



**Ladies of Quality:
The Role of Women in Elite Families in
Seventeenth Century England.**

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An understanding of the varied roles of women within elite families in seventeenth-century England is essential to our understanding of the functioning and survival of such families, especially during turbulent times. This thesis examines women and their activities within their families, looking at the effect such activities had on the women themselves and on the wider family. My primary aim is to examine the wider importance of elite women, beyond the bearing and nurturing of their own infant children. While these activities were, of course, of crucial importance both to the women concerned and to their families, women also were active in a variety of areas to which I direct my attention.

The areas of activity for elite women fall into two categories - the business/economic side of family life, and the emotional/relationship side. Women were extremely active both in estate management and business, and in the marriage negotiations, education, health and care of their families. When their own children had reached adulthood women did not suddenly become superfluous. Their activities continued, and were indeed of importance throughout their married lives and into widowhood.

Study of these activities reveals several important factors about elite women and elite families. Women supplied an essential stability and continuity to the family through their presence and contribution. When the head of the family could not be present his wife took over his tasks. This happened frequently in the unsettled seventeenth-century. Business, politics, diplomatic posts, military matters, exile or imprisonment all could take the landowner away from his estate and render him incapable of giving attention to it. In such situations wives experienced a pseudo-widowhood where they had to make the important decisions and do the work of the head of the family. After their husbands died they were well trained to take care of their jointure estate or their own property. These situations demonstrate clearly what women were capable of in the seventeenth-century. They showed great resource, intelligence and ability in their activities and also often enjoyed considerable power and authority.

The activities of women also demonstrate the real determinants of power and influence within families. It was wealth which determined how much authority and influence a person

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enjoyed, rather than gender. If a woman controlled resources she had bargaining power and the ability to enforce her own values and wishes on other family members. The importance of personality in this area is also evident. Some women relished their tasks and the challenges these brought much more than others and some were much more flexible in their values and their ambitions for family members. These personality differences obviously had a big impact on the type of family relationships and on the way the family ran.

Within the limitations caused by restricted legal rights and opportunities women were flexible enough to adapt to their conditions and to stretch their limits, exerting a great influence on the family. The activities women were involved in gave them fulfillment and satisfaction. They could see themselves as important family members, and as widows gained a substantial degree of freedom and independence. Their influence in the lives of the younger generations of their family meant that their values were passed down and remained active. They also maintained emotional ties with these younger family members, hence enabling them to cope with widowhood, and the adulthood of their own children. These women cannot be ignored if an accurate picture of the elite family is to be constructed. They were an important and valued resource.

In examining these women I have studied a variety of family papers, both in manuscript and printed form. I have concentrated on the correspondence of women, but also included legal papers, diaries and memoirs. The women I look at include Mary, Lady Thynne, the Duchess of Seymour, Lady Anne Clifford, the Countess of Huntingdon, Lady Lowther of Ackworth, Lady Lonsdale and Lady Katherine Paston. These women and the others I look at provide a rich display of diversity and show the limits and possibilities open to women of elite families.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis. I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan if accepted for the award of the degree.

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Abbreviations

- H. M. C. Historical Manuscripts Commission.
- Hastings Correspondence. The Hastings Collection of Manuscripts from the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- Lowther Papers. Lowther Papers, Cumbria County Record Office (Carlisle).
- Letters of the Altham Family. Letters of the Altham Family of Mark Hall in Latton 1630-1716. Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York. Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, England. (transcribed by M. E. Bohannon).
- Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth W. H. W. Powell.(ed.), Letters from the Manuscript Volumes of Elizabeth, Lady Lowther of Ackworth, see photocopies of a collection of transcriptions at Muncaster Castle held in the Cumbria Record Office (Carlisle).
- Seymour Papers. Seymour Papers, Longleat, Wiltshire.
- Thynne Papers. Thynne Papers (Longleat, Wiltshire).





Introduction

The study of family life in early modern times is a widely expanding field. New insights have been made over the last thirty years or so, and much progress in our understanding of such families. Any historian wishing to begin research in this area therefore, has a wealth of knowledge, opinion and debate from which to draw. Related to this field of research is the study of women in early modern times. Several historians have concentrated on the position of women within early modern families, looking at their status, role and functions. Women should, beyond doubt, figure strongly in any research done on the family, and a close look at their many different functions and their importance is necessary, firstly in order to understand the functioning and survival of families and secondly to understand what women were capable of in the seventeenth-century, how wide their influence was and what the determinants of wealth and influence really were.

Much of the study on elite families in the seventeenth-century has revolved around the question of change in family forms and the level of emotion and attachment between members over time. Largely this debate has been sparked by Lawrence Stone's **The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800**, published in 1977. Stone argued that the seventeenth-century saw a rise of patriarchy within the family and an increase in the repression of children. This repression created adults who were cold, unable to form close attachments to one another, and often capable of aggressive hostility.¹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries parents could not afford to become close emotionally to their children because of the high child mortality rate.² Stone sees a change beginning in the late seventeenth century and more widespread in the eighteenth, towards greater freedom for children and greater equality between husband and wife. There was warmer affection between family members.³ This statement is qualified by Stone however, to such an extent that very little remains of his original argument. These changes are trends, not absolutes, he writes, and older customs and values survived for a very long time.

¹ Lawrence Stone, **The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800**, (London, 1977), pp. 194, 195.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 215.

³ *Ibid.* p. 221.

"The degree to which, if at all, this new family type was adopted varied enormously from one class and one family to another."⁴ Such changes usually began among the urban bourgeoisie and then spread to the landed classes. Stone also states that the three types of family he charts overlapped each other by up to a century and none fully died out.⁵ These qualifying statements place doubt on the wisdom of using family "types" at all, and of charting change with these types.

Randolph Trumbach also sees change beginning at the end of the seventeenth century and becoming strong in the middle of the eighteenth century. According to Trumbach the patrilineal ideal dominated from the year 1000 to the end of the seventeenth century when domesticity, or the egalitarian system, began to appear and dominated the eighteenth century, especially after 1750.⁶ Trumbach states that after 1750 aristocratic children began to survive infancy in unprecedented numbers. They were not better protected from disease or better nourished, and therefore the conclusion Trumbach reaches is that they survived because they were better loved. The quality of their attachment to their mothers had improved due to their mother's conversion to domesticity.⁷

Ralph Houlbrooke states that Lawrence Stone exaggerates the speed, extent and uniformity of change. He argues that the predominant form was the nuclear family from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and there were no fundamental changes to family functions and ideals. Affection was increasingly emphasised and authority weakened but this shift, although significant, was not fundamental. The change in ideals was complex and gradual. He concludes that the emotional lives of ordinary people were centred primarily within the nuclear family.⁸ Discussion of the quality of family life within elite families clearly is a matter of some debate.

Miriam Slater does not chart change in the family but rather looks at one family in particular to see how it survived and functioned in the seventeenth-century. Her study of the Verney family stresses cold, calculating family relationships and reveals a family whose members were primarily motivated by mercenary considerations and who were almost continually locked in bitter rivalry with one another. Patriarchy and patrimony created a system of values where an individual was

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 657.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 10.

⁶ Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family-Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England*, (London and New York, 1978) pp. 1-3.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 208, 234.

⁸ Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700*, (New York, 1984), pp. 15, 16, 253, 254.

primarily concerned for his own welfare first, and where there was little or no room for affectionate and generous behaviour. Patriarchal control, primogenitural inheritance and the male/female double standard all combined to keep family members dependent on the head of the family. Because relationships were built on this need and to encourage personal advancement an individual had little or no time or motivation to develop friendships for personal gratification. Emotions of love and psychological support were the exception rather than the rule.⁹

Both Christopher Durston and Ferdinand Mount argue for the resilience and power of the family. Durston charts the experiences and pressures faced by families in the twenty years of the English revolution, 1640 - 1660. Although some families split due to the great pressures of this time, in general the family proved to be very resilient. During such times of trouble it was in fact often strengthened and became even more important to members. They looked to the family for support. Durston argues that the traditional rhythms and sentiments of family life were too deeply rooted to be blown away by the upheavals of the time.¹⁰ The family destroyed the revolution not vice versa. Puritan teachers tried to destroy English popular culture and this was resented and resisted by the English population. The traditional culture was an enemy of the Interregnum government and the most resilient aspect of this was the family.¹¹

Ferdinand Mount says that the family is a subversive organisation. Throughout history there has been a power struggle between the public world of state, church and political ideology, and the private world of the family. The public world has sought continually to gain control of the family and the family resists this in varying degrees at different times. Historians have looked for change in the wrong place. They seek it in familial attitudes but these did not change, it was rather the ability of the state or church to control them that changed. It is the outside enemies of the family, not the family itself, which is the passing historical phase.¹²

The debate on the form and quality of family life is related to the discussion on the position of women within these families. According to Miriam Slater women were considered social and

⁹ Miriam Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century-The Verneys of Claydon House*, (London, 1984), pp. 43, 45, 57, 58.

¹⁰ Christopher Durston, *The Family in the English Revolution*, (London, 1989), pp. 172, 173-174.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 174.

¹² Ferdinand Mount, *The Subversive Family*, (London, 1983) pp. 1, 228.

intellectual inferiors.¹³ The position of an individual in the family hierarchy is the key to understanding their values and attitudes.¹⁴ Because relationships were built on reciprocity, that is, the ability to reciprocate a favour done for you with some suitable recompense Ralph as heir was in the most favoured position, controlling the resources of the family. His younger brothers and the women of the family were dependent on him. Having no power or resources women were unable to reciprocate.¹⁵ They were a burden which had to be married off as soon as possible. Marriages were for social and economic advantage and would only succeed if both partners accepted the same goals and conduct of married life. Ralph and Mary Verney's marriage was a success because of their social and financial compatibility and their shared values.¹⁶ Women's contribution to marriage was very limited. Slater insists that after the birth of an heir women had few vital contributions to make.¹⁷

The problems with using only one family in this way are highlighted by Vivienne Larminie. She shows in her study of the Newdigates family just how much variation there could be between families. In the Newdigates family it was the younger children and women who were secure while the heir was the major sufferer, having to meet many debts and portions and marrying as a solution to financial problems.¹⁸ An individual's fate was not "moulded" by their position in the family. Larminie argues that Slater has underrated the importance of individual personality and that conflict in marriage was more likely due to personality than economic or social

¹³ Miriam Slater, *The Verneys of Claydon House*, p. 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 139. Joan Thirsk highlights a seventeenth-century commentator, John Ap Robert, who after discussing with some friends the possibility that an individual's position in the family moulded their character wrote "An Apology for a Younger Brother" in the early seventeenth-century. He and his friends had decided that character was moulded by position in the family and the expectation or not of inheriting the father's wealth. "Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century" *History*, vol. 54, no. 182, October 1969, p. 364.

¹⁵ Miriam Slater, "The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth Century England" *Past and Present*, no. 72, 1976, p. 50.

¹⁶ Slater, *Verneys of Claydon House*, p. 147.

¹⁷ Slater, "The Weightiest Business" *Past and Present*, p. 40.

¹⁸ Vivienne Larminie, "Marriage and the Family: the Example of the Seventeenth-Century Newdigates" *Midland History*, vol. 9, 1984. This situation was not infrequent and can also be observed in the Fleming family. Daniel Fleming was determined to provide his daughters with portions and to educate and provide his younger sons with respectable occupations. He did not think that they should be sacrificed in order to preserve the estate intact for the eldest son. Daniel Fleming had fifteen children, thirteen of whom lived to adult age so this was quite a commitment. While the younger sons pursued studies and careers, the eldest son William had no definite occupation and was expected just to wait for his inheritance. He wanted to achieve independence from his father and to marry (at over thirty he was still unmarried.) His relationship with his father suffered as a result. William even left his father's home and went to London where he threatened to borrow money against his expectations, in an attempt to try and force his father's hand. See J.R. Magrath(ed.), *The Flemings in Oxford 1650-1700* vols. 1-3, especially vol. 2, 1681-1690.

circumstances.¹⁹ Far from being superfluous after the birth of an heir Larminie draws attention to the fact that women also helped with business and with the education of children. They did not exist merely to bear children. Alison Wall also emphasises the wider roles and abilities of women in her article on two sixteenth-century wives- Joan and Maria Thynne. The literature of the time presented a model of Elizabethan womanhood which emphasised the meekness, humility and dependency of women upon their husbands, but this was a fantasy and not based on reality. Joan and Maria were active and powerful in a man's world. They knew the ideal and paid lip-service to it but in their actions did not conform to it. Wall shows that these women were active managers of their husbands' affairs and their activities went far beyond the prescribed tasks considered the province of women.²⁰

Robyn Priestly also argues that the role of women sometimes went beyond what was commonly thought of as the domestic sphere and that women stretched the limits of their role to the utmost. She looks at the early seventeenth century, using the Isham, Dering and Sherfield families to show the partnership which often existed between husbands and wives and the complimentary roles they had in matters such as marriage negotiations and estate management and business. She emphasises the great variety that existed between families and the effect personality and circumstance had on how each woman fulfilled her role in the family. As Alison Wall shows with Joan and Maria Thynne, Priestley's examples demonstrate that the ideal of the submission and inferiority of women was only paid lip service to in most instances as gentry families needed the partnership provided by husband and wife.²¹

Historians have also tried to chart change over time in the position of women, commonly attributing this change to the rise of capitalism in the seventeenth-century. Both Alice Clark and Susan Cahn argue that during the course of the seventeenth-century elite women lost the important economic role they had previously enjoyed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The position of women declined relative to men, and women became increasingly dependent on their

¹⁹ Larminie, "Marriage and the Family" *Midland History*, pp. 3, 18. Ralph Houlbrooke emphasises the importance of both individual character as well as material circumstance in determining the quality of parenthood. *The English Family* p. 156.

²⁰ Alison Wall, "Elizabethan Precept and Feminine Practice: the Thynne family of Longleat" *History*, vol. 75, no 243, February, 1990, pp. 23, 28, 35, 37.

²¹ Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life in the Seventeenth Century*, Phd. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1988, p. 372.

husbands. This process was going on in all levels of society but occurred first with the upper levels. Robyn Priestley also suggests that gentry women were not so involved in estate matters after 1660.²²

I do not attempt to chart any change within families during the seventeenth-century. Such changes, if they occurred at all, are difficult to chart and elusive to find with any degree of certainty. The different circumstances of individual families and the positions of women interest me far more. Variations were many and these had an impact on the lives of individuals. In respect to any changes that may have occurred to the position and role of women my own enquiry has revealed little in this respect. As far as I can see elite women made just as important a contribution after the Restoration as they did before it. It was the individual situations of each woman and the family they were part of that had the most effect and which determined their roles and influence. Like Larminie I feel individual personality also exerted a powerful influence and that to look at this and the factors of everyday life and existence is more useful and likely to yield enlightening results.

My introduction to the seventeenth century elite family was Lawrence Stone's **Family, Sex and Marriage in England**, alongside the correspondence of Lady Mary Thynne to her eldest son. This was an excellent introduction for several reasons. Stone's book raises many points of interest and questions and provides a wealth of detail and richness of ideas. Also, in reading this along with the Thynne papers I became startlingly aware of the disparity between Stone's cold, indifferent family relations of the seventeenth century and the warmth and affection of the correspondence. Mary Thynne began each letter with "Dearest" and her comments demonstrated concern, affection, love and deep attachment to all her family members. When the letters began her son was 36 years of age but Mary still retained a share of his life and a concern in his affairs. Clearly, bonding, affection and love were strong in this relationship. Another thing about the letters of Mary Thynne which was immediately apparent was the wide variety of roles Mary performed - marriage negotiations, childcare, correspondence, business, renovations, legal matters to name a few. She had obviously a significant role to play in the family even though her children had reached adulthood. These two points were the most immediately striking and in my

²² *Ibid.* pp. 190-191.

later reading of other sources these points have only become more clear and strong, strengthening my picture of the elite seventeenth century family and women within it.

Patricia Crawford states that for upper class women, it is clear that their days and nights were filled with attending to their children and their households. She refers to Sara Heller Mendelson's observation that the autobiographies of aristocratic women frequently reveal that women's adult lives were structured around the rhythms of pregnancies, childbearing and child rearing.²³ But what about women's other roles? Did they have any? Patricia Crawford states that in the seventeenth century preachers taught that the ideal good woman was the good mother.²⁴ How were women regarded beyond their child bearing and rearing functions?

The questions this thesis attempts to answer are the following. What were the roles of women within elite families beyond childbirth and the nurturing of their own children through infancy? What influence did such women have in the decisions and actions of the family? What were the determinants of power and influence in seventeenth century society? How important were women to the proper functioning and survival of the elite family? It will explore the continuing role women had with the younger members of their family - in marriage negotiations, education, health and guardianship. Their economic function in the family will also be discussed - both as wives and widows. Study of women shows that they could still be classed as good mothers after their children had reached adulthood, though now operating in a wider sphere to ensure their own well-being and that of their families.

The sources which have revealed the answer to these questions mainly took the form of correspondence. Elite women left particularly rich written records in this way, making the study of such women not only possible but specially rewarding. Miriam Slater acknowledges the benefits of using letters to study family life. Letters, she says, enable the historian to study the family in the very process of living. The problems with this sort of evidence are also raised by Slater. Because some do not survive guesses sometimes need to be made. Slater's solution to this

²³ Patricia Crawford, "The Construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England" in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England* (ed.) Valerie Fildes (London, 1990), p. 16. And referring to S.H. Mendelson "Stuart Women's Diaries" in M. Prior(ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, (London and New York, 1985), p. 195.

²⁴ Crawford, "The Construction and Experience of Maternity" in *Women as Mothers*, p. 8.

problem was to read long runs of correspondence so a full picture could be built up.²⁵ I have also concentrated where possible on long runs of correspondence and these have been surprisingly frequent. Mary Thynne wrote frequently to her sons over a period of nearly thirty years, at times writing every couple of days. A very rich and detailed picture can be thus constructed by looking at these documents. Long runs of correspondence have also survived between the Duchess of Somerset and her stewards, the Countess of Huntingdon and her husband, Lady Katherine Paston and family and associates and Lady Lowther of Ackworth and her acquaintances and family. The situations of these women, their relationship to other family members and a little of their personality can be detected when looking at these letters. Robyn Priestley raises another benefit of using letters: because they were not written for publication later as so many diaries and memoirs were they lack the self-consciousness of these records. Records written in such a self-conscious way can be very misleading about both the author and those they are writing about.²⁶

Nevertheless, diaries and memoirs do have their uses. The network of the family is often revealed in such accounts and, as long as the likelihood of bias is taken into account, they can prove very enlightening. One such record is the diary of Lady Anne Clifford. Her detailed account of events, relationships and history make her diary a rich source. The "Meditations" of Lady Elizabeth Delaval have also proven very useful. A final source of evidence has been various legal and estate papers. While I have not concentrated on these they have been useful in filling in gaps the correspondence did not cover and in adding fresh information and insight. The legal papers of the Duchess of Somerset were the most helpful to my understanding of both the Thynne and the Seymour families. Wills, such as that of Sir Henry Frederick Thynne, were also important.

The sources demonstrate the resilience of the family. As Durston and Mount argue, the family was a strong institution in the seventeenth-century. Families were strong and survived great upheaval and turbulence. Seventeenth-century England was not lacking in upheaval and uncertainty. Not only were there the usual problems of high mortality, frequency of illness and accident, and lack of medical knowledge but the seventeenth-century saw civil war in England and

²⁵ Slater, Miriam, *The Verneys of Claydon House*, pp. 2-3.

²⁶ Priestley, Robyn, *Marriage and Family Life*, p. 18.

great political strife. Through all these problems elite families survived. One of the most important factors to this survival were women. The resilience and health of the elite family cannot be understood without close consideration of the many roles of women within their families.

Antonia Fraser argues that in the seventeenth-century women were strong vessels where they had the opportunity; that is, where a particular combination of character and circumstance enabled them to be so. The Civil War meant the arrival of these opportunities and women proved themselves strong, courageous and resourceful. Fraser provides many examples of the extraordinary achievements of women during these years. However after the war she argues, this view of strong women was not sustained and there was little improvement in real terms in the status of women.²⁷ What Fraser fails to emphasise is that there was a wealth of circumstances during the seventeenth-century which gave women the chance to stretch their limits of ability and influence and to show that they were strong. While the Civil War years naturally provided unusual situations and tasks for women, the role of women and their strength was not confined to these years. In a variety of situations and times women's contribution and roles helped their families to survive and to be successful.

Not only did their roles benefit their families in many ways but they were of great worth to the women themselves. Through their relationships with younger family members and their activities in business and negotiations women obtained fulfillment and a sense of self worth. Far from lacking self-esteem and feeling superfluous, all these women made a positive contribution to the well-being of their families. This contribution enabled them to cope with widowhood and the departure of their own children from their control. Old age and widowhood did not prevent women from enjoying a varied, active and important role within their family and they often exercised considerable authority until their deaths. To achieve an understanding of the functioning of the family the importance of women must be taken into account. As more studies are completed of families such as the Verneys, Thynnes, Derings, Ishams, Sherfields, Newdigates, Seymours, Lowthers and Hastings, a more accurate picture can be constructed, as free as possible from vague generalisations and guesswork.

²⁷ Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel* (London, 1984; this edition 1985) pp. 524, 528, 529.

Wives - Business

A good Accounteant who keepe my books of accoumpte for about 20 yeares and in the receipt and disbursement of above £20,000 I cannot say I ever lost £5 soe careful shee was to give content and keepe all perfect and strayght in which tyme wee never [had] but one purse which shee kept and was a faithfull steward.

Sir John Lowther on his late wife, 1647.¹

You that are troubled that I have so much businesse are now like to be a woman of businesse yourselfe; for I can have no affair but what shall be communicated to you, for I can rely on no person's affection or discretion more than your's.

Daniel Finch to his wife, 1679.²

Women of seventeenth-century gentry and noble families had a very significant role to play in the business affairs of their family. Both as wives and then widows they were frequently involved in the running of estates, in legal matters and in business decisions. No depiction of the role of women in this period would be complete which ignored this aspect of their lives. Moreover, consideration of such activities by women is essential to our understanding of the ways in which families survived and functioned economically in the seventeenth-century. Discussion of wives must be conducted separately from that of widows because their different situations had different impacts on the types of role and the powers they wielded in their families. This chapter therefore will deal with the role of wives in the family economy, leaving the experience of widows to be considered separately.

Some historians have so far failed to observe the role of women in business matters that they have considered elite women to have had little or no part to play in the affairs of the family's estate. One of the more common theses has been that in the lower levels of society women had an important role to play in ensuring the economic survival of their family. Such a role placed them on near equal footing with their husbands as both had a crucial contribution to make to the well-

¹ C.B. Phillips(ed.), *Lowther Family Estate Books, 1617-1675*, Surtees Society, Pubs. vol. 191 (1979), pp. 62-63.

² Daniel Finch to his wife, Lady Essex Finch. 28 July, 1679, *Historical Manuscripts Commission Series 71 (hereafter H.M.C.), The Finch Manuscripts* vol. 2, (1922), p. 54.

being of the family. This contribution gave the woman a sense of usefulness, worth and fulfillment. However in the upper levels of society women had no such role to play. The wife contributed to the well-being of her family through her portion and the children she bore, and was otherwise largely superfluous. Consequently, elite women suffered from low self-esteem and boredom. The usefulness and worth experienced by lower class women was denied them. Alice Clark states that upper class women were very important partners for their husbands in business in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but that by the Restoration they had largely lost this role and had become ornamental. The spread of capitalistic organization of industry made possible the idleness of growing numbers of women. Clark draws a distinction between the upper classes of society and the lower levels:

Though the stern hand of economic necessity was thus withdrawn from the control of women's development in the upper classes, it was still potent in determining their destiny amongst the "common people"³

Another proponent of such a view is Susan Cahn, who argues that between 1500 and 1700 the transition to capitalism eroded the wife's role in providing her husband with help in his own craft or trade.⁴ The position of women declined relative to men, for women's work was being increasingly performed by outside specialists and the idea that it was not "genteel" for women to work became increasingly popular. Increasingly women became dependent on their husbands. Cahn qualifies this statement by saying that not all women became wholly dependent on their husbands but some did and these were the women of the upper and middle classes.

All available evidence suggests that it was in the upper and middle strata of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth- century English society that the model of the dependent wife first came to life. By the turn of the seventeenth-century, [1600] men

³ Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919 1st. ed., 1968 new impression) p. 41.

⁴ Susan Cahn, *Industry of Devotion-The Transformation of Women's Work in England, 1500-1660* (Columbia University Press, New York:1987) pp. 46-47.

of these strata quite evidently believed that wives were economic burdens rather than helpmeets.⁵

Poorer women, she argues, continued to perform day-to-day tasks necessary for basic survival and so possibly retained a level of esteem lost to wealthier women. The higher the social strata, the less necessary and the less desirable the wife's help.⁶

The view of the seventeenth-century elite woman being a superfluous, unuseful part of the family is also put forward by Lawrence Stone who argues that it was the eighteenth-century that witnessed the need for wives to be companions to their husbands, and cites an increase in female education to fit women for this role, during this century.⁷ The inference is that in the seventeenth-century such education was obviously not necessary as women were not expected to be companions or helpers to their husbands, merely bearers of children. Miriam Slater also denies any economic role for elite women, stating that after the birth of heirs they had few vital contributions to make to the marriage. She argues that men in the seventeenth-century considered women were incapable of dealing with matters of any great importance. Through her study of the Verney family she comes to the conclusion that women were considered junior partners at best, at the mercy and whim of the male head of the family, having to court his favour and obey his every command. Their importance in the economic affairs of the family Slater considers to be negligible as such matters were considered to be the province of men.⁸

However, the evidence of elite correspondence, legal papers and estate documents demonstrates clearly that in the upper levels of society women were important supporters of their husband's economic dealings - often being given tasks of considerable responsibility and at times being called upon to exercise their own initiative in some crucial decisions. Women legally were under the control and authority of their husbands and so of course did not have complete autonomy in their financial affairs. They were assured some measure of financial independence if they were assigned "pin money", an annual income specified in the marriage settlement, or

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 164.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 167-168, 171.

⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800*, p. 355.

⁸ Miriam Slater, "The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-gentry Family in Seventeenth Century England," *Past and Present*, 72 (1976) p. 40 ; *Verneys of Claydon House*, pp. 66, 67.

inherited land or money which the settlement left solely in their charge. However, as wives they largely supported their husbands rather than undertaking their own independent economic affairs. Within their legal restrictions and limited financial independence, women managed to greatly influence the economic affairs of their family and often enjoyed considerable power. The partnership of husband and wife was more equal than many historians would suppose.

Alison Wall, in an interesting examination of two sixteenth-century women of the Thynne family, has shown the partnership that could exist between husband and wife. Joan and Maria Thynne shared responsibility with their husbands for the running of their estates in "amicable partnerships". Their husbands largely remained in London and "trusted their wives to manage complex affairs and make important decisions."⁹ Joan and Maria were given broad responsibilities by their husbands, including household and estate management and involvement in law-suits. Left on their own both these women successively ran the estate and coped with its problems with a high degree of confidence and efficiency. While Clark and Cahn would argue that this involvement no longer took place in the later seventeenth-century, many examples exist which demonstrate the opposite, including that of a woman of the same family.

Robyn Priestley also acknowledges the partnership of husband and wife in business and estate management. The options women had to choose from were limited and their sphere of influence restricted but most women did not allow themselves to be passive.¹⁰ There were, she argues, numerous seventeenth century examples of women who involved themselves in estate management, both as wives and widows.¹¹ The doctrine of the submission of women, although maintained by both law and pulpit, seemed to receive only lip service in everyday life. In gentry families a working partnership was needed between husband and wife. "The reality was that in most of these families wives had to be competent in running large households, and sometimes also estates."¹² Priestley uses examples primarily from the Dering, Isham and Sherfield families to illustrate the activities of women in litigation, politics and estate affairs. These activities "were vital to the successful maintenance of their families".¹³ Priestley's examples are concentrated on

⁹ Alison Wall, "Elizabethan Precept and Feminine Practice" *History*, Feb. 1990, vol.75, no. 243. pp. 36, 37.

¹⁰ Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, p. 373.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 180.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 372.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 201.

the first half of the seventeenth century and although she suggests that the activity of women in estate management declined during the course of the century, this is not discussed in any great detail.¹⁴

Women might not have known a lot about business and finance when they married, but they certainly gained knowledge and experience during their years as wives. This stood women in good stead later when they became wealthy widows, and enjoyed far greater independence and power, especially if they owned their own land and could organise and control estates and people as they willed. Although it was as widows that women usually achieved their greatest freedom of action wives must not be disregarded. Many wives experienced pseudo-widowhood during married life when their husbands were away, and in these situations often had to run the estate and make decisions themselves. Married life was not only an important training period for later life, but was also a time when a wife gave support to her husband and entire family, and this support was sometimes so extensive that it gave the wife a position of considerable importance.

The correspondence of wives, particularly those who had been married some years, demonstrates their ability to perform in this sphere successfully. Several things become clear when looking at such correspondence. The importance of personality in determining power and the type of relationship is evident. Also the importance of both husband and wife to the economic survival of the family - the different tasks performed and how each complemented and reinforced the other becomes clear. The letters reveal the complexity of the husband/wife relationship and the position of the wife within the family. Wives did not automatically obey their husbands in everything. Although they often felt they should obey them in regard to business affairs, when they felt their interests threatened they disagreed, quarrelled and criticized their husbands. The relationship was more complex than historians have generally acknowledged and the influence of women much more important. The lives of several gentry/aristocratic women attest to this fact.

The uncertain economic and political conditions of seventeenth-century England made the wife a crucial member of the family in terms of financial success and survival. The head of the family often was prevented from managing his estate personally for periods of anything from a few days to several years. Indeed absentee landowners were recognised to be such a problem that

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 190-191.

a proclamation was issued on 20 June, 1632 ordering all gentlemen to leave London for their country seats within 40 days unless they were engaged at court or on legal or other business.¹⁵ Besides all the normal concerns which took landowners away from their estates, the upheavals of the Civil War, Restoration and the accession of William III served to increase uncertainty and the demands made on upper-class men. All too often business, politics or court life took the head of the family away from his estates and diverted his attention away from their management.

The land was the basis of aristocratic wealth and honour. It was the commodity most desired, and which gave its owners great prestige. Consequently, management of estates, whether done well or poorly, could dramatically affect family fortunes, in particular social status, in a way no other financial dealings could. In the seventeenth century most aristocrats did not farm their own land but let it out to tenants, sometimes keeping a small home farm for themselves. Clay states that there was an intense demand for land along with rapidly rising rents which made it more profitable to let, and that well before 1700 almost all great landowners were simply rentiers.¹⁶ Lawrence Stone has argued that in the seventeenth century there was a change in the way estates were handled with lords seeking more efficient management.¹⁷ Among diverse subjects which needed attention were tenants, rents, leases, markets, crops and stock, fines, enclosure and often litigation. This required a great deal of work and an army of servants and officials. Bailiffs, agents, receivers, stewards, auditors and solicitors all played important roles and needed to be instructed, guided and supervised. Often family members were involved in helping to run the estate.

At the apex of all this activity and diversity were very often wives. If a landowner was prevented from personally fulfilling the tasks required in estate management the wife was ideally suited to take over. Stone argues that landowners had a pathological fear of being cheated by officials.¹⁸ Honesty, competence and the power and will for radical decision-making was needed to bring estates under efficient management and this required personal supervision by the lord

¹⁵ Bertram Schofield (ed.), *The Knyvett Letters (1620-1644)*, (London, 1949), fn. p. 78. For a discussion on this see Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, (Oxford, 1990), pp. 118-120. There were a series of proclamations from the 1590s to the later 1630s to deal with this problem.

¹⁶ C.G.A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change : England 1500-1700 Volume 1 People, Land, Towns*, (Cambridge, 1984), p. 144.

¹⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641*, (Oxford, 1965), p. 334.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 295.

himself.¹⁹ Although Stone argues that with new techniques in the seventeenth century, for example surveying, it became less necessary for the landlord to personally supervise his estate,²⁰ it makes sense to assume that personal supervision would still have been highly beneficial. I would suggest that the fear of being cheated and the need for personal supervision (even in the seventeenth century) highlighted the ideal position of the wife in the family. If the landowner could not be present himself, and frequently he could not, here was the ideal person - loyal, with an interest herself in efficient management, who had the authority of ownership behind her and was capable of making the necessary decisions without always having to defer to a superior. Robert Barrington, writing to his mother in 1629 sums up his feelings towards the role played by his wife in business.

I pray do me the favor to give my wife my thankses for hir care in my busines; I thanke God the confidence I have in hir takes away the care that otherwise might troble me in the greate employment I now am in.²¹

Thomas Knyvett, writing to his wife in 1632 told of a Mr. Palmer of Kent who, under the proclamation of 1632, was fined a thousand pounds for living in town. Thomas noted however that Mr. Palmer was a bachelor and added that he hoped such troubles would not affect him as he had a wife at home.²² Thomas Knyvett clearly hoped that the authorities would not be as strict with him as they had been with Mr. Palmer because Katherine was there to represent him on the estate. The running of an estate was clearly quite naturally seen as the wife's province in the event of her husband's employment elsewhere.

The activities and powers enjoyed by wives depended almost entirely on the situations their husbands found themselves in. For those husbands in exile or imprisoned the wife had almost total power, had to bear the burden of estate management and to work to free her husband and

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 332.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 333.

²¹ Robert Barrington to Lady Barrington, 9 (Feb.), 1629, *Barrington Family Letters, 1628-1632*, (ed.) Arthur Searle, Camden 4th. Series vol. 28, (London, 1983), Letter 25, p. 53.

²² Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, 13 November, 1632, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 27, p. 78-79. See also footnote 5, p. 78. Felicity Heal also recounts an incident where the Countess of Lincoln asked for permission in 1624 to stay in town and was told by King James that "the country is the most fitting place for the ladies to live in, in, in the absence of their Lords", *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, pp. 119-120.

ensure the financial survival of the family. These women enjoyed considerable freedom and had to use their own initiative. Although they often had the assistance of other family members such as brothers, brothers-in-law, uncles and cousins, as well as the service of lawyers and stewards, the final decisions were made by the women themselves, functioning in the position of head of the family in the absence of their husbands. Women such as Dorothy Sidney, Countess of Leicester, Elizabeth Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, Katherine Knyvett and Mary Verney experienced such a situation. For those women whose husbands were ill their role was more circumscribed, depending on how serious the illness was. Mary Thynne's role was that of helper to her husband. Suffering pain from the gout, Sir Henry Frederick Thynne lacked the mobility to fully manage the estate alone, as well as the ability to write letters. Mary Thynne took over some of these tasks, relaying information and instructions to her sons. She carried the estate to a limited extent and was of great use to her husband. She did not however experience the authority of Katherine Paston, who largely took over the entire management of the estate because of her husband's illness which appeared to render him incapable of nearly all activity. She married Edmund Paston in 1603 when she was twenty-five years old and he was eighteen. By 1618 Edmund was extremely ill and Lady Katherine took over the running of all matters connected with the estate. She corresponded, made decisions and acted on them, organized servants and conducted a lawsuit, for her husband. She was the one with whom the people concerned corresponded and bargained. The power she enjoyed was all but absolute.²³

Husbands also could be prevented from managing the estate personally because they were away on business in London, or overseas on an embassy. Dorothy Sidney was in the situation of having to manage the estates while her husband was ambassador to France. He entrusted her with considerable authority over his estates to which she devoted herself with enthusiasm. While the estate belonged to the earl and he retained control and the final decision-making, he was in France and the correspondence and writings of the earl and countess and their stewards and agents, demonstrate just how much power a wife could experience, and how much money she could take

²³ Ruth Hughey (ed.), *The Correspondence of the Paston Family 1603-1627*, (Norfolk Record Society 1941 vol. 14). This collection of correspondence provides many examples of Lady Katherine's power and activity in the management of her husband's estate, an activity which is acknowledged by Ruth Hughey in the introduction (see page 20).

charge of.²⁴ Business in London or involvement in war also led to absenteeism among landowners. Thomas Knyvett wrote a number of letters to his wife while thus employed, instructing her on the management of his estates and his letters demonstrate clearly the wide ranging nature of her duties. These duties were especially important after Thomas was imprisoned and facing sequestration. William Seymour, Marquis of Hertford was often away from his estate and his wife Frances bore much of the burden of its management. He was also much involved in the Civil War on the royalist side. The correspondence of Frances Seymour demonstrates the wide range of her abilities and duties. Her knowledge and activity is amply demonstrated by the detailed letters sent to her by her stewards and agents. The detail, length and terms used indicate that Frances Seymour was well-acquainted with her husband's business and all matters connecting to it.²⁵ Clearly wives were extremely beneficial to the prosperity of landowners, extending their spheres of influence and ability to do as many things as possible. Depending on their personal situation a landowner's wife could be called upon to perform any task dealing with estate management.

The role wives had in estate management was influenced by the presence or absence of other family members, in particular whether there were adult sons or not. Adult sons, with their strong motive for ensuring the economic health of the estate, could influence decisions for they usually had to be consulted and their advice at least considered. Adult sons also could provide assistance, support and advice to their mothers in the absence of their fathers. Both sons and daughters could help a woman feel less alone as she tried to manage financial affairs and assist her husband. Mary Thynne had three adult sons and two in particular, the heir Thomas and the second son Harry, were very active in assisting their mother in her financial dealings. Mary's husband, Sir Henry Frederick Thynne also turned to his sons for assistance. Harry was based in London as a courtier and so was well placed to perform business duties for his parents. In her letters to him Mary Thynne often apologised for bothering him so much with their affairs when he was already so busy. In November 1677 she began a letter to him in this fashion. "I am sorry to

²⁴ See discussion below on pages 33-35 and 46-48.

