been thought.

A satisfactory life style for single women could be to exist in a basically female establishment. Judith Isham's satisfaction with single life sprang, at least in part, from the comfortable life of the household she shared with her great-aunt Lady Elizabeth Denton, her twin sister, Elizabeth, sometimes two widowed friends of Lady Denton's, assorted other visitors, and an unmarried male cousin.[94] Stereotyped notions about female households are totally misleading when looking either at Lady Denton's household or that of Abigail Harley. Both groups were affectionate, supportive and involved with family, friends and kin. They were centres of a great deal of socialising at home and away, they were actively interested in the events of the day, and they were in no sense isolated or turned inward.[95] The Denton household functioned as a family

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[94] This cousin, John Stuteville, was a lawyer and was often very useful to the 'family', for example, he was commissioned to conduct marriage negotiations. He was an integral part of this household, but he seems to have had much less authority in the household than Denton, and no more than the other women, even though they were younger than him.

and regarded themselves as a family. When Lady Spring was investigating the likely reception of a marriage proposal to Elizabeth Isham she wrote to John Stuteville, 'I have ever found that kindness and respect from the family at Stow as I was bound in gratitude to wish'.[96] And when the family was broken by Lady Denton's death only Judith Isham and John Stuteville were her executors, and Elizabeth L'Estrange noted that at the time of her death Lady Denton had by her only enough money for her funeral charges 'and to keep the family together a month'.[97]

The life-style possibilities of single women in the seventeenth century encompassed great variety, from extreme subjection to remarkable independence. Their lives were undoubtedly enhanced by financial independence and the ability to exist apparently within a household structure, even if they were in fact recreating that structure to make it more suitable to themselves.

STEP RELATIONSHIPS:

The Sherfield correspondence confirms much that is already well known about step relationships in the seventeen century. Possibly the most conspicuous of these facts is the immediacy with which new members of the family were absorbed - at least on the formal level of designation. Rebecca Sherfield's first extant letter after her marriage to Henry refers to 'my daughter Till', [98] who was in fact Henry's daughter by his previous

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95 Letters illustrating the extent to which the four Isham girls were brought up by Denton, and the life-style of the household at Stow: NRO IC 273, 274, 280-287, 290, 291, 316, 320, 340, 353, 386, 401, 403, 447, 456, 458, 463, 466a, 470, 493, 531, 532, 536, 554, 565-569, 573, 624.

96 E Spring to John Stuteville, n.d. NRO IC 531.

97 Elizabeth L'Estrange to Justinian Isham, 25 July & 1 Aug.1664, NRO IC 565 & 566.

98 Rebecca Sherfield to Henry Sherfield, 5 June 1624, HRO Herr. XXXI, 1.

marriage. This apparent adaptation into the new family was no doubt influenced by the frequency by step relationships. Laslett suggests that the number of families broken by death in the early modern period closely approximates that broken by divorce in contemporary American society.[99] Of the seventy-two children in the core families in this study thirty had lost at least one parent before the age of 15, and twenty-two of them lived for some time at least with a stepparent.

The Bedford/Sherfield/Long families also illustrate the very high proportion of children who experienced the death of one or more of their parents before adulthood. The six Bedford children lost their father when the eldest was 14 and the youngest less than one year old. Six years later their mother died. Thus they had suffered the loss of both parents and were in the care of their stepfather, Henry Sherfield, while five of them were still under the age of 18. It was reasonable that the children should remain with their mother after their father's death, particularly as she married again within a few months, however, what was somewhat more surprising, they remained Henry Sherfield's responsibility after his wife's death.

Several factors made it likely that the children would remain as a family with Sherfield, in spite of the fact that they still had at least two married aunts and a grandfather on their mother's side of the family. In part it was the strength of the nuclear family already created, but also Sherfield was by that time the heir to that part of Mary Bedford's estate not tied to the children's legacies, and he was the administrator of those legacies. The younger children had grown up with Sherfield as their father, and their stepsister Matilda was only two years younger than the youngest of the Bedford children, consequently they were part of the Sherfield family structure. When Sherfield remarried it was to another

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[99] Laslett, Family life and illicit love, pp.160-163.

widow, this time with eight children.

Matilda Sherfield, Henry's only daughter experienced the death of her mother when she was 4 years of age, and was brought up from the time she was 8 by her stepmother, Rebecca. The family consisted of the younger Bedford children, her half sisters and brothers, and also the younger of the Long stepsisters and brothers, the youngest of whom was actually a year younger than Matilda. The Long children had not experienced the death of their father until two of them were over 20. The ages of the others ranged from 18 to 5. They were all adults before the death of their mother or their stepfather. The family brought together in 1616 by the marriage of Rebecca Long and Henry Sherfield thus contained fifteen children none of whom had both parents living, and six of whom had lost both parents and were therefore living in a household which contained only one blood relative - a half sister. In spite of the size and comparatively fragmented nature of this household there is no reference in any letters still extant to its being considered exceptional or in any way unacceptable.

As far as it is possible to ascertain both Henry and Rebecca maintained good relationships with their stepchildren. The household seems to have been a happy one, and Bedford and Long step siblings functioned as a nuclear family. In adulthood they relied on each other and supported each other, with little apparent differentiation between brothers and sisters and stepbrothers and sisters. There seems to have been no more or less friction between parents and children than between stepparents and children. The relationships which seem to have been most abrasive were those between Henry Sherfield and the eldest son of each family, William Bedford and Henry Long, and the trouble seems mostly to have arisen over financial matters. It must be added that Rebecca's relationship with her eldest son was also disastrous, and the fault seems to have been principally on his side. The few disagreements with the

younger children also arose over money where the tension was doubtless increased by Henry Sherfield's control over the payment of legacies left by their respective fathers. Henry Sherfield is in fact an impressive example of a diligent and caring stepfather. His efforts in marriage making and career planning seem to have differed very little from those of a father. His years of support of George Bedford illustrate both his personal concern and his sense of duty. There is no doubt of the affection that his stepchildren felt toward him, particularly the younger ones.

Of the seven children of Sir Edward Dering, the first baronet, all had lost at least one parent by the age of 13. Elizabeth, the mother of the eldest son, died when Anthony was one year old. Sir Edward's second wife, Anne, mother of Edward and Elizabeth, died when they were two and a half years and 7 months old respectively. The four children of Sir Edward's third marriage were 13, 12, 11 and 8 when their father died. Anthony had thus lost a mother and a stepmother by the time he was 7, and had acquired a second stepmother by the time he was 10. Edward was three and a half and Elizabeth approaching 2 when their father married again. In middle age Edward wrote in his autobiography, 'the first misfortune I had was the loss of that prudent and virtuous mother. The next was that of my Father marrying again which followed soon after'.[100] Yet there is no evidence of obvious discord between Edward and his stepmother from letters during his childhood. In fact Sir Edward, his father, wrote to Unton in November of 1637, 'I thank thee for thy kind care of Ned'.[101] It may be that Sir Edward's recollections were influenced by the altercations between himself and his stepmother after the death of his father.