²⁵ The Seymour Papers provide many examples of Frances's activity in estate matters in the absence of her husband. See my discussion on pages 31, 35-36 and 48. See also the following chapter where Frances Seymour demonstrates her knowledge of her husband's estate after his death.

see that the necessity of our affars should fall so heavy upon you that have so much busniss of your owne."²⁶ The existence of these sons did not make Mary Thynne unimportant in family business. She was still the member closest to her husband and most intimate with his financial affairs, it just meant that the support network of the family finances was somewhat broader for their presence, and that Mary had assistance from, and did assist in her turn, a larger group of people. Indeed women with grown sons often found their business responsibilities increased rather than diminished, for, like Mary Thynne, they not only assisted their husbands but assisted their sons' affairs also.

Of course, in general wives enjoyed more authority, freedom and responsibility in business when a landowner had nobody else to turn to. They also found it easier to be singleminded in their pursuit of the interests of their husband, even though they may have regretted having no adult sons to assist them. Katherine Paston and Elizabeth Hastings had to support their husbands without the help of adult children. Elizabeth Hastings died after sixteen years of marriage, in childbirth, and Katherine Paston was a widow before her son grew to adulthood. Although she had the advice of other family members such as Sir John Heveningham and Edward Paston, the decision-making remained Katherine's own.²⁷ Only two of Frances Seymour's sons survived to adulthood. Henry, the elder, died in 1654 leaving a very young son as heir, and Frances did not enjoy cordial relations with her other son John. Katherine Knyvett died leaving two sons - one of whom was 23 years of age and the other 21. They both had spent a considerable amount of time overseas and consequently neither had been of much help to their mother with the running of the estate. As soon as they were old enough to assist they left for adventure abroad and Katherine had to bear the burden of estate management alone.

A wife's role in estate management was also influenced by the possession of personal property. If a woman owned land in her own right, separate from the marriage settlement, she exercised total freedom over its management. This gave her independence and an area of interest isolated from that of her husband. Frances Seymour for example owned lands in Ireland and a manor called Drayton. An example of a different sort is that of Lady Anne Clifford who faced

²⁶ Mary Thynne to Henry Frederick Thynne, 22 November, 1677, *Thynne Papers (Longleat)*, vol. 34, fo. 25.

²⁷ See discussion below on pages 32, 33, 38, 40-43. Edward Paston was cousin to Sir Edmund Paston's grandfather and was made a trustee of the estate by Sir William Paston, (d. 1610).

tremendous conflict and pressure from her first husband because he wanted her to sell her rights to some property she believed was her rightful inheritance. Lady Anne steadfastly refused to give in to her husband's demands. Women who owned their own property or who believed they were entitled to certain property were likely to be more independent and less narrowly focussed on their husbands. They were also likely to be extremely well acquainted with the procedures of estate management and to be used to exercising their authority over this. In respect to their own property they had total autonomy, in contrast to the wives who only supported their husbands in the management of his estates.

Personality also played a part and some wives relished their duties more than others, but despite different situations and personalities all the wives discussed showed a willingness to be involved and a natural acceptance that they should be. It is the fact that husbands were absent from their wives however that affords us the glimpse into the duties and capabilities of elite wives in the economic sphere. Wives helped their husbands even when they were present and able to run the estates personally. However, it is when husbands were absent or in some way suffering from a reduced ability to contribute as much as they would like, that we really see the abilities, knowledge and duties of the upper class wife. If her husband was absent a wife had to write to him with details of the estate, and vice versa. Wives also had to correspond with stewards, tenants, bailiffs, solicitors and family members. These are the valuable records that remain for the historian. It is also when wives were put under the most difficult, trying circumstances, when they had to carry the estate, when they were pushed to the utmost limit of their resources, that we can truly see how knowledgeable, experienced, resilient and determined such women were. Wives were safety mechanisms for the seventeenth-century family. Their presence limited the disruptive influence of absentee landownership and illness, which so threatened the elite classes in the uncertain seventeenth-century.²⁸ As such, wives must be studied in relation to estate management and business if the elite family and its financial survival is to be understood at all.

The amount of correspondence left by wives over estate matters should come as no surprise. One of the major tasks for the wife of a landowner was correspondence. Writing letters

²⁸ Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, p. 191. "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."

was an activity that seemed the particular province of the wife and all the women mentioned in this chapter performed this duty in regard to estate management. Even when their husbands were present, wives shared the burden of letter writing. The many people who needed to be contacted over business included family members, tenants, stewards, bailiffs, solicitors, government officials, and business associates. The wife's help was invaluable in rendering this task manageable, and was especially important when the husband was somehow indisposed or absent. It is because wives did write so often about the management of estates that we have the records revealing the duties they performed and their role in the running of the estate. Mary Thynne sums up this role of correspondent and secretary very clearly. Her husband, greatly troubled by the gout in the years leading up to his death in 1680, employed his wife as letter-writer over these years. Mary was aware of her role as correspondent which she described in 1673 in a letter to her eldest son Thomas "whilst I am your fathers scribe as well as my owne, you will thinke I may have ocasion to fill this sheete, and to give him the presedency".²⁹ Mary then goes on to relay the information her husband had given her.

There are many letters to and from wives concerning the estate affairs of their husbands - instructions were given and carried out, news conveyed, problems talked about and solved. Given their role as correspondents women could not help but be intimately acquainted with the financial affairs of their husbands. Indeed it was imperative that they should be. As wife of the landowner they were privy to all that went on and as secretaries they amassed a great deal of knowledge and gained valuable experience.

What were the major tasks of these women? What were the major concerns of their letters? The main task, while running the estate, for those with husbands in prison, exile or facing sequestration was to obtain the liberty of their husband and to work for the removal or avoiding of the sequestration order. Special mention should be given to the efforts of wives to save their husband's estates from sequestration, or to obtain the release of their husband if he was a prisoner. In these situations the financial survival of the entire family depended on the wife and her role and importance cannot be overrated. It was a great responsibility which their husbands

²⁹ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 27 February, 1673, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 40.

entrusted to them, and demonstrates the partnership that existed between them. In such situations the wife was put to the test in her abilities, presence of mind and determination.

The seizing of Royalist land during the Civil Wars or due to religious non-conformity brought financial disaster upon a sizeable handful of the English aristocracy and gentry, and drove many into exile on the continent. One family thus threatened was the Verney family. Ralph Verney was staunchly loyal to the Church of England and consequently refused to sign the Covenant. In 1643 he went into exile in France with his wife Mary and children, Peg and Edmund. He was named a delinquent and his estates sequestrated three years later.³⁰ His wife, although pregnant, travelled back to England to fight for the estates. She went to London in late 1646 and was only granted a certificate of sequestration from the Buckinghamshire Committee (which had imposed the sequestration order) in April 1647. Her baby was born in June and soon after died. She had to present the certificate and her petition to the House of Commons, and only in January 1648 was the order lifted.³¹ Mary Verney had been alone in England for one and a half years trying to get the order lifted - soliciting parliament, presenting her husband's case, writing letters, consulting with various advisers - with the added concern of her pregnancy and the birth of her child. She succeeded in ensuring the financial survival of the family. Considering the importance of her mission and its successful outcome, it is all the more surprising that Miriam Slater, in her study of the Verney family and the relationship between Mary and Ralph, should argue that men considered women were incapable of dealing in truly important matters and that Ralph treated his wife as a child.³² In this matter Mary Verney was certainly far from superfluous but was, on the contrary, extremely important to the survival of the family.

The Countess of Leicester was also active in attempts to save the Leicester estates from sequestration. She argued against the sequestration, no doubt helped by the fact that her brother, the Earl of Northumberland, supported Parliamentary opposition to Charles and was a member of

³⁰ Sidney Lee (ed.), *The Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 58, (London, 1899), p. 265.

³¹ Flora Fraser, *The English Gentlewoman*, (London, 1987), pp. 74-75.

³² Miriam Slater, *Verneys of Claydon House*, pp. 66, 68. Mary Verney died only two years after her arduous task was successfully completed. See also Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, p. 195-6. Slater argues that the use of women in this way emphasised male beliefs about their innate inferiority. Priestley says that this must be accepted with caution given women's behind the scenes role in politics.

the Committee of Both Kingdoms. A letter from the countess to William Hawkins, her steward, expresses her concern.

Though this busines be done by I know not whom, yeet is it liklie to proove verie prejudiciall to us if it be not speedelie and cairfullie lookt to, for the tenants are allreadie forbidden to paie thear rents to my lord's use, and thaie will be glad of this ocasion not to paie at all.³³

Clearly, not only was the possible total loss of the estate a great fear, but while the matter was being debated the tenants were able to evade payment of their rents so money from the estates was not coming in. The arguments of the countess against the sequestration finally proved successful and it was cancelled.

These two women demonstrated a knowledge of legal matters and the problems involved in avoiding or escaping from sequestration. However well they were briefed by their husbands or their lawyers, the fact remains that the burden fell on the wives. The support and positive contribution they made is unquestionable. Another family whose estates were sequestered was that of Thomas Knyvett. Thomas was taken prisoner by Cromwell at Lowestoft during the royalist insurrection in 1643.³⁴ He was imprisoned for a few months and then released with some restrictions remaining on his personal liberty.³⁵ He faced sequestration and while in London worked hard to avoid the order. In this he was ably assisted by his wife Katherine who had to run the estates alone and help her husband at the same time.

Flora Fraser, discussing the efforts of Mary Verney to overcome the sequestration of her husband's estates, states that it was thought women stood the most chance of success in petitioning the government for the return of estates and reversal of attainders. Supplication was the traditional role for women and "tears might soften hard hearts, where reasoned arguments never would".³⁶ Thomas Knyvett certainly subscribed to this belief as his many letters to Katherine demonstrate. In May 1644 he wrote that when she had received a new certificate it

³³ The Countess of Leicester to William Hawkins, 26 September, 1643, H.M.C. 77 DeL'Isle and Dudley Manuscripts, vol. 6 1636-1698 - Sidney Papers, 1626-1698. (1966) p. 436. See also footnote, p. 436.

³⁴ Bertram Schofield, (ed.) *The Knyvett Letters*, fn 2, p. 109, and Introduction pp. 32-34.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Introduction, p. 35.

³⁶ Fraser, *English Gentlewoman*, p. 74.

would be fit for her to come to London and "appeere in the busines, for weomen solicitors are observed to have better audience then masculine malignants".³⁷ It is observed, he said in another letter to his wife, that wives have far better success in their solicitations then we men. He gives the example of Mistress Hall. Her husband, with all his attendance and charge could do nothing, but her "Rethorick" caused Mr. Cor[bet] to appear at the Committee and make a motion for her husband. Soon after, the order they wanted was made and he was given liberty to go down and solicit and look to his own affairs, and recover what he could of his goods.³⁸

Thomas often wrote asking Katherine to go to London and help in the petitioning, for her presence was seen as necessary to success. "All my fellowes' wives are ther, solliciting ther husbands inlargment, And why stayst thou so long?"³⁹ he wrote in April 1643. On 30 May, 1644 he wrote

I wish thou weart heer with all my hart, for yor solicitation would doe more in a weeke then I am like to doe in a quarter.....But all the freinds that I speake with are absolute of opinion that yor solicitation would prevaile farr beyond mine, and I see good exsperience of it both in Mis Holl and the Lady Kempe. Therefore, good sweet hart, come up to my assistance assoone as you can.⁴⁰

During her time alone on the estate Katherine also executed various tasks for her husband which helped in his cause. In August 1643 Thomas requested that she gather up all of his papers and writings and put them into a trunk. He wanted the writings in the box with the title bonds safely laid up, and told her to give the two small guns in his closet behind the books into a friend's hands.⁴¹ In such circumstances a loyal wife was invaluable. Such activities needed an absolutely trustworthy person to fulfill them.

Thomas related to his wife his disappointments, problems and progress, giving instructions as to what she must do to best serve his cause. For example, on 2 May, 1644 he

³⁷ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, May 1644, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 75, p. 147.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 23 May, 1644, Letter 77, p. 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 22 April, 1643, Letter 54, p. 114.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 30 May, 1644, Letter 78, p. 153. See also his letter of 20 June, 1644, (Letter 81, p. 159) and 11 July, 1644, (Letter 84, p. 166).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 1 August, 1643, Letter 60, p. 123.

wrote that he hoped a letter from the Earl of Manchester would help him overturn the sequestration order but had to try and prevent the seizing of his goods by a man called [Richard] Browne, until he could obtain a hearing. His wife could help in this area. "You must ingage Mr. Baliston in this, and Dr. [Thomas] Browne, who I hear was once his master. I prethe use thy wisdomes and discretions".⁴² The next day he wrote that she would do well to solicit some of the best of the Committee to "make stay of the violence".⁴³ Later in the month he praised her efforts. She had made excellent progress and Thomas believed that if those friends made good their promises he did not doubt to come off very well. He sent her down copies of his petition and his answer to the certificate. Edmund Hovell was sent down as her solicitor to the Committee. It was necessary to keep everything as close as possible until she had gained a new certificate.⁴⁴ Again on 23 May, 1644 Thomas praised his wife. He received her letter to the Committee of Sequestrations and commented "'Tis very well solicited of thee. I hope 'twill doe me some pleasuer".⁴⁵

The above examples demonstrate beyond doubt that Katherine Knyvett was an invaluable aid to the efforts of her husband to prevent his estates being taken from him. Unlike Ralph Verney and the Earl of Leicester he was in England and obviously could see his wife, correspond and assist her efforts in a way that the other two could not. However it is also evident that Katherine Knyvett had often to act upon her own initiative, and to deal with men, many of whom were hostile to her husband.⁴⁶ It is true that she sometimes made mistakes. Letters and discourses of Katherine's were intercepted and enraged Mr. Cor[be]t, a man who could do much harm to Thomas's chances of success.⁴⁷ Her indiscretion did not seem to cause Thomas too much harm but she did demonstrate a lack of care in putting such obviously controversial words in writing. It is also true however that Katherine was probably one of the very few people of whom Thomas

⁴² *Ibid.* 2 May, (1644), Letter 71, p. 142.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 3 May, 1644, Letter 72, p. 143.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (11-14 May, 1644), Letter 74, p. 144-145.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 23 May, 1644, Letter 77, p. 150. See also his letter of 12 June, 1644, Letter 80, pp. 157-158. Katherine asked by her husband to correspond on his behalf to those who might be sympathetic to his plight.

⁴⁶ Her sons, John who was nineteen in 1642 and Thomas who was seventeen, both appear to have spent much time out of the country and so were of limited use in assisting their mother. Letters of 3 May, 1644 (Letter 72, pp. 142-143) and 23 May, 1644 (Letter 77, p. 150), show that John had actually made matters worse for his father with an indiscreet letter, and it is evident in the letter of 16 May, 1644 (Letter 76, p. 149), that John was serving in the army overseas. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 8 June, 1644, Letter 79, p. 155.

could totally trust, and that she was a comfort and support to him at this difficult time. He described her effect in July, 1644.

Thy wholesome advise and com'fort hath much refresh't my droop'ing spirrits, for, to tell the true, I goe up and downe heer like a body without a soule, a kinde of forlorne creature, that breaths nothing but discontented ayer.⁴⁸

Another aristocratic wife who had to endure the imprisonment of her husband was Elizabeth Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. She had been married to Theophilus Hastings, 7th Earl of Huntingdon for over sixteen years and was faced with the arduous task of trying to attain the earl's liberty when, at the end of November 1688 he allegedly attempted to poison the Earl of Bath at Plymouth and to seize the citadel for James II. He was imprisoned with all the officers of his regiment save one.⁴⁹ Conditions in the citadel where he was confined were not very comfortable or healthy. It was very cold and Huntingdon soon came down with some sort of chest infection [described in the letters at various times as a cold, a pleuresy and a consumption].⁵⁰ His wife took on the extra task of helping her husband, despite her pregnancy and considerable distress. The efforts of Elizabeth Hastings are evident in her correspondence. Through December she wrote to her husband every couple of days, sometimes twice in one day, with news, advice and accounts of what she had done to obtain his liberty.

That her activities were not easy for her is very evident, and she faced many difficulties, made worse by her pregnancy. On 3 December, 1688 she ended her letter to the earl with the comment that the condition she was in deserved some pity but that he could use her as he pleased and she was always entirely his.⁵¹ Eight days later she wrote that she was pleased to find the earl "prety well" but for her own part she was "the most mesirable creature leveing".⁵² As well as the trouble with her husband she was worried about her family, in particular her brother.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 4 July, 1644, Letter 83, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography* vol. 25 (London, 1891), p. 135.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Hastings to Theophilus Hastings, 4 December, 1688, HA 4802 and 18 December, 1688, HA 4807; Theophilus Hastings to Elizabeth Hastings [3 December] 1688, HA 6076 and 14 December, 1688, HA 6080, *Hastings Correspondence, Huntington Library, San Marino, California*, Box 53.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Hastings to Theophilus Hastings, 3 December, 1688, *Ibid.* HA 4801.

⁵² *Ibid.* 11 December, 1688, HA 4805.

She also complained that she received no assistance from any of the neighbours, although some others had helped her.⁵³ In another letter she states that she had tried to exchange her husband for "Lord Loveles" [John Lovelace, 3rd. Baron Lovelace of Hurley] and had gone to the authorities over this but had been told it was not practicable. She said to her husband that she had not received any assistance or help from any of them, they loved to bring people into trouble and would not do anything to help them out.⁵⁴ It was an uphill battle for Elizabeth Hastings to help her husband at this time.

The Earl of Huntingdon realized how difficult his wife's efforts were although he sometimes criticized her. On 15 December for example Elizabeth felt driven to excuse herself to her husband over some of her actions. "I think I cannot bee blamed for hasening down your writs and I sent nothing more by Duncomb;...and thearefore I am noe wais answerable for this". Later in the letter she assured her husband that she had not been curious about his writings and had not disturbed or looked at any of them, only to secure them for safety.⁵⁵ Although the earl obviously could criticize he was aware of the distress his wife suffered and at times praised her abilities and tried to comfort her.⁵⁶ On 4 December he wrote "I am infinitely obliged to you for your greate concern for mee of which your letter to the new collonel is too greate an instance".⁵⁷ The earl also responded to his wife's fears that he was not doing all he could on his own behalf, assuring her that to achieve his liberty he had not "omitted anything in (his) power to compasse".⁵⁸ Two days later he came close to an apology to his wife. "I pray doe not thinke mee refractory for I will bee advised by you and ever yours."⁵⁹ The earl needed to encourage his wife and to assure her that his efforts matched hers.

The tasks performed by the countess for the release of her husband were many and varied and she performed them conscientiously. She assured her husband on 1 December that she had left nothing undone and hoped for success.⁶⁰ This was again repeated on 3 December when she

⁵³ *Ibid.* 6 December, 1688, HA 4803.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 3 December, 1688, HA 4801.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 15 December, 1688, HA 4806.

⁵⁶ Theophilus Hastings to Elizabeth Hastings, *Ibid.*, 9 December, 1688, HA 6079, "I desire you to make much of your selfe, and visit your friends, and deny your selfe nothing; and I aproove of what you doe".

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 4 December, 1688, HA 6077.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 14 December, 1688, HA 6080.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 16 December, 1688, HA 6081.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Hastings to Theophilus Hastings, *Ibid.* 1 December, 1688, HA 4798.

opened her letter to her husband with "I have left nothing undon for your releas".⁶¹ One of her major tasks was correspondence, writing to various people who could be helpful to her husband. She wrote to the Earl of Bath and her cousin to try and obtain permission for her husband to come to London, and also wrote to the Prince of Denmark asking him to interpose for her husband's release.⁶² Her letter of 3 December outlined to her husband the many things she had done. She had tried to have him exchanged for another, to no success, applied herself to the king that he would tell his commissioners to try and obtain the earl's freedom from the Prince [of Orange], had made a particular interest to Lord Hallifax, to Lord Churchill and Lord Coote, obtained a writ of parliament for the earl and another for Lord Bath to facilitate his freedom and gave the earl news of the country.⁶³ As well as working for her husband's release Elizabeth Hastings was also a vital link with the outside world. She gave him news of what was happening with parliament and politics enabling him to judge with some degree of accuracy what was the best action to take.⁶⁴

The partnership of this husband and wife is most evident in the way each gave the other advice. The countess was not shy of advising and instructing her husband, and indeed the earl once even asked for her advice. On 16 December he wrote "pray give mee your opinion what I am to doe to obtain my liberty and I will followe itt".⁶⁵ Much of the advice of the countess to the earl concerned the importance of the earl showing people that he was a true protestant and not a papist, which was essential if he was ever going to be released. On 18 December Elizabeth wrote that it was absolutely necessary that everyone knew what his true principles were, and that he should receive the sacrament in the parish church, or failing that, in his chamber. She also corrected the earl for showing resentments, saying this was not the time to show discontent because a note would be made of it. The countess also chastized her husband for taking so long to write to "the great man". Nothing could be done but through this man and "time is pretios". The countess

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 3 December, 1688, HA 4801. See also her letter of 15 December, 1688, HA.4806, "tis not multiplicity of affairs that prevents my wrighting methodically as you doe but the distraction of my thauts for vesets I make none and have noe other buisness but the obtaining your liberty".

⁶² *Ibid.* 1 December, 1688, HA 4799 and Elizabeth Hastings to the Prince of Denmark, *Ibid.*, 1688, HA 4800.

⁶³ Elizabeth Hastings to Theophilus Hastings, *Ibid.* 3 December, 1688, HA 4801.

⁶⁴ See the letters of Elizabeth to Theophilus, *Ibid.* 3 December, 1688, HA 4801; 7 December, 1688, HA 4804; 11 December, 1688, HA 4805 and 15 December, 1688, HA 4806. For example on 7 December she wrote and said she would write to Jaquis (their steward) as he wanted but it would not be to much purpose as all was up in arms there. Also see Theophilus to Elizabeth, 4 December, 1688, HA 6077, where he asks for news, especially of parliament and the commissioners.

⁶⁵ Theophilus Hastings to Elizabeth Hastings, *Ibid.* 16 December, 1688, HA 6081.

hoped the earl was preparing to answer all things at the trials. The earl should make his application by letter or petition and if he did not know how best to present it he should send it to her and she would take care of it.⁶⁶ There are many letters in this vein and the countess in her turn received letters of instruction from the earl. These mainly concerned securing the house against plunder, obtaining necessary documents and giving information. In one letter he wished the children to be moved further away from London.⁶⁷ The instruction and advice between them reveals a partnership where both contributed. The Countess of Huntingdon, like Mary Verney, Dorothy Sidney and Katherine Knyvett was her husband's most loyal, trustworthy partner and had to perform difficult tasks under worrying and trying conditions. The countess died in childbirth on 24 December, 1688.

These women were largely alone, for their husbands were helpless to do anything apart from giving occasional advice and instruction. They rose to the occasion and performed a variety of tasks with energy and expertise. The importance of a wife to these men is obvious - without this loyal partner they would have been less able to obtain their release and avoid or reverse sequestration orders. Husbands turned quite naturally to their wives as their most immediate business partners when the estate was facing a crisis, and wives were totally thrown back upon their own resources as they dealt with a variety of problems. The burden of the estate fell on their shoulders.

While releasing imprisoned husbands and freeing estates from sequestration orders were dramatic duties encountered by some wives, many more had to shoulder more mundane responsibilities in managing estates. Since they often lived on the estate they were involved in its day to day operations, although where their husbands owned estates in several counties they would have depended on stewards. However, since stewards would take no major steps without direct orders, even with these they had to regularly correspond.

One of the most important responsibilities was rent collection. Wives with husbands facing sequestration, exile and imprisonment by far faced the most formidable task in this area.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Hastings to Theophilus Hastings, *Ibid.* 18 December, 1688, HA 4807.

⁶⁷ Theophilus Hastings to Elizabeth Hastings, *Ibid.* 16 December, 1688, HA 6081. Also see 14 December, 1688, HA 6080 and 4 December, 1688, HA 6077.

⁶⁸ See also Christopher Durston, *The Family in the English Revolution*, pp. 91-92.

Because tenants were unsure who owned the land (particularly in the long months when the issue was being discussed and contested) they were wary of paying money to the landowner. If they paid and then the estates were sequestrated, they could have to pay again to the parliament or the new owners. Of course these problems also provided the tenants with an excuse for not paying the rents. Katherine Knyvett faced this problem while running the Knyvett estates when her husband was facing sequestration. Thomas wrote to her in August 1643 that if the Commissioners sequestrated his estate before he was rightfully convicted William Harrison (his steward) was to

let my farmors knowe that I stand upon my justifycation, And if thay shall pay' any of my rents to any upon this sequestration, thay shall doe me a great deale of wrong, And I shall have just cause to requier pay'ment at ther hands againe.⁶⁹

This instruction sums up the problems faced by landowners in this situation, and, of course, the burden fell on their wives when they were not there.

The fact that Katherine faced trouble with tenants over rent is attested to in another letter from Thomas, on 3 April, 1644. It was written in answer to a letter Katherine had written to him the week before, and Thomas said that he was sorry she had so "troublesome a game to playe amongst those clownes".⁷⁰ They valued the fear of threepence against his own subsistence, and hoped to strike a good bargain with him because he was brought to such financial hardship. Thomas added that he did not know what to advise in this case only that Katherine should use them kindly, make the best bargain with them that she could, and get in the half years rent as fast as she could. It was better to yield to a small inconvenience than to cause a bigger trouble where they could lose all. This bargaining for rents with tenants was a task of some diplomacy and skill and far from easy, as the tenants were struggling themselves in very uncertain conditions. Although the steward would do the negotiating Katherine had to make the final decision alone because of the situation of her husband. He was in a position only to offer advice and no more.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, 1 August, 1643, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 60, p. 122.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 3 April, 1644, Letter 67, p. 134.

⁷¹ See also the Countess of Leicester to William Hawkins, 26 September, 1643, *H.M.C. Series 77*, vol. 6, p. 436.

The Earl of Leicester, in leaving his entire estates in his wife's hands, both in 1636 when he was Ambassador to France and in 1642 when he expected to be sent into Ireland as Lord Lieutenant, entrusted to her the collecting of rents which totalled over £4,000 a year. In 1642 the Earl appointed Hawkins to bring all his rents and profits to the Countess and she to receive them.⁷² Although the Earl did not approve of the way his wife handled his finances, his decision to place his rents in her hands indicates his assurance that she was the appropriate person to fill his place when he was out of the country.

Frances Seymour, Marchioness of Hertford also had to collect rents, and like most landowners she experienced some trouble with her tenants. Thomas Gape in July 1652 related to her a dispute over rent. Mr. Birch was insisting he should pay no more than the old rent and hoped her ladyship would not expect more. Gape consulted with her lawyer, Sir Orlando Bridgeman who suggested Mr. Birch have the old terms for one year considering he had not acted against Frances Seymour in a law-suit that had been begun by one Gerrard. Having acquainted his mistress with these facts Thomas Gape goes on to say "This I hold it my duty, to acquaint your honor with, leaving it to your lapps owne wisdom to doe therein as you shall thinke fitt".⁷³ The decision-making belonged to Frances Seymour - her agents negotiated, worked out a possible bargain that they felt would be acceptable, presented her with information, gave advice and consulted, but left the final judgement on the action to be taken, to her.

This situation occurred again in a letter from Gregory in 1654. He told her that many tenants wanted to wait until after the fair that was to be held soon, so they could raise some money to pay their rents. Some farmers assured Gregory he would receive the rents but he rather sceptically said he wished he could believe their word. He added "I suppose it is your Honors pleasure to try all faier meanes first with them".⁷⁴ In the area of rent collection Frances Seymour directed her agents and decided on the best action to be taken. Her husband was either too busy to undertake these matters himself, or these problems concerned Frances's own land over which she had sole authority.

⁷² Earl of Leicester, "Diary of Events, 1636-1650" H.M.C. Series 77, vol. 6, p. 556.

⁷³ Thomas Gape to Frances Seymour, 16 July, 1652, *Seymour Papers, Longleat, Wiltshire*, vol. 7, fo. 29.

⁷⁴ W. Gregory to Frances Seymour, 25 November, 1654, *Ibid.* vol. 7, fo. 50.

Katherine Paston also was in charge of rent collection, for her ailing husband. It is clear that she was the one to whom rents were sent and explanations made when there were delays. Sir John Heveningham wrote in November 1621 apologising for the fact that Woodyard, a tenant, had not yet paid her "his halfe yeares ffarme which was due at Midsommer last".⁷⁵ Sir John was now sending the money and hoped that the next half year at Christmas Woodyard would make a speedier payment. In 1622 Sir John again wrote, sending her some money, explaining the delays and problems in receiving it, and promising the rest soon.⁷⁶ Sir John Heveningham was brother-in-law to Lady Katherine's husband. Here is another example of family members helping each other, with a gentlewoman at the apex. Lady Katherine took the place of her husband in gathering rents and chasing up tenants, using other family members where necessary. Mary Thynne also involved herself in rent collection, helping both her husband and sons to ensure the efficient receiving of rents although her role was one of passing on information and advice, whereas Katherine Paston had total authority. Although wives might perform such tasks as rent collecting this task was shaped by their own individual circumstances and personalities.

When husbands were unavoidably absent wives had to instruct the stewards of their husbands' scattered estates to summon the manorial courts so that tenants could be admitted, leases renewed and tenants fined. Katherine Knyvett received letters from her husband about the keeping of courts, instructing that they continued to be kept in his absence. "Let the courts be kept as at other times"⁷⁷ he wrote in March 1643. One year later, March 1644, he wrote "Let me heer from thee before you meddle with keeping of any courts"⁷⁸ but then about a week later he again wrote "I doe concurr with you concerning keeping of my courts. I pray let them be as formerly".⁷⁹ Despite disruptions in their lives landowners attempted to maintain the day-to-day running of their estates as normally as possible and a wife at home who could give orders about such matters to his stewards was a definite asset. This routine aspect of running an estate could be very complicated and difficult during and after the Civil War, since often courts could not be kept

⁷⁵ Sir John Heveningham to Katherine Paston, 6 November, 1621, *Correspondence Paston Family*, Letter 22, p. 57.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 27 August, 1622, Letter 24, p. 58.

⁷⁷ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, 24 March, 1643, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 52 p. 110.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 13 March, 1644, Letter 64, pp. 128-129.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 21 March, 1644, Letter 65 p. 131.

without the permission of the County Committees. In April 1647 Frances Seymour's steward, Thomas Keilway wrote that he had attended several committees at Warminster and Bridgwater and his endeavours proved so successful that he soon obtained permission to keep courts.⁸⁰ Frances's husband had compounded for his estates in 1646 but presumably had been unable to raise the money at this stage and until the Seymours could pay a fine to free them permission needed to be granted before such courts could be kept. Katherine Paston ran courts in lieu of an ailing husband as is evident in a letter she received from Edward Paston in 1624.⁸¹ Katherine received advice from Edward Paston but this letter makes clear that she was the one arranging the courts. Her husband's name was not even mentioned.

The paying and receiving of money other than rent, such as debts, also was a task of upper class wives. Wives could satisfy a husband's pressing financial need to either pay off a debt or to receive badly needed money that was owed to them, freeing their husbands to deal with other business. When husbands were imprisoned, in exile, or engaged in expensive overseas diplomatic business this was crucial. A steady stream of finance was essential to furnish their needs and to ensure success. The financial health of the family often depended on wives in these instances and their activity in the transfer of money was wide ranging. In 1644 while Thomas Knyvett was in town fighting sequestration he wrote to his wife about £200 he owed a man called Corselles. The only way he had to pay this was by sale of land, one Blackhall farm. Thomas instructed his wife to use Corselles kindly if he came, and to inform him what Corselles said about the business. He was to be paid "his use".⁸² Thomas frequently wrote to Katherine for money when his funds dropped low. Her sons who were abroad also needed money. It was Katherine's task to gather what money she could and send it, not always the easiest thing to achieve at that time of uncertainty.⁸³

The Countess of Leicester demonstrated her confidence in dealing with money and the wider world of finance very soon after her husband left for France. In September 1636 she wrote

⁸⁰ Thomas Keilway to Frances Seymour, 18 April, 1647, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 19.

⁸¹ Edward Paston to Katherine Paston 29 May, 1624, *Correspondence Paston Family*, Letter 40 pp. 70-71.

⁸² Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, March 27, 1644, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 66, p. 133. (See also two earlier letters of 1623 from Thomas to Katherine, written while Thomas was on business in London, Letters 9 and 10, pp. 63-64).

⁸³ *Ibid.* See letters 6 April, 1643, Letter 53, p. 113; 21 March, 1644, Letter 65, p. 131; 27 March, 1644, Letter 66, p. 133 and 3 April, 1644, Letter 67, p. 134.

to her husband's steward, William Hawkins, requesting that he send her an account of the earl's financial affairs. A bill had arrived from the earl in Paris and if it could not be paid it would be necessary to solicit the Treasury.⁸⁴ Over the next couple of months letters between William Hawkins and the countess concentrate on this business. Hawkins solicited Lord Holland, Lord Treasurer, Secretary Coke, and the King for the bills to be paid and relayed the progress being made to the countess. Throughout he acted on her instructions. For example she wrote to Hawkins in October 1636 "I praie, be verie earnest in thees solisations, for my lord's wants growe verie great".⁸⁵ She wrote personally to the Earl of Holland to ask him to represent to the King the condition her husband was in. Her own jewels were pawned and his credit in France had gone and huge disgraces would fall upon him unless supplies were sent.⁸⁶ The impression given by the countess is one of knowledge, activity and persistence, in the face of the very unsympathetic men of the Treasury. Letters from Hawkins repeatedly describe the unwillingness of these men, Secretary Coke in particular, to grant the bills.⁸⁷ It is true that Hawkins informed the earl of these proceedings and received instructions from him concerning them, the earl of course encouraging a successful and speedy end to the business. However, it was Dorothy Sidney, in England who was ideally placed to be most active and influential in the matter. The earl clearly relied on his wife to do the best possible to obtain the money he needed and she proved herself to be very supportive in this - instructing Hawkins, writing pleading letters herself and marshalling evidence.

The earl expected his wife to pay his debts for him, as he had left his estates in her charge. However, in his "Diary of Events" the earl bitterly claimed that from 1636 to 1639 she had control of his estates but did not pay off any of his debts,

though some of them were clamorous and she had all my estate as aforesayd, but what she did with it I know not, but I hope she grew riche and layd up money as she might do very well. ⁸⁸

⁸⁴ the Countess of Leicester to William Hawkins, 3 September, 1636, H.M.C. Series 77, vol. 6, p. 47.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 16 October, 1636, p. 57.

⁸⁶ the Countess of Leicester to the Earl of Holland, 12? October, 1636, *Ibid.* pp. 55-56.

⁸⁷ The letters from William Hawkins to the Countess on 4 September, 1636 (p. 47) and 1 October, 1636, (pp. 53-54) *Ibid.* are just two examples.

⁸⁸ the Earl of Leicester, "Diary of Events, 1636-1650" *Ibid.* vol.6, p. 555.

Again, the earl went on to complain that she never, from the beginning of 1642 onwards, paid any interest or any of his debts. The debts increased and he said, nearly proved his ruin.⁸⁹ From mid-summer 1644 to Christmas 1645 he "never received one penny from any part of his estate".

My wife had it all and would not part with one penny, but still threatned that if I took [any part?] of it, she would turne the keeping of the house into my hands, which I being loth to undertake in such times of trouble as that was, and being loth to dissolve my family as a thing dishonorable and prejudiciall to my children, gave way to her unreasonablenes and never tooke one farthing, but lived as well as I could upon my little stock and borrowing....⁹⁰

The countess would not even lend her husband fifty pounds so he could send their son into Holland.⁹¹ The earl continued to detail the extravagant demands of his wife for money and the various bargains they came to over this. What the actual situation with the earl's debts was is difficult to ascertain. Dorothy Sidney was probably receiving little or no rents from the tenants during war-time and consequently there simply were not available funds to pay them. There was definite tension between husband and wife over this, with the earl clearly expecting his wife to assist him by paying his debts and accusing her of hoarding up his money for her own use.

Frances Seymour organised payment of money for her husband, rather more successfully it seems than the Countess of Leicester. For example she wrote to Thomas Gape "you have done my lord vary good service in bringing in so much mony by taking the acompts, and your entended jorney for the like purpose was very good".⁹² Later she wrote again to Gape "you have done a great worke and passed thourough much dificulty in a short time, which I thanke you for, and approve of the £5 you promised to advance to him, and all your proceedings in it".⁹³ In one letter she wrote about money she was awaiting from my lord, to pay the bills. He had said she could have it when his rents came in. Frances told Gape that she would follow his (Gape's) advice and wait patiently, but if it took long she would use her own money and then repay herself when she

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 556.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 557.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 557.

⁹² Frances Seymour to Thomas Gape, 5 January,(?), *Seymour Papers*, vol. 6, fo. 65.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 7 June, (?), vol. 6, fo. 73.

received the money.⁹⁴ Frances Seymour demonstrated considerable initiative in paying moneys and was obviously well aware of her husband's financial state. With money of her own she was ideally able to support and help him when need be, tiding him over until such time as she could be reimbursed. Likewise, Mary Thynne was prepared to use her own initiative in paying money for her husband out of her own pocket and was knowledgeable and concerned about the moneys due to and owed by her husband. In a letter to Harry of 22 July, 1679 she asked him to pay "Mis. Robson's" bill and then to let her have it for she did not know if there was something that may be due from her husband. If so she would have to reimburse herself.⁹⁵ Such examples demonstrate a certain independence in the financial affairs of wives as distinct from their husbands. They show that wives kept close control of their own finances as well as those of their husbands.

Some wives had the help of various family members in the paying of their moneys and debts, and they could be useful in lending money when it was needed. Sir John Heveningham in 1621 sent rent to Lady Katherine and added that Sir Thomas Holland (Lady Katherine's brother-in-law) had recently written to him saying that Lady Katherine had need of more money than the half years farm rent and if she wanted he (Sir John) would lend her £100 until Michaelmas.⁹⁶ Mary Thynne cooperated with her two sons to pay and receive money for her husband, and kept them well informed. On 9 May, 1675 she wrote to Thomas that her husband was journeying into town on business. She guessed he intended to see what moneys were due to him and she hoped he intended to pay all bills due to others. Mary asked Thomas to have one more try with Blancher, to get the principal at least out of his hands even if they could not get the interest.⁹⁷ Mary's letters demonstrate the way the family worked together in regard to money lending and payments. She was at the centre of all this activity, instructing, conveying information and asking questions.

I am to acknowlidg the receipt of your last which desires your supply of a some dew for a half yeare at Cristmas, hee (her husband) cannot well collect how that can bee a day of payment and therefore desires you to explaine it to him.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 12 January,(?), vol. 6, fo. 62.

⁹⁵ Mary Thynne to Harry Thynne, 22 July, 1679, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 34, fo. 37?.

⁹⁶ Sir John Heveningham to Katherine Paston, 29 March, 1620, *Correspondence Paston Family*, Letter 20, p. 55.

⁹⁷ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 9 May, 1675, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 64.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 27 February, 1673, fo. 40.

In another letter to Thomas, Mary again corresponds for her husband. Thomas had sent his father some advice about the disposing of a sum of money. Mary replied that her husband had nothing to say against the security but that he did not think it fit to decide yet and needed a little more time to think about it.⁹⁹ In one letter to Harry she discusses business and gives instructions "...you are desired to see at Mr Browne's how the account stands for hee canott apprehend how that mony dew from Mr Littleton should bee to discharge him".¹⁰⁰ There are many such letters from Mary to Harry. In 1677 she wrote that his father's illness forbade him to be in town himself so the trouble he would have taken had to fall on Harry. She details payments to be made, sends a sum of money and ends that she hopes his next letter will inform them the greater part is paid.¹⁰¹ These examples demonstrate how useful family members could be, especially sons, for an upper-class wife in her efforts to support and help her husband in his economic affairs. They show that the family worked together as a team, with the wife an important source of instruction and information for the others, on behalf of her husband.

The knowledge and experience Mary gained through assisting her husband in his financial affairs enabled her to use her own initiative when the opportunity arose, and to help other family members as well. An example of this is the letter of information she sent to Thomas in 1668. She had already sent one letter to him that day and was not intending to send another. However, she saw Mr. Barker on his way home and "by accident" he told her about a sum of money that could be let out for 4%. She asked if she could tell her son about it and he agreed. There was £10,000 to be lent but it had to be held for three years. Mary felt that this was not an unreasonable condition. If Thomas thought this a "mottion to entertaine" he knew how to address Mr. Barker who would be ready.¹⁰² Mary, as both wife and mother, was able to help her entire family when occasion arose and exhibited confidence in dealing in financial matters with others, even those outside her own family. Wives were not merely passive recipients of instructions from their husbands but could use their own initiative to the benefit of the whole family when occasion arose.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 27 January, 1673, fo. 39.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Thynne to Henry Frederick Thynne, 22 November, 1677, *Ibid.* vol. 34, fo. 25.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 17 November, 1677, vol. 34, fo. 21.

¹⁰² Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 1668, *Ibid.* vol. 31, fo. 7.

Wives' activities even extended to such important matters as the buying and selling of land, stock, produce and wood. This was usually carried out on the instructions of their husbands but depending on circumstance some wives used their own initiative and enjoyed considerable freedom. Wives who were active in the purchases and sales associated with estates include Dorothy Sidney, Katherine Paston and Katherine Knyvett. Their central importance to the success of these ventures is evident, although the situations of each were very different. Dorothy Sidney revealed her independent nature and confidence in making decisions without her husband in December 1636 when she wrote to the earl to inform him that she had "taken upon me to make a bargain with Crikendell for your wood".¹⁰³ She explained what the agreement was and added that she had thought it was best to go ahead with the bargain without waiting on an answer from the earl because Crikendell was about to furnish himself elsewhere. While she kept her husband fully informed, this was after the event because the bargain had been completed before she told her husband about it. Similarly, Lady Katherine Paston's husband seemed to have little role to play in the purchase of land undertaken by his wife in 1624. Edward Paston wrote to her advising her to be very careful in a bargain she was making in purchasing Skeiton Manor. She should be very careful in enquiring what the said manor is worth and what she agrees to.¹⁰⁴ It is clear that Katherine was making all the decisions, again her husband was not even mentioned.

A different situation was that faced by Katherine Knyvett. Her husband, unlike Edmund Paston, remained in charge of the purchase and sale of goods and property. Katherine's role was that of supporter, ready to stand in her husband's place when he was prevented from conducting the transactions himself. In 1623 Thomas wrote to Katherine that she was to tell George Keeper that Thomas wanted him to sell the wood in Middle Wood to the "best advantage".¹⁰⁵ In 1641 Thomas wrote a detailed letter to his wife describing the problems he was facing over a certain transaction involving the sale of some wood.¹⁰⁶ Such a letter demonstrates that Thomas wanted his wife to be aware of his business dealings, clearly it would make it easier for her to support him if the occasion so required. In 1644 Katherine had a more active role when Thomas wrote to her

¹⁰³ the Countess of Leicester to the Earl of Leicester, 1 December, 1636, H.M.C. Series 77, vol. 6, p. 70.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Paston to Katherine Paston, 12 April, 1624, Correspondence Paston Family, Letter 37, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, May, 1623, Knyvett Letters, Letter 6, p. 59.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 17 January, 1641, Letter 46, p. 98.

saying that he wished she could make money of what wood was fit to be sold. If the sequestrators were quieted he thought that commodity should sell well.¹⁰⁷ Katherine was ideally placed to sell what was needed to help Thomas at this very uncertain time when clearly he was unable to deal with such matters himself. Such transactions, carried out by Katherine, were important in ensuring a ready supply of money.

Another crucial fact of life for landowners was litigation. Landowners were often involved in litigation of some sort whether it consisted of disagreements over rent with tenants, disputes with neighbours over boundary lines, or conflict over wills between family members. Land and litigation seemed to go hand-in-hand, with an almost limitless supply of problems which could only be solved by going to court. Many wives were involved in litigation, to varying degrees, largely because of their involvement in the management of their husbands' estates. Women proved themselves shrewd and capable in this area with a sound knowledge of legal practices. As in other areas of estate management wives helped their husbands, and at times instructed the lawyers and fought the case without their husbands' participation.

Mary Thynne's involvement in legal affairs reveals her close working partnership with her husband and her sons. Mary Thynne's role in litigation was that of conveyer of information and instructions from her husband to her sons. She did not seem to initiate her own legal action, merely supported her husband in his, as his sons did. Sir Henry Frederick Thynne lent money out and this was not always repaid. His son Harry had the unenviable task of chasing up these outstanding debts. Mary relayed her husband's orders to her son and was not slow to instruct Harry to use the threat of litigation if the money was not paid. In one instance Mary wrote that her husband wondered that after allowing Mr. Squibb three months to pay his debt that he should at six months end offer only half. Harry was told that his father desired him to tell Mr. Squibb that if he did not make a speedy payment of it he would hear from Sir Henry "upon other termes then hee has yet used towards him".¹⁰⁸ In another letter she hoped "Sir Viner" would pay them the money and if not he must be made to do it. Henry was also sent a letter of attorney to receive money from his cousin with whom Sir Henry Frederick Thynne was involved in a law-suit. Mary instructed

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 13 March, 1644, Letter 64, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Thynne to Henry Frederick Thynne, 24 February, 1677, *Thynne Papers*, vol.34, fo. 9.

her son to receive all the papers concerning the case and take account of how the suit stood.¹⁰⁹ Mary demonstrated a sound knowledge of her husband's legal affairs and her contribution was important.

Frances Seymour similarly, was aware of legal matters and also was involved in litigation. In 1646 she was involved in a dispute over the settling of her brother's estate. Dorothy Baker, writing to Frances in September said "I hope your sorow will not drowne your prudent care, of procuring frendes to helpe the settlement of my lord's estate, with the least preiudice and best advantage that may bee".¹¹⁰ Later, in October she wrote again and said that she had heard reports of a will suppressed and suspicion of foul play offered and begged for information.¹¹¹

Unlike Mary Thynne Frances Seymour owned property in her own right. Consequently Frances was much concerned over the settlement of her estate, about which she corresponded with her solicitor, Sir Orlando Bridgeman. In a letter of 1657 Bridgeman wrote to her explaining that he had received the abstracts of the settlement of her estate but there were a few problems which he proceeded to detail to her.¹¹² A few months later he wrote that he hoped the draft of the settlement of her estate had been further thought upon and settled, to the greater advantage of the family.¹¹³ Frances had to make her own decisions concerning the settlement and inheritance of her property, a task which she had no difficulty in performing. She had much more scope than Mary Thynne. Mary supported and helped a landowner in the mechanisms of achieving his legal objectives. Frances Seymour was a landowner and so had complete autonomy.

Katherine Paston was in a different situation to both of these women. She owned no property in her own right yet because of the serious illness of her husband she took over litigation on his behalf, and was largely independent, free to make her own decisions and to act as she saw fit. She demonstrates most clearly the power and influence a wife could exercise. She was closely involved in legal dealings because her ailing husband was largely incapable of undertaking them personally. In 1618 Edmund Paston undertook a Chancery suit against Sir John Heveningham, Edward Paston and John Jermy. However, his illness and obvious inability to

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 22 November, 1677, vol. 34, fo. 25 and 5 March, 1678, vol. 34, fo. 29.

¹¹⁰ Dorothy Baker to Frances Seymour, 17 September, 1646, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 15.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 7 October, 1646, vol. 7, fo. 17.

¹¹² Orlando Bridgeman to Frances Seymour, 30 July, 1657, *Ibid.* vol. 7, fo. 83.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 29 September, 1657, vol. 7, fo. 89.

manage affairs personally meant the burden fell on his wife's shoulders. Lady Katherine made all the arrangements, received and sent related correspondence and made all the important decisions. She was the one who was contacted in all matters pertaining to the case, and was obviously well-versed in all its aspects. Lady Katherine's intimate knowledge of the case is demonstrated in her correspondence, which shows that she was the force behind the lawsuit. There are several letters between Lady Katherine and Sir John Heveningham over this matter.¹¹⁴ Each was careful to remain polite and agreeable but neither wanted to give an inch. Certainly Lady Katherine proved herself to be very well aware of her rights. Although she was willing to settle things amicably if possible, she was firm about what she wanted and what she thought she had a right to, and had no intention of settling for less.

Correspondence also reveals that Lady Katherine had charge of important legal documents and participated in meetings dealing with litigation. These meetings often required travel from home. In 1624 Edward Paston wrote to Katherine with some instructions for when she came up to London. Obviously a case was to come to court and Edward wrote to make sure Lady Katherine did not forget to bring up any of the important documents that would be needed (such as decrees, bills and important copies).¹¹⁵ There is evidence elsewhere that Lady Katherine travelled on legal business. Obviously her husband was completely unable to. In a letter of the 2 January, 1624 Edward Paston wrote to Lady Katherine to organise a meeting at Norwich with her, all the feoffees and Mr. Denny so they could have a conference about the suits with which they were engaged. He asked her to send messages to Sir John Heveningham, Sir Thomas Holland, Sir Thomas Hyrne and Mr. Martin Sidley to request them to meet all together.¹¹⁶ The ending of the above letter, "So good Madame with my Comendacions to Sir Edmunde and your selfe I leave you" demonstrates that Sir Edmund Paston was with his wife while all this activity was going on but that he had little to do with the process of litigation which was being carried out, all the information and instructions concerning the case being directed to Katherine, not to her husband. Katherine was determined to protect the interests of her husband and children against threats from

¹¹⁴ See Sir Heveningham to Katherine Paston, 3 October, 1618, *Correspondence Paston Family*, Letter 7, pp. 43-44 and Lady Katherine Paston to Sir John Heveningham, 4 October, 1618, *Ibid.* Letter 8, p. 44.

¹¹⁵ Edward Paston to Lady Katherine Paston, 12 April, 1624, *Ibid.* Letter 37, pp. 68-69.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 2 January, 1624, Letter 30, p. 63.

other family members. While fulfilling the wishes of her husband it is clear she also saw her actions as safeguarding her own interests and that she had strong views on the rights or wrongs of the case and was knowledgeable in all its complexities.

The above three women demonstrate how it was possible for wives to have influence in the legal affairs of their husbands, in a variety of capacities. Due to circumstance some made a more significant contribution than others, but all did make a contribution. The success of a family in warding off threats and obtaining its rights owed much to wives.

In addition to the above major areas of activity aristocratic and gentry wives performed a variety of day-to-day activities concerned with the running of the estate. The variety of tasks and concerns faced by these women is impressive. Katherine Paston for example ordered a survey of one of her husband's manors Midleton, near Appleton. Edward Paston reported that as Lady Katherine had requested he had engaged a surveyor, Thomas Waterman to survey and map the manor. He engaged the bailiff to organise the "ancient" tenants to show him the grounds. Waterman was hired for a noble a day, and when the plan was completed Edward would send the bill to Lady Katherine.¹¹⁷ From these letters it is clear Lady Katherine made the vital decisions and that she controlled the purse-strings. It was to her that these letters of information and request went, rather than to her husband. The survey she had arranged would greatly aid efficient management of the estate, for as Edward Paston's letter of the 29 May, 1624 remarked, it would make their position much clearer at the manor court.¹¹⁸

Taxation was a problem faced by all landowners in the seventeenth-century and wives had to learn to cope with this matter as well. Thomas Knyvett shared his concerns about his taxation with his wife. Writing to Katherine in 1643 he stated that his land had been very "gently" valued by the assessor and he hoped the lands would bear the rents and all the taxes.¹¹⁹ Lady Katherine Paston also involved herself over the matter of taxation, although in a much more active way. William Brende, her steward, wrote to her in 1624 about the amount of taxes which had to be paid. Sir Edmund Paston was assessed at a higher rate than the stewards and others concerned

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 26 May, 1623, Letter 27, p. 60.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 29 May, 1624, Letter 40, pp. 70-71.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, 11 July, 1643, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 55, p. 116. By this he meant that he hoped the tenants would be able, or would agree to pay both their rent and the taxes.

thought he should be, and more tax was demanded than they felt should be paid. The Commissioners tended to agree that the rate was too high but said that if the roll returned in the Exchequer agreed with the assessment the higher rate would have to be paid. William Brende sought Lady Katherine's consent to pay at this rate, or for any other instructions she might have for him.¹²⁰ Sir Edmund might have been the one taxed but his wife made the crucial decisions concerning the payments made.

The leasing of land was also much influenced by wives. Lady Katherine organised the leasing out of land and in September 1623 Edward Paston wrote to her concerning the lease of the grounds around Midleton Tower which he had proposed to take. Lady Katherine had agreed to this lease, but Edward, finding that he was required to fence towards the Common and that there was no fencing wood at all on the grounds, decided to withdraw and left it to Lady Katherine to seek a tenant elsewhere.¹²¹ In this letter Edward Paston goes on to say that he met a man who told him he had been given leave by Lady Katherine to take some stone out of her stone pit in Midleton. Edward could find no letter of authorisation on him from Katherine and so desired to know whether he did really have leave or not, and if so how many loads he could take. He also told Katherine of pollution in the area and the need to speak at the Commissioners for the Severn on the 23rd. The feoffees needed to write to him saying they allowed him to deal in their behalf to stop the pollution or it would be thought he worked alone when he spoke at the Commission. Such a letter demonstrates the great variety of matters Katherine was called upon to arbitrate and over which she had authority.

Judging what was to be done with troublesome tenants was also sometimes the province of the wife especially when she owned the land concerned. Thomas Gape wrote to Frances Seymour in 1655, describing the antics of some undutifull tenants at Drayton. He would soon be waiting on her ladyship and "then you shall have a faithfull accompt of all my proceedings and of such observations as I made during my short stay at Drayton, which I shall submit to your lapps most

¹²⁰ William Brende to Katherine Paston, 5 August, 1624, *Correspondence Paston Family*, Letter 45, pp. 74-75.

¹²¹ Edward Paston to Katherine Paston, 11 September, 1623, *Ibid.* Letter 28, pp. 61-62.

wise direction".¹²² Frances in this instance was free to come to any decision she chose because her husband had no authority over her land.

Repairs to tenants' houses and farm buildings also had to be undertaken on a regular basis. In a letter to his wife in 1625 Thomas Knyvett gave instructions for wood to be given to "Mr. Bootye" if it was used to repair any houses upon his copyhold, but not if it was to sell and make a benefit from them for himself.¹²³ Dorothy Sidney, demonstrating her initiative and confidence in this area, described to her husband while he was in France, some repairs which she had done which she hoped would be acceptable. Some things had had to be done out of charity she said, "for Will Lokes house was so neer falling downe as it could not have stood this winter, so as he has now a pretie hous buillt from the ground, but it has cost you above £30". The countess also described renovations to "Leicesters Logeing" and "Kings Logeing" which were chambers in their own home. This work included the mending of windows, making wooden shutters and moving furniture all which had been done since the earl left.¹²⁴ Once again although she felt the need to inform her husband she did so once it was all "a fait accompli" and could not be reversed or effectually disputed. Repairs often had to be made to the homes of the landowners themselves and this sometimes included quite extensive renovations. For example in a letter of 26 September, 1636 the Countess of Leicester described to her husband renovations which were underway on the house at London. This included work on the great chamber, ante room and stairs, a good chimney piece in the great chamber and painting and gilding of stairs, doors, windows, cornice and balcony. Tasks still to be completed included the furnishing of the great chamber but it was all very expensive and the countess was afraid this would not be able to be done with the money they had set aside for the purpose. She would try, she said, to make it go as far as possible.¹²⁵

The many and varied activities and concerns discussed thus far demonstrate the important role wives had in the economic functioning of the family. They were support and safety mechanisms softening the disruptive, unsure elements of seventeenth-century life. But did they see themselves in this light and were they so regarded by their contemporaries? How did wives

¹²² Thomas Gape to Lady Frances Seymour, 26 August, 1655, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 64. (See also a letter to Frances from Amos Walrond, 25 December, 1655, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 68).

¹²³ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett (Aft. 7 May, 1625) *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 13, p. 66.

¹²⁴ the Countess of Leicester to the Earl of Leicester, 10 December, 1638, *H.M.C. Series 77* vol. 6, p. 153.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 26 September, 1636, pp. 51-52.

perceive themselves and their economic role in the family? How did others regard them? Such feelings are difficult to pick up with any great accuracy and all that can be done is to examine the clues that individuals themselves dropped centuries ago. Available evidence suggests that elite wives knew that they were important to the family's business affairs and that they had a confidence in their abilities. Such beliefs were demonstrated by Mary Thynne. She was well-versed in estate management and not incapable of criticizing her husband over some of his actions. In 1676 in a letter to her eldest son Thomas, Mary relayed the news that a particular business matter was going badly and added "your father now sees what all his delays and ill management has brought upon him".¹²⁶ She then proceeded to suggest what could best be done to remedy the situation. In a letter of 1679 to Harry she wrote "It is very hard for mee to keepe my promis to you when I am guided by another's inclinations not my owne. At last you will heere receive an note of your father's hand".¹²⁷ Again, in 1675 Mary wrote to Thomas "I am tould your father will see home, but I feare will not have done all that I wished beefore hee leave the towne".¹²⁸ Mary's husband clearly was not decisive or swift enough in his business decisions and actions to suit his wife. Mary Thynne was confident enough of her own abilities and judgement to be able to criticize her husband in this manner. She felt she was qualified to adopt this attitude and expected her sons to understand and appreciate her frustration.

Mary Thynne was a strong-minded woman. It is possible that this led to conflict in the area of estate management. There is evidence that a clash did occur in one instance in which Mary, in a letter to her eldest son told how she reminded her husband that they had only ten months to pay £3,000 plus what they had borrowed and she suggested that some wool might be sold, presumably to aid the repaying. She was rebuked for speaking on this matter and, she told Thomas, resolved to hold her peace from now on although someone had to say something. With the air of washing her hands of the matter she told Thomas "if I am not thought fitt to doe it after my owne way hee shall doe it his".¹²⁹ Mary's involvement and strong ideas on what actions needed to be taken did not always meet with agreement from others and her husband at times

¹²⁶ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 19 June, 1676, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 80.

¹²⁷ Mary Thynne to Henry Frederick Thynne, 22 February, 1679, *Ibid.* vol. 34, fo. 32.

¹²⁸ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 24 May, 1675, *Ibid.* vol. 31, fo. 68.

¹²⁹ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 19 August, 1676, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 86?

clearly resented her efforts to influence his actions. Nevertheless Mary Thynne gives the impression that she was the organised, business-like side of the partnership. Thomas no doubt had also experienced his father's vacillation in business because in writing to her son Mary clearly expected him to understand and sympathize.¹³⁰

The Countess of Leicester was a strong-minded upper class wife, certainly far away from the idea of a meek and mild gentry wife who left important matters to her husband. She had confidence in her abilities, a confidence that was shared by her husband, at least initially, when he left her in charge of all his estates when he went as ambassador to France in 1636. The earl stated that on his going he "gave my wife my whole estate"¹³¹ and intended himself to live only on the "entertainment" the king gave him as ambassador. The countess, therefore, had the control of all the earl's estates and possessions in England. At this time she had eight daughters to provide for, her sons (three) being abroad. The earl proceeds to detail just what estates he possessed at this time, thus providing us with a clear understanding of what the countess had to manage. His estates were Penshurst and Robertsbridge with rents and provisions of £2,000 a year, in Wales there was £1,000, in Warwickshire £200 or better and also he owned two houses "well and sufficiently" furnished. In 1637 he was also left Walsingham, worth £900 per annum.¹³² Thus, he left his countess in charge of considerable estates, entailing large sums of money, tenants and stewards and other estate servants. He was to regret this decision but not because the countess proved unable to manage it, but rather because (as he believed) she proved only too well able to manage it to her own advantage.

It could not be said that the countess enjoyed a calm, stable marriage. She was involved in many disputes with her husband and these mostly concerned money and the estate. According to the earl she took control of his rents and finances so well that he had quite a struggle on his hands to win back the use of them for himself.¹³³ The impression given by Dorothy Sidney is that she

¹³⁰ D. R. Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People - The Estate Steward and his World in Later Stuart England*, (Cambridge, forthcoming), Chapter 14 provides another example of Sir Henry Frederick Thynne's vacillation in business. Thomas Hawkes had been steward for Sir Henry but with the transfer of Shropshire properties to Thynne's eldest son Thomas he became steward for this eldest son. Hawkes complained to Thomas Thynne of Henry Frederick's endless delaying of the final settlement of accounts. (Hawkes to Thomas Thynne, 30 September 1674, *Thynne* vol. 20, fo. 190.).

¹³¹ The Earl of Leicester, "Diary of Events 1636-1650" H.M.C. Series 77, vol. 6, p. 554.

¹³² *Ibid.* p. 554.

¹³³ Earl of Leicester, *Ibid.* See especially p. 557.

considered herself at least as capable at running an estate as her husband, if not better. For example after the earl had written seeking to restrict her activities, she replied:

yeet will I not with draw my selfe from the performance of any thing that lies in my power, which maie keepe you from eather inconvenience or dishoner, though in your postscript you desier me not to trouble my selfe with any thing that concerne you. I will not quarell with you upon that unkind expresion, yeet will saie that many of your businesses wold have gone worse then thaie have done, if I had not considered them with more then ordinarie care.¹³⁴

The Countess insisted on knowing all about her husband's financial affairs, as her frequent requests to Hawkins, her husband's steward, reveal. In October 1636 she wrote that she would like to see Hawkins very much (if the weather was good and his occasions permitted it) "for I do not so perfectlie understand my lords busines as I desier to do".¹³⁵ In December of that year she complained that she had not heard from him for a long time and desired to "receave informations of all that" he knew concerning her lord's affairs, "for I live in a great ignorance wich is painefull".¹³⁶

Not only did the countess have the confidence to demand information on her husband's activities but also often sent her husband advice on how to manage his affairs in France. In one letter she spoke on how he might best conduct himself, adding "And lastlie, contracte your expences to as litle a preportion as is posible,...To my aprehtion £50 or £60 a weeke well governed should make a good show".¹³⁷ She also gave advice on the engaging of a steward, telling her husband that Mr. Darrell, who had been recommended to him, was in her opinion, too young to be efficient in his duties.¹³⁸ These are the words and actions of a woman confident of her own judgement and ability in the area of finance. The earl found when he did return to England that his wife was in a very strong position and determined to remain there. Their

¹³⁴ The Countess of Leicester to the Earl of Leicester, 11 December, 1638, *Ibid.* p. 154.

¹³⁵ The Countess of Leicester to William Hawkins, 23 October, 1636, *Ibid.* p. 59.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 4 December, 1636, p. 71.

¹³⁷ The Countess of Leicester to the Earl of Leicester, 21 January, 1637, *Ibid.* p. 81. Also see her letter of 25 October, 1636 in which the Countess adjures her husband to be "verie thriftie for the time to come,..." (p. 60) and a letter of 27 April, 1637 where she again asks him to "be as frugall as it is posible". (p. 104).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 9 December, 1638, p. 153.

struggle, while interesting to observe, provides new insight into power-play within families and clearly shows the knowledge and power elite women, as wives, could experience.¹³⁹

We have already seen that wives commonly gave their husband's advice (for example Elizabeth Hasting's advice to her husband on his conduct while a prisoner), and that clashes could occur. Such interaction demonstrates that women had their own views and opinions on estate management and saw their involvement as an active and important contribution to the financial survival of the family. Husbands clearly accepted their advice although at times clashes did occur when two strong minds differed. Although the ultimate decision would rest with the husband, he was influenced in the actions he took, to a large extent, by his wife.

The relationship of elite wives with stewards and agents, demonstrated in the correspondence of Frances Seymour, shows that wives were not treated any differently by servants than were male landowners. The stewards and agents Frances corresponded with worked for her husband, but as his wife she often had to give them instructions and they had to reciprocate with information and advice. Agents sent information and then waited for her commands and there was no sign that they felt unable to obey because the commands were given by a woman. For example, Amos Walrond wrote in 1655 about a business concern and said that he dared not intermeddle in this until he knew her judgement "by which I am totally to be guided".¹⁴⁰ Frances Seymour had many advisers and professionals working for her and her husband. They gave her the information and their advice and she was the one who had to judge it, weigh it up and act upon it. They awaited her instructions.

Lady Anne Clifford provides another interesting example in that she, unlike the wives mentioned above, acted in direct opposition to her husband's wishes and naturally this caused a great deal of dissension and conflict between them. When moved by strong principle wives could take courage to oppose their husbands in economic and legal matters, a phenomenon observed in the life of Lady Anne Clifford. Lady Anne's father died when she was fifteen years old. He left his property to his brother, Sir Francis Clifford, with reversion to Lady Anne if his heirs male

¹³⁹ The instances of dispute between the Countess and her husband are too numerous to mention. One particular decision of the Earl to reduce his wife's money "...caused a huge storme in the house,.." "Diary of Events, 1636-1650" *Ibid.* p. 558.

¹⁴⁰ Amos Walrond to Frances Seymour, 29 December, 1655, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 71.

failed. This was contrary to a deed executed at least as far back as the reign of Edward the second, stating that the estates were always to be entailed on the landowner's heir, irrespective of sex. The estates, therefore should have descended to Lady Anne, not her uncle, and with a firm belief that she had the right on her side and supported by her mother, Lady Anne decided to fight for them. She was a woman with a very well defined sense of her rights and in her mind there was no doubt that she had the right to the estates.¹⁴¹

Lady Anne's tenacity brought her into bitter conflict with her first husband, Richard Sackville, the Earl of Dorset. He wanted her to sign away her rights to the estates in return for a cash sum, and exerted considerable pressure to compel her to do so, enlisting the aid of many powerful men of the time, including King James. Lady Anne recorded her reaction to this masculine pressure in her diary.

but I beesech'd His Majesty to pardon me for that I would never part with Westmoreland while I lived upon any condition whatsoever. Sometimes he used fair means and persuasions, and sometimes foul means, but I was resolved before so as nothing would move me.¹⁴²

The Earl of Dorset also took Lady Anne's child away from her, refused to let her go to London, and cancelled her jointure - all to no avail. Lady Anne's fortitude demonstrates how strongly she felt about those lands for which she was ready to sacrifice marital happiness and even her child. Anne eventually won her case and the deaths of her uncle and cousin without heirs left her free to claim her northern lands in 1649. If a wife owned land in her own right, or had the expectation of owning land in her own right she had power to influence those around her. Sometimes wives did feel that they knew better than their husbands and had the confidence to oppose them, especially when they saw their interests threatened. Women such as Lady Anne saw their interests and rights as more important than the wishes of their husbands.

Despite the frictions that sometimes occurred however it was generally the case that wives were seen as the most able, loyal business partners for a landowner, and were used as such,

¹⁴¹ George C. Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford*, (Wakefield, Yorkshire, 1967; Second edition), pp. 1-2.

¹⁴² Lady Anne Clifford, *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford*, (ed.) D.J.H. Clifford, (Alan Sutton, 1990), "The Knole Diary, 1603-1619" 18 January, 1617, p. 45.

especially in times of crisis. Thomas Knyvett expressed most clearly the way most landowners must have felt towards their wives. In a letter to Katherine in 1643 at the height of his trouble with sequestration and imprisonment he wrote, "I knowe I cannot have a better steward then thy selfe to mannage our affaiers".¹⁴³

It is not surprising that wives were so willing to help their husbands and play an important role in safe-guarding and fostering the finances of their families. Not only did such activities give women a feeling of importance, fulfillment and purpose, which was especially valuable after they had finished bringing their own children up, it was in wives' own best interests to ensure that business and estate management ran smoothly and that the possessions of the family remained secure. If the husband suffered financially then so too would the entire family, including the wife. Consequently women were very active in such activities as rent collecton, debt collection, correspondence with agents and stewards, litigation and in protecting estates from sequestration. There is no evidence that anyone felt this to be unnatural or unusual. The activity of wives in business and estate management varied from family to family but they all expressed knowledge of their husbands affairs and played a role in maintaining the wealth of the family, being flexible enough to adapt their roles to the situations facing their husbands and families at the time. Wives therefore were one of the safety mechanisms of gentry and aristocratic life, compensating for the deficiencies caused by a disruptive and precarious existence.

¹⁴³ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, 24 March, 1643, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 52, p. 110.

Widows - Business

The experience of elite widows largely begins where that of wives ends, demonstrating a hardwon knowledge of estate and legal matters, coupled with much greater independence and freedom of action. As wives they learnt a great deal about business and finance which was put to their own good use after the deaths of their husbands.

Very little study has been made of gentry and aristocratic widows in the seventeenth century. Historians have preferred to concentrate on widows of urban merchants, tradesman or farmers, while destitute widows have also drawn considerable attention. Why have elite widows been so neglected? There are many sources available to reward such study. The explanation for the omission lies in assumptions made about such widows. As gentry wives have been regarded as superfluous and unuseful members of the family by historians such as Miriam Slater, Lawrence Stone and Susan Cahn, so the widows of these families cannot help but be dismissed in much the same way, especially as they no longer even have the virtue of being able to bear children. Their role within the family is all too often assumed to be over, that they did little and were of negligible influence.

Even those historians who acknowledge an important economic role for elite wives, fail to recognise the importance of widows of this class. Alice Clark, for example, while providing valuable information on the business activities of women gives little attention to widows. She acknowledges that elite women were important business partners for their husbands (in the beginning of the seventeenth century anyway) and illustrates this with several examples. However, although some examples of the business activities of widows are provided these are lost under her general discussion of women, and are not examples drawn from the aristocratic/gentry class anyway.

It is essential that widows be studied separately from wives because they operated under a peculiar set of circumstances and conditions that were unknown to married women. To subsume both groups under the single heading of "women" is to ignore this fundamental distinction and to present a distorted, incomplete account of the role of elite women in the seventeenth century. Status, both marital and social, so fundamentally influenced the experiences of women in the

seventeenth century that each group must be distinguished before any discussion can take place. Between widows themselves there were certain similarities but also many differences due to class and wealth. It is the situation and activities of gentry/aristocratic widows in the economic sphere that is the concern of this chapter.

Widowhood was likely to be experienced at least once by women in seventeenth century England, and some women experienced it more than once. If wives survived their child-bearing years they usually outlived their husbands and many did not marry again. Various historians have recognized this phenomenon although largely in regard to the widows of tradesman or farmers. B.A. Holderness states that widowers were much more likely to seek new partners than widows. Men, he argues, seem to have taken new wives soon after bereavement at all ages.¹ Carlton also clearly demonstrates that although the remarriage rate of widows climbed with the social scale men were still three to four times more likely to remarry than widows.² Although mainly looking at the following century, Bridget Hill discovered that widows headed households far more often than widowers or single men, one reason for this being that widows were less likely to remarry.³ Hill argues that widowers and single men were very reluctant to take on the management of a household without a housekeeper or wife whereas many examples exist of a widow taking over her husband's farm, shop or trade and "managing the household successfully without remarrying."⁴ Men, it seemed, were far less capable of functioning happily without spouses, than women.

Another feature of widowhood which could have influenced the remarriage rate of widows was the ambiguous way in which they were regarded in the seventeenth century. Women were under the authority and control of men for much of their lives, daughters controlled by fathers and wives by their husbands. Widows therefore were in an unusual position of freedom and independence in not having a man in charge of them. Again, this has been noted by historians but mainly in regard to the widows of non-gentry/aristocratic classes. Charles Carlton argues that men

¹ B.A. Holderness, "Widows in pre-industrial society: an essay upon their economic functions" in Richard M. Smith, *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*, (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 431.

² Charles Carlton, "The widows tale : male myth and female reality in sixteenth and seventeenth century England" *Albion*, vol. 10, no. 2, summer, 1978, p. 123.

³ Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford and New York, 1989), p. 241.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 242.

feared widows because "they did not fit into the age's concept of a hierarchical cosmic order". With no man "to guide them they were, so to speak, a weak link in the great chain of being".⁵ Barbara Todd also draws attention to the ambiguous situation of the widow in early modern society. While an ungoverned woman was seen as a threat to the social order and hence young single women were encouraged to marry, the widow, also theoretically a threat to the social order, was criticized and mocked for remarrying. Todd argues that a remarrying widow confronted men with the prospect of their own death and replacement by another.⁶ Whether men feared them or not, the existence of a sizeable number of widows in seventeenth-century meant that men had little choice but to deal with them.

These phenomena can be observed with elite widows as well. As with widows of lower classes, many elite widows remained single after the deaths of their husbands. Although Carlton argues that elite widows married more frequently than those in the lower classes, among the upper classes there was frequently an added incentive for these women to remain unmarried. Often their husband's will contained the proviso that they could only keep their jointure if they did not marry again. This provision was designed to safeguard the inheritance of their children. Many women of this class therefore preferred to remain single and financially independent. Many of those who owned property in their own right simply did not wish to marry again. Remarriage was clearly not always the most attractive option for a widow. Study of elite widows also demonstrates that the supposedly ambiguous nature of widowhood seldom affected these women. Indeed they were influential in a variety of activities, had many business dealings with men, and were usually treated as equals in these dealings. They were important and respected members of their community. These women could live for many years after the death of their husbands and far from being lonely and superfluous found fulfillment through the management of estates and business. The study of wealthy widows demonstrates how widely women could exercise their wills and personalities in early modern society, and what the factors restricting freedom and opportunity really were.

The most important factor distinguishing elite widows from those of other classes was that elite widows were financially secure. Upon the death of their husbands the new widows were

⁵ Carlton, "Widows tale" *Albion*, p. 126.

⁶ Barbara J. Todd, "The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered" in M. Prior, *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, (London and New York, 1985), p. 55.

given in their sole charge a "jointure" estate which commonly comprised one third (at times more) of the entire estate that had been owned by their husbands. This property was theirs to manage as they willed although they did not own it and consequently could not sell it. At their death it usually passed to the heir male. While the jointure gave the widow an income and security for the rest of her life, it also, if extensive enough, could enable her to save and so lend out money, perhaps even to buy land in her own right. Indeed, in addition to jointures some owned property in their own right which they could do with as they pleased. In an era of very inadequate poor relief, the provision of a jointure was essential to ensure the well-being of women through old age until death. It is the control of property that distinguished elite widows most clearly from those of the lower classes. There were many more destitute and helpless widows than wealthy ones. Bridget Hill states that jointures large enough to give financial independence were rare and that although widowhood could provide unique opportunities for independence and freedom for those left comfortably off, these women were a small minority. Most were dependent, vulnerable and had to struggle to survive.⁷ Consequently, when talking about elite widows we are talking about a minority of women, but nevertheless a very important minority.