However, there are some other indications about the nature of the

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[100] Edward Dering, autobiography, p.10 in Bond, Diaries, p.108.

[101] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 11 Nov.1637, KAO U350 C2/57.

relationship between Unton Dering and her stepchildren, particularly the heir, even in childhood. Firstly, it is perhaps noteworthy in itself that Sir Edward should feel the need to thank Unton for her care of Ned. This raises the question of how completely Edward was accepted by his step-mother at that time - he was 12 years old, and Unton Dering had been married to his father for eight years. Early in the marriage when Sir Edward's duties kept him at Dover Castle, Unton stayed there with him while the three children of his previous marriages stayed with their grandparents at Surrenden.[102] While not in the least inappropriate in the seventeenth century this may nevertheless be an indication of attitude, since almost certainly they were not being sent away from Dover because it was unhealthy. Anthony and Edward were sent away to school at an early age, Edward was 6. And they seem to have visited home very infrequently. Henry and Ned, the sons of the third marriage did not leave home for school at such early ages, but were educated at home with a tutor for at least part of the time.[103] One of the sons of the third marriage was also named Edward, which may have further alienated the older Edward.

Although Edward, the heir, as he was after 1634 when Anthony died, was referred to in some of Sir Edward's letters to Unton by name he was more usually referred to as 'the boy'. In one letter Sir Edward wrote, 'I have sent the boy to Cambridge (thorough I hope) this day'. Such a designation was common at the time, but has some significance when the same letter concludes, 'God bless us with a comfortable return together, and preserve our little flock'.[104] It would seem that the older Edward did not belong to the 'little flock', but that may have been in part because of his age -

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[102] Edward Dering, first baronet, to his mother, n.d., KAO U350 C2/24.

[103] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 4 Nov.1640, KAO U350 C2/85.

[104] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 22 Oct.1641, in Larking, Proceedings, p.56,57.

in 1641 he was 16, six years older than the eldest of Unton's children. However, the contrast between the comparative formality toward Edward and the sometimes extravagantly affectionate terms toward Unton's children is very noticeable. In one letter Sir Edward refers to 'the boy' and later to 'my dear little ones',[105] and in another letter about that time he wrote, 'God in heaven bless our little boy; indeed, love, they are all precious to me'.[106] These references seem particularly significant because Dering was Edward's father, not his stepfather.

The extremely close relationship between Sir Edward and his third wife may have further distanced a sensitive and somewhat introspective child, such as Edward almost certainly was. However, he referred to his father in his autobiography as 'dear and worthily dear',[107] so if there was some strain in the relationship during his childhood he seems in later life not to have identified his father with it. What lends weight to the impression that Unton Dering set some distance between herself and her stepchildren is that Elizabeth also seems to have spent a good deal of time away from her stepmother. Elizabeth was often with her father in London when the four youngest children were at home in Kent with their mother. On one occasion when Elizabeth was ill while in London Unton wrote to her husband that Betty was now among her best friends, Sir Edward replied, 'Thou dost wrong thy self, worth all of them, and more.'[108] Was this Unton's tactic for encouraging Sir Edward to keep Betty with him and his mother in London?

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[105] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 2 May 1641, in Larking, Proceedings, p.46.

[106] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 20 May 1641, in Larking, Proceedings, p.46,47.

[107] Edward Dering, autobiography,p.10, in Bond, Diaries,p.109.

[108] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 13 Jan.1641, in Larking, Proceedings, p.69.

The sense of distance between a stepmother and her children and an heir was not unusual. Recalling her husband's response to his father's remarriage Lucy Hutchinson wrote,

> he was old enough to be sensible that his father's second love and marriage to a person of such quality as required a settlement for her son must needs be a lessening to his expectation, but he was so affectionate to his father that he received it very contentedly,...

However, when Hutchinson returned from the university he found that he could 'enjoy no great delight' in his father's household with 'another brood of children springing up in the house, and the servants endeavouring with tales and flatteries to sow dissension on both sides'.[109] The four daughters of Sir Justinian Isham's first marriage lived with their great aunt, as their mother had wished, and only visited the family home infrequently after their father's remarriage. Their relationship with their stepmother, and even their stepbrothers and sisters, was more dutiful and correct than warmly affectionate. However, serious disagreements did not break out between the two families until after Isham's death, when a clash was caused by his attempt in his will to make the maximum provision for the children of his second marriage, and the minimum possible endowment to Judith, the remaining undowered daughter of his first marriage.

The most interesting developments in the relationship between Sir Edward Dering and his stepmother came after his father's death and his own marriage. Dering senior, had settled large amount of property upon the sons of his third marriage, and he had also left Unton in possession of Surrenden Dering.[110] Following his father's death in 1644 Sir Edward went to France for about eighteen months. His 'disputes at law' with his step-

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[109] Lucy Hutchinson, Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson, with the fragment of an autobiography of Mrs Hutchinson (London,1973) pp.24,25.

[110] Bond, Diaries, p.5, note 11; Dering, autobiography, p.12, in Bond, Diaries, p. 111.

mother began almost immediately upon his return. After the Restoration Sir Edward, who no longer felt the need to live inconspicuously, rented Surrenden from his stepmother. Their relationship during the next few years was characterised by disputes and lawsuits which nevertheless did not break the ties of obligation which Sir Edward accepted as the head of the family toward his younger half-brothers and sisters. Harry gained a place at Cambridge and Ned was established as an apprentice to the merchant Mr Rich. His stepmother involved him in a variety of smaller tasks such as commissioning a cloak for Ned, but the state of their relationship did not allow her to trouble him with requests on her own behalf.[111] Sir Edward continued to assist his brothers and sisters in the administration of their finances, and with counsel and advice; and the children of the family seem to have held each other in mutual affection.

In a letter in which she sought help from Sir Edward for Ned who was being ill treated by a harsh master, and for his sister in a matter touching her reputation, Unton admitted, 'I know, and thank you for your loving regard of him', she added that she knew he had 'a great interest in their respect and affection', and she concluded the letter, 'God will double your blessings in yours, for your assisting me in the protecting mine from the many temporal and spiritual assaults to their hazard.'[112] The relationships of Sir Edward and his sister and their families with their half-brothers and sisters seem to have been satisfactory, with visits and letters being exchanged into maturity, and the exertions of Sir Edward on behalf of his siblings being replaced by mutual transactions of business when convenient.

Relationships between half-brothers and sisters were not always so harmonious, and when they were most difficult the bitterness was

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[111] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 12 March 1649/50, KAO U350 C2/103.

[112] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 7 Feb.1653/4, KAO U1107 C/22.

frequently created by decisions about inheritance and/or the relationship with the stepparent. Vivienne Larminie, writing about the Newdigate family, noted the deep resentment felt by Sir John Newdigate toward his half brother Henry. This was provoked by the fact that his father had made equal provision for Henry, though he was a younger son, and the resentment expressed itself in bitterness against Henry's mother.