Whilst all gentry/aristocratic widows controlled land there were important differences amidst this group that must be acknowledged. Firstly, important differences existed between widows who merely controlled a jointure and those who in addition owned land in their own right. Women in both circumstances provided help, advice and support for their families while they ran their own business affairs. However, those with land in their own right had the additional ability to reward or punish family members through bequests in wills. They had the power to manipulate their relations, to enforce their will and to ensure obedience amongst family members to their own wishes. They also had the ability to sell, improve, lease the land as they wished during their lifetime. A widow in control of a jointure, while assured of income and comfort, did not possess this power. The land was not hers and she had no control over where it went after her death.

Widows who owned their own land in addition to jointures, included Frances Seymour, Lady Anne Clifford and Lady Lowther of Ackworth. The will of Frances Seymour, Duchess of

⁷ Hill, *Women, Work, Sexual Politics*, pp. 251, 257-8.

Somerset sparked a bitter lawsuit between family members at her death in 1674. Study of the legal documents concerning this case sheds light on the power the duchess had to disrupt her family and reward those members she wished to. Lady Lowther of Ackworth used her wealth as a whip to enforce obedience upon her grandchildren of whom she had guardianship. She had been left £20,000 in lieu of dower by her second husband, and demonstrated her business initiative in purchasing Ackworth Park with this, in which she lived until her death in 1699 when it became the possession of her eldest son Ralph.⁸ Lady Anne Clifford possessed vast estates in Cumberland and Westmorland. She demonstrated considerable initiative in undertaking vast rebuilding on her lands and managing her tenants in new ways. She enjoyed complete freedom to enforce her will on her lands. The wishes of Lady Anne were honoured at her death in 1676. A dispute only arose a couple of years later after Lady Thanet, her daughter to whom the lands had been left, died.

Widows who controlled jointures alone were Mary Thynne and Joan Barrington. Joan Altham and Mary Wortley seemed to be similiarly circumstanced. Mary Thynne's husband left a jointure estate of £1,000 per annum, plus £200 in money to his wife when he died in 1680.⁹ Lady Barrington, as well as her jointure estate of Clavering had been left the lease of the tithes of Hatfield Broad Oak by her husband Sir Francis.¹⁰ Although these women did not have the freedom to use this land as they pleased they still had to manage and run it and to cope with all the problems associated with land management. Like most widows they received assistance and advice from family members and professionals and reciprocated with advice and help for others. The correspondence of these women shows that they were an important part of the economic organisation of the family. Although they lacked the power of property owning widows they still exerted a powerful influence within the family. What this influence was and how it worked is evident in the correspondence of these women.

Another factor influencing the experiences of widows was whether their husbands died leaving an adult heir, or one in his minority. If the heir was underage the widow usually had to

⁸ C. M. Lowther Bouch and J. Lowther Bouch, "Article 8:Lowther of Ackworth" *Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archeological Society Transactions*, New Series, 41, 1941, p. 153.

⁹ The will of Sir H.F. Thynne, 28 February, 1679, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 71, fo. 137-139.

¹⁰ Arthur Searle (ed.), *Barrington Family Letters*, Introduction, pp. 6-7.

look after the family estates and make the necessary decisions until such time as her son came of age and could take over. Bridget Hill acknowledges the importance of the widow in this situation.

If her children were not yet of age, it depended to a large extent on her efforts whether that household could continue as a viable economic unit.¹¹

Widows in this position possessed a great deal of power, but were also faced with much worrying responsibility. Such women included Lady Lonsdale, Lady Lowther of Ackworth and the Duchess of Somerset. Lady Lonsdale was named an executor by her husband who died leaving an incomplete, out-of-date will. Consequently she had many important decisions to make and uncertainties to clear away. Her eldest son was only eight years old and it would be several years before he could take over himself. Lady Lowther had guardianship of her grandsons from her first husband and her son Ralph was twenty years old when her husband died. She mentioned in her letters the actions she had to take over business until her son was old enough to take over and run them himself. Frances Seymour was in an unusual position when her husband died in 1660. His heir was not his only surviving son John (who was of age) but his grandson (son of an elder deceased son Henry). His grandson was only nine years old when he died. Frances Seymour was named an executor by her husband and the will also stated that he would like her to educate his grandchildren. A battle over the custody of the young duke raged between Frances and her daughter-in-law. This battle was eventually won by the child's mother. When this grandson died in 1671 son John inherited the title.

Widows with adult children, including the heir, naturally had less influence over the family estates and the heir than did those with an heir who was a minor. However, the widow in this circumstance often worked together with the heir and other family members to ensure the economic good fortune of the family. They worked as a team. This organisation is well described in the letters of Mary Thynne to her adult sons, particularly the eldest Thomas who was forty years of age, married and had four children of his own, when Mary's husband died. Joan, Lady Barrington was similarly circumstanced when her husband died in 1628. Her eldest son Thomas had been married to his second wife for four years. Her sons and sons-in-law wrote many letters

¹¹ Hill, *Women, Work, Sexual Politics*, p. 251.

of business to her and from them Lady Barrington's shrewd business sense appears. Lady Altham, likewise, had grown-up sons, and her son James was particularly active in various tasks for his mother such as rent collection and persuading tenants to pay what they owed. Each of these women assisted and were assisted by, their grown-up children. Each family member had their own economic role in the family, and the widow was no exception.

A certain continuity of experience from wife to widowhood can be observed with aristocratic and gentry women and must be given some attention. The experience and knowledge gained during their years as wives when they supported their husbands in economic affairs can be seen in their lives as widows. This is particularly evident, for example, in their relations with stewards and bailiffs. These men had been in service for a number of years in most circumstances. They had usually served the widow's husband and then after his death worked for the heir. In both circumstances they also served the woman - as the business partner of her husband, and as the widow running the jointure estate. If the heir was a minor they worked for the widow who ran the estate until he came of age. They served the family rather than any particular individual. If the widow owned property in her own right they helped her with this as well. The stewards and bailiffs who worked for widows therefore, were familiar to them, on the whole, and were well acquainted with their financial affairs and the way they liked things done.

This continuity can be clearly seen with Frances Seymour and Thomas Gape who continued to correspond with each other in much the same way after 1660 as they had before her husband died, although as a widow Frances no longer had to consider the wishes of a husband. Mary Thynne, also, as a widow continued to use Thomas Hawkes as a bailiff, as she and her husband had done previously. Although I have been unable to discover whether this continuity took place for the other women of this study it is likely that such women as Lady Barrington, Lady Altham, Lady Lonsdale and Mary Lady Wortley continued to make use of the same stewards and bailiffs. If they had served them well during their years of married life there was no reason to change, and every reason to keep them in service. Consequently there was a familiarity and stability about the economic activities of widows, a sureness and confidence about what they were doing. The step into widowhood, was not economically a distressing one because of this continuity.

Another example of continuity occurred again with Frances Seymour. She kept careful records of all her expences and these were listed and added up by her. One such list was a very long one detailing all the things she had spent money on since the death of her husband which she thought should be allowed to her out of his estate. The list goes on for several pages, the items including the payment of bills and debts, annuities, servants' wages, interest and payment for the services of such men as the Attorney General and the Clerk of the Crown. An example is this entry concerning her son, for the sum of £112.

paid to my Lord John Seymaure in part of his anuity (left him by my lord duke and due out of his estate) at severall times to suply his ocassions as will apeare by a perticuler of it¹²

The list demonstrates the duchess's very clear understanding of the financial affairs of her husband and her ability to deal with his estate after his death. It is one of the clearest instances where we can detect the way in which a widow used the skills she had acquired during her marriage. Indeed it was as a widow that she needed this knowledge and skill more than ever before.

There was also a certain continuity to be seen in the role played by women in business and estate management, from wife to widow. This can be observed with women who had adult sons when they were widowed and who ran jointures. During their time as wives these women supported and worked in partnership with their husbands in estate management and business. After the death of their husbands their adult children soon took the place of the husband in their financial affairs. They wrote to their sons giving information, advice, performing tasks for them, and in return sons helped their mothers with their business affairs. Women always had an active interest in the well-being of their family at large, and after the death of their husband this was intensified. They could now devote all their attention to this. This is seen in the lives of Mary Thynne, Joan Barrington and Joan Altham primarily. These woman worked in partnership with their sons to achieve their economic ends. Mary's sons were of great help to their mother not only in giving advice about estate affairs but in executing tasks for her, a role they had performed when

¹² Frances Seymour - accounts, n.d., *Seymour Papers*, vol. 6, fo. 94-97.

their father was alive. Mary was herself aware of how much help they gave her and expressed this in a letter to Harry.

I did not expect the employing you as my agent, should make you my benefactor, which truly you have been, in a present I should hardly have been stoued on my self¹³

Although the support given to Mary by her sons was important, the giving of advice and support was not of a one-sided nature. As a widow Mary continued to provide help and advice to her children on economic and financial matters, and indeed at this stage of her life had more time and freedom to do more for them than ever before. For example she wrote to her son Harry on behalf of her third son James asking if he would pay off "Sr. J.L." (probably her son-in-law Sir John Lowther) for James and explaining that this was her request not James' because she often felt uneasy when James was away from home.¹⁴ The financial affairs of her sons were no mystery to Mary Thynne and she often involved herself in them. Joan Altham also was engaged in something like a partnership with her son and a letter of 21 August, 1648 shows how they talked together over the disposal of some money and agreed to what use it should be put for which Joan asked for a receipt when they next met.¹⁵ During their widowhood women continued to interact with other family members in the economic sphere and spent even more time with them on business affairs as they took the place of their husbands in this field.

One last example of continuity occurred in the life of Lady Lonsdale. She felt strongly that she must carry out the wishes of her husband after his death. Lady Lonsdale wanted to follow in the footsteps of her husband and to achieve the things he had wanted to achieve. This is clear in a letter of Sir John Lowther to Lady Lonsdale in which he urged caution over her conduct in campaigning for votes for parliamentary elections.

¹³ Mary Thynne to Henry Frederick Thynne, 10 March, 1683, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 34, fo. 101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 20 October, 1682, fo. 77.

¹⁵ Joan Altham to her son [James?], 21 August, 1648, *Letters of the Altham Family of Mark Hall in Latton 1630 - 1716*. Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York. Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, England. (transcribed by M.E. Bohannon) f. 98, no. 124.

there is one caution to be had that the instruments you use be the best can be got, and that you do not too nicely follow your late lord's method in this particuler, for his self-sufficiency and over-spreading interest could make any instruments serve his turn¹⁶

Certain actions such as the purchase of certain property and maintaining influence in parliamentary elections were undertaken by Lady Lonsdale because it was what her husband had wished to achieve. She wanted to follow in his footsteps, using the methods he had used and achieving the things he had wished to achieve. For many widows, especially those left in charge of the estate with a young inheriting son, this was the case. They tried to the best of their ability to fulfill what they saw to be the wishes of their husbands. In this respect continuity too was maintained.

The system of property and family relationships was designed to ensure that the deaths of land owners caused the least possible disruption to the family at large in an economic sense, and to ensure that the family economy still ran smoothly. Of course sometimes problems arose with inheritance disputes, incomplete wills and such like. However, women were trained throughout marriage to run estates and make business decisions, go to law and to work well with other family members. This gave great strength to the family and helped ensure its financial survival.

The experiences of elite widows differed from woman to woman, however in all cases, the family was a very important consideration, arguably the most important consideration controlling their actions and decisions. Study of elite widows in all their differing circumstances reveals independent women with an important economic role in the family. As widows the family was still of crucial importance as it had been when they were wives, and there was still important work to do. Their activity did not seem to decline with age, rather it increased their independence and made good use of their skills and abilities. They still had the satisfaction of making a significant contribution to their family. Far from shrinking from such responsibilities correspondence demonstrates that these women positively enjoyed this activity and entered into it whole-heartedly.

There were many elements involved in the economic contributions made by widows to their families and towards their own individual advancement. The correspondence reveals detail of the day-to-day running of an estate and the types of responsibilities widows were faced with.

¹⁶ Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale, 5 March, 1701, *Lowther Papers*.

Widows appeared to remain in the country most of the time and were therefore present to oversee estate management. They used a network of family members, stewards and bailiffs to aid them in the daily running of the estate.

Collecting rents was a major task of elite widows and it appears that money came directly to them. Lady Anne, in the last year of her life, received in her chamber her stewards with rents and gave instructions for rent collection. On 17 February, 1676 she noted in her Day-by-Day Book that her servant Thomas Strickland and his man "Lanc: Machell" rode towards Appleby to gather her Candlemas rents.¹⁷ On the 29 February she noted that Strickland paid to Mr. Edward Hasell, her estate steward, for her use £305 5s. of her Westmorland rents which were due at Candlemas last and she gave Strickland an acquittance under her hand and saw the money put into the trunk in her chamber.¹⁸ Lady Anne remained in complete control of rent collection up until her death at the age of 86.

Frances Seymour also had the responsibility of organising and keeping track of rent collection. Careful account and record keeping is evident in several of her papers showing that she kept an eye on her financial affairs, checking that no mistakes were made. One paper she entitled "A perticuler of what mistakes I find in the Pembrockeshire acompts and some queries concerning it" in which she listed certain rentals which she did not understand.¹⁹ On another sheet, this time entitled "the justing the account for Essex House tenements" she highlighted some inconsistencies between the rent recorded on paper and what had been recorded in the book. She noted that on the paper in the first seven quarters Jackson's rent was 8 shillings more abated than in the book and Savage rent was 10 shillings less than in the book. After noting some more information about discrepancies she concludes "so that I conceave that Walrond (a bailiff or steward) hath charged himselfe in his owne wrong with £57 6s. and 9d".²⁰ As a landowner she had to keep track of such matters and fix any discrepancies.

There were also many letters between the duchess and her stewards, agents, bailiffs and others over rent collection and the situations of her tenants. One such letter from Thomas Gape,

¹⁷ Lady Anne Clifford, *Diaries*, Day-by-Day Book "the Last Months" 17 February, 1676, p. 254.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 29 February, 1676, p. 259.

¹⁹ Frances Seymour - accounts, (n.d.), *Seymour Papers*, vol. 6, fo. 90.

²⁰ *Ibid.* fo. 91.

her steward, demonstrates again how she had to keep a close watch on rent collection and the activities of her stewards and bailiffs. Gape wrote on 16 March, 1666 that he had examined Mr. Beardesley's accounts for 1657 and 1658 finding him in the duchess's debt for £91 15s 4d. He wanted to look further into the accounts and to be sure there was no error before he took any action. Mr. Beardesley was a steward for the duchess and Gape was suspicious of his activities. He told Frances that she was losing money and rents were not being recovered in good time.²¹ Such sums as these sources quote, indicate that Frances had charge of considerable property and that her task was not always an easy one.

On 18 August, 1664 Thomas Gape wrote to inform her that he had received the bonds and copies and would do all he could to get the moneys in and returned quickly. The tenants had been busy with the harvest and Gape needed to know how much money had already been returned so he could determine what was still in arrear. He had had a long debate with the tenants over the value of their farms and what they should pay the duchess. They made so inconsiderable an offer that Gape said he would not go further with it until he had told the Duchess about it. "I humbly leave all to your Graces consideration".²² Frances Seymour had to make decisions about rent collection and the correct price to charge. She was the one with the authority.

Lady Lowther of Ackworth too had a considerable responsibility in rent collection. She did not merely receive rents and information from others but was herself well aware of the situation of her tenants and how much they owed her and at times dealt with them directly. In August 1688 she wrote to a tenant whom she addressed "Honest Henry Bartlemew" to inform him that he had to pay his parsonage Midsummer rent as soon as he could, also that he was in arrear for two years on his bond. She ended the letter by signing herself "your loving landlady".²³ This direct request for payment of rent was also made to family members. In 1688 she wrote to her sister Leigh of Puttenham, firmly requesting she pay her overdue rent, a sum of £52 for the lease of Shooland. Lady Lowther entreated her to pay it as soon as possible because she had great need for

²¹ Thomas Gape to Frances Seymour, 16 March, 1666, *Ibid.* vol. 7, fo. 153.

²² *Ibid.* 18 August, 1664, fo. 138.

²³ Lady Lowther to Henry Bartlemew, 15 August, 1688, **Letters from the Manuscript Volumes of Elizabeth, Lady Lowther of Ackworth, 1682-1692**, (ed.) W. H. W. Powell, (1908), See photocopies of a collection of transcriptions at Muncaster Castle held in the Cumbria Record Office (Carlisle), Letter 14.

money and had been very patient in waiting so long for it already.²⁴ Following this letter there is a note in Lady Lowther's writing stating £52 had been paid in March to her London agent Mrs. Dorothy Trevisa leaving only a half year lady day rent of £26 still in arrear.²⁵

Interestingly, this letter demonstrates that she employed a woman to receive her London rents, a position of considerable responsibility. Women performed many financial and economic functions at a variety of levels, and this afforded no surprise or anxiety amongst contemporaries. Indeed, Mrs. Trevisa's predecessor had also been a woman. In a letter to Mr. Smith (manager of Lady Lowther's property in Surrey) Lady Lowther explains that God having taken her "good old friend and faithful accountant Mrs. Clarke" she did not know who to employ at London to receive her shop rents but for the present had entreated Mrs. Dorothy Trevisa, who lived with her son-in-law Sir John Lowther in Southampton Square to receive them. Mrs. Clarke had been highly regarded by Lady Lowther who considered her a dear friend and trusted worker. She told Mr. Smith that in all the time she had dealt with her she had never found her in error.²⁶ To her sister Leigh she described her as "my good friend and old acquaintance"²⁷ and to Sir John Leigh explained how troublesome Mrs. Clarke's death was to her because she had been a "just, true friend".²⁸ The loss was one in which she felt the entire family had a share as she expressed to Thomas Leigh "we have all lost a special friend, of good Mrs. Clarke".²⁹

W.H.W. Powell, editor of the letters from the manuscript volumes of Lady Lowther (1908), writes that Mrs. Clarke's business capabilities did not seem to be of a "very extraordinary character" but that Lady Lowther always "found her a devoted servant and scrupulously exact in all her dealings".³⁰ There is no reason to doubt Lady Lowther's evaluation and the only letter that still exists from Mrs. Clarke demonstrates a business-like approach and the efficient providing of necessary information. In this letter she stated that she would send all she had to Lady Lowther by the next post. Henry Bartlemew had told her he would become Lady Lowther's tenant for the whole farm and malt house and would enter both at Michaelmas. He will bring the acquittance

²⁴ Lady Lowther to her sister....Leigh of Putenham, 10 October, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 15.

²⁵ note in Lady Lowther's writing, 1688, *Ibid.* no. 16.

²⁶ Lady Lowther to Mr. Smith, 1 March, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 5.

²⁷ Lady Lowther to her sister Leigh of Putenham, 10 October, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 15.

²⁸ Lady Lowther to Sir John Leigh, 5 March, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 6.

²⁹ Lady Lowther to ?Thomas Leigh, 5 March, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 7.

³⁰ W.H.W. Powell, (ed.) *Ibid.* note to letter 5, 1688

next time and then Mrs. Clarke will give him the £20 as agreed. Mr. Thomas Leigh had come and she will return to Mr. Ralph Lowther the £10 he owes him.³¹ Mrs. Clarke seemed very honest and was no doubt a very useful servant to have in London.

Mrs. Trevisa, residing in London as a housekeeper to Sir John Lowther was obviously ideally situated to receive London rents after Mrs. Clarke's death. The one existing letter from her to Lady Lowther however suggests that she may have not been a very worthy successor to Mrs. Clarke. In June 1692 Mrs. Trevisa wrote that she had had an extremely fatiguing day with Mr. Hudson going over receipts and arrears. She is "so muddled I know not what to do, for looking over the receipts confounds me".³² However, as this is the only existing letter it could possibly present a one-sided view of the abilities of Mrs. Trevisa and it is noted that at the time of this letter she had been working for Lady Lowther for over four years so clearly was not as hopeless as this one letter might suggest. Despite the difficulties these two women experienced it is clear that they were an important part of the network of people who served the economic interests of Lady Lowther. Ability and conveniency were the important factors, not gender.

Lady Lowther also wrote to instruct her stewards and agents over rent collection. She had a very business-like approach to this. In a letter to "Master Detton" (her agent or bailiff) she writes "pray call up rents, for I want moneys, and to let one rent come when another is due is neither good for lord or tenant".³³

Mary Thynne, Joan Barrington and Joan Altham also demonstrate, through their correspondence, that rent collection was a large task in their lives. These women also demonstrate how their sons helped them in this task. Lady Anne Clifford was alone in her management of her estates, Frances Seymour was at odds with her only surviving son and the heir was a child, and Lady Lowther of Ackworth also largely seemed to do things on her own. The Ladies Thynne, Barrington and Altham however, possessed reliable sons who assisted them readily with the administration of their jointure lands. This is particularly evident in the area of rent collection.

³¹ Mrs. Clarke to Lady Lowther, 7 September, 1686, *Ibid.* Letter 14. There is however, a letter from Robert Lowther in Amsterdam to Lady Lowther explaining that one of her letters had been prevented from arriving sooner because Mrs. Clarke had written "Anserdam in Halon" instead of "Amsterdam in Holland". 19/29 September, 1684, Letter 21.

³² Mrs. Dorothy Trevisa to Lady Lowther, 14 June, 1692, *Ibid.* Letter 6.

³³ Lady Lowther to Master Detton, 1 November, (1683), *Ibid.* Letter 7.

Rent collection so occupied the letters of these women that it must have been a fairly large part of their lives.

Mary Thynne often seemed to experience trouble in receiving rents on time. In 1686 she wrote to Thomas that she wanted him to meet with the Stretton, Shropshire steward, Thomas Hawkes, but although she had written to Hawkes about this she had heard nothing from him. She said that there had to be a good sum of money in either his or the tenants' hands because she had not received any returns for nearly a year.³⁴ In 1690 Mary's problems with Thomas Hawkes had still not been resolved. She wrote to her eldest son saying that she thought she would never hear from Hawkes and had written to him three times without answer. Peers, another steward or bailiff, at Minsterley, Shropshire, had given her a return although it was not as much as was due. He wanted her to write a sharp letter which he could show to the tenants, preferring, Mary said, that she should appear in such a manner to them rather than himself. If the spring was to be a good one Peers needed to work hard to gather the rents that had been neglected for so long.³⁵ In a letter of November 1689 Mary wrote that she received a letter from Peers with particulars of those tenants in arrear since his last accounting at Drayton. The amount in arrear was £64 and Mary feared it would be more likely to increase than decrease. It was a sum which, she said, "goes deepe in my personall estate".³⁶

Lady Barrington was another widow who had a network of relations to aid her in rent collection. Her sons and sons-in-law wrote to her frequently on business. Her son-in-law, Sir William Meux, for example, wrote to her in 1628 concerning unpaid money and two fines contracted for. He told her he would take the best course possible but was afraid that the part of Elsmore rent not paid was "somewhat desperate".³⁷ Joan Altham frequently used her sons to get in rents for her. In October 1640, Joan wrote to John saying that she had asked Mr. Denam's son

³⁴ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 24 April, 1686, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 32, fo. 26. Thomas Hawkes had worked for Mary's husband and now worked for her son. The letter demonstrates problems Thomas Thynne was having with accounts. Mary could have been aiding Thomas in receiving his money as well as being concerned for her own income.

³⁵ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 25 January, 1690, *Ibid.* vol. 32, fo. 244. Estate stewards, bailiffs and agents never acted without the authority of their master or mistress. Peers probably needed written confirmation from Mary Thynne in order to show the tenants that he was not exceeding his authority and that the payments which he was ordering to be made were agreed on by their mistress.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 18 November, 1689, fo. 221.

³⁷ Sir William Meux to Joan Barrington, 8 August, 1628, *Barrington Family Letters*, Letter 5, p. 34.

to leave his father's rent for her at John's chamber. If he had done so it needed to be carefully kept until John's brother (probably James) arrived and whatever was above forty pounds needed to be sent down to her by the bearer of the letter.³⁸ Joan in another instance required James to write to one of her tenants asking why he had paid so little of his rent. He had said he would pay the rest but did not send word when or how he intended to pay this and James was to speak to him about it and to let him know her feeling on the matter.

let him know I take it not well hee should falter so with mee....and therefore let him know I expect a better account of him; and if your leasure will give you leave I pray let him bringe his bills to you and what you see is due to mee let him pay to you³⁹

It was very convenient for a widow with rents to collect from different parts of the country and different people needing to be contacted, to have adult sons to assist her. The correspondence also indicates that it could have been useful to have the added support of a son when trying to collect rents and to deal with recalcitrant tenants and stewards, as widows sometimes had to do.

The correspondence of gentry women with stewards reveals the other decisions that had to be made by these women and the other elements of estate management. In November 1665 Thomas Gape wrote to the Duchess of Somerset a very detailed letter concerning payment of money, leases and arrears. A house was to be repaired because a chimney had fallen down and there had been destruction of woods in the Park and the deer were lean.⁴⁰ Lady Lowther of Ackworth in a letter to "Master Detton" tells him that she is prepared to let a certain widow stay on as long as she had cleared up all her arrears and asked him to make sure to get Ned Beacham's arrears secured.⁴¹ Lady Anne's Day-by-Day Book, written during the last months of her life, records that she received and paid for various goods in her chamber. On 4 January she saw Thomas Wright the Quaker to whom she paid for 12 bushells of malt for beer for her house.⁴² On 7 February she was visited by the deaf woman of her almshouse and she paid her for 5 dozen

³⁸ Joan Altham to her son John, 20 October, 1640, *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 50, no. 61.

³⁹ Joan Altham to her son James, 14 January, 1648, *Ibid.* f. 79, no. 97.

⁴⁰ Thomas Gape to Frances Seymour, 26 November, 1665, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 142.

⁴¹ Lady Lowther to Master Detton, 1 November, (1683), *Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth*, Letter 7.

⁴² Lady Anne Clifford, *Diaries, Day-by-Day Book*, 4 January, 1676, p. 232.

yards of Bonlace, but was very angry with her because she had brought so much and "told her I would have no more of her".⁴³ Lady Anne was still greatly involved in household accounts and activities noting for example the preserving of fruit, payments for wood, linen, maps, paintings and other goods and the death of an old servant.

Widows often wrote to family members on a wide variety of estate matters that cropped up from day to day. In 1688 Mary Thynne wrote to Thomas, informing him of a tenant who wanted to rent some land worth about £150 to £200 a year. In a letter nearly a week later Mary reminded Thomas of this matter. He had not answered her about the tenant in the last letter. The man concerned, she said, was thought by those that knew him, to be a very honest as well as sufficient tenant. If Thomas did not have a farm of that value to let then it would be no hard matter for the tenant to be furnished in Wiltshire.⁴⁴ Widows often gave advice and information to their sons as the sons did for them. Joan Barrington's son-in-law Sir Gilbert Gerard wrote to her in 1628 about her estate.

I shalbe gladd to heare how you have disposed of your harvest, and for your inventory there is noe hast, but when I next see you I will doe what service I can therein.⁴⁵

Sir Gilbert again in 1629 wrote to Lady Joan. He said that he had dispatched her business about her inventory and goes on to discuss her lease of the tithes and the payments of these, what would be the best way to organise it.⁴⁶ Correspondence with both stewards and family members reveals how involved widows were in the day to day running of estates, facing such matters as repairs, stock, harvests and tenants on a daily basis.

Another matter related to estate management which widows often had to deal with was court keeping. We have information on this for Joan Altham and Lady Lonsdale. These courts were kept by landowners for the signing in of tenants and making contracts and such estate business. In a letter of March 1639 Joan asked her son James to write to her and tell her whether he had spoken to Mr. Jeue about the keeping of her court at Feltwell and the time that would be

⁴³ *Ibid.* 7 February, 1676, p. 249.

⁴⁴ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 8 July, 1688, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 32, fo. 192 and *Ibid.* 14 July, 1688, fo. 193.

⁴⁵ Sir Gilbert Gerard to Joan Barrington, 18 August, 1628, *Barrington Family Letters*, Letter 8, p. 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 10 February, 1629, Letter 26, p. 54.

most convenient for him if he accepted the job. The court was usually kept on Lady Day and that time was drawing near and if he could not go Joan would have to employ another. She told James that if Mr. Jeue wanted the job he needed to look through the Court Roles before he began, to learn the customs and proceedings of the former courts. These roles could not be taken away from Feltwell because Joan needed them with her so she could use them when necessary.⁴⁷ On 9 July, 1639 Joan again wrote to her son and asked him for a note of the fines that were set at the last court because some of the tenants were refusing to pay.

I pray remeber to bring the note of the fines that were set at the last court for some of them had day given them till Midsomer and now they refuse to pay beecause I know not certeynly the somes, what to demand of them and one of them says hee needs not pay till hee hath his coppie, and therefore pray Mr. Jeue to send it if hee can when you come⁴⁸

Lady Altham asked her son for assistance but it is clear that she was aware of all the important facts. She did not need him to make decisions for her, rather to execute the tasks she was unable to perform.

Lady Lonsdale also held a court at Brough Barony and received advice from Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven over this. On 3 October he wrote concerning the appointment of a suitable man to keep the Michaelmas court.⁴⁹ Mr. Atkinson (Lady Lonsdale's steward) advised that someone other than Mr. How be chosen. Sir John Lowther agreed that Mr. How should not do it but did not agree with Mr. Atkinson's choice either. He sent Lady Lonsdale a letter for her to sign appointing his own steward, William Gilpin, which she should send by the next post.

Taxation was also a fact of life for these women. This matter seemed to be the cause of concern amongst much of the aristocracy and gentry in the seventeenth-century. Many letters can be found expressing doubt over assessments and sometimes attempts were made to bring down the level of taxation. In 1690, in a letter to her son Thomas, Mary Thynne described the efforts she had gone to in trying to obtain clearer information about her assessment.

⁴⁷ Joan Altham to her son [James?], 2 March, 1639, *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 33, no. 39.

⁴⁸ Joan Altham to her son James, 9 July, 1639, *Ibid.* f. 44, no. 54.

⁴⁹ Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale, 3 October, 1700, *Lowther Papers*.

I heare not a word out of Shropshire, and tho I have writt to Peeres to know how I am rated for one tax, shall pay another beefore I am informed⁵⁰

Like all landlords Mary Thynne believed that she was not receiving quick, accurate information, needed for effective decision-making and action.

Mary Wortley certainly had trouble with taxation and relied on James Altham, her son-in-law for assistance. She often wrote to James to tell him what was happening and to ask for help and advice. In one letter she said that someone needed to look into the accounts of taxes and assessments and to "mediate for mee that I might not bee raited above my reueneues". If this did not work then she had to go to law. She ended by saying that she left "all to your opyone and direction".⁵¹ Both the above women relied on others to help them to cope with their taxation. But taxation assessments were a fact of life that these women, as widows and property controllers, had to deal with.

The activity of such women in estate and economic matters meant that they could not avoid becoming involved in legal disputes. These often took place against tenants due to tardy rents or disagreements over leases and obligations. Disputes also arose with others over debts to be paid, land ownership, damages to property and inheritance disputes concerning wills, settlements and bequests. It is in the area of litigation that elite widows demonstrated most their tenacity in fighting for what they considered to be their rights, and in their knowledge of the legal processes needed. Landowners were often involved in law suits and widows were no exception. They proved themselves willing and able to undertake any action that was necessary.

The legal disputes concerning Lady Anne are legendary. She had already personally experienced the frustration of litigation while a wife, when she tried to obtain the right to the lands which had been her father's and at the same time to ward off the predatory attempts of two successive husbands to her fortune. Her lands, when she came to inherit them, were suffering from a great deal of disorder due to the Civil Wars. Her tenants had almost become used to regarding the land as theirs and certainly had become used to paying their rents erratically, or not

⁵⁰ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 18 January, 1690, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 32, fo. 241. The tax would actually have been paid to the Shropshire Commissioners by the steward on her behalf. Mary Thynne was merely trying to find out what it was going to cost her.

⁵¹ Mary Wortley to her son James Altham, (n.d.), *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 137, no. 165.

paying them at all. They consequently did not submit willingly to the efficient organisation and new demands Lady Anne placed upon them. The result was protracted lawsuits to force them to give in. Lady Anne refers to these disputes frequently. For the year 1650 she writes

and in this time the suites and differences in law began to grow hott between my tennants in Westmorland and some of my tennants in Craven and mee.⁵²

The conflict with the tenants in Craven was worked out by a compromise agreement but the Westmorland tenants were not so easily reconciled. Through 1652 and 1653 the cause seemed to go against Lady Anne with the case being thrown out of court on 6 November, 1652 and on 9 November, 1653 going against her at the Common Pleas Bar.⁵³ In 1654 she obtained a special [edict] against the tenants, but it was not until 1656 that a decisive victory was at last achieved at the Common Pleas Bar in Westminster Hall. The juries gave a verdict in her favour, against her tenants and the next day at the second trial the tenants refused to plead, so again the jury decided in Lady Anne's favour.⁵⁴ With great satisfaction Lady Anne notes in her diary.

and the court thereupon awarded mee costes in both the said causes, [to the] vallew of two hundred and fifty poundes, and both verdicts exemplified under the seale of the courte.⁵⁵

There were two other trials, in 1656 and 1657, both of which went to Lady Anne - the first (12 November, 1656) of which she notes "the land decyded to bee myne and not the tennants. And since I leased out to another for one and twenty yeares".⁵⁶ The prolonged struggle for control of her land Lady Anne recorded in detail so that her posterity would know and remember the long campaign and her success. She had set a precedent which future tenants and landowners could refer to if such a challenge was ever contemplated again.

Much can be learned of Lady Anne's personality from her records of her disputes with her tenants. She explained just what she hoped to achieve by these actions.

⁵² Lady Anne Clifford, *Diaries*, "The Kendal Diary, 1650-1675," 1650, p. 106.

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 115, 120.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 122, 127.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 127.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 130.

I altered the tenure of this lande, which was the principall thing I was at in my suites in law with my Westmerland tennents, as being a great benefitt and advantage to mee and my posterity, and not only to mee but to all the landlords and tennants in that county.⁵⁷

This is Lady Anne the shrewd business-woman, determined to increase the profitability of her land and ready to overcome those who threatened this improvement.

The Duchess of Somerset was another wealthy widow who engaged in law-suits. That the duchess handled considerable sums of money is particularly well demonstrated by Gape's letter of 15 May, 1666. Writs had been issued against a man who owed the duchess £25,000. A petition was to be presented to the king to recall the man from overseas where he had fled to avoid paying his debt. Gape discussed in his letter what had to be put in such a petition.⁵⁸

In another instance the duchess received a letter from Clarendon. Sir Thomas Higgons had exhibited a Bill in Chancery against the duchess and desired her appearance on the last day of the term. The letter gave her notice of this and told her to "give order to those you do imploy in such cases for your appearance".⁵⁹ Being involved in litigation was not unfamiliar to the duchess as she had involved herself in such matters while her husband was alive. However, the papers dealing with her will and the lawsuit which followed it demonstrate how much more power she really had as a widow and wealthy mother, grandmother and grandmother-in-law within her family.

Lady Lowther of Ackworth's involvement in legal disputes arose from outstanding debts she was owed and also to disputes over land ownership. The extent of Lady Lowther's wealth is indicated by the fact that Lord Strafford owed her a considerable amount of money which he found very difficult to repay. The list of manors deposited as security for the loan was worth £1,500, the manors not within her deed were worth £1,000 and in addition it was listed that Lord Strafford also had an estate at Gloucestershire of £900.⁶⁰ Lady Lowther's letters demonstrate her ability to be firm and to insist on repayment, even to the point of threatening to take the debt out of

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 132.

⁵⁸ Thomas Gape to Frances Seymour, 15 May, 1666, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 7, fo. 156-7.

⁵⁹ Clarendon to Frances Seymour, 27 November, 1663, *Ibid.* fo. 135.

⁶⁰ List of Manors etc. within my Lady's Deeds - deposited as security for the loan made by Lady Lowther to Lord Stafford, 1682, *Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth*, no. 4.

Strafford's security or to go to court. In April 1683 she wrote that she had depended on his promises that it would be paid but she had heard that his orders to pay had been recalled.

I can be no longer delayed, but I must resort to the security and get it of your tenants as well as I can, for to depend upon further promises is in no way reasonable, there will be next month eight hundred and ten pound due upon plain interest, besides the times lapsed in the general payments which come to no small sum.⁶¹

She is resolved to "take my afflictions to myself and use the readiest means for their redress". In 1684 her son Robert wrote to her that he saw that Lord Strafford had paid no interest and that she had go to law, which he said, was "very bad".⁶² Lord Strafford was forced in several letters to excuse himself for his tardy payments and to ask for more time and patience from Lady Lowther. In April 1683 she instructed her agents that she was remitting her law proceedings until after midsummer next in the hope of more payments because she would rather not become involved in such a suit till her son came of age to look after his own business, though she admitted that she had a large share in it herself. She made her position very clear, that she would not fail to "dun my lord" if the payments were not made.⁶³ Clearly the interest on the loan was steadily rising and becoming more unmanageable as time went on.

Lady Lowther's involvement in legal matters was not confined to debt collection. In 1682 she was involved in a dispute with Sir Henry Marwood over his tenure of Ayton Mills. He was demanding rents, threatening to recover what he saw as his legally.⁶⁴ In a letter to Mr. Atkinson, an agent of her grandson Sir John Lowther of Lowther, Lady Lowther explained the situation she found herself in.

My son and I, are much threatened by Sir Henry Marwood for the free rents he demands now he is come to live at Busby - we are like to have a suit but I hope Sir John will free us at the worst for the arrears incurred in his grandfather's time.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Lady Lowther to the Right Honble. Lord Stafford K.G., 2 April, 1683, *Ibid.* Letter 2.

⁶² Robert Lowther, Esq. to Lady Lowther, 12/22 August, (1684), *Ibid.* Letter 20.

⁶³ Lady Lowther to Master Warne, 4 April, 1683, *Ibid.* Letter 1.

⁶⁴ Sir Henry Marwood to Lady Lowther, 25 October, 1682, *Ibid.* no. 6a.

⁶⁵ Lady Lowther to Mr. Atkinson, 1 November, 1682, *Ibid.* Letter 7.

The dispute clearly involved Sir John as her husband's heir and Lady Lowther expected him to work with her in resolving the problem. Lady Lowther also showed care in preparing her case. She wrote to an former tenant of Ayton Mill to discover if he had ever paid any rent to Sir George Marwood while he was at Ayton. Sir George was saying that he had and Lady Lowther needed to know the true situation if she was to go to court. She said she did not want to engage in such a suit "to receive a foil".⁶⁶ Lady Lowther demonstrated care and preparation in both the above matters, clearly preferring to avoid legal action if at all possible, but nevertheless adamant that if necessary she would undertake such action. She also worked with her step-grandson who was an adult, to achieve her objectives.

Lady Barrington was fortunate in having a son-in-law who was a lawyer and could give advice on legal matters. Sir Gilbert Gerard, married to her daughter Mary, proved to be a useful addition to the family with his experience and contacts. In a letter of December 1628 he gave detailed advice to Lady Barrington on a legal matter, stating that he had asked the advice of better lawyers than himself about the situation. The first matter was the question of a fine. If the surrender was made and the tenant assessed then the fine was due unto the lord and at his death had to go to the executor. The second matter was about a rent that must go to the executor and not to the heir. There was some dispute between Lady Barrington and her eldest son Thomas, where he as the heir and she as the executor had a conflict of interest. She asked Sir Gilbert to discover what the situation was legally so it could be settled.⁶⁷

Mary Wortley was involved in a dispute with Sir Thomas Wortley, who I imagine was her brother-in-law, concerning her settlements. She wrote to James that once her business was settled she would be a free woman though not a wealthy one. Her personal goods were made over in trust to her nephew Derham, her nephew Robert Anderson and to James. Sir Thomas and her brother, she says, are very "averse and unreasonable" to her.⁶⁸ In another letter she stated that the writings were all sealed and delivered between them. She had to pay a fine of £150 to Sir Thomas and he would not seal until two people stood as security for the payment. She asked James and

⁶⁶ Lady Lowther to the Late Tenant of Ayton Mills, 9 December, 1682, *Ibid.* Letter 12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* See also the letter from Sir William Meux to Lady Barrington, 8 August, 1628, Letter 5, p. 34. Sir William was also trying to help Lady Joan sort out the confusion over the fines.

⁶⁸ Mary Wortley to her son James Altham, (n.d.), *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 138, no. 166.

Robin Anderson to stand for her, pleading that she was only asking because she was forced to try and satisfy him.⁶⁹ In another letter she wrote instructing James to send someone (I assume it was Sir Thomas) a letter which she would write, stating her complaints and to declare her business.⁷⁰ The support of the family was more necessary to those widows who did not command a lot of wealth themselves. Here also the widow needed something done which she felt her son might be able to do better than herself.

Lady Lonsdale's involvement in legal matters stemmed from the incomplete nature of her husband's will. Advice about the will was needed, a fact emphasised by Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven and Lady Lonsdale's brother, Lord Weymouth. Sir John wrote in October 1700, "the first step to your quiet is to know the condition you are in, which none but counsel can tell you".⁷¹ Lady Lonsdale was facing much work at Lowther of which Sir John was aware. "These unexpected [annoyances?] that you dayly meet with, the delays in your affairs at London can give you no less trouble than you express, wherin none can more truly share than I doe."⁷²

The organisation of settlements and allowances also needed to be carried out. Sir John wrote that he and Lord Weymouth agreed that she ought at least to be put into a capacity to live anywhere and a short bill in Chancery to establish an allowance for "my lord" (her eldest son) should achieve this.⁷³ Lady Lonsdale undertook a bill in Chancery to this end and Sir John advised that the two most important points were an allowance for her son and an application of the rents of the purchased lands for the maintenance of the younger children and raising of portions.⁷⁴ A letter from Sir John in January 1701 stated that the purchase of Thornthwait would be easier now that the settlement of [86] overcame the defects in the will.⁷⁵

The power of a widow to disrupt her family and to reward and punish various members is seen most clearly in the will of Frances Seymour and the lawsuit which followed it. Frances owned property in her own right - both Drayton Manor and certain lands in Ireland. She had not been on good terms with her son John for many years. One of Frances Seymour's grandchildren,

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* (n.d.), f. 140, no. 168.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* (n.d.), f. 141, no. 169.

⁷¹ Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale, 3 October, 1700, *Lowther Papers*.

⁷² *Ibid.* 7 October, 1700.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 31 October, 1700.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 7 November, 1700.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 20 January, 1701.

Frances Finch had married Thomas Thynne on 11 February, 1673. Frances Seymour was well acquainted with her granddaughter, having raised her from childhood and in the years following her marriage the duchess became very fond of Thomas. Thomas Thynne's influence over the duchess was resented by John Seymour, who being in debt constantly, had often to rely on his mother for money.⁷⁶

The letters of Frances Seymour to Thomas Thynne's mother, Mary Thynne, express how she felt about this addition to her family. "I may shew the sence that I have of my son Thinns infinite merret from mee by acknowledging it by my actions to the utmost of my power".⁷⁷ Thomas and Frances Thynne lived with the duchess, having apartments at Essex House, and she was certainly there for the birth of their first child, her great-grandchild. In another letter to Mary Thynne the duchess writes once more about Thomas "I am certaine that I shall make no difference betweene him and anny of my owne children in my affections".⁷⁸

The Duchess of Somerset made her will in June 1673, adding a codicil on 8 September of that year and then a second codicil on 21 April, 1674. It was the second codicil which sparked the lawsuit within the family. It left all goods, chattels and personal estate of Drayton Manor to the Thynnes, freed from all gifts and legacies.⁷⁹ Papers survive which show the reasoning Thomas Thynne used to convince the Duchess that she should insert this codicil. He argued that after the payment of debts and everything else no entire manor was likely to fall to any one of the heirs so consequently they would have to sell their shares to one or sell to an outsider. Either way the manor of Drayton would be divided. He went through one by one all of the heirs of the duchess, Lady Elizabeth Seymour, Lady Jane Clifford and the children of her daughter Winchilsea. Lady Elizabeth Seymour, the heir at law would have a large proportion of the Seymour estate in Wiltshire and Somersetshire and so would have little fondness for an estate in a distant county. Lady Jane Clifford and the family of Burlington already had a noble seat in Yorkshire and a vast fortune in Ireland. The issue of Lady Winchilsea would be better off with cash portions. After preparing the way so admirably Thomas presented his petition, which was that since it was his

⁷⁶ A. Daly. Briscoe, *A Stuart Benefactress*, pp. 103, 105.

⁷⁷ Frances Seymour to Mary Thynne, 24 March, 1674, *Seymour Papers*, vol. 6, fo. 87.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* (n.d.), fo. 89. The date for this letter is around 27 October, 1673 - 8 January, 1674 (see H.M.C. 58, vol. 4, p. 361).

⁷⁹ H.M.C. 58, Bath, Longleat Manuscripts, vol. 4, Seymour Papers 1532-1686, p. 359.

children who would partake of the blood of that illustrious family of D'evereux (Frances Seymour's family), so the manor of Drayton should be left to Frances Thynne (her granddaughter) and himself by her will.⁸⁰

Thomas also told the duchess the best way this should be done, going through the rival merits and objections of clauses, codicils and deeds. Thomas, with considerable foresight, suggested that a codicil could be open to dispute but that was the method finally decided on and the codicil duly made and added to the will.⁸¹ The Duchess died in 1674 and the codicil was vigorously opposed by John, Duke of Somerset, the Countess of Southampton, Lady Jane Clifford and Lady Elizabeth Seymour. It is more than likely that Thomas Thynne had been prepared for such a reaction. Their argument was that by 21 April, 1674, when the codicil was supposed to be made, the duchess did not have the use of her reason, memory and understanding. They stated that she had had to have her hand guided to sign it, it had not been read to her and she had not remembered how to spell her name. They claimed that one of her servants, Elizabeth Attwood had been promised rewards by Thynne if she took care what she said about the decay of reason in the duchess, and that Sir Orlando Bridgeman would have been asked to advise her had she had "the use of her reason". She had stated that she had made additions to her will to benefit Lady Elizabeth Seymour but Thynne had drawn up the codicil without any provision for her and the duchess would not have signed it if she had understood what was in it.⁸²

Many witnesses were called in to testify including the servants of the duchess. The Thynnes argued that she had known exactly what she was doing and that she had loved and placed a great deal of trust in Thynne since his marriage to her granddaughter. The above two letters from the duchess to Mary Thynne were used as evidence of the affection to which she held her grandson-in-law.⁸³ Most of the witnesses seemed to believe that the duchess had been of a sound mind and the case, after approximately two years of argument and counter-argument, went in favour of the Thynnes. This decision was also a decision in favour of the duchess's mental capacity and ability and right to leave her possessions to whom she chose.

⁸⁰ Thomas Thynne to Frances Seymour, (n.d.), *Seymour Papers*, vol. 6, fo. 229-230.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* (n.d.), fo. 231.

⁸² H.M.C. 58, vol. 4, pp. 359-360.

⁸³ *Ibid.* pp. 360-361.

The amount of bitterness and the great cost expended by these various family members bears testimony to the fact that the will of the duchess was an extremely important document that had profound effects on the lives of several of her relations, many of whom were themselves wealthy and powerful individuals. The making of a will was likely to be the most significant action in the life of a widow and moreover was one over which she had complete control to reward or punish as she saw fit. In this respect gender had little influence. Where there was wealth there was power. Sir John Lowther used his will to disinherit his son Christopher because he was displeased with his behaviour. Wealth, not gender, was the key.

Such a detailed example of the use of a will is difficult to find. Dispute over the estates of Lady Anne Clifford only arose with the will of Lady Anne's daughter to whom she had left the land. However, another widow who clearly used her wealth as a weapon over other family members was Lady Lowther of Ackworth. She was given custody of her three grandsons by her first husband. Their education, apprenticeships and trades were in her hands. Their behaviour was not always that of which Lady Lowther approved. The youngest, Woolley, for example, was extravagant, indulged in drinking bouts and became involved with a woman of servant class to whom his employer feared he would marry. Lady Lowther was asked to chastize them and she did so several times. In these letters she used her wealth as a whip to ensure their obedience. If they did not behave she would have nothing more to do with them. She had spent a lot of money on them but would do so no more if they did not work hard. Her letters certainly stimulated letters from her grandsons assuring her that they would work hard, that their employer was not fair to them, and that they would never think of marrying without her consent after all she had done for them.⁸⁴ Wealth was the weapon most effective in influencing family members and if a widow possessed the means, she in turn had power over her relatives. Lady Lowther's grandchildren were particularly reliant on her because she was their guardian. These examples demonstrate that wealth was the key determinant of power and influence in the seventeenth-century. Gender had only a very limited significance where wealth was in plenty and a wealthy widow had virtually the same freedoms, abilities and activities as a wealthy man had.

⁸⁴ See discussion on pages 124, 127-130.

One activity that commonly occupied elite widows in varying degrees was building and renovations. Such activity was a natural part of estate management - there were always mills, fences, cottages, barns and stables to be repaired and built. Stewards wrote to the widow asking for authorisation to rebuild something that had been damaged, or with information of the need for a certain building. Sometimes however, widows became much more involved in building and renovations than just the occasional estate repairs and improvements. Lady Anne Clifford and Mary Thynne both were involved in important building operations during their widowhood. Their experiences in this activity demonstrate clearly the difference between widows who owned their own land and those who had charge of a jointure estate and had adult children. The roles of both these women, in the same activity, were quite different. Lady Anne, with complete control over her actions, undertook a vast, extremely costly building effort throughout her estates, which made a considerable mark on the landscape of Cumberland and Westmorland. She did this to please herself and to leave a monument to posterity. Mary Thynne, on the other hand, simply supervised the extensive renovations to her eldest son's home, Longleat. The Kendal diary of Lady Anne Clifford and the correspondence of Mary Thynne to her son Thomas illustrate the differences very well.

Lady Anne's building and repairing efforts included seven castles, four churches, various estate buildings and an almshouse. Lady Anne's diary not only records this work in detail but expresses the pride and satisfaction she had in such activity. The first reference is to 1650 where she employed herself in building and reparation at Skipton and Barden Tower. Over the next ten years work went on at her castles of Appleby, Brougham, Skipton, Brough and Pendragon. Towers were repaired, walls built, buildings and closets created, courts cleared of rubbish and roofs and gutters put in. Lady Anne took particular pride in making these castles habitable again - many had not been used for many years and Anne detailed this in her diary. In Appleby Castle the Norman Keep, known as Caesar's Tower, had not been habitable since 1569. Brougham Castle had been "ruinous and desolate" since King James had lain in it in 1617, until she had made it "lately habitable". Brough castle had "layne ruinous" since 1524. Pendragon had been largely

destroyed by the Scots 320 years ago, but in 1661 she stayed there for three nights. It was now habitable to her "great costs and charges".⁸⁵

The tremendous amount of money, time and effort that went into these building projects demonstrate how free Lady Anne Clifford was with her own property and the great amount of wealth she had command of. The repairing and rebuilding of these castles was largely designed to satisfy her own sense of importance and pride. It did not significantly improve the value of her lands - on the contrary it took a lot of money from other projects, and required a great deal of upkeep, all of which was a drain on the finances of the estate. But Lady Anne did not have to consider anyone else when she acted, and for her, an old-fashioned woman in an old fashioned region, the castles were very important.

Along with her pride in her inheritance went a practical, shrewd business nature. Her fine castles were symbols of her wealth and power. However, that wealth and power came from her estates, which needed to be efficiently managed. Consequently her building and repairing activities were not restricted to her own places of residence but were also directed to churches and such estate buildings as farms, barns, cottages and outbuildings of all kinds. The work done on these structures reveals Lady Anne's intimate knowledge of the area over which she ruled, and the needs and mechanics of estate management. Again, these developments are detailed by Lady Anne in her diary.

She built or rebuilt many important buildings on her estates. A new water-cornmill was built at Sillesden manor in Craven in 1653 and an old mill at Brough was pulled down and rebuilt in 1661.⁸⁶ In 1662 she ordered several new buildings including a brewhouse and bakehouse inside Brougham castle and a kitchen, stable, bakehouse and brewhouse at Brough castle. At Pendragon she built a wall- "10 quarters in height and 90 roodes in compasse" with two gates and a stable, coachhouse, brewhouse, bakehouse and washhouse inside the court with a little chamber over the arched gate.⁸⁷

In 1655 most of Appleby church was pulled down on Lady Anne's orders, because it was so decayed. She made a vault in the church for herself to be buried in. The repairing of the

⁸⁵ Lady Anne Clifford, *Diaries*, "The Kendal Diary, 1650-1675" pp. 110, 120, 146, 154.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 120, 150.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 157-158.

church, she took care to mention, cost her six or seven hundred pounds.⁸⁸ At Skipton Church the steeple was rebuilt.⁸⁹ In 1658 she pulled down and rebuilt Bongate church and in 1659 pulled down and rebuilt the church of Nine Kirks.⁹⁰ Her church building, although not directly related to estate management, exemplified her practical piety.

As well as being aware of the needs of estate management Lady Anne regarded charity and poor relief as one of the responsibilities and duties of her position as a wealthy landowner. In 1651 she was present at the laying of the first foundation stone of her almshouse in Appleby town, for which she had purchased the land, and which was completed in 1653.⁹¹ Lady Anne herself decided who should be its beneficiaries, choosing eleven poor widows and an "injured maid", and placing a "deceased minister's widdow" in charge of them.⁹² Her concern for destitute widows shows her awareness of not only a pressing problem but also her sympathy for them as a widow herself, although a much more fortunate one.

The impression which remains after reading Lady Anne's diary is that she positively enjoyed spending her money on such activities. She built largely for herself - as a part of her own self-consequence, and to make up for all the years that she was denied what she believed was rightfully hers. Her frequent comments on the costs she expended, the improvements she made after years of desolation, how much she improved her property compared to previous owners and her keen sense of history illustrate this vividly. She was building monuments to herself that would stand for years and symbolised her wealth and power in the region. Lady Anne had the ability to significantly change the landscape of the area. She alone decided and acted.

Lady Mary Thynne's experience in rebuilding and renovations at Longleat was vastly different. Her oversight of her son's program of renovations there was one of the most useful examples of the way in which Mary helped her son administer his estate. Mary Thynne did not involve herself for her own benefit, her role was to help her family and she had the time and the ability to do so, and she demonstrates how a widow who was not independently wealthy could still remain of importance to the family. Longleat was the principal seat of the Thynne's and the

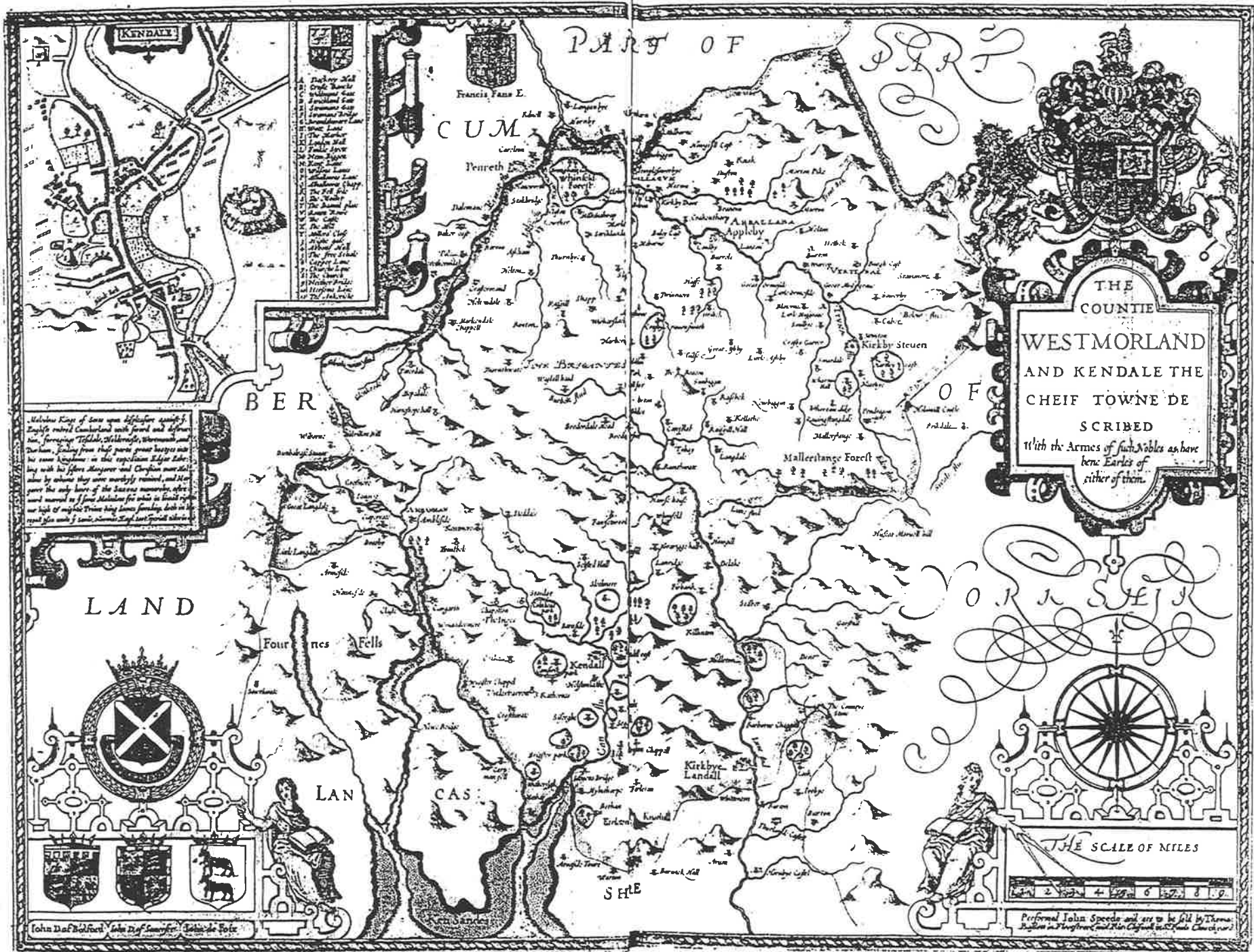
⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 124.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 125.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 138, 141.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 110.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 116.



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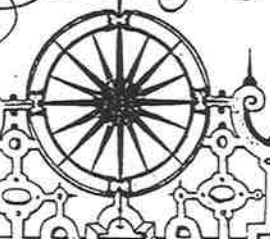
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THE
COUNTIE
OF
WESTMORLAND
AND KENDALE THE
CHEIF TOWNE DE
SCRIBED

With the Armes of such Nobles as have
bene Earles of
either of them.

O R J S E J R



THE SCALE OF MILES

Performed by John Speede and are to be sold by Thomas
Blaugie in Fleetstreet, and John Chapman in St. Dunstons Church-yard



- A. The River of the Ure
- B. The River of the Aire
- C. The River of the Wharfe
- D. The River of the Ribblesdale
- E. The River of the Aire
- F. The River of the Wharfe
- G. The River of the Ribblesdale
- H. The River of the Aire
- I. The River of the Wharfe
- K. The River of the Ribblesdale
- L. The River of the Aire
- M. The River of the Wharfe
- N. The River of the Ribblesdale
- O. The River of the Aire
- P. The River of the Wharfe
- Q. The River of the Ribblesdale
- R. The River of the Aire
- S. The River of the Wharfe
- T. The River of the Ribblesdale
- U. The River of the Aire
- V. The River of the Wharfe
- W. The River of the Ribblesdale
- X. The River of the Aire
- Y. The River of the Wharfe
- Z. The River of the Ribblesdale

Malcolme King of Scots upon his returne from
England returned into Scotland with his army
and his forces, forming the hills, mountains, and
valleys, taking from their parts great booty and
his own kingdom in the region of the Lake
with his three Mayors and Clergymen, and the
valley by which they were yearly visited, and he
was the only lord of the Lakes, and he was
never married as if his Malcolme for white in hand
one high of might three being James fourth in
that line with his son, James, King of Scotland



John Diefholfoord John Diefsonifer Antioche Boie

symbol of their wealth and status in society. It also was the place where Thomas, his wife and children lived and entertained for the majority of the year. Renovations therefore needed to be done with great care and involved a not inconsiderable expenditure. Thomas placed his mother in charge of this daunting task. As a trusted family member and experienced business-woman she could be relied upon and her assistance freed her son to attend to his pressing concerns elsewhere.

Thomas and his family lived in London at the time of the renovations and therefore there are many letters from Mary to her son explaining the progress of the work, the problems encountered and payments which needed to be made. On 30 April, 1683 Mary wrote an extremely detailed letter to Thomas about Longleat telling him what had been achieved. She was sure, she said, he would like to hear how the work advances. She was trying to finish the rooms below as fast as she could but it could not be done until alterations were made above for the boards to be taken up. In the two upper rooms all the rubbish of the walls and the beating down of the ceilings would spoil the new ones below. The chamber she slept in while overseeing the work was not going to be very pleasant for her, so she suggested that the children go into Thomas's bedroom and she go where they are now. Mary seemed to be looking after her grandchildren while all this was going on. She went on to talk about payments. The cash Thomas had left was all gone and no more had come in. The workmen needed to be paid and Mr. Allan feared Thomas was in greater arrears to them than he knew. Mary offered her son a piece of advice, "noething is of greater preiudice to a person that vallewes his reputation then the clamor of traidsmen and workemen". She also offered to use her own money for a while and Thomas could pay her later.

If you please I will make a bill upon Mr. Coggs for a hundred pound and Mr. Allin shall receive it for your use and I take his receipt for it till I can have yours for I hope the bills out of Shropshire are paid.⁹³

Mary certainly placed more importance on the prompt paying of tradesmen than was characteristic of the elite classes of that time.

In May 1683 Mary was still supervising at Longleat and her letters show her close attention to detail. The altering of the chimney in the hall she believed would not take less than three weeks,

⁹³ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 30 April, 1683, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 204.

although Mr. Taylor claimed he could do it in a fortnight. The best time for doing it would be in her son's absence because of the great dust there would be. She would delay work on another chimney for she felt it would not be a good idea to thrust in a chimney so near to the timber and the leads and therefore would wait until Thomas came home to see for himself. The weather was uncertain and the wall had not been advanced beyond the surface of the ground and she feared the brick would not be burnt when they needed it.⁹⁴ The Thynnes demonstrate the way in which a family supported and reinforced each other in financial management. Mary Thynne - despite the fact that her husband was dead, her children grown to adulthood and her lack of large personal estates still had a significant role to play within the family and important tasks to perform. Lady Anne Clifford and Lady Mary Thynne were both elite widows involved in building but their different circumstances meant that their roles in this area were vastly different, although both made an impact in their different ways. When a widow had wealth there was no limit to what they could do, even though they were women. Admittedly Lady Anne Clifford was very unusual, but she still serves to demonstrate the possibilities to which women could attain if they had the means. Mary Thynne demonstrates the fulfillment widows still received through their families, even when their children were powerful adults and they themselves were widowed. They still had knowledge and experience that were of use, and they were trusted by men with important work.

Widows were also involved in the buying and selling of land and stock. Their freedom to do this largely depended on whether they personally owned land or not. Widows who involved themselves in such activity included Lady Lowther of Ackworth, Lady Lonsdale and Lady Barrington. Despite the difference in circumstances of these women, all these examples demonstrate the shrewdness of elite widows when it came to business, and the fact that sentiment was not allowed to get in the way of a good business deal. A certain tenacity is also evident. These women had to deal with men in these negotiations and did so admirably. Family members often became involved.

For example, Lady Lowther of Ackworth bargained very shrewdly with her step-grandson, Sir John Lowther of Lowther, over the sale of some land in 1682. Sir John had no objections to selling the land but disagreement arose over the price to be paid. Lady Lowther did

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* [5?] May, 1683, fo. [206?].

not want to pay more than £400 and Sir John did not want to take less than £500. In their letters each tried to convince the other that the price they put forward was the one nearest the true value of the lands and what they could afford to allow. In December Sir John finally offered to sell at £450, which, he said, he would be the loser by. Lady Lowther accepted this offer, although she added that it would not be to her advantage.⁹⁵ Since Sir John had the advice of his very experienced steward and since Lady Lowther was a shrewd bargainer it is impossible to determine what price the two really thought was reasonable. Their compromise decision reflects their recognition that neither side would agree to what the other wanted. In this negotiation, Lady Lowther appeared at least as tenacious as Sir John, forcing him to the compromise offer.

Lady Barrington also became involved in a property sale with a family member - in her case her son Robert. He wrote to her in 1629, giving information about the sale of her underwoods. She wanted to know what he had done about the sale and he replied that he had told her he was going to sell underwood from six acres and 20 trees for timber and that to that end he had had some of the townsmen to view it with him, hoping that they would want to buy it. However they would not agree to join with him at the price of £50 and only offered £44 or £46. Robert decided he would buy it himself and came home and told Lady Joan so. "Your answer to me was you must trust me with what I did for you, and I thinke I have discharged the part of an honest man." He told Lady Joan that although he could have had it at the cheaper price that the others offered, he valued the things he has bought from her at too high a rate. He goes on to discuss payment.

For the money, the usuall tyme of payment for wood sale is Whitsuntide, but I purpose to pay it at Lady Day without faile. I hope this will give you full satisfaction in this busines⁹⁶

Lady Joan was treated much like any other business partner her sons had dealings with. Family members could benefit from wealthy widows and vice versa. It is difficult to determine Lady

⁹⁵ Sir John Lowther to Lady Lowther, 3 December, 1682, Letter 10 and Lady Lowther to Sir John Lowther, 9 December, 1682, Letter 11, **Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth**.

⁹⁶ Robert Barrington to Joan Barrington, n.d., [4 February, 1629], **Barrington Family Letters**, Letter 24, pp. 51-52.

Barrington's stand as there are no letters from her in this instance, however the tone and detail of Robert Barrington's letter to his mother indicate that no sale would go ahead unless all the facts were presented to her and she was completely satisfied that the deal was to her advantage.

The women in the above two examples knew what they wanted and set about obtaining it. The transactions were relatively straightforward. For Lady Lonsdale however there was a great deal of confusion and uncertainty over whether she had the means to purchase some property, called Thornthwait. The letters of Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale describe the problems facing this purchase. He thought this property very desirable to own but he did not see how she could competitively bid for it when her financial position was so very unclear due to the incompleting will of her husband. He explains this in a letter of September 30, 1700.

I doubt your ability to deal for it, till I understand the will better than I doe, we know that personal estate what it is but where the childrens maintenance shal arise, is what I press so much to be advised off by counsell. Time spends, and the longer you are in the dark, the more wil be the difficulties I doubt not but my Lord W[eymouth] and every man of an estate that looks after it, has business enough of their own, but 'tis a critical time with you⁹⁷

The problem of Thornthwait crops up in several letters, obviously Lady Lonsdale did not want to give up on it too easily. In a letter of 3 October Sir John wrote that the neighbourhood of Thornthwait made it a desirable purchase even though it was dear but Lady Lonsdale had no moneys beyond her daughters' portions and so it was not advisable to bid for it. He approved of Lady Lonsdale's desire to go ahead with it because it had been what her husband had wanted.⁹⁸ In this situation Lady Lonsdale was evidently trying to fulfill the wishes of her husband. She was in charge of the estate and was trying to ensure that this estate was advantaged to the best of her ability, ready for her son when he came of age. Purchase of Thornthwait was clearly an important part of this goal. The problems with the will were hindering this. On 17 October Sir John wrote that there did not seem to be enough money to expend on Thornthwait and that the difficulties

⁹⁷ Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale, 30 September, 1700, *Lowther Papers*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 3 October, 1700.

found by counsel against the will seemed to confirm this.⁹⁹ In November he said that although there was an opportunity for purchasing Thornthwait he thought she would not be capable of it, not through want of money but because her business was not "rightly adjusted".¹⁰⁰ The number of letters written by Sir John to Lady Lonsdale (at least four in three months) demonstrates how determined Lady Lonsdale was over this issue. If it was at all possible she was going to purchase Thornthwait. Clearly the confusion over the estate prevented her from making the business decisions she wanted to make.

In all the above instances, elite widows dealt with male family members as equals. They displayed as much determination, ability and knowledge as their male counterparts. Lady Lowther and Lady Barrington were shrewd in their purchase and sale of property, and Lady Lonsdale made sure that Sir John investigated fully into the ability she had for the purchase of Thornthwait. In these instances too, especially in regard to Lady Lowther and Lady Lonsdale, these women were not acting purely for their own benefit. They wanted to ensure that the estate increased in value for those it would be left to. In particular Lady Lonsdale was concerned to keep to the wishes of her late husband and to benefit her young son, the heir.

One important area in which women, and widows were involved was parliamentary elections. Parliamentary elections, though not directly connected with finance, nevertheless deserve attention because politics were another way in which a family exercised influence, power and consequence. Robyn Priestley has also acknowledged the importance of women in politics. She argues that although their scope was not as great as for men, women, particularly widows, at times wielded considerable influence.¹⁰¹ My discussion will concentrate on the political contributions of widows for which I have found the most evidence. Widows were important in the process in differing ways, depending on their individual power and circumstances. Lady Lonsdale supported candidates from her family after the death of her husband. The letters of Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale demonstrate the many different measures and powers Lady Lonsdale enacted, and how intimately she was involved in politics. They provide detail on the soliciting of votes, use of influential people, steward and agents and the writing of

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 17 October, 1700.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 11 November, 1700.

¹⁰¹ Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, p. 193.

persuasive letters. Lady Lonsdale controlled the estate for her young son and did her best to sustain the Lowther political "interest" until the heir was old enough to do so himself. A very different role was played by Mary Thynne, Lady Lonsdale's mother. Her son Thomas was much involved in politics and Mary Thynne's letters to her sons reveal a keen interest, along with information and advice. Her son James and her son-in-law Richard Howe ran for parliament in 1690 and Mary's letters to Thomas demonstrate her role in this matter very clearly. She supported her sons as far as she was able, but her role was, of necessity, a much more passive one than her daughter's. A final example can be provided by Lady Anne Clifford who, in the final months before her death at 86 years of age, was asked to help the candidatures of friends and family members. Her role was very limited but she demonstrates that she had the power to help someone achieve success in the political field.

In 1700, when the letters from Sir John to Lady Lonsdale were written, a great deal of activity was taking place in preparation for parliamentary elections. Sir John, on 29 August said that not half the pains had been taken for the Revolution that were now being undertaken for the present vacancies and the next parliament.¹⁰² Much planning and thought went into these matters and like all aristocratic/gentry families the Lowthers were immersed in it. With her late husband's activity in this area, and her brother, Lord Weymouth, in the Lords, Lady Lonsdale was familiar with such matters and the tactics that they involved. She was also keen to follow in the footsteps of her husband and to support his interests in the two counties in which they were influential - Cumberland and Westmorland. Sir John of Whitehaven's son James was one of the candidates supported by Lady Lonsdale and Sir John and the other was a Mr. Lawson.

Lady Lonsdale used her agents and stewards to solicit for votes and to perform other tasks necessary to successful campaigning. The directions for much of this came from Sir John. Soliciting for votes seemed to be the principal activity. In September Sir John wrote saying that Mr. Atkinson had secured 700 votes in Brough Barony.¹⁰³ Three days later he urged Lady Lonsdale to hasten her orders to Mr. Atkinson for Mr. Lawson. Mr. Lawson had been to Whitehaven and Sir John believed he would do well enough there although the opposition had had

¹⁰² Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale, 29 August, 1700, *Lowther Papers*.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 23 September, 1700.

a great start on him. The opposition had great interest at Penrith and so Mr. Forth had to take some pains there. Sir John asked Lady Lonsdale to write "two words" to Mr. Bird to assist Mr. Forth's endeavours. Some more information was given and Lady Lonsdale was asked to write another letter, this time to Mr. Jackson.¹⁰⁴ On the 30 September Sir John again asked Lady Lonsdale not to fail to give "pressing orders" to Mr. Atkinson and to send to all her bailiffs. There was some worry over Lady Lonsdale's parson Threlkeld, who seemed to enjoy drinking with the opposition. According to Sir John his wife had sense but he did not know if she had any influence over her husband. Some of Lady Lonsdale's servants might direct his vote and if he wanted to solicit he should do it on the right side.¹⁰⁵ On 18 November Sir John wrote that his son and Mr. Howard had begun their applications at Carlisle because of the early appearance of the opposition. Lady Lonsdale should write to Mr. How her agent there so the country would know that she carried on the same interest as her husband did, which the other side was trying to deny. He also suggested that Mr. Read, an influential alderman, be used at Carlisle. For some reason Lady Lonsdale felt some resentment towards him but Sir John argued that he had served well at Brough-Barony upon Mr. Lawson's account, more than Sir John's letters or her agents efforts together had managed. Sir John added however that he did not insist on anything she did not approve of.¹⁰⁶

As well as using men to solicit votes, (and trying to keep others loyal) Lady Lonsdale and Sir John also used the keeper of the court-leet at Burgh to influence votes. They were careful to appoint someone who would do this well. As stated above Sir John wrote in October to say that his old estate steward, William Gilpin should be given the court¹⁰⁷ and wrote a letter asking him to do so which Katherine had to sign if she agreed. This letter asked Gilpin, as a lawyer, to take charge of the court and added as another of his duties the following.

¹⁰⁴ **Ibid.** 26 September, 1700.

¹⁰⁵ **Ibid.** 30 September, 1700.

¹⁰⁶ **Ibid.** 18 November, 1700.

¹⁰⁷ **Ibid.** 3 October, 1700.