> ...for though I had the inheritance of my father wholly due to me by birth right as eldest of the house and her son that brought a valuable estate and while she lived upheld the house, you son to her that brought nothing and what ruins followed her entry there are too many witness:...[113]

Although the relationships between the Dering offspring were more harmonious than that, the relationship between Unton and her stepson continued to be full of recriminations. A letter which sued for his influence on his brother's behalf would also reproach him for his unjust treatment of her. In March 1640 she wrote,

> for our differences which were more revived at our parting than I expected, I do refer them to your conscience, which I hope (not withstanding your hardships to me) is good and tender; and to our good God, who in his good time will dispose your heart to more just apprehensions of me, and actions towards me. And if not I know my duty, and trust God for grace to act it. And will continue whilst I am, your truly loving mother, Unton Dering.'[114]

Unpleasantness arose when Dering wished to remove relatives whom Unton had allowed to live on his land without his permission, presumably during her tenure of the family estate; over money Unton owed to Sir Edward, and to Elizabeth's husband, Sir John Darrel; over rent owed by Dering to Unton for Surrenden; and over jointure land which Sir Edward wished to lease from Unton.

The most serious recriminations however were over Unton's claim to certain pictures from Surrenden and rights to wood as part of her

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[113] CR136B1273 as quoted in Larminie, 'The Newdigates,' p.206.

[114] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 12 March 1649/50, KAO U350 C2/103.

jointure. 'For the pictures,' she wrote,

> I have so just a right in them, as I can safely say upon my conscience... they are mine as given me with the goods in my closet... therefore if you proceed I think your suit will neither be successful, nor honourable... if you think you have a right to the wood you may go on in law for I am fully satisfied of my right in it.[115]

Both parties made claims of innocence and goodwill. Unton wrote,

> My own innocency shall vindicate me from those mistakes you say I am subject to. I wish you would demonstrate to me and the world those honourable and just pretences you make, till when if I mistake not again, you will not have that peace in yourself, nor I that content in you which is desired by her who shall ever have affectionate wishes for you, U. Dering.[116]

Sir Edward replied,

> ...if you understand these things otherwise, 'tis sufficient for me that I know them so, and the difference of your judgement, will perhaps rather condemn you of partiality than me of untruth. I desire you if conveniently you can to send me the money you owe me, for to want it may be some inconvenience to Madam your obedient son E.D.[117]

Lady Dering felt that her stepson at times misconstrued her intentions and her words, and on one such occasion expressed her wish that he had let his wife read her letter since 'I am confident she would have given it a fair interpretation'.[118] Both sides sought legal advice over Lady Unton's use of her jointure lands, particularly in regard of the felling of trees.[119] Ultimately Sir Edward took the case to Chancery where he complained that on her jointure lands which were in reversion to him his stepmother had, 'ploughed up meadow and pasture, and cut down timber, and committed other spoil in the premises, and threatened to commit more'. She was commanded

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[115] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, n.d. [c.1653], KAO U1107 C/21.

[116] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, n.d. [c.1653], KAO U1107 C/21.

[117] Edward Dering to Unton Dering, 7 [ ] 1652, KAO U133 C1/2.

[118] Unton Dering to Edward Dering, 165[ ], KAO U133 C1/2.

[119] John Nayler - Legal opinion re decayed trees on a widow's estate for life. 1653, KAO U1107 C/19.

to 'cease and forebear' on pain of a fine of £1000.[120]

One of the most interesting aspects of this relationship is that for as long as letters continue between the two combatants the functioning of the relationship, not just of the families, but of Unton and Sir Edward themselves was not destroyed by their disputes. They still observed the 'courtesies' of civil greetings, styled themselves 'your faithful and truly loving mother' and 'your obedient son', and expressed expectations of each other which seemed to ignore the stresses of their relationship. It seems by doing this they were able to keep the fabric of the family intact. Unton saw this as vital to keep the influence of the head of the family on behalf of her children, and Sir Edward believed it to be the unavoidable duty of the head of the family.

The extremes of the Sherfield and Dering households illustrate yet again the variety of seventeenth century family life. There are obviously, in any century, serious problems inherent in setting up households containing members of more than one nuclear family, but in the seventeenth century there was, particularly for daughters, less escape from family confines than there is in modern society. One solution was to join or create another household as Sir Justinian Isham's daughters did, but this can only have been an option for comparatively few. Letters from Mary Bedford show that although she had been brought up in Henry Sherfield's household for most of her life, and held him in great affection, he had slightly less authority over her than a father. These delicate balances of power may have been particularly difficult in a patriarchal society, both for adults and children. And the issue of inheritance in a landed society made the tensions even greater. This may even help to explain why the Sherfield family achieved greater contentment

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[120] Copy of a decree against Lady Unton Dering in dispute with Edward Dering, 1656. KAO U133 L/2.

than the Derings, since there was less at stake financially.

CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of this thesis that within the undoubtedly hierarchical society of the seventeenth century, where male authority was supreme and the subordination of females and children automatically assumed, the chief characteristics of ordinary gentry families were in fact variety of behaviour, experience, and values, and a family environment with strong ties of emotion between spouses and between parents and children. There was considerable potential for individual women and also children to avoid conforming to patriarchal expectations, while not openly defying them. And one may infer from the relationships within some families that the assertion of patriarchal authority was also a very individual matter. Each of the three areas of the study illustrates this.

Some historians have stressed that marriage making in a patriarchal society subsumed the interests of the individual under the interests of the family, and marriages were arranged to benefit the family financially and socially, rather than in the interests of the bride or groom. This is the view of Lawrence Stone and Miriam Slater in particular, but Wrightson has affirmed G. E. Mingay's assertion that 'among the propertied classes generally the individual's interest in marriage was subordinated to the interest of the family'.[1] I believe this statement to be too strong for most gentry families. An individual's independence of action was often subordinated to what the family believed appropriate, but this was determined not only by the interests of the family, but also by the interests of the one to be married. It is more accurate to say that family members, especially heirs, were not allowed to ignore financial

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1 G. E. Mingay, The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class (London, 1976) p.109, quoted in Wrightson, English Society, p.73.

considerations, rather than that their interests were subordinated to them.

In the seventeenth century the processes by which new marriages were made, and the intentions of the match-makers, were much more complex than mere assertions of patriarchy and preservation of dynasty. Although the head of the family carried ultimate authority and responsibility in any marriage making project undertaken or rejected, one of the most notable features of marriage making in the seventeenth century was the range and number of people involved in looking for likely prospects, carrying messages, planning and negotiating. Family, kin and friends, particularly in London, were constantly closely concerned. Such involvement and responsibilities created what are usually viewed as arranged marriages; however these arrangements were usually in effect match-making.

Opinions varied about what weight parental authority should have. The counsel of churchmen and moralists expressed a degree of ambiguity, even confusion. Thomas Gataker after stating that 'a prudent wife is of the Lord' hastened on to say that this is not to be interpreted 'as if parents had no hand, right or power in disposing of their children, or in advising them and providing in that kind for them'. Disposing, advising and providing could be very different funtions.[2]

At least by the beginning of the seventeenth century the sons and daughters of the gentry had been given the right to veto matches which they found unacceptable. However, the opportunity for free personal choice was much rarer. Although a percentage would be quite impossible to estimate, it certainly seems that the majority of marriages at the beginning of the century, and many even later, were initiated by people other than those to be married, usually fathers. But young people had

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2 Thomas Gataker, A Good Wife God's Gift: and A Wife Indeed: Two Marriage Sermons (London, 1623) p.9.

considerable opportunity to become acquainted, and quite often such acquaintance was of a casual social nature, and led to them initiating their own matches. Although young women were sometimes in the position to choose between suitors, the chance to become acquainted and initiate matches tended to be a freedom for men rather than women.