And that you wil take that oportunity to dispose the freeholders there to comply with the recommendation that the Justices of Peace have made of Mr. Lawson to serve the county in Parliament.¹⁰⁸

On 10 October in a letter to Lady Lonsdale Sir John wrote that as to the elections she had done her part, or would, if Mr. Gilpin kept Brough-Barony Court.¹⁰⁹

Lady Lonsdale clearly had an important, active role in organising and rallying support for parliamentary candidates. She had a wealth of resources - especially in the form of manpower, at her disposal. The above letters, all from Sir John, are one-sided, and it can easily seem that Lady Lonsdale merely followed Sir John's orders and had no ideas of her own. Close scrutiny of the above correspondence reveals however, that often there were disagreements between Sir John and Lady Lonsdale. In a letter of 7 November Sir John wrote that he had received her letter of the 26th. which he described as

very full and expressive enough of your sentiments of business and if in some things different from mine, the mistakes may be on my side. Mr. Bird no doubt would doe the business of ye court in B[rough] B[arony] very well, but he is too much ingaged elsewher to be entire in the matter of the election. If you wil have my lords interest there supported as it ought to be Mr. Gilpin must be made steward there.¹¹⁰

While remaining polite and reasonable, Sir John tried to make sure his plans remained the ones in force. Despite Lady Lonsdale's knowledge of such matters, Sir John had far more experience.

Although Sir John assisted Lady Lonsdale this was not all one-sided and Lady Lonsdale used her influence to aid Sir John's son as well. In a letter of 23 November Sir John wrote to express his gratitude for a letter she wrote on behalf of his son which was "exceedingly wel rec'd, and wher al is like to succeed as wel as we can desire".¹¹¹ There was a two-way mutual assistance between Sir John and Lady Lonsdale. Their goals had more chance of succeeding if they worked together.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* October, 1700.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 10 October, 1700.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 7 November, 1700

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 23 November, 1700.

Lady Lonsdale's importance and influence (in her own right) is also evident in her negotiations with Lord Carlisle. Lord Carlisle was a powerful man whose influence and support would be helpful to the success of a candidate in Cumberland or Westmorland. Sir John told Lady Lonsdale that their success would all depend on what he would do.¹¹² He was to be the mayor of Carlisle and intended to be present at the Penrith and Appleby sessions.¹¹³ Sir John's letter of 30 September reveals that the support of Carlisle had been achieved, "my Lord Carlisle espouses the interest of your family with great zeal".¹¹⁴ It was important for Lady Lonsdale to be on good terms with Lord Carlisle and this she managed with considerable success. Sir John wrote to her on 11 November when she was in London, "My Lord Carlisle is at London ere this, and I doubt not but he wil discourse you of all the publick affairs of this country".¹¹⁵ Clearly a role in public affairs was not denied to women, and given ability and circumstance they could make an impact, as Lady Lonsdale obviously did. Background, wealth and ability counted - not gender.

Mary Thynne also had a role in such matters, although her role was limited. Her sons were adults and she ran her jointure estate herself. Nevertheless she was knowledgeable in politics and kept informed of all that was going on. Apart from a few letters to her son Thomas expressing interest in his activities as an M.P. prior to his elevation to the peerage in 1682 there is a particularly rich string of letters from herself to her son Thomas at the beginning of 1690. At this time her son, James and son-in-law, Richard Howe, were candidates. The role of Mary Thynne as a conveyer of important news becomes evident in these letters, as does the fact that she must have been intimately acquainted with all the events that were taking place. Mary described her situation and role on 15 February, 1690.

whilst your two brothers are so employed in the pirsutt of the great affaire in hand, I doubt there leasure to aquant you with what passes, and therefore take that taske upon my selfe¹¹⁶

¹¹² *Ibid.* 29 August, 1700.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 26 September, 1700.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 30 September, 1700.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 11 November, 1700.

¹¹⁶ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 15 February, 1690, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 32, fo. 258.



Catherine
Sister to the Duke of Weymouth
Grand Daughter of the Lord Coventry
Wife to John Vane, Lord of the Manor
& Grand mother to John Vane, Master of the Manor

The letter which follows details the great efforts taken by Howe and Thynne and their attempts to secure interest.

In a letter of 23 February, 1690 Mary wrote to tell Thomas that things were going on prosperously and she added "each day gains us interest"¹¹⁷ thus identifying herself with the success and failure of her son and son-in-law in their campaigns. She clearly saw herself as part of it. It certainly occupied her thoughts as she herself acknowledged to Thomas in March.

when I heare from thee I hope I shall bee informed of the proceedings you have made in your owne affaire, tho the publick concerne I beeleave takes up all our thought, I am sure it doth so much of mine whilst your bro are so ingaged that I thinke of little elce as I should doe¹¹⁸

In her letter of 1 March, 1690 she told Thomas that the elections at Cirencester would be on Tuesday and those at Gloucester on the 12th. of that month. They and their friends had neglected nothing and whatever happened there would be a good appearance of the most sufficient men of the town and of the gentlemen in the country. James was fighting a great interest and his would be the greater victory if he won. The election at Glosucester they heard would not be until the 18th. and this made some believe it was kept in reserve if one failed in another place.¹¹⁹ Mary Thynne demonstrates considerable knowledge and sense in this letter in summing up their chances of success.

On the 9th. she wrote to inform Thomas of the success of Richard Howe in Cirencester. It had cost him a great deal but it put by a man that would have done great hurt for one that might do good. James tried hard and his success or failure was not yet decided.¹²⁰ On the 16th. she wrote that James had unfortunately failed in his attempt and that it was easy for people to promise their interest but hard to have it performed and James found little interest when it came to trial. Richard Howe even found his attempt much more difficult than he anticipated.¹²¹ These letters demonstrate the wholeheartedness in which Mary entered these activities, her interest and joy at

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 23 February, 1690, fo. 262.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 5[?] March, 1690, fo. 266.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1 March, 1690, fo. 264.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 9 March, 1690, fo. 268.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 16 March, 1690, fo. [270?].

success and commiseration at failure. She was a useful support and relayer of information and with her knowledge of such matters was able to make sensible judgements.

The fact that Lady Anne was still a very powerful woman through the last months of her life is testified by the fact that she still was involved in requests for patronage. On 22 February, 1676 she received a letter from her daughter Thanet requesting that if there should be another parliament that Lady Anne would make her son John one of the burgesses for Appleby.¹²² Lady Anne had received another request for patronage in January when Lord Wharton's eldest son asked her if he could serve as knight if there was to be a new parliament, to which request Lady Anne gave her consent and promise of assistance.¹²³ Lady Anne, as a great landowner, could mobilise a substantial "interest" during elections.

Both Lady Lonsdale and Mary Thynne had an important role to play in politics in the seventeenth century even though this was a domain closed to women. Within the limitations imposed upon them these women found ways to exert their influence. They were part of the team of relations and servants who worked together to achieve success. Lady Anne too, was a powerful influence needed for success. So in the political as well as the economic sphere elite widows found a meaningful role to perform and continued to exercise power and influence, shaping events around them.

The activities outlined and discussed throughout this chapter indicate that widows, far from being confined to superfluous, useless lives, functioned in the wide spheres of politics and economics, and thought nothing of dealing with men in these spheres. They were often shrewd managers and were prepared to use all means possible to obtain their goals. But how did others perceive wealthy widows and their abilities and position in society? How did widows perceive themselves?

It is clear that these women were not always admired and at times clashes occurred. Because they dealt in matters concerning money this was perhaps unavoidable. Often disputes took place within their own families, especially with their adult sons. It was natural to expect such conflict between the widow, with her experience of the way her husband used to run financial

¹²² Lady Anne Clifford, *Diaries, Day-by-Day Book*, 22 February, 1676, p. 256.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 7 January, 1676, p. 234.

affairs, and her son now in charge and with perhaps new ideas about management. There may have been feelings of resentment on the side of the widow who was not longer the focal point of the estate, although she might try to be. A clash occurred between Joan Barrington and her eldest son Sir Thomas Barrington in 1629. Joan expected payment of some money from Thomas which was not forthcoming. Thomas explained that he could not pay as yet but would not neglect to do that which was expected of him.¹²⁴ This letter of February was followed by one in July where it becomes evident Thomas still had not managed to satisfy his mother. He thought he had arranged it all with her to her satisfaction and he would have given her payment priority over his others if she had insisted on it.¹²⁵ Sir Thomas was also involved in a dispute with his mother over some fines in which she sought the advice of Sir Gilbert Gerard to determine to whom the fine should go.¹²⁶ The relationship between mother and son did not always run smoothly, especially when financial matters were at stake. Sir Thomas clearly felt that his mother was rather unreasonably making problems, which he had done all he could to settle. Of course the relationship was not always like this and as has been observed previously, Mary Thynne, Joan Altham and Mary Wortley worked in partnership with their sons to the advantage of both parties, as did Lady Barrington at times.

Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven demonstrates that he assessed each person's abilities on their merits not as women or men. He rebuked Lady Lonsdale with brutal candour in a letter of 29 August, 1700. Lady Lonsdale was in difficulties with her late husband's affairs. Sir John said that his mother-in-law (Lady Lowther of Ackworth) had understood as much about her husband's estate as his father himself had and that if Lady Lonsdale had used the same application, which he said she had not, then she would have understood it as well as his mother-in-law had, maybe even better.¹²⁷ Clearly Sir John believed Lady Lonsdale had neglected to help her husband in business. Because she had neglected her duties as a wife she was paying the price as a widow, with great difficulties to face. There is no way to discover how true Sir John's charge was. However, considering the difficult task Lady Lonsdale undertook at her husband's death it seems unlikely

¹²⁴ Sir Thomas Barrington to Joan Barrington, 14 February, 1629, *Barrington Family Letters*, Letter 27, p. 55.

¹²⁵ Sir Thomas Barrington to Joan Barrington, 8 July, 1629, *Ibid.* Letter 43, pp. 72-73.

¹²⁶ Sir Gilbert Gerard to Joan Barrington, 17 December, 1628, *Ibid.* Letter 18, pp. 44-45.

¹²⁷ Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to Lady Lonsdale, 29 August, 1700, *Lowther Papers*.

that she was ignorant of business matters during her husband's lifetime. Her husband certainly trusted her enough to name her his executor. Sir John's comment illustrates however that he did not automatically believe all women to lack business skills but rather assessed them as individuals. He was full of praise for his mother-in-law, Lady Lowther of Ackworth, and her abilities. She, according to Sir John, had properly fulfilled her duties as a wife. It was taken for granted that involvement in economic affairs was an important part of the duties of an elite woman.¹²⁸

Sir John acknowledged that as an executor Lady Lonsdale was of crucial importance to the estate. Her presence was necessary for any business to be done. On 19 September he urged her to return to Lowther.

You may phaps object against the liberty I take of advising your return, but its what you must certainly doe,....tis impossible any business there, as Mr. Atkinson tells you, can be carryed on wthout your presence, and with it and a good agent that may have recourse to you for your approbation it may be done. You wil perhaps object you are not a sufficient judge to give directions but you wil find that very easie when things are fairly stated to you, besides you wil never want advice wher you are doubtful.¹²⁹

Lady Lonsdale was clearly the most important person governing the decisions on the estate. As an executor she was a necessary authority behind many of the decisions which had to be made. The correspondence also shows that she had her own ideas about the running of her affairs and did not just listen to others and meekly obey.¹³⁰ She received advice but she was the one who had to decide whether to act upon it or not and she had the confidence to do so.

While it seems as though widows such as Lady Anne Clifford, Frances Seymour, Lady Lowther of Ackworth and Lady Lonsdale were totally in control and were respected, even when disagreements took place, other women did not appear as strong, or did not see themselves to be as strong as men in the economic sphere. Joan Altham and Mary Wortley both expressed the

¹²⁸ **Ibid.** Sir John however did demonstrate in one instance that he thought some things should not be attempted by women. Lady Lonsdale had been talking to her sister Lowther who had told her that Sir John had said Lady Lonsdale had power to help her in regard to her annuity. Sir John denied saying this and added that he was sorry they had spoken about it "since a matter of this nature seems not to fall under women's determination". 10 October, 1700.

¹²⁹ **Ibid.** 19 September, 1700. See also his earlier request 9 September, 1700.

¹³⁰ **Ibid.** See Sir John's letter of 7 November, 1700, discussed earlier.

belief that their sons could perhaps succeed where they had failed in a difficult financial situation. Lady Altham, in a dispute over dealings with her stock and crop said that as soon as she had heard from the individual concerned she would send to James, "choosing rather to trouble you then any othere and thank you for your willingnesse and readinesse, to assist mee".¹³¹ She hoped for some resolution soon and added that perhaps James' words would hasten the individual concerned more than her letters. More was needed than Lady Altham felt herself able to achieve. Mary Wortley, in her dispute with Sir Thomas Wortley, wanted James to send a letter she had written to Sir Thomas about her complaints and stating her business, "which I emagen wold bee beter then one from my selfe beeing hee so slightley regardes my wantes".¹³² Both of these women felt that to succeed the extra support of their sons was needed. It is difficult to tell whether this was because they were women, or because of the individuals involved. It is clear however, that widows in the strongest financial positions were the most confident - in their rights and in their abilities. Those in shaky positions, unsure of their situation, expressed lack of confidence. It was wealth, and to an extent personality, that were the determinants of respect and power, not gender.

Wealthy widows certainly kept their families busy with their many and varied financial concerns. Parliamentary elections, renovations, money-lending, estate management and lawsuits - all these activities occupied the lives of widows in seventeenth-century England. The above examples show that after the breakup of the husband/wife economic partnership a widowed mother/son or son-in-law partnership took its place. The skills of such women enabled them to function with a great deal of confidence and ability in this partnership. The impression received is one of a family company or firm, wherein all assisted each other and in which the widow was placed in a position of considerable importance and responsibility. Far from being superfluous they were the impossible to ignore members of the family when it came to business. The seventeenth-century English elite family had many safety mechanisms to ensure its survival financially and one of the most important of these was the woman, from wife to widow, who ensured the continuity and security of the economic base of the family.

¹³¹ Joan Altham to her son James, 6 September, 1639, *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 46, no. 57.

¹³² Mary Wortley to her son James Altham, (n.d.), *Ibid.* f. 141, no. 169.

Across the Generations

The importance of women to the elite family in the seventeenth-century was not confined to economic and political matters. Women were particularly influential in the lives of younger members of their families and their importance in this area was wide-ranging. Much has been said about the childbearing and nurturing role of the mother in seventeenth-century society. Few would now deny that mothers cared deeply for their children and were intimately involved with their development during their formative years. As such they had a role of tremendous importance in early modern society. Little has been said however about the role of elite women beyond this nurturing role. Not only did they maintain an importance in their adult children's lives but the longer lived also had a role in the lives of their grandchildren, nieces and nephews and even occasionally great-grandchildren. Like their economic role, this role ensured the survival of the family and was of immense benefit to younger generations. Consequently, this chapter will deal with women, either wives or widows, with adult children, and examine their role in the emotions and relationships of family life.

These women were, first and foremost, keenly interested in the younger members of their family and often involved themselves in many aspects of their lives. They also possessed a great deal of useful experience and knowledge, which was of great value to younger generations. The value of experienced, older women to the family as a whole, and to its individual members is particularly evident in this respect. To ensure the continuing prosperity of the family, the proper education and upbringing of its younger members - both male and female - was necessary. Advantageous marriages had to be contracted for them, assistance had to be given - in the form of finance and advice. They had to be protected and encouraged and admonished as the occasion required. Women in families played a considerable role in these activities. They also formed deep attachments and bonds towards various younger people in the family and often spent a great deal of time with them. Investigation into the role and position of these women within the family highlights several themes which will be investigated, namely, the power women enjoyed, the role they performed in the transmission of values through the generations and their importance to the well-being of the family through emotional support, communication and bonding, health and

education. In their activities women exerted power and influence over the course the family took. Consequently they must be considered if the shape of family relationships is to be understood.

The power and influence a woman enjoyed over the younger generation depended on several crucial factors. The most important was whether or not the woman possessed guardianship over the young members of her family. If she did her control was absolute until they grew to adulthood, and she often retained importance after that period of minority. Before the Civil War minors were put in the custody of the Court of Wards. Their estates could be put in the hands of some favoured courtier or someone who had purchased the wardship. This was a handy revenue raiser for the Crown. However, two facts which became clear through reading gentry and aristocratic correspondence was that, after the extinction of the Court of Wards in the Revolution, upon the deaths of husbands, wives were most commonly given custody of the children, and that upon the deaths of both parents it was grandparents who were most likely to be given custody of the children and who were responsible for them until they came of age, and often beyond. Evidence seems to suggest that a considerable number of gentry children were left to the care of their mothers, and more especially their grandparents. The fact that many fathers, who had reason to believe they would not live to see their children grow up, appointed their wives or mothers as trustee for their children, proves that gentlewomen were seen as responsible, caring, intelligent individuals who could be trusted to do the best possible for their children. Women such as Lady Lowther of Ackworth, Dame Anne Barnardiston and the Duchess of Somerset had guardianship over grandchildren, while Lady Lonsdale and Lady Anne Clifford were guardians over their children.

The extent of Lady Lowther's control is evident in a Deed of Release dated in 1686 which recites that by Deed Poll of 11 August, 1677 Sir Thomas Leigh

did appoint the custody and tuition of his three children, John Leigh, Thomas Leigh and Woolley Leigh, during their minorities, unto Dame Elizabeth Lowther, his mother, if she lived so long- for which purpose she was to have the management of the profits of all lands etc., as should, at her death, belong to the said children.¹

¹ Memorandum of Deed Appointing Lady Lowther the Guardian of Sir Thomas Leigh's Children, 1686, *Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth*, no. 30.

The Duchess of Somerset was guardian to a granddaughter, the Lady Elizabeth Seymour. The Duchess's legal papers clearly state the Lady Elizabeth had been brought up by her grandmother Frances, Duchess of Somerset, who took care in her will to provide amply for her.² Lady Elizabeth was also her heir at law. The legal papers highlight the Duchess's role as guardian and the heavy responsibilities she had. She was expected to ensure the successful future of the grandchild in her charge. Likewise, Dame Anne Barnardiston was guardian of a granddaughter, Anne Clopton, and as well as educating her, negotiated shrewdly for her marriage.

Women such as Mary Thynne, Joan Altham and Katherine Knyvett were not guardians. Mary Thynne's children reached adulthood before she was widowed and she predeceased them. Consequently she was unable to exert total control over either her children or grandchildren. Joan Altham found herself in a similar position. Katherine Knyvett predeceased her husband and did not live long enough to enjoy any grandchildren. These women, not being guardians did not have the same influence or power over the younger generations as did the guardians. Such a difference was also likely to have quite an effect on the quality of relationship between the senior female and the younger individuals of the family. Dorian Apple suggests that the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is influenced by the authority held by the grandparents in the family. If grandparents are associated with family authority their relationship with their grandchildren will be much more formal whereas the relationship will be more indulgent, close and warm if grandparents are disassociated from family authority.³ Such a distinction must be kept in mind when studying these women's interactions with their children and grandchildren.

The above examples also demonstrate another factor which helped to shape the extent of influence enjoyed by women over the younger generations - the existence and influence of other family members. Family members often competed for dominance over other members especially when an inheritance was an issue. The ability of women to exert their own will depended often on the personalities of those involved and the amount of wealth each had. Wealth was another important factor which helped to determine this relationship. A woman who had a great deal of money or land stood in a much better position than those who did not, because she had the greater

² H.M.C. 58. Bath, Longleat Manuscripts, vol. 4, Seymour Papers, p. 370.

³ Dorrian Apple, "The Social Structure of Grandparenthood" *American Anthropologist*, vol. 58, (1956), p. 662.

bargaining power necessary to enforce conformity and correct behaviour. These distinctions had an enormous influence on the character of relations in the family and on women's ability to be a strong force within the family.

Experienced older women performed a number of roles within the family, their performance affected by the factors of relations, wealth and guardianship. Roles as diverse as adviser, financier, child-minder and educator can be observed. The best place to begin is with the relationship of women to the children in the family who were not their own because not only did this interaction give much enjoyment and fulfillment to women but demonstrates clearly that women's nurturing and caring role was not confined to their own children but was used by the entire family. It is also where the affection and emotional attachment between women and younger family members can be observed. This interaction most often involved grandmothers and their grandchildren and thus it is this relationship which will be discussed in some detail. However, it must be remembered that such a role was also evident between aunts or great-aunts and their nephews and neices.

Dick as soone as he awaked today aske to goe home to his grandmother, and many times when he is earnestly a talking calls me grandmother he is so mindfull of you.⁴

So wrote Elizabeth Oxinden to her mother Katherine in 1658, clearly aware of the great delight such an account would give to the doting grandmother. Her account of the affection of grandson for grandmother presents a heart-warming picture. But how important was the relationship between a grandmother and her young grandchild? Evidence strongly suggests that in the early years of a child's life it was a special, rather intimate relationship in which both individuals contributed much emotion and time. It was thought to be of great value, highly prized by other family members as well as those involved. Grandmothers often exercised a formative influence on their grandchild's life, especially during the first ten to fifteen years, as they commonly spent a great deal of time with them and established close ties and bonds. They also exercised considerable authority over the child, in some instances seeming more influential than

⁴ Elizabeth Oxinden to Katherine Oxinden, (after July, 1658), *Oxinden Letters*, vol. 2, ed. Dorothy Gardiner (London, 1937), p. 224.

the parents. It is clear that the position of the grandmother cannot be ignored when dealing with the seventeenth century elite family.

First and foremost, how common were grandmothers in gentry and aristocratic families of the seventeenth century? Peter Laslett states "You could not with confidence expect to see your grandchildren in the world we have lost, not in England anyway."⁵ The view that women did not usually live long enough to become grandmothers has led historians to largely ignore these older women in the family, but the grandmother must not be dismissed in such a fashion. In the first place, you could expect to see your grandchild with a far greater degree of confidence in the upper classes than in those lower down the social scale, primarily because women married at a much younger age in the upper classes. The age at marriage for women in gentry/aristocratic families was often in the late teens, sometimes the early twenties, compared to the late twenties for working class women. If a woman married at twenty she could be a grandmother at 45 to 50 years of age quite easily and at this stage could have several years of active life remaining to her. Indeed, one assumption which must immediately be laid to rest is that grandparents were virtually non-existent because the high mortality rate prevented anyone reaching this state. Not only were grandmothers often not elderly but elite women did often live to a ripe old age in which some even experienced great-grandparenthood. If a woman survived her childbearing years she had a reasonably good chance of living to old age. A quick survey of several gentry/aristocratic women will be sufficient to illustrate this point.

The sample of family papers I have examined is very restricted, yet it provides numerous examples of grandmothers. Among them are Lady Lowther of Ackworth, who died in 1689 at the age of 78, 24 years after her second husband died. The Duchess of Somerset died in 1674 at 75 years of age, outliving her husband by 14 years. The birthdate of Lady Thynne is uncertain and therefore her age when she died in 1692 cannot be determined, however she outlived her husband by 11 years and her eldest son was 52 years old when she died, thus indicating Mary was around 70 years old or more. Lady Barrington was well over 80 years of age when she died in 1641, her husband having died in 1628 and Lady Anne Clifford was 86 when she died in 1684. Both Lady

⁵ Peter Laslett, *The world we have Lost - further explored*, (London, 1965; this edition 1983), p. 104.

Lowther of Ackworth and Lady Anne Clifford outlived two husbands and both experienced great-grandparenthood along with Lady Barrington.

Two things may be observed from this sample. One, that the existence of grandmothers was entirely possible for seventeenth-century families and also that women who survived their child-bearing years commonly outlived their husbands. Hence we can expect to find many more grandmothers than grandfathers and to expect grandmothers to experience a longer period of grandparenthood than grandfathers did. Grandmothers were more important in the family, especially to grandchildren, than were grandfathers, because they were present for much more of the child's life. Also, if child mortality was high in the seventeenth century, fertility, especially among the upper classes, was also high. If many children died so a significant number lived who were able to know and relate to their grandmother. When this happened the grandmother exerted considerable influence. Indeed there are very rich sources available for study of the seventeenth-century gentry grandmother and her young grandchildren.

The correspondence of Mary Thynne and her family, gives a detailed picture of the importance of a grandmother in the life of a young grandchild and vice versa. There are references to her involvement with several grandchildren but the most detailed concern Henry Thynne, the eldest son of her eldest son Thomas. Henry, as heir, was important within the family, but there is little trace of this consideration in Mary's letters. They express absolute delight in the antics of her grandson, pride in his achievements, concern for his health and education, and her affection and love for him. Her correspondence clearly reveals the feelings and experiences of a grandmother as she interacts with, and responds to, her grandchild, and also recounts the responses of her grandson to her. The correspondence of the Thynne family is also important in that it provides clues to the feelings of other family members to Mary's role and position as a grandmother. While this is not so easy to discover, we are able to discern the attitude of the wider family to the grandmother and see how the grandmother fitted into the seventeenth-century family.

The tendency of the grandmother to assume an importance in the life of her grandchild was fostered from the very beginning of the child's life, through the role the future grandmother played at the births of her daughter's children and the bond which often existed between mother and daughter. It was common for a mother to stay with her daughter during the last weeks of her



pregnancy and to assist at the birth of her child. During this time of anxiety and often danger she provided support and the knowledge derived from her own experiences. The visit usually extended several weeks after the birth when the grandmother probably took charge of her grandchild while the mother recovered. Consequently it is no surprise that she was involved with her grandchild from birth. It was easy for an interest and close attachment to form. The involvement of the grandmother in the birth of her grandchildren, and the associated feelings of expectation and concern are given expression in many seventeenth-century letters.

The Thynne correspondence is rich in this area. Mary Thynne's frequent presence at the births of her grandchildren is clearly established. The letters of Mary Thynne's son Thomas to his father reveal the fact that Mary was present at the birth of her grandson Henry in 1676. On 9 February, 1676 Thomas wrote that his wife Frances had given birth to a son, which after a poor start was in good health, adding "I suppose my mother hath acquainted [you] with all particulars in hers".⁶ Clearly Mary Thynne was with her newborn grandchild at Drayton, also sending news to the new grandfather, of the birth and the progress of the child. In a letter of 23 February, 1676 Thomas again wrote giving his father news of the child and added "my mothers time now of returning draweth on".⁷ Mary Thynne had obviously been at Drayton for at least one month to share the first few weeks of her grandchild's life. Incidentally, her daughter Katherine Lowther was staying at Drayton with her brother and sister-in-law at this time and gave birth to a girl (Mary) on the same day that Frances had her boy.⁸ Mary Thynne was therefore able to be present at the births of two of her grandchildren at once. Thomas wrote in his letter of 9 February after he had acquainted his father with Henry's birth, that his poor sister had a terrible time of it, but was now pretty well and fond of her little girl.⁹ Mary Thynne was obviously much needed at this time and had a role to play in supporting her daughter and daughter-in-law. This role also fostered an interest in and fondness for her grandchildren.

In later years Mary was prepared to go to a great deal of trouble to be with Katherine for the births of her children. Katherine, married to Sir John Lowther of Lowther, lived in

⁶ Thomas Thynne to Sir Henry Frederick Thynne, 9 February, 1676, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 33, fo. 51.

⁷ *Ibid.* 23 February, 1676, fo. 53.

⁸ Hugh Owen, *The Lowther Family* (Chichester, Sussex, 1990), p. 199.

⁹ Thomas Thynne to Sir Henry Frederick Thynne, 9 February, 1676, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 33, fo. 51.

Westmorland in the north of England. She had fourteen children over a 23 year period, most of whom were born at Lowther. Mary expressed her dissatisfaction that Katherine had to give birth so far away, although she admitted she had never expected her daughter to have all her babies in the south.¹⁰ Mary was clearly unhappy with a situation that hindered her from being present at the births and being active and helpful in her daughter and young grandchildren's lives. But Mary did as much as possible to involve herself in the births, despite the difficulties. She braved the great distance and dreadfully cold weather to make the journey to the north of England in 1682 to be with Katherine. Snow lay heavily on the ground and Mary had to be carried over the last stages on a litter because the horses could not make it through. Mary wrote to Thomas to tell him she had arrived and that his sister was well and cheerful "which I hope [you (sic)] will continue to heare till her paine end in her owne pleasure as well as ours".¹¹ Mary Thynne was prepared to exert considerable effort in order to be at the birth of her grandchild, believing her presence was, if not essential, at least extremely desirable.

Indeed, even when Mary was unable to be physically present at the births, she still exerted an influence over them and involved herself as best she could. In 1686 Mary explained to Thomas that she was afraid it would be out of her power to be with Katherine at her lying-in. The estimated time of birth was around Michalmas and the "winter" journey would be too much for her. Nevertheless Mary was kept informed of the estimated time of birth and said she would try to persuade a family friend to go to Katherine in her stead.¹² In particular Mary involved herself in the organisation of midwives. This was especially important in regard to Katherine because good midwives were scarce in the north, mainly being concentrated in and around London. Mary indeed expressed her concern over this situation to her son.

I pray lett mee have the first notice affter thine wheather there bee any hope of Mis Birch going to Lowther for I am in great care for poore Kitty till I heare she may be either neere or have a good midwife with her.¹³

¹⁰ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 14 May, 1680, *Ibid.*, vol. 31, fo. 149.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 13 February, 1682, fo. 190.

¹² *Ibid.* 1 April, 1686, vol. 32, fo. 19.

¹³ *Ibid.* 1 May, 1680, vol. 31, fo. 140.

She had heard reports of a good midwife from an acquaintance and asked Thomas to discover who the midwife was, hoping to prevail with her to go so far north as to be with Katherine for the birth.¹⁴ Mary made her presence felt even over a distance. Her involvement and concern in the births of her grandchildren is clearly evident in the Thynne family correspondence.

The correspondence of other families confirms this picture and demonstrates that the interest and involvement of the grandmother was not confined to the Thynnes. Nor was the special role of the grandmother considered unusual or exceptional within the family, but rather was expected and relied upon. The Barrington family correspondence demonstrates this clearly. Lady Barrington was present at the birth of her grandchild in 1629, and James Harrison, writing to her stated that he would like to see her but

Your presenc wilbe a great comfort to your worthy daughter in that condition she is in, your absenc would have added much to her affliction and caused many distracted thoughtes in your owne good heart.¹⁵

Judith Barrington also wrote to Joan concerning this event saying that she wanted to see her very much "but you have soe lawfull a cause to detaine you".¹⁶ Joan Altham was also a grandmother who played an important part at the birth of grandchildren. Her niece Mary Bankes wrote to her in 1635 wishing her well in her intended journey to her daughter

on whome my poore prayers shall ever atend, as a feelling member of those paines she is to passe, and I hope with safty and comfort to you all.¹⁷

In 1648 Joan Altham wrote to her son to give him news of the birth of his sister's child. She "was safely brought to bed on Wedneseday last of a daughter and is pretty well I most humbly thanke god". Lady Altham, her brother and Mrs. Roper "made it a Mary".¹⁸ In this instance not only was the grandmother present at the birth but even helped to name the child. The importance of the

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 14 May, 1680, fo. 149.

¹⁵ James Harrison to Joan Barrington, n.d., (early October? 1629), *Barrington Family Letters*, Letter 68, p. 94.

¹⁶ Lady Judith Barrington to Joan Barrington, [early?] October [1629], *Ibid.* Letter 69, p. 95.

¹⁷ Mary Bankes to Joan Altham, 5 March, (1635), *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 14, no. 17.

¹⁸ Joan Altham to her son, [James?], 21 August, 1648, *Ibid.* f. 98, no. 124.

grandmother is therefore clear. She often played a crucial role in the safe bringing into the world of her grandchild. She tried to be there if she could, organised and planned, exerting an influence even when she could not be physically present at the event. The correspondence however shows more than the presence and involvement of the grandmother at the birth of her grandchild, it also shows that the hope of grandparenthood was well understood and expressed within the family. The interest and concern felt by the entire family over the birth of a child was felt particularly keenly by the expectant grandmother.

The concern of Mary Thynne for her daughters and her hopes for the safe births of her grandchildren were probably intensified by the fact that both of her daughters, Katherine Lowther and Mary Howe, and her daughter-in-law Frances Thynne often experienced problems such as illness during pregnancy, miscarriages and sickly infants. The likelihood of problems in childbirth and high mortality rates did not prevent people from hoping for a healthy baby. Indeed they were extremely disappointed when their hopes failed and this was particularly true of the hopeful grandmother. In 1683 when Katherine was pregnant Mary wrote that she hoped God would put a brave boy into her arms or another girl with her safety would be welcome news.¹⁹ In February 1686 she wrote again concerning Katherine who was extremely ill in her pregnancy and stated "I pray God it may portend what wee all wish".²⁰ When Mary Howe miscarried in 1680 Mary Thynne wrote to her son "your poore sister Howe has defeated my wishes beefore I could reasonably make them my hopes".²¹ Mary's hopes of grandparenthood were clearly expressed in these examples which also demonstrate the concern of other family members and Mary's role in keeping them informed of all developments.

The hopes and fears associated with grandparenthood are evident in other families as well. Mary Bankes expressed these in a letter to her aunt Joan Altham in which she desired her respects be sent

to my sweet cosen Smith (Lady Altham's daughter) to whome you are a going, and for whome I shall pray to God for a happie hower, that she may pase those perilous paines

¹⁹ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 28 April, 1683, *Thynne Papers*, vol.31, fo. 201.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 20 February, 1686, vol. 32, fo. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.* 27 April, 1680, vol. 31, fo. 138.

with as much ease as is possible for a woman, and that at the last she may enjoy what she then will most desire to be: the mother of a young sonne, and to make you a happie grandmother²²

Lady Joan was on her way to her daughter's side and her hopes of grandparenthood and concern for the safety of her daughter and grandchild were well understood by her niece.

Mary Spencer in a letter to her son-in-law James Altham also expressed hope and concern. James's wife was nearing the time of birth and Mary wrote that she would come to stay with her now

whare I shall willingly bee a troble tell the time it please god to make mee a grandmother...I dare not venter to stayer from my daughter aney longer, emaginyen it will bee hey time now to visett her²³

The concern of a mother for her daughter, a woman's role at the birth of her daughter's children and as conveyer of news to the family at large, and her experience and knowledge in matters of childbirth all served to focus the attention of the grandmother on to her grandchildren from the very first moments of the grandchild's life. The unique position of the grandmother is obvious - she was ideally suited to be of considerable importance to the growing infant in a way that was impossible for the grandfather or any other family members. Her importance and role in regard to her grandchildren was clearly recognised by the family.²⁴

²² Mary Bankes to Lady Joan Altham, 19 November, [?], *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 11, no. 13.

²³ Mary Spencer to James Altham, [1638?], *Ibid.* f. 26, no. 31.

²⁴ Concern, support and interest was also shown by Lady Lowther of Ackworth upon the birth of her nephew's son. Richard Ellis wrote to her reminding her of her promise to be a surety for the child. [15 October, 1688, Letter 17, and 17 October, 1688, Letter 18] Lady Lowther agreed and said she was glad to hear of the safe delivery. [18 October, 1688, Letter 21] She wrote to another niece asking her to represent her as witness to the boy and to pay a guinea to the midwife, and another to those that attended Mrs. Ellis. If Mrs. Ellis did not nurse herself another guinea was to be paid. Lady Lowther said that she would repay her the sums she spent. [18 October, 1688, Letter 20] *Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth*. Lady Lowther also gave advice to her nephew Richard Ellis, about his daughter. She was an old-fashioned woman, Lady Lowther admitted, and so if the child did not do well with the spoon she recommended she be nursed and could name a good woman to do this. The nurse she had in mind could not live with the Ellis family because she had many children of her own but her house was pretty and warm, her husband sober and "painfull" and she had fine, lusty children of her own which she kept cleanly and carefully. If they were determined to breed up their child by hand Lady Lowther wished them well and hoped they would not find it too disquieting. Lady Lowther to ? (probably Richard Ellis) n.d. prob. May 1686, *Ibid.* Letter 4. The above letter reveals a passing down of values and childcare practices through the generations. Lady Lowther was clearly not impressed by the idea of the mother nursing her own child and put forward as good a case as possible for wet-nursing. This included her own experience of her daughter putting three of her own children out to nurse with this woman.

The early involvement and interest of the grandmother in her grandchild increased as the child grew older and began to develop its own personality, mannerisms and idiosyncracies. These delighted and concerned grandmothers who appeared to be well-acquainted with their grandchildren. The period of the child's infancy until the mid-teens was often a golden one for both grandparent and grandchild and their relationship was characterised by affection, freedom, indulgence and delight. Infant grandchildren were considered to be good companions by their grandmothers who often spent a great deal of time with them.

The fact that grandmothers took great delight in caring for their young grandchildren and in having them stay with them, often for considerable periods of time, is clearly expressed in the correspondence. Mary Thynne, writing to her eldest son in 1676 stated that she "should bee glad to see you pursue your ententions of sending the little fellow as soone as you can as a companion to us both".²⁵ Henry Thynne, "little fellow", did indeed spend a great deal of time, stretching into months, while very young with his grandparents, and then after his grandfather's death in 1680, with his grandmother alone. His parents at times had to ask to see him he was monopolized so much! Writing to his father in 1678 Thomas Thynne stated "I confesse I am soe much a stranger to him, that I would bee glad to have a little of his company".²⁶ Henry Thynne was only two and a half years of age at this time and seems to have spent much of that time with his grandparents. Thomas Thynne even promised in the above letter that he would only borrow him.²⁷

An intimation of how Henry Thynne felt about long visits with his grandmother occurs in a letter by Mary Thynne in 1680. Mary related that Henry "has of late been so kinde to mee that hee tells mee hee will stay with mee as longe as hee lives".²⁸ This remark comes to us from a doting grandmother, but when considered with the large amount of time he spent with her indicates Henry's willingness to stay with his grandmother. There are numerous references attesting to Henry's living with Mary Thynne, and indeed, from 1676 to 1680 he seems to have been with her almost constantly.