In planning a marriage which was likely to have a good chance of success in terms of family satisfaction and individual happiness, parents and friends considered a whole range of criteria. But a prospect would be speedily discarded in the early stages if he or she brought insufficient wealth or social status. This was the bottom line, the one qualification without which the most personable suitor could not hope to survive. Even the language of 'love' often had finance as its idiom. Although it was not assumed that a wealthy marriage would necessarily be a happy one, a marriage of poverty was believed to have small chance of success. Finance was always important in gentry marriages, since the continuance of family status and well-being depended upon wealth and property.

So as the search for a spouse began these economic considerations were basic, but they were seldom the sole determinant. The lack of any one of a variety of other criteria - personal character, piety, or family reputation - could also disqualify a hopeful suitor. These criteria operated as a basis for selection, but final acceptance or rejection of the proposal depended on the 'liking' of the young couple. 'Liking' could describe feelings varying between passionate attachment to the absence of positive dislike. But often 'liking' seems to have grown quickly into strong affection and even romantic love. Macfarlane is quite correct in asserting the importance of romantic love in marriage making, although he almost certainly overestimates the freedom which members of gentry families had to follow its dictates. And he does not sufficiently acknowledge the fact that love could take a variety of forms in the seventeenth century, not all of them clearly identifiable in the 1980s as

'romantic love'. The nature of emotional bonds is an area in which it is particularly important not to allow our assessments to be coloured by the emotional experiences and expectations of the 1980s.

When a match sprang up more spontaneously, and love, or some form of personal attachment, existed before family negotiations began, the list of desirable qualifications once again came into play, but this time as the basis of acceptance or rejection by the family. Sometimes concessions were made to the young couple's feelings, but by no means always. Unsympathetic parents resented having their hand forced in this way. However, the coincidence of expectation between parents and their children meant that very often when an attachment was formed all that remained was for the parents or friends to finalise the legal details. When men and women were responsible for their own matches they often made the same type of marriage that their parents would have made for them. This not only illustrates the universality of many of these criteria, but also urges caution when we consider the degree of compulsion necessary in a seemingly mercenary marriage.

In the making of marriages the situation most frequently fell between the extreme of an arranged marriage involving compulsion and planned for financial and social gain alone, and the other extreme of passionate inclination on the part of the young to marry for romance. The nature and strength of attachment before marriage varied greatly in individual circumstances. Many people of all ages and social classes married with an eye to the main chance, many others entertained the idea of marrying for 'love' - however they defined the word. The key to understanding the complexity of marriage arrangements in the seventeenth century is not to underestimate the variety of criteria applied, or the extent to which these criteria were entangled in the minds of individuals planning marriages or being married as part of their value system and expectations.

The assumption was that if the right balance of desirable qualities

existed in the prospective spouse, the chance for love to develop was greatly enhanced. And parents had the responsibility to make the initial assessment of these qualities. The matter of suitability was usually left to the discretion of the parents, and the issue of liking to the children. But few parents failed to appreciate the need for mutual attraction, and few children were impervious to material and social advantages. Clashes of interest between parents and children when they arose generally did so not because parents failed to recognize the need for their children to find a partner attractive, but because they would not accept strength of prior attachment as a sufficient reason to proceed with a match if other qualities were wanting.

The amount of shopping around, the number of discarded suggestions and even abandoned negotiations, may well be an indication of the effort to arrive at the right balance of qualifications - someone wealthy enough, pious enough, attractive enough, kind enough to be considered suitable. The ideal was a match in which the two parties most directly concerned loved each other, or were confident they could learn to do so after they were married, and in which both families wholeheartedly approved of the match. Those planning marriage were to love with judgment and caution.

Since it is possible to demonstrate convincingly that in seventeenth century gentry families it was believed that there should at least be liking before marriage, it is not surprising to find that it was widely believed that couples, once married, would love each other. Sir Robert Southwell believed that unless a couple were 'happy in each other... neither greatness nor great estates can speak them such'.[3] It was the practical consequence of the wish to live contentedly and affectionately within one's marriage and family which led in most of the families in this

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3 Robert Southwell to Sir John Champarte, 7 Dec.1675, H.M.C. Egmont Vol. II, p.39.

study to a considerable discrepancy between the theories which were supposed to regulate the lives of men and women, and the realities of everyday life.

The law and the pulpit both maintained the inferiority, submission and dependence of women, and the importance of men exercising the authority which God had given them in their families. And there are sufficient examples from the seventeenth century to establish that women of all classes were potentially almost completely vulnerable to the wishes and demands of the men within, and even outside, their families. However, the doctrine of submission seems on the whole to have received only lip service in everyday affairs in the families in this study. Everyone in the patriarchal family understood that in any clash of wills a husband could command his wife's submission; but if such submission was frequently demanded it is certainly not evident in the letters of these husbands and wives. The assumption that marriage was made and continued for mutual help and comfort had much greater force. Marriage needed to be an efficient working partnership in gentry families. In everyday life individuals and families did what suited their needs and personalities.

The reality was that in most of these families wives had to be competent in running large households, and sometimes also estates. Women were excluded from the many public employments open to men, and their domain was to be the domestic sphere. It is not possible to assess from any of the letters in these collections the degree of frustration which this imposed upon women, but some conclusions may be inferred from the manner in which the definition of the household or domestic sphere was expanded. Several of the women in these families ran or supervised the running of the estate in their husbands' absences. The letters of others include knowledgeable discussions of political issues, and evidence of active support of their husbands during elections. Almost all these wives made suggestions to their husbands on a wide variety of issues, and

expected to be consulted in family matters, both major and minor. It would seem that activities which were clearly for the benefit of husband and family could be categorised as a part of the domestic sphere. This might include travelling to support a relative in childbed, purchasing cattle, negotiating a marriage, or defending the family estate or castle.

In many marriages and families, intelligent, strong and/or well-loved women acted with considerable independence, and often in a very forthright manner. Men required and received differing measures of deference from the women in their families. The letters in these collections indicate that women functioned within the boundaries of ultimate male authority, knowing that the law and religion placed them in a position in which obedience could be required, but that authority was in practice not a constant source of oppression. This was a restricted way to live, but most of the women did not allow themselves to be passive. Few confined themselves to their defined place. The amount of control women had over their lives and marriages was limited both in theory and reality, however, the theory was more restrictive than the reality.

The balance of authority between husband and wife was greatly influenced by the nature of their relationship. All the marriages in this study about which there is enough evidence to make an authoritative statement, were at least affectionate, and judged satisfactory by their families. But more significant is the number of marriages which were romantically loving and passionate in a manner with which twentieth century commentators can readily identify. Most men chose to spend as much time as possible with their wives and families, they enjoyed each other's company, and the preponderance of letters written while couples were apart bemoan their separation in a manner far removed from routinely polite clichés. Contrary to the claims of Stone and Slater, husbands and wives in most marriages in the seventeenth century were held together not merely by dynastic ties, but by strong emotional bonds and commitment to

each other as individuals.[4]

The families established by couples who have strong ties of affection are likely to be warm and loving. However, in the seventeenth century expectations about child-care were different from those in the modern period. The family had greater responsibilities for socialisation, schooling, and care in illness, but there was a collective family responsibility for the children which made separations of mothers and children more acceptable than has become the norm in contemporary society. This study rejects the idea that the use of wet-nurses is proof of callous indifference toward infants, since there is considerable evidence of great care in the supervision of wet-nursed infants. The families in this study were not characterised by distant and demanding patriarchal relationships between fathers and children, but more often by openly expressed affection, and even indulgence towards children. Parents took their duties toward their children seriously, and one of those duties was love. They took pleasure and pride in their small children, and continued their care and concern throughout their lives. They expended enormous amounts of time, effort and money to see their children well and happily married, and established in careers. As with marital relationships, examples of loving families with strong effective bonds were not limited to the late seventeenth century.

In spite of the consolation of religious belief in the reality of heaven, many parents were quite unable to moderate their grief at the loss of children. Although the death of newborn babies may have occasioned

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4 The classification of marriages as 'happy' is very risky, but in her survey of seventeenth century female diarists Sara Mendelson has attempted to do so. She suggests that of a total of twenty-one unions, about which she had sufficient information, fifteen were 'loving and companionable' marriages, and six were 'satisfactory' marriages. [Mendelson, 'Stuart Women's Diaries, p.193.] Among the families in my study I would place the percentage of happy marriages higher, but it must be admitted that unhappiness and discontent are less likely to be expressed in family letters than in diaries.

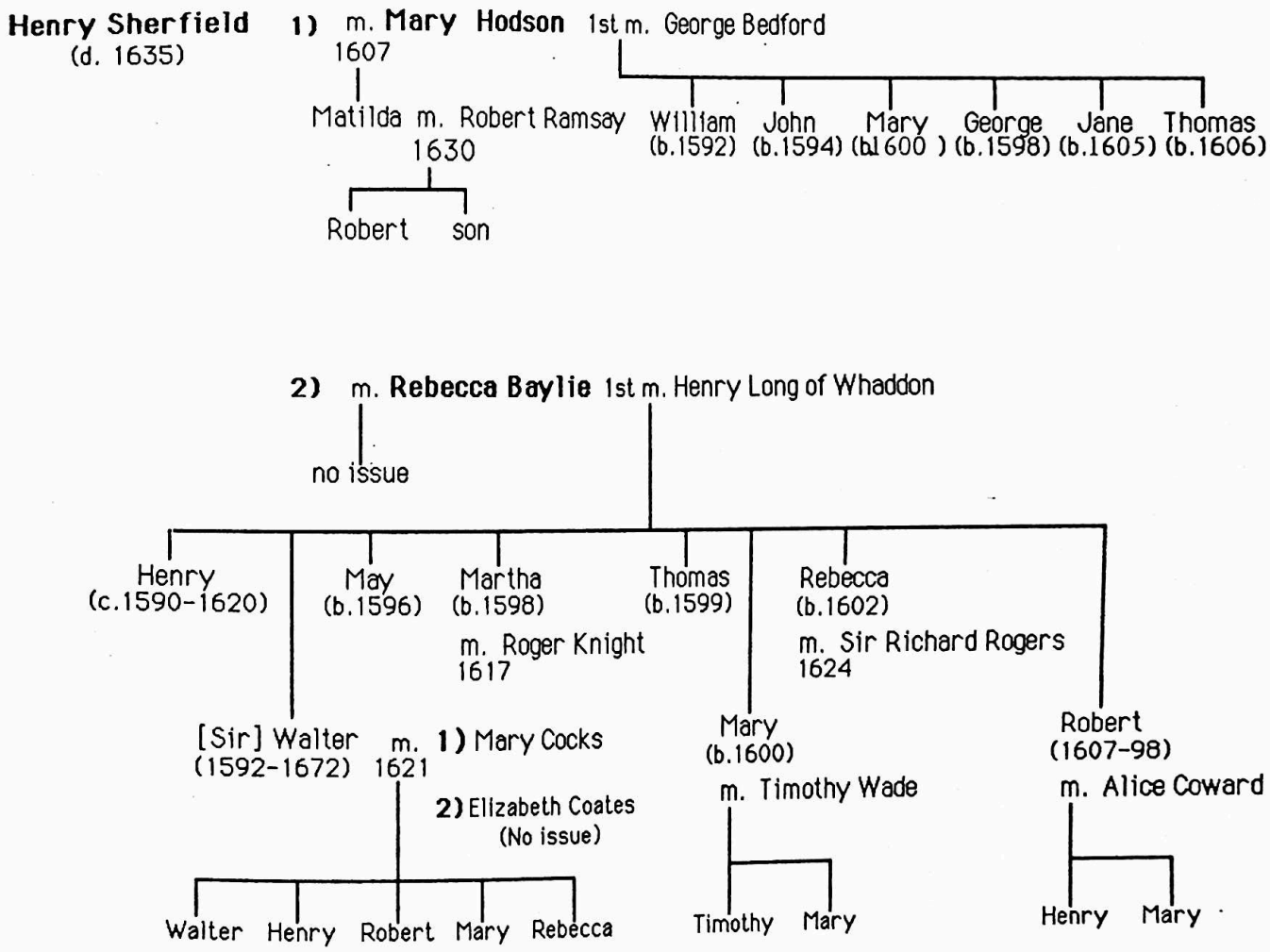
slightly less grief than the death of an infant or child, this remains an impression, and is quite unquantifiable. What is certain is that most parents were not able to avoid investing emotionally in young children in order to save themselves trauma. Parents' care for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their children was rewarded by the continuing affection of their children in adulthood.

Even some of those family members so frequently considered peripheral, both in the seventeenth century and since, were less neglected than some have assumed. Most families made strenuous efforts to assist younger sons to establish themselves, and some experienced considerable success. However, in spite of love and good will a society governed by primogeniture made the lot of younger sons a hard one. Neither did a patriarchal society have places of clearly defined status for unmarried women. But for unmarried women, younger sons and stepchildren, as for all family members in the seventeenth century, individual circumstances encompassed enormous variety.

The values and expectations of the families in this study were not predominantly those of patronage and reciprocity. Their strongest ties were the emotional bonds which existed within their families. Family life was the framework of their existence and their primary social world. Family members gave each other material and emotional support and loyalty, these were expectations so well understood that they needed little explanation. Their experience of family life was different from our own, but it was no less varied and certainly no less supportive or demanding.