²⁵ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 30 September, 1676, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 92.

²⁶ Thomas Thynne to Sir Henry Frederick Thynne, 7 September, 1678, *Ibid.*, vol. 33, fo. 91.

²⁷ See also Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, pp. 172-173, 262-263, 290, 297-298.

²⁸ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 12 April, 1680, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 128?

The substantial amount of time Henry spent with his grandmother is also suggestive of the attitude of his parents to these visits. They obviously were more than happy about the arrangement despite their natural desire to see their son occasionally. They certainly had no qualms about putting the care of their son and heir into Mary Thynne's hands, trusting to her competence and responsibility. Frances Thynne expressed her feelings on the matter very distinctly in a letter to her husband. They were in debt due to the death of Thomas's father and so might have to leave England for a while. Frances wrote that if they stayed in England she would be happy to have "my lady" [Mary Thynne] stay with them, and if they went the children could not be left in better hands [than hers].²⁹ The indication is that in the seventeenth-century grandmothers often fulfilled a similar role to that which they do today - childcare. When parents were in difficulties or had tasks to do in which children could be a hindrance, the grandmother was the ideal person to step in. Not only could she be trusted, she obviously enjoyed the task, and so did the grandchildren. The grandmother/grandchild relationship was seen by the wider family to be very important, almost as beneficial to the child as the parent/child relationship.

The feelings of grandmother and grandchild and the attitudes of the wider family, therefore, all encouraged a close relationship. In seventeenth-century correspondence we see this closeness expressed in a variety of ways. Among the most revealing are the use of nicknames and terms of affection. Mary Thynne used terms of affection almost constantly for her grandchildren, Henry Thynne was continually referred to as "little fellow" for example in 1677 she wrote "little fellow [continues?] I thanke god very well and pleasent company".³⁰ At times she called him a "pretty fool" or "little fool" as in 1680 "tis a pritty foole and at [an] night keepe mee company with so many questions".³¹ A couple of months later "the little foole" was at Asthorp for his health.³² Mary Thynne's granddaughter, Henry Thynne's sister, was commonly known as "popett" in the letters of her grandmother. In 1682 Mary Thynne wrote "I shall bee glad to heere of all your healths and that honest fellow (yet another affectionate term for Henry Thynne) continue as good

²⁹ Frances Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 13 March, [1680?], *Ibid.*, vol. 13, fo. 31-32.

³⁰ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, [10?] December, 1677, *Ibid.*, vol. 31, fo. 100.

³¹ *Ibid.* 8 April, 1680, fo. 124.

³² *Ibid.* 24 July, 1680, fo. 178.

as I left him and popitt as she promised mee".³³ Along with nicknames affectionate abbreviations were used. Mary's Lowther granddaughter Elizabeth was known as Betty.

Abbreviations and nicknames for grandchildren were common in other seventeenth-century families as well. Joan Altham, while caring for her granddaughter wrote to her daughter about "pretty Mal who thrives and prospers well thankes bee to god".³⁴ Joan also in this letter made a guess as to who the child would look like, in the manner of doting relatives the world over. She wrote to her son in 1639 stating her love and blessing to himself, her dear daughter and her "pretty one".³⁵ Lady Lowther of Ackworth also used such terms of affection. In two letters of 1685 she spoke of the illness of "our little Mabel" who had been taken into Somersetshire by Lady Lowther's daughter.³⁶ In 1688 her son Sir John Leigh wrote that "little Jacky" desired to be remembered to her ladyship.³⁷ Thomas and Katherine Knyvett's children Elizabeth, John, Thomas and Muriel were known as Buss, Jack, Tom and Muss in the correspondence of Thomas to Katherine.³⁸ These names continued in their adulthood. In a letter of 9 October, 1621 Thomas in sending his final greetings wrote "pray God bless littel Pudd" meaning his daughter Elizabeth.³⁹

The giving and use of nicknames are a clear indication of the type of relationship.⁴⁰ The nicknames mentioned above beyond doubt establish the fact of the grandmother's doting, affectionate feelings for her grandchildren, and the strong bonding between them. They imply that the relationship was not a strict, formal one, but one in which familiarity and intimacy were the dominant features. Grandmothers seemed particularly partial to using nicknames for grandchildren, as they are today. Whether these originated with the parents or the grandparents is

³³ *Ibid.* 13 February, 1682, fo. 190.

³⁴ Joan Altham to her daughter [Alice?], n.d. [1638/?], *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 7, no. 7. verso.

³⁵ Joan Altham to her son [James?], 2 March, 1639, *Ibid.* f. 33, no. 39.

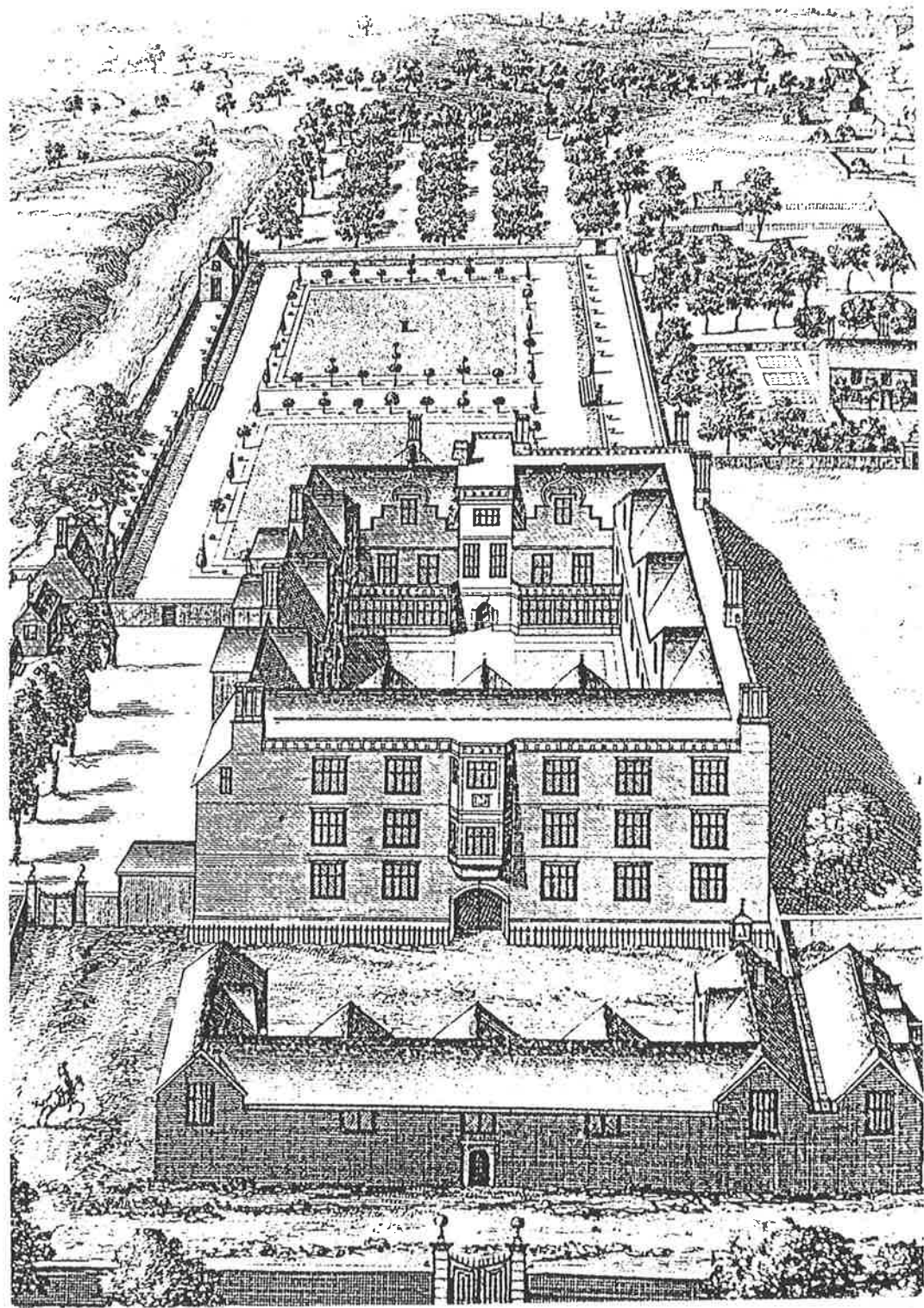
³⁶ Lady Lowther of Ackworth to Sir John Leigh, 11 July, 1685, *Manuscript Volumes - Lady Lowther of Ackworth*, Letter 13 and Lady Lowther of Ackworth to Robert Lowther, 16 August, 1685, *Ibid.* Letter 14.

³⁷ Sir John Leigh to Lady Lowther, 29 February, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 3.

³⁸ Schofield, *Knyvett Correspondence*, p. 26 (introduction). These names occur in many letters, for example 6 April, 1643, Letter 53, p. 113; [16 July, 1643], Letter 56, p. 117 (Here Elizabeth is also called Betty), [18 April, 1644], Letter 70, pp. 139-140; 3 May, 1644, Letter 72, p. 143. On 20 July, 1643, Letter 57, p. 119 Thomas send his blessing to "my bonny Girles".

³⁹ *Ibid.* 9 October, 1621, Letter 2, note 6, p. 56. Schofield suggests this sentence refers to Elizabeth, the eldest or only child of the Knyvetts at that stage.

⁴⁰ Robyn Priestley says that pet names for children is not conclusive evidence of affectionate attachment to children or lack of formality in parent-child relationships but that the very widespread use of nicknames in the families she encountered indicates a trend in that direction. *Marriage and Family Life*, p. 296.



difficult to ascertain, but evidence shows that nicknames and affectionate terms were understood by the wider family who indeed joined in referring to the children in these ways.

Grandmothers were very proud of their grandchildren and this pride, clearly expressed in their correspondence, also reveals the love and affection they felt. As in the twentieth century, grandparents appear to have been inordinately proud of their grandchildren's small achievements and believed them to be exceptional children. Examples such as this occur several times in the letters of Mary Thynne. She wrote in 1675 "I heare popett is the finest girle in england"⁴¹ and boasted in 1677 how much her neighbours loved her grandson.⁴² Several years later she travelled north to visit her daughter, Katherine Lowther. Katherine's daughter Betty attracted Mary's attention with her good behaviour in church. "Betty not three yeares old seat yesterday at sermon and prayers as if she had been twenty without so much as moveing to disturb those that weare with her."⁴³ Mary's particular intimacy and love for her grandson is clear in the detailed letters she wrote to his parents about his antics. In a letter of 10 December, 1677 she spoke in detail of his good behaviour out visiting, especially boasting of his skill at playing cards, and then adds "I am glad to heere you will come hirther without invitation though I should have given it you. When you doe you will see him a child to make good all I have said of him".⁴⁴

Mary Thynne's pride and satisfaction in her grandchildren expressed itself not only in words of praise but in acts of indulgence and generosity. Such generosity was evident in the long periods of time she looked after them, and in the gifts she gave. For example they were not forgotten at Christmas. "I remember Christmas must furnish the childrens pocketts as well as the table with mince pyes. I pray deliver to each of them twenty shillings and I will add it to your

⁴¹ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, [June?], 1675, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 75.

⁴² *Ibid.* 6 December, 1677, fo. 98.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 13 February, 1682, fo. 190.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* [10?] December, 1677, fo. 100. This letter appears to be very early to be referring to Henry Thynne who was born at the beginning of 1676. I have been unable to find any other reference to another child of Thomas and Frances Thynne beyond Katherine "poppet" born in 1673 and Henry. Mary's comment in this letter could refer to a child who died in infancy. Another son was born around 1690, a long time after the above letter. The Thynne pedigree in Beriah Botfield, *Stemmata Botevilliana: Memorial of the families of De Boteville, Thynne, and Botfield*, (Westminster, 1858), p. 57, mentions a child called William who died in infancy although there are no dates given. Despite this problem the letters still demonstrate the affection which existed between Mary Thynne and the very young members of her family. Her pride is also evident in her letter of 24 July, 1680 where she recounts to Thomas a conversation his son had with Dr. Lydall. Mary believed that Harry's fancy was quicker than his judgement "as those of treble his yeare many times are". vol. 31, fo. 178.

mony heere."⁴⁵ In 1680 she gave Henry a trumpet and a toy gun and in an earlier letter described him as a "great tresure".⁴⁶

Lady Altham also expressed pride and fondness in her grandchild. Mal was growing prettier every day she said.⁴⁷ Later, while writing to her son she said "kisse little Mall once a day for mee till I see her to doe it myselfe".⁴⁸ Clearly there was a great deal of love felt by Lady Altham and Lady Thynne for their grandchildren. They noticed any intimate detail which they thought set their grandchildren apart from other children, either in physical appearance, skill at games, educational ability or manners. What must be noted is that affection and love were shown outwardly - expressed through the giving of gifts, words of praise and commendation and physical embraces. These expressions were the natural, outward manifestations of the love grandmother's felt for their grandchildren and the special relationship that existed between them. Grandmothers had no hesitation in displaying their love in such ways within their families, and such displays were understood and accepted by the family.

Although there was great delight and enjoyment between grandmothers and grandchildren, the relationship did not always run smoothly. At times there were clashes of personality, tensions and disagreements. Such clashes largely occurred with adult grandchildren. Once in their late teens they became more independent and busy establishing themselves in their own families and careers. They were more likely to have their own ideas about how to live their lives and fill their time, and would resent the interference of a grandmother. This can be observed with Lady Lowther of Ackworth and her grandsons, John, Thomas and Woolley. She had a difficult time trying to keep them from drinking and idleness once they were studying and in apprenticeships. Once grandchildren were grown-up and outside the grandmother's immediate sphere of influence they were much harder to control. The generation gap obviously became more evident when the grandchild was an adult or approaching adulthood, the relationship was no longer simple, in decision-making more was at stake and conflict was much more likely.

⁴⁵ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 10 December, 1686, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 32, fo. 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 3 July, 1680, vol. 31, fo. 167, 3 April, 1680, vol. 31, fo. 121.

⁴⁷ Joan Altham to her daughter [Alice?] n.d. [1638/??], *Letters of the Altham Family*, f. 7, no. 7. *verto*.

⁴⁸ Joan Altham to her son James, 31 October, 1638, *Ibid.* f. 41, no. 50.

Conflict, however did sometimes occur with young grandchildren although on a much smaller scale. Young seventeenth-century children, like twentieth-century children, often decided they wanted their own way and grandmothers were forced to discipline them, usually a task they did not enjoy. Mary and Henry Thynne provide the best examples of this. In 1680 while staying with his grandmother Henry became very angry when she chastised his nurse, of whom he was extremely fond. Mary described his subsequent behaviour in a letter to her son "most part of the day the child was so angry with mee that neither his uncle nor aunt could make him looke on mee when hee sate on the table beefore mee".⁴⁹ Mary Thynne remained indulgent towards him despite his fit of sulking "tis a child of great understanding God bless him"⁵⁰ but nonetheless became determined to dismiss the nurse. On 1 June, 1680 she wrote again to her son that the nurse was not instructing Henry well enough and that Henry was too fond of her "my thinkes the affections of one so yonge should not bee so fixed".⁵¹ On 3 July the nurse left and Mary gave her grandson a gun and trumpet from Oxford to "excuse her absence".⁵²

Henry was well able to influence his grandmother's behaviour to get his own way, especially when he was ill. Mary described this well

little fellow is pritty well and would bee better if hee would drinke the snaile water, but hee crys and fretts so much in the doeing it, that I must leave it offe, lest it ocasion him more ill, then remedie⁵³

A month later Mary also wrote "his illness haveing so promotted my indulgence that twill bee hard to bringe him into order".⁵⁴

The above examples serve to illustrate the fact that the relationship of grandmother and grandchild was of a two-way nature. Grandchildren were not merely passive recipients of their grandmothers' wishes and behaviour. They were equally able to exert an influence on their grandmother through various tactics including emotional blackmail. Although this point seems so

⁴⁹ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, [20?] May, 1680, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 156.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 1 June, 1680, fo. 157.

⁵² *Ibid.* 3 July, 1680, fo. 167.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 8 April, 1680, fo. 124.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 6 May, 1680, fo. 143.

simple as to be taken for granted it needs to be emphasised when studying the seventeenth-century family. Historians in this field have tended to focus too exclusively on the way in which parents influenced their children. The behaviour of parents has been seen as determining the nature of the family, with little or no attention being given to the reciprocating influence children exerted. Drawing attention to the shortcomings of this view point, Linda Pollock argues that children were far from passive creatures - they made demands on parents and parents had to operate within the context of these demands.⁵⁵ I have found this to be just as true of the grandmother/grandchild relationship. We see Mary Thynne, although firm in her intentions, responding to the behaviour and needs of her grandson. Their relationship was two-way and dynamic. Conflict and personality clash was possible between grandmothers and grandchildren as it was in all relationships, despite the love and affection which also existed.

Thus far we have seen the birth and the growth of the relationship between grandmother and grandchild. From birth, where the grandmother was placed in an ideal position of power and influence, one which was acknowledged by the entire family, through the early years of the child's life where the grandmother became well-acquainted with her grandchild. The relationship involved affection, pride, indulgence and conflict. What is obvious but which still must be emphasised is the amount of emotion involved. Historians such as Lawrence Stone and Miriam Slater argue that relations within the family were cold in the seventeenth-century and that there was little room for love and affection. Lawrence Stone in particular has argued that parents could not afford to become too attached to their children because of the high likelihood of their death.⁵⁶ The relationships I have been describing certainly do not support this theory. The overwhelming impression is one of concern, love and attachment towards grandchildren, a knowledge of their habits and personalities and a desire to do what was the best for them. Theories of cold, indifferent family relationships must finally be laid to rest in the light of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children-Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 270.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, p. 70.

⁵⁷ See Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, Chapter 6: Parents and Children. Theories of harsh, cold parent-child relations are given a further battering by Robyn Priestley. Priestley, using the Isham, Dering and Sherfield families has found a great deal of variety in parent-child relations, but overwhelmingly has found that there was close and loving attachment between parents and children in the seventeenth century. While her primary

The role of older women in the family was not just confined to grandmothers and childcare. Grandmothers, mothers and aunts could be burdened with great responsibilities which required shrewdness, intelligence, and often considerable efforts. Their sons and husbands thought they were capable of the responsibilities they laid on them, indeed that they were the ideal persons for these responsibilities. These responsibilities included the most important and fundamental areas of a family's life and demonstrate the love and solicitude such women had for members of their family as well as their power and influence. One very important undertaking of elite women was marriage negotiations on behalf of younger members of their family. The marriage of family members did not only affect the lives of the couple involved but had repercussions throughout the entire family. A successful marriage ensured financial survival, as well as survival in terms of heirs and future generations. In these matters women had an extremely important role and must be considered if this aspect of the functioning of the family is to be understood. Interest in the marriage prospects of family members, both children and grandchildren, began early. If guardians, women had a very extensive role in these negotiations as it was their sole responsibility to see to the successful marriage of those individuals in their charge. When women did not have guardianship, their role was of necessity much more circumscribed, although they still managed to have some sway over the final decision.⁵⁸

Lady Anne Clifford is an excellent example of a strong-willed woman who, as guardian of her two daughters, negotiated good matches for them. Her daughters were born while she was married to her first husband Richard Sackville, Earl of Dorset. Margaret was born in 1614 and Isabella in 1622. Anne was their guardian after the death of her husband in 1624, and five years

emphasis is on the relationship of children with their parents, and parental attitudes to children she also has some interesting examples of the grandparents' reactions to their grandchildren. In particular her discussion of Sir Edward Dering and his wife Mary Dering was useful. Their grandchildren stayed with them for considerable periods of time and were the source of much joy to the doting grandparents. The letters of Edward Dering demonstrate intimate knowledge of the health and progress of their grandchildren and they gave advice on education. Much of the information given by Priestley on the involvement of grandparents in the births, education, health and general growing up of their grandchildren corresponds to the information I have found with my families, although interestingly Priestley found that the most enthusiastic comments over the births of children were from male family members (see pages 272, 287) and she provides many examples of grandfather/grandchild interaction, for example see pages 292, 297-299.

⁵⁸ See Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, Chapter 1 She argues that the authority of the head of the family was absolute but that mothers often had an important role in marriage negotiations. When widows women had the ultimate responsibility for their children's marriages and their role is much easier to assess. Priestley provides examples of a mother's involvement in negotiations (pp. 47-50), a widow's (p. 45), a great-aunt's (pp. 55ff.) and an aunt's (p.60). She also looks at the complimentary roles wives and husbands had in negotiating marriages for their children (pp. 50-51).

later, while Anne was a widow, her eldest daughter Margaret was married to John, Lord Tufton. Margaret was very young when this marriage took place, being not yet 15 years of age.

It is Lady Anne's influence over the marriage of her second daughter that is of most interest however. In 1630 Anne married again, this time to the Earl of Pembroke. Conflict arose between them because the earl wanted Anne's daughter Isabella to marry one of his sons by his first marriage and for Anne to settle £5,000 (that is Isabella's portion) upon his son. Lady Anne refused. So long as she approved of the match she wanted her daughter to choose her own husband. In her diary Lady Anne recalled these times. In 1645 and "also some yeares before," she said

happened a great cause of anger and falling out between my lord and mee, because he desired to have one of his younger sonnes marryed with my daughter Isabella, which I could in no way remedie, my daughter being herself extremly averse to the match⁵⁹

Lady Anne was immovable on this point despite a great deal of unpleasantness from her husband who was a violent-tempered man. Finally, on 5 July, 1647 Isabella was married to James Compton, Earl of Northampton.

Lady Anne's resolve in the face of unpleasantness demonstrates a strong personality. Her ultimate success in marrying Isabella to James Compton reveals the helplessness of her husband to influence the marriage of her daughter contrary to her wishes. Lady Anne also demonstrated a sensitivity to the wishes of her daughter, agreeing that she should not marry someone she was averse to. It was Lady Anne who made the decisions concerning her daughter, not her second husband.

The same features of power and sensitivity were evident in the guardianship of Dame Anne Barnardiston over her granddaughter Anne Clopton. The marriage of Anne was a serious business requiring considerable forethought and time because Anne was an heiress, the sole heir to her father, the late Sir William Clopton, and so was of course vigorously courted by several hopeful future husbands. Dame Anne had paid £500 for her wardship. Sir Simonds D'Ewes in his *An Account of my Life, 1602 - 1636* gives a detailed account of the negotiations for Anne

⁵⁹ Lady Anne Clifford, *Diaries*, p. 96.

Clopton's hand in marriage, undertaken on his behalf by his father, and his account reveals Dame Anne's overwhelming influence on the proceedings. When D'Ewes entered negotiations Anne Clopton was only 13 years old. Early negotiations such as this were often the case when a lot of money was at stake.

Dame Anne's activity and authority in negotiations is made clear in D'Ewes' account. He writes that matters were near a full agreement between his father and Anne's grandmother "whose warde shee was" and nothing remained to conclude the business but their own "mutuall consents and likings upon an interveiw".⁶⁰ D'Ewes spoke with some relatives of Anne Barnardiston over the matter and hoped that one of them would move her on his behalf. It was Lady Barnardiston who wrote letters giving permission for Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston and Mr. Arthur Barnardiston to proceed with the treaty.

D'Ewes also shows that Lady Barnardiston was ambitious for her granddaughter and had a number of possible matches in mind for her. After several delays it seemed to D'Ewes that all would run smoothly with Lady Barnardiston satisfied to all her demands. However, D'Ewes writes that the "olde Ladie" began to play her part of inconstancy and moved a match for her granddaughter with an Essex gentleman. She also tried to marry her granddaughter to the eldest son of William, Viscount Say and Seale a little later. These attempts came to nothing and D'Ewes denounces such "unjust" proceedings.⁶¹ Marriage negotiations were a matter of honour and the refusal of D'Ewes's offer, if it became publically known, would have injured D'Ewes's reputation and worth in future marriage negotiations. D'Ewes had a lot at stake and so of course did not look favourably on any action that might have threatened his interests. However, if Dame Anne was ambitious so was he. He admitted in his *Account* that this was "the 4th. female inheritrice I cast my thoughts and desires upon".⁶² Dame Anne could afford to be ambitious and choosy in her search for her granddaughter's husband and certainly demonstrated great energy in trying to secure the most advantageous match possible for her.

⁶⁰ Simonds D'Ewes, *An Account of my Life from 1602-1636*, Harleian MSS vol. 646, fo. 92. Special thanks to Sara Warneke for allowing me the use of her transcript of D'Ewes' *Account*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* fo. 93v.

⁶² *Ibid.* fo. 92.

This care is demonstrated again in D'Ewes' account. The match was finally agreed upon and Lady Barnardiston accepted all his father's offers with a little modification. Simonds went to meet Anne Clopton and her grandmother in person and was perfectly happy with his future bride. At this time D'Ewes had "serious discourse" with his future bride's grandmother, and again in early September. He obviously believed her to be an ambitious woman who would break agreements if it meant a good match for her granddaughter. D'Ewes wanted the marriage to take place as soon as possible because he feared "some greater offers might bee made to tempt the old lady, who was naturallie as most of her sex maruailous inconstant". But he then proceeds show how careful she was of her granddaughter's future, irrespective of money. D'Ewes recounts that she refused a match of twice his father's estate because she did not approve of the behaviour of the young man nor of the ill carriage of his father to his wife.⁶³ Lady Barnardiston looked carefully into the background of each possible match, and personality as well as wealth was important. She did not want her granddaughter to be ill-treated.

This emphasis on establishing a good married life for her granddaughter was seen again when she discussed the marriage with D'Ewes. D'Ewes stated that she wanted the marriage to take place as much as he did because she feared relatives would be too mercenary. But she had one objection to an early marriage which was the very young age of her grandchild. She feared for her life if she should become pregnant too early. Dame Anne also was concerned about the strength of D'Ewes affections, quite rightly I think. She feared that although D'Ewes was interested in Anne Clopton now this was not solid or real love and might alter and lessen after marriage. These were all very real worries and display a sensitivity and caring attitude alongside the ambition. Happiness in marriage was clearly of paramount importance to Anne Barnardiston and she strove for this end in her negotiations with suitors. Simonds assured her that he would forbear to "reape the fruits" of the marriage until the danger was past, and that his affection would be maintained and increased.⁶⁴ The marriage finally took place.

Dame Anne Barnardiston controlled all proceedings and was definitely in a position of authority when it came to the marriage of her granddaughter. She displayed an intelligence and

⁶³ *Ibid.* fo. 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* fo. 95v.

shrewdness in the marriage negotiations which annoyed Simonds D'Ewes who obviously would have much preferred a smoother path to success. Her emphasis on the relationship between her ward and D'Ewes also demonstrates careful thought and understanding. Dame Anne was able to extract various promises from D'Ewes in this area. She certainly showed herself to be more than capable of negotiating a marriage successfully, thinking of every aspect and eventuality. It would be interesting to read her side of the story.

Both Lady Anne and Dame Anne enforced their values and priorities on the younger members of their families and forced others, such as Phillip Herbert and Simonds D'Ewes to accept these as well. Such things as personal choice, happiness in marriage, affection and safety were important to them and they ensured as much as was possible that these factors were safeguarded. The marriages of their wards were consequently vastly different than if they had allowed the others involved to obtain the upper hand.

Another example of a female guardian involved in marriage negotiations was Lady Lowther of Ackworth. Like Lady Anne Clifford and Dame Anne Barnardiston she demonstrated great concern and care in the marriage negotiations for one of her younger daughters. Roger Hainsworth in his article on patterns of marriage and inheritance among the later Stuart gentry uses Lady Lowther as one of his examples to demonstrate that what really motivated parents when they chose husbands for their daughters was the well being of the daughter. They wanted to ensure that they would be financially secure for life before they parted with them.⁶⁵

Lady Lowther asked her son-in-law Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven to find out the details about the heir to the Bellingham estates, whom she was considering as a possible husband for her daughter. Lady Lowther insisted that she would not agree to any match unless her daughter had a maintenance of at least £1,000 a year. Personality and age were also important and Lady Lowther enquired after these. However, although the gentleman in question was reported relatively favourably in regard to habits and personality ("a notable, brisk young man, hath a good mother wit, not much clergy, not fond (as is said) of marrying and if he keep sober company may do

⁶⁵ D.R. Hainsworth, "Fathers and Daughters; Patterns of Marriage and Inheritance Among the Later Stuart Gentry" in *Principalities, Powers and Estates. Studies in Medieval and early modern Government and Society*, (ed.) L.O. Frappell (Adelaide, 1979), p. 18.

well")⁶⁶ the match fell through because Mr. Bellingham would not agree to the £1,000 a year maintenance and Lady Lowther would not come down low enough to reach an agreement.

The comments made by Lady Lowther clearly illustrate that her concern was primarily for the welfare of her daughter. She was willing to provide a £5,000 portion but for this a £800 maintenance a year was needed at least. She told Bellingham that that which "most primarily concerns the contentment and satisfaction of young people's lives [is] a full and competent fortune...to secure them from debt, and to make their lives comfortable". As she later stated, her daughter as an unmarried woman under Lady Lowther's guardianship lived very well, had £300 a year for her personal expense and Lady Lowther gave her "her table". Considering this life of ease Lady Lowther would not readily give her over to another's control who perhaps could not provide well enough for her.

As Hainsworth points out, Lady Lowther's insistence on the £800 maintenance did not indicate greed for herself.⁶⁷ She would gain nothing financially and would in fact lose £5,000. She had no use for the further family connections the marriage would provide. Her concern was fully for her daughter. Lady Lowther had been married and consequently widowed twice. Her second husband she had chosen herself and he had been an extremely wealthy man. The important matter of marriage could not be left to an inexperienced daughter. Lady Lowther had the experience necessary to negotiate a match that her daughter lacked.

Although guardians had a much more extensive role, many women who were not guardians still exerted a great influence on marriage negotiations in their families. Frances Seymour, Duchess of Somerset was one such woman. She was not the guardian of her granddaughter, Lady Frances Finch, whose father, Lord Winchilsea, was still alive, but seemed to take on some of the tasks of a guardian in the negotiations for her marriage. Lord Winchilsea appears to have been very preoccupied with various political activities and the responsibility for the marriage of his daughter was, to some extent, left to her grandmother.

Frances Finch married Sir Thomas Thynne on 11 February, 1673 and it is through the correspondence of Thomas to his father in the weeks prior to this event that we obtain the clues as

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 17.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 18.

to the role of the duchess. In a note on "The Particulars proposed by Mr. Attorney" Thomas Thynne listed the conditions of his marriage. £7,000 was to be paid down upon the marriage and £2,000 of this was to be given by the Duchess of Somerset and £5,000 by Lord Winchilsea. The other party wanted a general entail. If there were no sons from the marriage and only one daughter she was to have a portion of £10,000, and if several daughters they had to share a portion of £12,000 between them. Thomas went on to discuss the jointure - £1,000 a year was insisted on, to be assigned on what land was currently let. The importance of Frances Seymour in these negotiations is revealed in the point concerning the maintenance to be paid. "They also presse for £1,500 a yeare present maintenance; especially the grandmother but I hope to obteine some little abatement."⁶⁸

Frances Seymour provided both financial help and shrewd bargaining power in assisting her granddaughter to a successful marriage. Factors such as maintenance during the marriage, the jointure for widowhood, and providing for daughters were important in ensuring a stable existence for a wife by making certain she had an income that was not dependent on her husband. Frances Seymour was able to bargain for these things and to add to the portion which enabled such demands to be made of the bridegroom and his father. She was an important part of the successful marriage of her granddaughter, and like Dame Anne Barnardiston, demonstrated a great deal of longsightedness over the marriage.

The papers of the Thynne family are also important in revealing the role of Mary Thynne in these negotiations. Her role was of a different nature to Frances Seymour's, being more one of adviser and conveyer of information and encouragement. In the above marriage it is clear that Thomas Thynne and his father were in charge of the negotiations from their end, but they still felt that it was important to inform Mary Thynne of the proceedings.

To all which (the present maintenance excepted) my father hath bin pleased to consent but desired time to acquaint my mother and some other of his friends with it.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Thomas Thynne, Sir H.F. Thynne Family Correspondence, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 33, fo. 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

It is doubtful whether Mary would have been able to prevent the match, had she so desired, but it is clear that the decision would not be made until she was consulted and her opinions given. She was of importance in the proceedings, even though she was not directly involved in the decision-making.

There are glimpses of this role in other marital negotiations in the Thynne family. Mary Thynne was not a guardian over any individual in her family but nevertheless managed to exert some influence, especially on the decisions of those who were guardians. As a grandmother she was not directly involved in the marriage negotiations of her grandchildren but rather exerted an influence on their guardians who had control. This was especially evident in the discussions over the future marriages of her eldest son's children, Henry and Katherine, which began rather early in their lives as was usual. Much thought went into such proceedings in families, it was after all probably the most important decision to be made in a person's life and had weighty repercussions on the future of the family.

Consequently, while Henry Thynne and his sister were still in their early teens their grandmother directed a great deal of advice to her son about their marriage prospects and the way such matters should be treated. She certainly believed that when it came to marriage parents and grandparents knew better than the couple concerned, remarking "to marry a child whilst it is under government is the best way of rendering them obedient".⁷⁰ She also gave advice on jointures and portions. In 1687 Mary advised that her son should plan what parts of the estate should form a jointure for his son's future bride. A good jointure would secure a good marriage and dowry for her grandson. Thus, she continued, if providence permitted the younger children to live to a marriagable age the estate was quite large enough to cater for them.⁷¹ Mary Thynne's experience is evident here. She realised the importance of careful planning in order to ensure the most advantageous marriages possible for her grandchildren. In 1687 when Mary advised Thomas to plan a jointure for his son's future bride, Henry Thynne was only eleven years old - clearly years away from marriage, but his grandmother was thinking ahead and ready to advise her son that preparations should begin early. Mary Thynne had successfully married or helped to marry her

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 16 October, 1687, vol. 32, fo. 133.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 24 September, 1687, fo. 125.

own children to advantageous matches and so could quite rightly be regarded as an expert in such matters.

Mary's experience and readiness to advise certainly would have been useful in the family, and her ability to empathise and encourage would have provided moral support. During the lengthy negotiations for her granddaughter's marriage Mary showed keen interest and concern and was quick to comfort her son when a proposed match fell through, telling him that he had no reason to reproach himself, only that he expected all people to act with the sincerity with which he did.⁷² In general Mary Thynne offered information, advice, and, when hopes were disappointed, comfort. Her values and beliefs about marriage were passed down to the younger generations, for example, her belief that it was better to marry offspring while they were "under government". Although not of direct importance to the marriage of her grandchildren her letters reveal the way family members united to offer advice and help and the important experience a knowledgeable woman could bring to the negotiations.

The partnership of husband and wife in negotiating the marriages of their children is especially evident in the Knyvett family correspondence. Thomas Knyvett, while preoccupied with business and legal proceedings in London, wrote several letters to his wife who was living in the country on their estate, about the marriage prospects of their eldest daughter Elizabeth (born c. end 1620/beginning 1621). In a letter of approximately 1637 or earlier Thomas wrote that his approaches to Edward Ward of Bixley had received consideration and now it rested on Katherine and himself to "carrye the busines discretely". The young man wanted to see Elizabeth before he went on to London so Thomas informed Katherine that Ward and his mother and a Mr. Gibbs would be at Thorpe to visit the Knyvetts tomorrow night. Katherine's role in the proceedings is clearly stated. "I give you a hint of it because you shall not be unprovided to give him a faier intertaine."⁷³

These negotiations were clearly unsuccessful because in 1643 Thomas was still searching for an appropriate husband for his daughter. On 16 July, 1643 he wrote that he wished Betty was with him. He had become acquainted with the gentleman they had already had some thoughts

⁷² *Ibid.* 14 January, 1688, fo. 151.

⁷³ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, (n.d.), *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 38, p. 89.

about, liked him very much and was sure Betty would as well. If the gentleman liked the match it would be quickly made and Thomas was well-placed to do this at that moment in town. Therefore Thomas told Katherine to "dispatch what thou canst quickly and leave the rest to God's protection and dirrection". Later in the letter he added "I long to try whether this designe for poore Betty will take effect".⁷⁴ In May 1644 they were obviously still trying for a match. "God allmighty prosper our honest indeavors for poore Buss."⁷⁵

That same year Thomas again was hopeful and Katherine had a rather more active role in helping to finalise a match. He had been told of a Captain Warner who had asked a friend of his about Elizabeth, being "very Inquissitive". Captain Warner's wife was sister to the widower Katherine wrote to Thomas about and so Thomas believes there is something in the business. If Katherine could contrive for the interested party to see Elizabeth and if affection caused liking between them then Thomas was sure he would think it worthwhile to come to London for her. Thomas suggested some ways a meeting could be arranged and again added "I beseech God prosper all good indeavors for poor Buss".⁷⁶

Thomas at this stage of the proceedings was obviously too occupied to be able to do everything personally. On 16 May, 1644 amidst other instructions and information to Katherine, Thomas wrote "I pray God send you good success in your Suff[olk] busines".⁷⁷ This business was negotiations for the marriage of Elizabeth with John Rous. On 30 May problems seemed to be occurring for Katherine as Thomas wrote that he was sorry her "Suffo[lk] hopes wear so unhappily dasht".⁷⁸ At this time Katherine was obviously bearing the brunt of the negotiations herself, Thomas too busy fighting sequestration to do more than give advice. He was obviously tied down because of the necessity of staying in London.