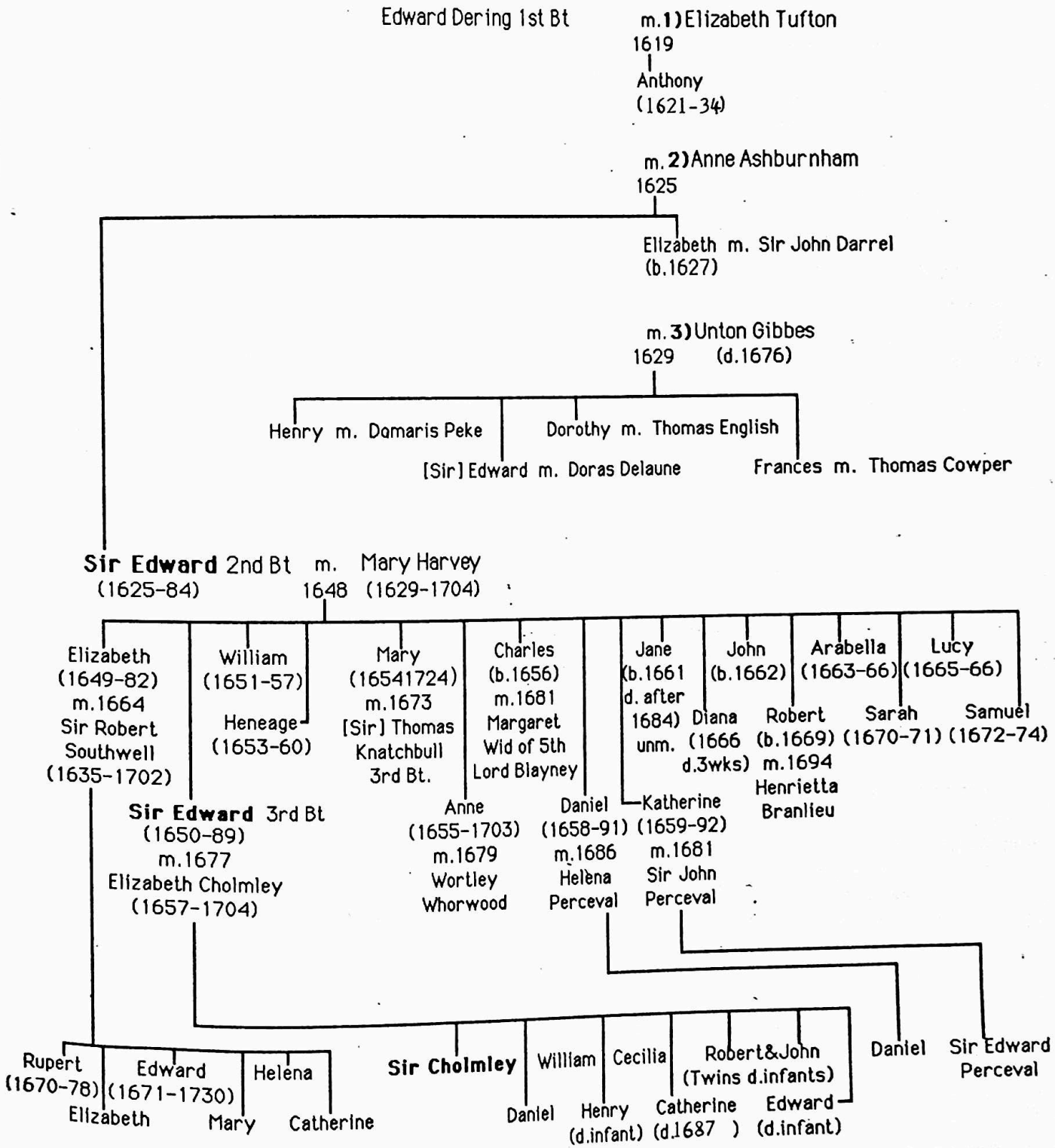
GENEALOGICAL TABLES AND CHARTS

Family and Step Families of Henry Sherfield



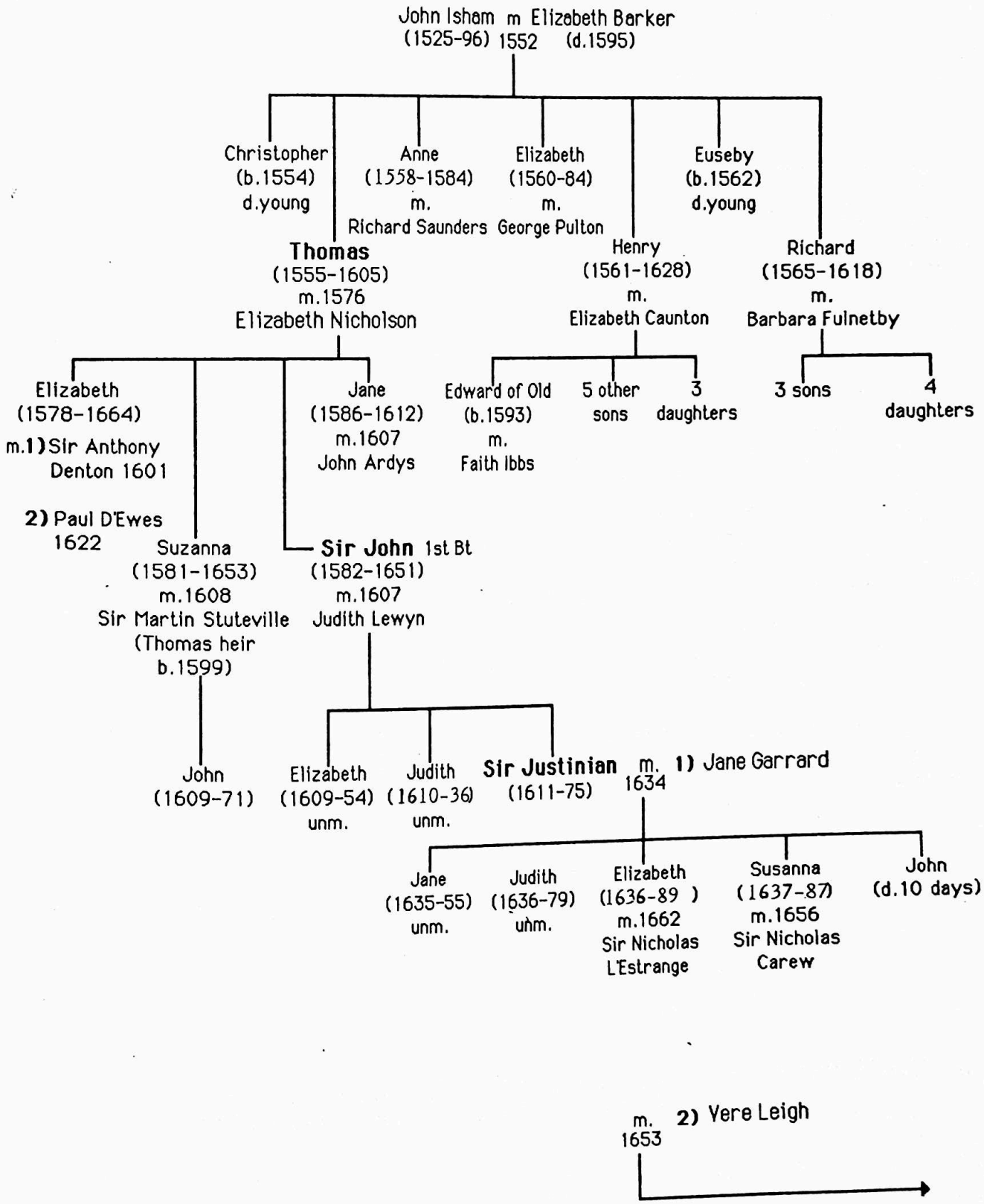
Compiled from: HRO Herriard 44 M 69; John Burke & John Bernard Burke, Extinct & Dormant Baronetcies of England Ireland & Scotland (London, 1841)

Dering of Surrenden Dering, Kent.

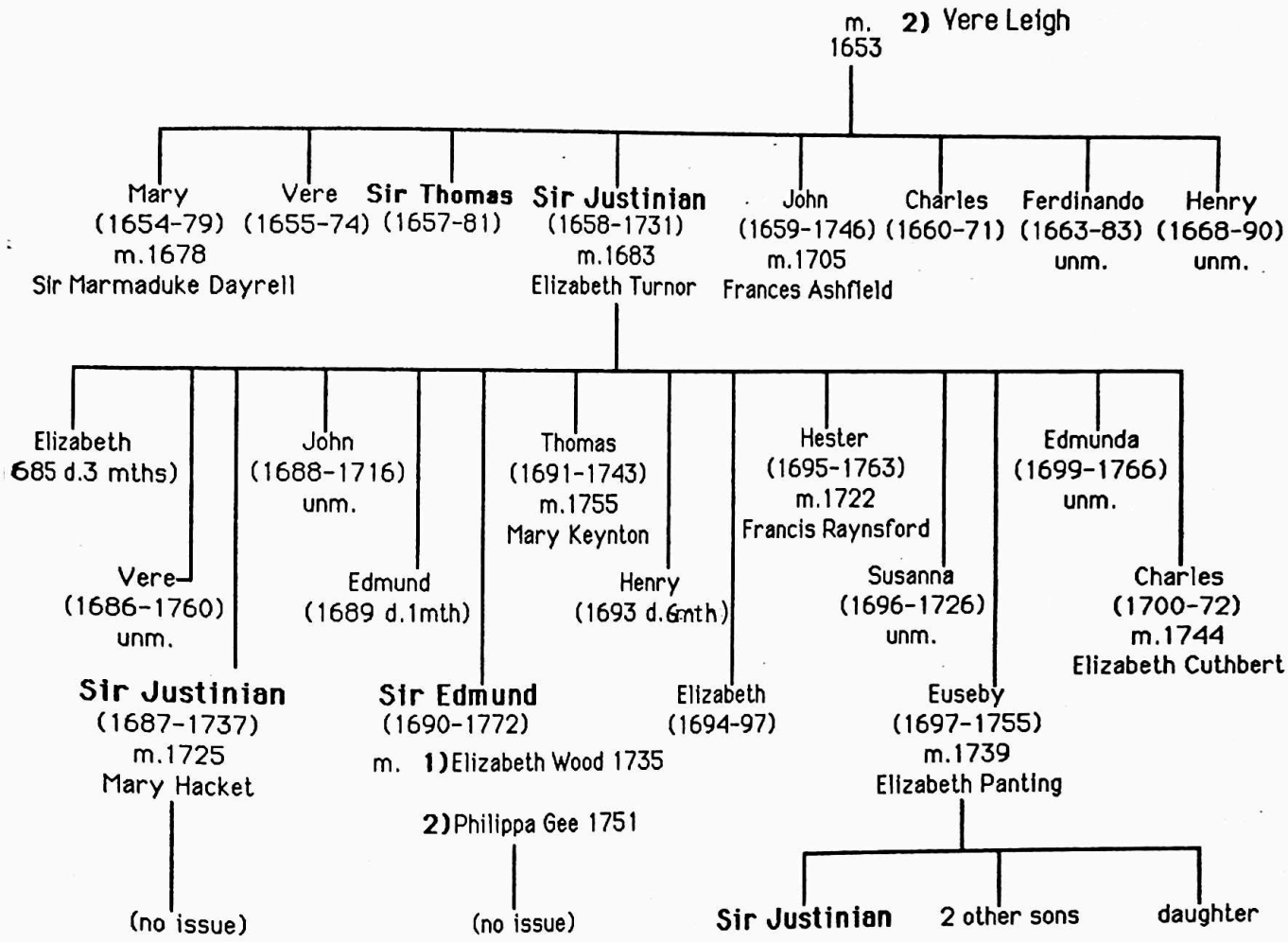


Maurice Bond (ed) The Diaries & Papers of Sir Edward Dering Second Baronet, 1644-1684. (London, 1976); KAO U133, U350, U1107, U1713.

Isham of Lamport, Northamptonshire



Isham of Lamport, Northamptonshire (continued).



Henry Isham Longdon (ed) The Visitation of the Country of Northamptonshire 1681, Harl. Soc. LXXXVII. p. 250-255; NRO ISHAM COLLECTION

George Bedford m. Mary Hodson (d. 9 Jan. 1612)

6 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married
William	16 Nov. 1592		1613
		24 mths	
John	11 Nov. 1594		
		3 yrs 6 mths	
George	2 May 1598		1633
		2 yrs 6 mths	
Mary	9 Nov. 1600		not m. 1623
		4 yrs 5 mths	
Jane	7 April 1605		1632
		16 mths	
Thomas	13 Aug. 1606		

Average birth interval: 33 months

Henry Long (d.1612) m. Rebecca Baylie

8 children:

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Henry	c. 1590		m.n.d.	c. 1621
Walter	3 Sept., 1592	3 yrs 9 mths	29	1672
May	5 May, 1596	23 mths		
Martha	9 April, 1598	17 mths	1617 (19)	
Thomas	9 Sept., 1599	18 mths	not married at 25	
Mary	10 March, 1600/1	22 mths	1624 (24)	
Rebecca	19 Dec., 1602	5 yrs	1624 (22)	
Robert	16 Dec., 1607			

Average birth interval middle 6 children: 25 months.

I John Isham (Aug. 1525- Mar. 1594) m Elizabeth Barker (d. Jan. 1594/5)

m. October, 1552 8 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Christopher	18 Feb., 1553/4	20 mths	---	d. young
Thomas (heir)	12 Sept., 1555	2 yrs 7 mths	1576(21) wife 20	May, 1606(50.5)
Anne	29 April, 1558	23 mths	m. n.d.	Sept, 1584(26.5)
Elizabeth	20 March, 1559/60	16 mths	m. n.d.	May, 1584 (24)
Henry	27 July, 1561	16 mths	June, 1591(30)	June, 1628 (67)
Euseby	24 Nov., 1562	25.5 mths	---	Dec., 1562 (8 days)
Richard	12 Jan., 1564/5	21.5 mths	Nov., 1587 (22.5)	May, 1618 (54)
Robert	27 Oct., 1566		---	d. young

Average birth interval: 21.8 months.

II Thomas Isham (Sept. 1555 - May 1606) m. Elizabeth Nicolson (Sept. 1552 - Aug. 1621)

m. 1576 4 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Elizabeth	29 Aug., 1578		1) May, 1601(22.5) 2) 1622 (44)	July,1664(86)
		30.5 mths		
Susanna	19 March,1580/1		Feb., 1607/8 (27)	Jan.,1652/3(72)
		16.5 mths		
John	27 July, 1582		Oct.,1607 (25)	July,1651(69)
		4 yrs 2 mths		
Jane	27 Sept., 1586		Oct., 1607 (21)	d. c. 1612

Average birth interval: 32 months

III Sir John Isham (July 1582 - July 1651) m. Judith Lewyn (d. June 1625)

m. Oct., 1607 3 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Elizabeth	28 Jan., 1608/9		un.m.	April,1654 (45)
		13 mths		
Judith	28 Feb., 1609/10		un.m.	Nov.,1636 (26)
		11 mths		
Justinian	20 Jan., 1610/11		1)Nov., 1634(23)wife(20) 2) 1653(42)	March,1674/5(64)

Average birth interval: 12 months

IV Sir Justinian (Jan., 1611 - March 1675 m. 1) Jane Gerrard (1614 - 1639)

m. Nov., 1634 5 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Jane	19 Aug., 1635		un.m.	Nov., 1655 (20)
		12 mths		
Elizabeth & Judith	27 Aug., 1636		Oct., 1662 (26)husb.(30) un.m.	Aug., 1689 (53) May, 1679 (43)
		15 mths		
Susanna	29 Nov., 1637		May, 1656(18.25)husb.(21)	Dec., 1687 (50)
		14.5 mths		
John	13 Feb., 1638/9		---	Feb.,1638/9(12days)

Average birth interval:13.8 months

m. 2) Vere Leigh (d. Nov.,1704)

m. 1653 8 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Mary	Sept., 1654		Nov., 1678 (24)	June, 1679 (24.5)
		12 mths		
Vere	22 Sept., 1655		un.m.	April, 1674 (19)
		18 mths		
Thomas (heir)	15 Mar., 1656/7		un.m.	July, 1681 (24)
		17 mths		
Justinian	11 Aug., 1658		July, 1683 (25)	May, 1730 (72)
		12 mths		
John	10 Aug., 1659		July, 1705(46)wife(19)	Oct., 1746 (87)
		15.5 mths		
Charles	25 Nov., 1660		un.m.	June, 1671 (10.5)
		2 yrs 4.5 mths		
Ferdinando	18 April, 1663		un.m.	Nov., 1683 (20.5)
		5 yrs 5 mths		
Henry	17 Sept., 1668		un.m.	Jan., 1689/90 (20)

Average birth interval between first seven children: 17 months

V Justinian Isham (Aug. 1658 - May 1730) m. Elizabeth Turnor (d. Aug., 1713)

m. July, 1683 14 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Elizabeth	13 June, 1685	12 mths	---	Sept., 1685 (3.5 mths)
Vere	1686	13 mths	un.m.	July, 1760 (75)
Justinian (heir)	20 July, 1687	14 mths	Sept., 1725(38)wife(27)	March, 1736/7 (49)
John	19 Sept., 1688	15 mths	un.m.	Nov., 1716 (28)
Edmund	19 Dec., 1689	12 mths	---	Jan., 1689/90 (6wks)
Edmund	18 Dec., 1690	12 mths	1) Feb., 1734/5(45) 2) May, 1751 (61)wife (44)	Dec., 1772 (82)
Thomas	29 Dec., 1691	14 mths	Jan.,1734/5(44)wife(30)	April,1743 (52)
Henry	18Feb., 1692/3	16 mths	---	July, 1693 (6 mths)
Elizabeth	18 June, 1694	13.5 mths	---	March, 1697 (3)
Hester	5 Aug., 1695	15.5 mths	May,1722(26)husb.(26)	Nov., 1762 (68)
Susanna	27 Nov., 1696	13 mths	un.m.	June, 1726 (29)
Euseby	23 Dec., 1697	12.5 mths	May,1739(41)wife(21)	June, 1755 (57.5)
Emunda	7 Jan., 1698/9	15 mths	un.m.	April, 1766 (67)
Charles	1 April, 1700		Dec., 1744 (44)	Sept., 1772 (72.5)

Average birth interval: 14 months

I Sir Edward Dering (Jan., 1598 - June 1644) m.:

1) Elizabeth Tufton (1602 - Sept. 1622) m. Nov. 1619

	Born	Married	Died
Anthony	1621	---	Sept., 1634 (13)

2) Anne Ashburnham (1605 - April 1628) m. Jan. 1625

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Edward	12 Nov., 1625		April, 1648(22.5)wife(18.5)	June, 1684 (59)
		21.5 mths		
Elizabeth	26 Aug., 1627		m. n.d.	n.d.

3) Unton Gibbes (d Nov. 1676) m. July, 1629

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Dorothy	1631		m. nd.	April, 1669 (38)
		c. 12 mths		
Henry	1632		m. nd.	n.d.
		c. 12 mths		
Edward	1633		Sept.,1669(36)wife(33)	1703 (70)
		c. 3 yrs		
Frances	27 June, 1636		1670 (24)	n.d.

II Sir Edward Dering (Nov. 1625 - June 1684) m. Mary Harvey (Sept., 1629 - Feb., 1704)

m. April 1648 17 children

	Born	Birth Intervals	Married	Died
Elizabeth	24 Jan., 1648/49	15 mths	Jan.,1664(15)husb.(28)	Jan., 1682 (33)
Edward	18 April, 1650	14.5 mths	June,1677(27)wife(20)	Oct., 1689 (39)
William	7 July, 1651	20 mths	---	April, 1657 (5.75)
Heneage	March, 1652/3	19 mths	---	Oct., 1660 (7)
Mary	9 Nov., 1654	13 mths	May, 1673 (18.5)	1724 (70)
Anne	6 Dec., 1655	14 mths	June, 1679 (23.5)	n.d.
Charles	8 Feb., 1656/7	19 mths	Oct., 1691 (34)	July, 1719 (63)
Daniel	13 Aug., 1658	16 mths	c. 1686 (28)	June, 1691 (32.5)
Katherine	6 Dec., 1659	19 mths	March, 1681(21) husb.(20)	Feb., 1692 (32)
Jane	12 July, 1661	16 mths	un.m.	after 1684
John	11 Nov., 1662	15.5 mths	?	after 1684
Arabella	28 Feb., 1663/4	20 mths	---	April, 1666 (2)
Lucy	11 Nov., 1665	11 mths	---	Aug., 1666 (9mths)
Diana	Oct., 1666	30 mths	---	3 weeks later
Robert	13 April, 1669	15 mths	March, 1694 (25)	n.d.

Sarah	18 July, 1670	20 mths	---	July, 1671
Samuel	26 March,1672		---	June, 1674 (2)

Average birth interval: 17.3 mths

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