The above letters also demonstrate the great concern felt by parents over the marriage of their daughters. If Elizabeth did not marry she would be in a difficult position. There was no other option open for women of the upper classes in the seventeenth-century. Thomas's

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* [16 July, 1643], Letter 56, pp. 117-118.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 2 May, [1644], Letter 71, p. 142. This comment referred to negotiations for a match with John Rous, a widower (see note 1).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* [11-14 May, 1644], Letter 74, p. 146. The widower in question was still John Rous who did eventually marry Elizabeth Knyvett. She was his second wife.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 16 May, 1644, Letter 76, p. 149.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 30 May, 1644, Letter 78, p. 154.

comments about "poore Buss" reveal the anxiety both Elizabeth and her parents would have felt during negotiations. Their anxiety would have been heightened by the threat of sequestration which was hanging over Thomas at this time. The bride had to bring a portion to the marriage and the larger this was the better the match. With Thomas Knyvett's finances being so uncertain negotiations would have been particularly difficult.⁷⁹ If he lost everything a successful match for Elizabeth would have been out of the question. Thomas gave voice to these fears in a letter of 8 June, 1644. "If I get not off this sequestration we are all undon, for I shall have no mean[s] to doe any [t]hing for poor Buss."⁸⁰ This problem was one which affected many families during the Civil War years. In the Verney family for example, Ralph Verney's sisters all had to accept marriages that were beneath them because Ralph's fortunes had been severely affected by his exile and near sequestration. The final successful marriage of Elizabeth Knyvett to John Rous was in no small way due to the efforts of Katherine Knyvett in marriage negotiations. Added to this was Katherine's invaluable assistance in overcoming the sequestration order which stabilised the financial situation. Wives clearly were often partners to their husbands in more than simple business. The explanation behind the survival of many of these families in the face of so much upheaval is undoubtedly the contribution of women in the various areas of family life.

When the guardian, usually a husband, had to be absent, or was preoccupied with other business, women often took over marriage negotiations. Frances Seymour and Katherine Knyvett helped in negotiations because the male guardians were largely preoccupied with political business. The survival of the family was important to these women. Just because male guardians existed, the importance of women should therefore not be discounted, because often men did not have the time to fully devote to these matters. Within the framework of their families was a recognised role for these women to support younger family members to these crucial decisions.

The overwhelming importance of wealth in providing power over the decisions and behaviour of others is well demonstrated by Lady Lowther of Ackworth (this time in regard to her

⁷⁹ The difficulties of marrying children under these conditions is shown in the relatively late marriage ages of the Knyvett children. Elizabeth was at least 23 years of age when she married, John was 32, Thomas 27 and Muriel 28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 8 June, 1644, Letter 79, p. 156. See also 23 May, 1644, Letter 77, p. 150. "And for the other marke you thought I had Aym'd at, by way of marriage, I showld be as gladd to see my children dissposed of for ther advantage in that way as you or any Parent liv'ing, but I see so much impossibility of effecting any such thing in these times and in the present condition we are nowe in, as I knowe nothing we can doe but rely and patiently expect Gods providence and good pleasuer."

grandchildren) and Dame Elizabeth Egerton. Both of these women exerted an influence over the marriages of their grandchildren because they possessed the very persuading element of money. Their interference demonstrates that if one had money one had power over the family, irrespective of gender.

Lady Lowther of Ackworth was guardian to her three grandsons Woolley, Thomas and John. They proved to be rather a handful for her and she frequently was reduced to threats that unless they behaved themselves she would spend no money on them or help them in any way. This included marriage. Woolley, the youngest brother, was serving an apprenticeship and his master sent reports to Lady Lowther complaining of his behaviour - he was extravagant, frequently drunk, and also supposedly attached to a maid servant and considering marrying her. Such a match of course would never be tolerated. Woolley wrote a pleading letter to his grandmother saying that it was all a pack of lies and he would never consider such a match. He assured her that he would always be guided by her.⁸¹ No matter what mischief her grandsons were involved in they would never go too far. Lady Lowther controlled the purse-strings and therefore they had to obey, or at least give the appearance of obeying. They would never step outside the circle of what was permissible in marriage.

Dame Elizabeth Egerton exerted a much more formidable influence on her grandson George's marriage and actually caused one proposed match to be dropped because of her influence. Dame Elizabeth was not her grandson's guardian but her example demonstrates that this was not always necessary to control over younger members. If one had wealth control could be just as great. Dame Elizabeth objected to the proposed match of George Booth to the daughter of the Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield. At a meeting on 16 July, 1638, at which her grandson was present she said that if her grandson married this woman he would be marrying a bastard. She was a bastard by the common laws of the land as were all bishop's children. Dame Elizabeth threatened that if George did marry her he would have neither the "worth of a groat from her" nor ever have her blessing, and would answer her in another world. She coupled this with "other

⁸¹ Richard Ellis to Lady Lowther of Ackworth, 17 October, 1688, Letter 18 and "Grandchild Woolley's Complaint, His master's unto me and Grandchild Woolley to me" December, 1689-January, 1690, Letter 3, **Manuscript Volumes-Lady Lowther of Ackworth.**

expressions of dislike and terms of disgrace both to the said lord bishop, his wife and children".⁸² Dame Elizabeth did not believe in hiding her displeasure under any veil of tact.

Negotiations were begun for a marriage with the Earl of Lincoln's daughter. Richard Brereton, in a conversation with Lady Egerton assured her that the match with the Bishop's daughter was broken and that the one in preparation would bring in a good portion. Lady Egerton was particularly eager for a good portion as she was involved in a law-suit with George's grandfather, Sir George Booth. The more money he received the more she would be able to be paid. Richard Brereton told her that since she approved of the match she should show her love to her grandchild and advance the same.⁸³ George did eventually marry Catherine, daughter of the Earl of Lincoln.

This example of grandmotherly pressure illustrates the importance of wealth to power. Lady Egerton had the leverage to stop any match she did not approve of. It also demonstrates the way in which the values of the older generation were impressed upon the young. Lady Egerton's belief about the marriage of bishop's was enforced upon her grandson and affected his marriage. All the above examples show that it was expediency, legal guardianship and wealth that were the determinants of the power of women in these negotiations, not gender. Women were flexible enough to adapt to their situation and to work within it in exerting their influence. Their contribution was expected and the activity of older women of all types of status and situation, in marriage negotiations is evident.

Education was another area in which women remained influential after their own children had reached adulthood. This influence was generally of two different kinds. They were often active in the early stages of their grandchildren's education, before these grandchildren went away to school or had tutors engaged for them. They also frequently gave advice to younger family members, particularly their children, about their grandchildren's education. In this way they retained some influence even though personal contact and contributions had ceased. Education in elite families was important in fitting people for future life and for maintaining the appearance of

⁸² **Tatton Papers**, no. 251, The Rylands Library of the University of Manchester, copy of a "note of remembrance" by two witnesses, Mr. James Chantrill and Peter Drinkwater "which they would be ready" to say and justify."

⁸³ **Ibid.** no. 253, Richard Brereton-memorandum of his conversation with Lady Egerton, 25 February, 1639.

gentility. The education of females in seventeenth-century England was different from that of males. While their brothers went off to school once they reached a certain age, and then into university, the Inns of Court or into apprenticeships - all male establishments, girls were commonly educated at home by their mothers or grandmothers. There they were taught religious values, such decorative accomplishments as drawing and music, and how to be good wives and housekeepers. Women consequently, tended to exert more influence over the education of females, because this was considered their sphere. However, the early education of boys, before their formal education began, was often carried out by women relatives such as grandmothers. Again, the distinction between guardians and those who were merely older female members of the family must be kept in mind. A guardian could organise her ward's education with total freedom, male or female, while other women had to exert their influence in a much less direct manner.

Men often entrusted the education of their children to their wives or mothers. As trusted family members they were bound by ties of affection and loyalty and so were eager to ensure the child was fit to make its way in the world and represent the family in a positive way. Older female family members also were likely to have experienced the education of their own children and so were knowledgeable. When organising their affairs in preparation for their death, men also often left the education of those in their charge to older women in the family. This can be seen for example both with the Duchess of Somerset and Lady Lowther of Ackworth. Lady Lowther's son Sir Thomas Leigh gave the custody and tuition of his three sons to his mother.⁸⁴ The Duke of Somerset in his will stated that he wanted his two grandchildren (one of which was his heir) to be educated "in such sort and by and with such persons as the said Lady Marchioness, my wife shall well like and approve of and not otherwise".⁸⁵ These were the children of his third son Henry, who predeceased his father. A tremendous battle over the custody and education of these children erupted between their grandmother and their mother after the death of the Duke, who had clearly believed that his wife was the best person to safeguard his heir. Another example of the trust given to elite women was in regard to Dame Anne Barnardiston. Simonds D'Ewes stated that Anne Clopton had been educated by her grandmother Dame Anne almost since her infancy and

⁸⁴ Memorandum of Deed Appointing Lady Lowther the Guardian of Sir Thomas Leigh's Children, 1686, *Manuscript Volumes-Lady Lowther of Ackworth*, no. 30.

⁸⁵ A. Daly Briscoe, *A Stuart Benefactress*, p. 85.

"not onlie after her father's decease but before alsoe".⁸⁶ Anne's father Sir William Clopton entrusted the education of his daughter and heir to her grandmother both before and after his death. Because older women often took on this task of educating younger family members they were the natural ones to appoint to continue after the death of the father. Older women were thus regarded by the men in the family as valuable sources of knowledge and help.

Lady Lowther of Ackworth, guardian to three grandsons, three sons and one daughter on the death of her second husband in 1675, became responsible for their education and their establishment into apprenticeships. Her daughter Margaret married in 1679 and there is no information relating to her education. However, in relation to her grandsons and her son Robert, there are many letters from 1682-1690 revealing her interest and authority over the training each received. As a wealthy guardian she had the necessary resources to encourage obedience.

Lady Lowther vehemently discouraged idleness in any form and for those whose education and training was financed out of her own pocket this was especially true. In a letter to Robert in 1683 she discussed his idea of "rambling into the country, and living on no employment".⁸⁷ He had thrown away two or three years at university only to decide not to be a scholar and now, having a kind, good master and full employment he was willing to waste all that cost, "which amounts to more than your father left you," reminded Lady Lowther, and leave. The discredit was also hard to bear. Lady Lowther declared her hatred of idleness, which was the root of all evil, and adjured Robert to apply himself to good.

In a letter of 11 October, 1682 Lady Lowther described to the recipient (unknown) the care she had taken of her grandsons Tom and Woolley. Woolley had cost above £200 since his father's death and his brother Tom before he went to Oxford very little less. The payment Lady Lowther saw fit for such an outlay was clear, "if they will take pains and be industrious, I shall think it well bestowed, if not I shall think no more of them".⁸⁸ Again, in a letter to Robert's master in Amsterdam, Mr. Bankes, in 1684, Lady Lowther stated that she would never own Robert her child if he did not merit his master's good account of him and redeem his former errors

⁸⁶ D'Ewes, *An Account*, fo. 97.

⁸⁷ Lady Lowther to Robert Lowther, 1 December, 1683, *Manuscript Volumes-Lady Lowther of Ackworth*, Letter 8.

⁸⁸ Lady Lowther to [?], 11 October, 1682, *Ibid.* Letter 6.

and failings. Employment she stated was the best guard against ill and she could never own an idle person, much less endure it in any of her own.⁸⁹ Lady Lowther demonstrates a pragmatic attitude toward education. It was to be used to fit a person for employment, so they could support themselves in an acceptable manner. She had invested much money on the education of those in her charge and did not want this to be wasted.

The amounts of money Lady Lowther was prepared to invest to train her son and grandsons is clearly presented in the correspondence. Lady Lowther was a generous woman in this respect. When Robert Lowther went to Amsterdam his board and expenses cost £60 a year and his master only gave him £20 and on top of this Robert wanted to learn Dutch and French in his spare time.⁹⁰ Lady Lowther agreed to make up the £40 difference for her son's board and allowed him £15 a quarter for clothes and other expenses.⁹¹ Lady Lowther seemed to need some convincing before she would agree to Robert's learning of languages. Robert assured her that he would only learn for about three or four months longer and by that time to fully master the understanding of it.⁹² In 1686 Lady Lowther wrote to her son that when he was bound an apprentice Mr. Bankes (his master) had asked for a bond which Lady Lowther had entered into for one thousand pounds. She asked Robert for his counterbond saying she did not want her executors to run into any trouble on her death.⁹³ She had invested considerable money to allow Robert an apprenticeship.

Another vice particularly disliked by Lady Lowther was extravagance. She chastised Woolley Leigh her grandson because he wanted more money which she did not believe he should stand in need of. She said she knew she gave him quite enough and although this time she would write to his master to supply his needs she wanted to hear no more of Woolley's wants.

if you be not provident in wearing your things, you know you have nothing of your own to sustain you. I never heard of any prentice at Hull that spent ten pound a year.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Lady Lowther to [?Mr. Bankes], 24 May, 1684, *Ibid.* Letter 10.

⁹⁰ Robert Lowther to Lady Lowther, 3 July, 1684, *Ibid.* Letter 12.

⁹¹ Lady Lowther to Mr. Gunston, 15 July, 1684, *Ibid.* Letter 15.

⁹² Robert Lowther to Lady Lowther, 10/20 April, 1685, *Ibid.* Letter 2.

⁹³ Lady Lowther to Robert Lowther, 8 October, 1686, *Ibid.* Letter 21.

⁹⁴ Lady Lowther to Woolley Leigh, 6 February, 1687, *Ibid.* Letter 6.

This quote sums up Lady Lowther's attitude well. If her grandsons were wasting money it was her money they were wasting. Lady Lowther often threatened to take away financial support as a means of bringing her charges to heel. It is clear that this was the source of her power. When Woolley's elder brother Tom died in 1688 Woolley expected to inherit his estate and so gain a measure of independence.⁹⁵ His master, Richard Ellis wrote to Lady Lowther about Woolley's drunkenness and that Woolley told his servants he would not be corrected by his master. All would be lost unless Lady Lowther sent a severe caution.⁹⁶ Lady Lowther immediately wrote to Woolley and threatened to give him up if he did not reform. She informed him that his brother had cut off the entail of his estate and gave up the writings so that debts would not swallow it up. Woolley and his brother John were barred from it. Only a Chancery suit could recover any part of it and Lady Lowther had no intention of undertaking one for Woolley unless she heard a better character of him from his master.⁹⁷ Lady Lowther used her wealth to educate and train her son and grandsons for useful employment and to ensure they persevered with that training. The formality of the mother/grandmother guardian is evident in the relationship of Lady Lowther and her wards. Her responsibilities were taken seriously and despite the strict tone of her letters she did amply provide for her son and grandsons, even when, in the same breath, she reproved them for carelessness and extravagance.

Lady Lowther of Ackworth kept herself informed of her grandsons' work and was quick to demand their diligence and application.⁹⁸ In a letter to "Master Lancaster" she asked for news of her grandchild Tom. She wanted to hear of his improvement and that he was framing "himself to live within that little compass his fortune" would allow and therefore "by industry to improve his small talent by diligence and hard study".⁹⁹ Education was needed to fit young family members to make the best use possible of what resources they had, however small. Masters and

⁹⁵ His master Richard Ellis wrote to Lady Lowther on 15 October, 1688, stating that he had put Woolley into mourning and told him to shun all occasion of evil "but find his brother's death, and the consideration of so long being his own master, makes him assume higher, and use more freedom than formerly". He had asked his eldest brother John, what he was likely to receive from his brother's death. *Ibid.* Letter 17.

⁹⁶ Mr. Richard Ellis to Lady Lowther, 17 October, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 18.

⁹⁷ Lady Lowther to Woolley Leigh, 18 October, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 19.

⁹⁸ Lady Lowther to Woolley Leigh, 27 January, 1686, *Ibid.* Letter 1. "if you be diligent in your Master's business I shall enlarge my fondness daily unto you." (There are many examples of such letters by Lady Lowther).

⁹⁹ Lady Lowther to Master Lancaster, 30 July, [1682], *Ibid.* Letter 1. "Master Lancaster" - Dr. William Lancaster (1650-1717), Fellow and Provost of Queen's College, Oxford.

teachers had to consider the entire individual and produce not only a merchant or scholar but a gentleman. Mr. Gunston in Amsterdam assured Lady Lowther that he would direct and assist Robert Lowther to the best of his ability in both merchandise and morals.¹⁰⁰ Lady Lowther had her own ideas about the progress which needed be made and the stages she felt her wards should have reached. "I think for the learning any of you got with Master Huntingdon, you needed not to have been so long with him..."¹⁰¹ Lady Lowther's requests for progress reports and news from teachers and masters illustrates her concern that her money was being used wisely and that her wards would be fitted for independence at a latter stage.

Dame Anne Barnardiston was also extensively involved in the education of her ward and granddaughter, Anne Clopton. Females had to be fitted for their role in life as males did. Sir Simond D'Ewes, in describing the attractions of his hoped-for future bride, stated that in Anne Clopton were

mett and conioined all those qualifications I desired to meete with in a wife. Shee had been verie religiouslie educated under Dame Anne Barnardiston her grandmother by her mother's side¹⁰²

In D'Ewes' list of the qualities he wished for in his wife, the religious education by her grandmother came first. It was likely to have been the second thing that attracted D'Ewes to the Anne Clopton match (after her fortune of course). After his marriage D'Ewes commented on his wife and the comfort she gave and her desire to increase in the practice of a godly and virtuous life which made her a great blessing to him.¹⁰³ Given D'Ewes highly coloured account which is perhaps less than sincere in places, a virtuous, well-behaved wife was clearly highly desirable and an education which instilled these virtues in girls from a young age was important to the family. Dame Anne Barnardiston's efforts in the education of her ward and granddaughter bore fruit in the marriage to D'Ewes. Both Lady Lowther and Anne Barnardiston took on the responsibility of educating young family members in their charge. The success of the family depended on

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Gunston to Lady Lowther, 14 July, 1684, *Ibid.* Letter 14.

¹⁰¹ Lady Lowther to ?Thomas Leigh, 5 March, 1688, *Ibid.* Letter 7.

¹⁰² D'Ewes, *An Account*, fo. 91v.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* fo. 97.

successful marriages of females and careers for men. In this way both these women were of crucial importance in ensuring the survival of the family and its members, and in maintaining a certain level of social standing and financial health.

Women did not have to be guardians to exercise an influence over the education of younger family members. Not only did they often educate infant children they also gave advice to the guardians concerned. This occurred with males as well as females. John Evelyn, for example at five years of age went to live with his grandparents in Lewes, Sussex. After the death of his grandfather two years later he continued to live with his grandmother who married again after a couple of years. While in his grandmother's charge he learned Latin and writing from a Frenchman, went to school to a Mr. Potts and finally to a free-school at Southover. He records in 1632 that his father "would very willingly have weaned me from my fondnesse of my too indulgent Grand-mother," and wanted to send him to Eton. However, Evelyn was too frightened to go.¹⁰⁴ He remained therefore under the eye of his grandmother until 1637 when eventually, his father sent him to university, determined that his sons should either get degrees or study long enough to establish themselves as gentlemen.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, although John Evelyn's education took place at male institutions of learning, his grandmother did have charge of it during childhood and adolescence.

Lady Mary Thynne also took a close interest in the education of her grandchildren, and particularly of Henry Thynne, and demonstrates the influence a woman could exert despite the competition of schools and male tutors. Henry appears to have begun to learn to read while in her charge, although not very successfully. In May 1680 she wrote

hee is pleasent company and has a stronge memory, but so great an aversion to his booke and so extreeme a love for his nurs that there is little signes of his improvement that way¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, vol. 2, (ed.) E.S. de Beer, (Oxford, 1955), pp. 7-15.

¹⁰⁵ W.G. Hiscock, *John Evelyn and his Family Circle*, (London, 1955), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 6 May, 1680, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 143.

and then later in the month "I know not what effect your letter may have upon him to incourage his learning but 'tis little hee yet doth toward it".¹⁰⁷ Although Henry at this time was only four years old Mary was concerned at what she considered his lack of progress. "I confess it is my care as well as thine to see the little fellow now above 4 years old and canott reade one word in his book."¹⁰⁸ She advised that his nurse, whom she believed to be incompetent, should be dismissed, advice which was acted upon promptly. Later in 1685 Henry at nine years of age was still lazy. Mary wrote "if you will writt in your next a postscrip for Hary I will beare you out in it who have tould him I will complane hee minds not his booke".¹⁰⁹ Clearly there were difficulties in educating a grandson and sometimes the father was needed to add extra weight to Mary's entreaties and reproaches. It appears that the grandmother's authority was at times not enough, perhaps because she tended to be too indulgent. It could also have been the case however that too much was expected of Harry and that he was simply unable to meet these expectations.

When Henry was older and was no longer under her roof, Mary continued to exert an influence on his education through the frequent advice she gave to his parents. In December 1686 she advised Thomas to hear Henry read and to get him to render an account of what he remembered afterwards.¹¹⁰ Three months later she wrote

I am very glad you are allready able to make some iudgment on Harrys improvement. Mony layed out on that plant is better beestowed then in your garden, and bringe you comfort as well as satisfaction.¹¹¹

Mary recognised the value of Henry's education to the future prosperity of the family. A well-educated son was able to support the family and ensure its success and good name in the world, for example through managing of estates, politics and connections. Mary Thynne spoke truthfully when she stated that Henry Thynne's education would bring his father comfort and satisfaction, a process in which she herself played an important part. Indeed, her knowledge of Henry's character and the problems experienced in educating him were given expression a couple of letters

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* [11?] May, 1680, fo. 148.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 1 June, 1680, fo. 157.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 1 May, 1685, fo. 228.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 31 December, 1686, vol.32, fo. 68.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 24 March, 1687, fo. 86.

later "where so tractable a child as Harry is, I am sure hee will improve with his tutor's industry which has bin his want heither to".¹¹²

Mary Thynne also had very definite ideas about the form of education, and the type of school which would be best for Henry. She was keenly aware of the current opinions on education as she demonstrated in 1687 when she told Thomas that presently the education of children was thought to be safest in the home, and acknowledged that this had not been thought the best way of education in the past.¹¹³ On the subject of schools Mary was quick to inform Thomas of the characteristics of those she had knowledge of. One had not above eight protestants and those of mean quality who were taught for half a crown entrance. "A cheepe bargin to the parents is like to bee a hard one to the child."¹¹⁴

In 1689 when Henry Thynne was thirteen years old Mary, in advising her son over his education demonstrated the mixed aims of seventeenth-century gentlemanly education.

Harry I presume is with you, and to make the best advantage of the place I wish you could putt him into the aquantanc of so well breed youths, as may improve his conversation, the booke will finde more houers at LL (Longleate) then it can bee allowed in towne and pirhapps it may bee as much for his advantage to bee well-breed, as to be very learned but these admonitions rather express my affection rather than my skill I am sure I would have him every thinge that may speake him a child to my dearest¹¹⁵

To be both learned and well-bred were essential for a gentleman. As the family was at that time in town it made sense to concentrate on the latter area. Study of his books could always be left for when they returned to the country.

There is, unfortunately, little information on the education of Henry's sister, "Popett". Perhaps her education was not seen as so important or difficult to arrange, or perhaps she was a better student. Certainly her grandmother was aware of her. In 1688 she wrote to Thomas saying

¹¹² *Ibid.* 9 April, 1687, fo. 92.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 13 May, 1687, fo. 100.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 5 June, 1687, fo. 104.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 19 October, 1689, fo. 212.

that she would shortly thank his daughter for her letter which was well written, adding however that Harry had not improved in his hand which she once thought would be as good as his sister's.¹¹⁶ The education of girls by older female family members is given a little more detail in Lady Elizabeth Delaval's "Meditations". Lady Elizabeth had tasks set her such as reading chapters in the French and English Bible or learning some part of scripture before her "playfellow's" could come and see her which were orders her "deare grandmother had commanded shou'd be observed".¹¹⁷ Elizabeth had a governess but her grandmother clearly kept a watchful eye on her grand-daughter's education. Later Elizabeth wrote about her grandmother

Her great goodnesse and humility had made her take the pains to teach me her selfe to read, which I did perfectly well before I was eight yeares old. She also spent much time in giving me dayly instructions as I grew up,....it was my deare grandmother Gorge that toke the greatest care of my mind and labour'd to implant early love of virtu in my heart.¹¹⁸

Like Dame Anne Barnardiston, Lady Gorge (although not a guardian) fostered and passed on her religious values to a younger generation, and indeed to the rest of the family. Through education, particularly of young girls, the values and beliefs of the grandmother could permeate down to the younger family members, remaining active and influential through generations.

As educators women were able to influence the values of younger generations. Their values remained a dynamic force in the family because they were able to personally convey and impress them upon the grandchildren they taught and because they gave advice to parents on their children, advice gained through years of experience. Older women fostered and moulded the youngest members of the family, and gave guidance and encouragement to those bringing them up. In this respect their position in the family was at times quite powerful. As educators elite women had the wellbeing of the family at heart. This concern was not only expressed in activities such as marriage negotiations and education but also through health care and medicine.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 7 January, 1688, fo. 147.

¹¹⁷ Lady Elizabeth Delaval, *The Meditations of Lady Elizabeth Delaval. Written between 1662 - 1671*, (ed. Douglas G. Greene), Surtees Society, Pubs. vol. 190, (1978), p. 29.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 68.

Older female members of the family exerted a certain influence over the physical health and well-being of younger family members. In many ways this was considered to be the special sphere of women and their influence in this area was of a rather informal type. Their concern and experience in medical problems rendered them most suited to the giving of advice and comfort. Many younger family members benefitted from their wisdom and the fact that they gave so much advice indicates that they were considered the ones to turn to when worried with health problems.¹¹⁹

Lady Thynne was intimately acquainted with her grandson's state of health while he was living with her. This is evident from the extremely detailed letters she wrote to her son concerning Henry. Henry was ill in 1680 and Mary wrote frequently - every two or three days - informing Thomas of his progress. On 27 March, 1680 she wrote

the little fellow I hope is better....yet hee is very lively and will not endure keepinge within doores if a freer aire would bee his perfect cure I wish hee had it for I am sure I love his health better then his company.¹²⁰

Examples of Mary Thynne's intimate involvement in the illness and remedies of her grandson occur many times in the correspondence. As she wrote on 30 March:

the little fellow I hope is better, for three mornings I gave him saffron and lemon, and this I have begunne with him, with snaile watter for I finde tis not so much of sicknes as his growing leane that is his ill. My coachman I hope has lost his ague, and when hee is able to sitt in the box the child shall not stay within one day. I had rather doe any thinge then trye the Doctors' medisens seence there appears noe nesity for I am sure his temper will not beare purging. His breath is better which makes mee hope the matter of the wormes is so too. I say not all this to promotte his stay with me if thou think Drayton would doe better, for God knowes I have noe greater ioy then thy sattisfaction¹²¹

¹¹⁹ See Robyn Priestley, *Marriage and Family Life*, pp. 170-173. See especially pp. 172-173 where she gives an example of a grandmother caring for her grandchildren. Also see pp. 291-293.

¹²⁰ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, [27th.?] March, 1680, *Thynne Papers*, vol. 31, fo. 115.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 30 March, 1680, fo. 116.

On 22 April, 1680 she filled almost two pages of a letter with detail of "little fellows" illness and the remedies she was trying.¹²² In May 1682 both Thomas's children were staying with her and Mary wrote "the children I thank God continue well and Harry shewes it in his lookes, Popitt tooke phisick yesterday, but her brother must not beegine his till a weeke after her".¹²³

While her grandchildren were living with their parents and Mary was not in charge of them she nevertheless continued to express interest and concern in their health. Indeed she expected to be informed about all her grandchildren and frequently gave advice to her children about their proper care. She obviously became worried and troubled when they became ill and she was not present to know all the details. For example, in 1685 she was afraid her grandson was ill and that the information was being kept from her.

I know thy feare of troubling mee would keepe an easy illnes of poore Harry from my knowlidge, and I hope there is no danger from his lookeing paile or his flesh a little wearinge.¹²⁴

In a letter to her other son Harry, Mary wrote that she was concerned when no letter came from London as she suspected her daughter's, probably Frances Thynne's, little boy was not well enough to confirm the hopes they had written to her of in the last letter. The weather was now warmer and Mary hoped the children would benefit from it. She also hoped Harry would be able to better judge his son Tommy's illness when the season allowed the use of medicines.¹²⁵ Mary Thynne did not only express her concern in her letters but also passed on her experience in health care and medicines. In her letter of April 1680 she gave Frances Thynne advice on making cowslip wine and the benefits of the rosemary flower when made into a conserve.¹²⁶ Earlier that month she prided herself on her knowledge and skill when she learned that the physician had ordered Thomas the same remedies that she herself had suggested.¹²⁷

¹²² *Ibid.* 22 April, 1680, fo. 184.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 20 May, [1682?], fo. [195?].

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 28 October, 1685, fo. 278.

¹²⁵ Mary Thynne to Henry Frederick Thynne (her son), 16 February, 1691, *Ibid.* vol. 34, fo. 220.

¹²⁶ Mary Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 10 April, 1680, *Ibid.* vol. 31, fo. 126.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 3 April, 1680, fo. 121.

Lady Lowther of Ackworth also demonstrated extensive knowledge of medicines and remedies. When her son Robert was in Amsterdam and became ill, he wrote to his mother a detailed account of his sufferings, explaining what steps he had taken to be cured.¹²⁸ Lady Lowther wrote back with advice, namely that "brimstone taken inwardly and anointed outwardly mixed with butter, never failed to cure any of you when you were children of a very troublesome evil".¹²⁹ It was sometimes dangerous to wear quicksilver girdles as some did but sound purging followed by anointing with brimstone was not dangerous although a little offensive in company! In August 1685 Lady Lowther assured her son that she would do her best to ensure he did not want for anything for the recovery of his health. "A spoonful of the dried powder of the outmost bitter rind of oranges" was her advice this time.¹³⁰ She advised him against using "Jesuits powder" (quinine) because this left the person taking it feeling worse than before.

Robert's letter of 25 August /4 September, 1685 stated that he was finally rid of the ague. He had not had a chance to use the orange rind recipe. The doctor had sweated, bled and purged him to no avail and finally had cured him with Jesuits powder, taken with wine which was a safe way to administer it. He was now very well but needed £15 for the doctor's and apothecary's bills.¹³¹ In a letter to Robert (3 September, 1685) Lady Lowther authorised Mr. Gunston to allow Robert £15 to pay the doctor and apothecary.¹³²

Lady Lowther's interest and concern for the health of her son is clearly expressed. She had a wealth of knowledge to give her son, based on experience, trial and error. Robert clearly could make his own decisions and did not blindly follow her advice. But Lady Lowther proved herself willing to pay for the costs of his recovery which were quite extensive. Older women had experience in medical matters which they were able to pass on to their children. Even when their children were adults the role of caring and teaching did not stop.

There are hints that Lady Lowther was involved in the health of her grandchildren too. In 1685 "our little Mabel" was struck with palsy and despite much effort was not yet recovered.¹³³

¹²⁸ Robert Lowther to Lady Lowther of Ackworth, 10/20 April, 1685, **Manuscript Volumes-Lady Lowther of Ackworth**, Letter 2.

¹²⁹ Lady Lowther of Ackworth to Robert Lowther, 13 May, 1685, **Ibid.** Letter 5.

¹³⁰ Lady Lowther to Robert Lowther, 16 August, 1685, **Ibid.** Letter 14.

¹³¹ Robert Lowther to Lady Lowther, 25 August / 4 September, 1685, **Ibid.** Letter 15.

¹³² Lady Lowther to Robert Lowther, 3 September, 1685, **Ibid.** Letter 17.

¹³³ Lady Lowther to Sir John Leigh, 11 July, 1685, **Ibid.** Letter 13.

Her daughter was taking Mabel to Somersetshire for a cure.¹³⁴ Robert Lowther stated that he hoped Bath would do "little Miss Mabel" good.¹³⁵ Richard Lowther (son of Lady Lowther's second husband by his first wife Mary Fletcher) wrote to Lady Lowther an account of the ill health of various family members, including his youngest boy who had caught smallpox.¹³⁶ Correspondence indicates that health and illness were matters of keen interest for most seventeenth-century people. Given the low nutritional levels and high incidence of medical complaints this is not surprising. People looked to other family members for advice and help during their illness or the illness of their children, and these family members were often women.

The Knyvett letters demonstrate that although women were active in health care they did not have absolute authority in this area. In 1644 Thomas wrote to his wife about the danger Betty had been in (presumably their eldest daughter Elizabeth, who in 1644 was 23 years of age). Thomas questioned Katherine's use of a doctor who was 80 miles away. He said he could "chide" Katherine heartily but knew she loved her daughter as well as he did. Now that Elizabeth was well again Thomas entreated Katherine not to meddle any more with "phissick" unless there was need and she had the advice of Dr. Browne. The best course was to cherish her with good wholesome kitchen physick.¹³⁷

Women clearly maintained the role of health care even after their children had reached adulthood. Like education and marriage negotiations they were sometimes directly involved and sometimes their influence took the form of advice to other family members. Their authority was not absolute in this area but they sometimes had to bear the burden of health care when the guardian was occupied elsewhere as we can see with Katherine Knyvett and Mary Thynne. Whether their remedies worked or not is beside the point. What is important is that they had knowledge which the family found to be useful and sought from them and that they maintained a concern and useful role after their own children were adults. They were a source of comfort and support to concerned family members. Considering their extensive knowledge of medicines it is

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 16 August, 1685, Letter 14.

¹³⁵ Robert Lowther to Lady Lowther, 25 August /4 September, 1685, *Ibid.* Letter 15.

¹³⁶ Richard Lowther to Lady Lowther, 18 February, 1687, *Ibid.* Letter 8.

¹³⁷ Thomas Knyvett to Katherine Knyvett, April 12, 1644, *Knyvett Letters*, Letter 69, pp. 136-137.

more than likely that they participated in such activities much more frequently than the available evidence allows us to state with certainty.¹³⁸

Death, disease, injury, unemployment, debt and war could easily overturn a family's fortunes and radically alter their lives. The presence of an active, supportive, responsible and experienced woman was a comfort and security to a seventeenth-century family. In the decision making process which ultimately influenced children and younger generations in the seventeenth-century, women often made an important and weighty contribution. They were a highly regarded, integral part of the elite family, being extremely useful to its proper functioning and stability. A serious consideration of women, particularly older women, is therefore essential to an understanding of that process and hence of the forces at work on seventeenth-century families. The interests and work of women did not only benefit the wider family. Their activities were of great edification for the women themselves. Through their relationships and input into the lives of younger generations they gained new emotional relationships and fulfilled their desire to be needed and to be loved. Such needs were particularly intense for women who had outlived their husbands and had seen their children grow into adulthood and independence. Women had an on-going, crucial role in the family, a role which gave them fulfillment and which safeguarded the family, helping it to survive and stay together.

After the death of Joan Barrington's husband, William Chantrell was quick to draw her attention to the younger family members who still needed a "watchfull eye" kept over them, that there might be "a generation of the Barringtons continued that may still prayse the Lord".¹³⁹ The seventeenth-century gentry family regarded its younger generations in a very important light. They ensured the survival of the family, and with the right training, careers and marriages upheld the family name in a positive way. Women played a positive role in moulding this important new generation. In attempting to discover the dynamics of seventeenth-century family life, the ways in

¹³⁸ Joan Barrington was a gentlewoman whose correspondence demonstrates a knowledge and concern in the health problems of her family but of whom it is difficult to state with certainty just how extensive her role was. The correspondence does imply that Lady Barrington was kept informed of the health of family members including her grandchildren. For example in 1629 Sir Gilbert Gerard reported that his boy Will had been feverish and well by fits so they did not know his disease but hoped it was only his teeth. 10 February, 1629, Letter 26, p. 54. See also James Harrison's letter concerning the good health of his son, Lady Joan's godson. n.d. [early Oct.? 1629], Letter 68, p. 95. **Barrington Family Letters.**

¹³⁹ William Chantrell to Joan Barrington, 18 November, 1628, **Barrington Family Letters**, Letter 11, p. 38.

which it survived, renewed itself and adapted over time, the gentlewoman provides an important piece to the puzzle.

Conclusion

The importance of women in elite families of seventeenth-century England was not confined to the bearing of children. In a variety of ways they helped to ensure the survival of the family and the well-being of its members. Economically, wives were important backups for their husbands. A wide range of misfortunes or activities often prevented the head of the family from pursuing its economic interests with the devotion necessary. His wife - loyal and knowledgeable - was able to take care of such business as he could not, even to the point of running the entire estate, if the occasion required it. Thus the disruptions of political life, court life, illness and war were, if not eliminated, at least kept to a minimum by the wife's efforts.

Throughout marriage many women learned to run estates and gained a great deal of experience in doing so. Sometimes, totally bereft of any help from husbands or sons, they had to function as the head of the family and make the necessary decisions. They demonstrated an ability to function in the wider world and to deal with men over finances and legal matters. When their husbands died therefore, these women were well-qualified to run their jointures or whatever land or money they possessed in their own right, alone. As widows they gained considerable independence and proved themselves as shrewd and intelligent as any male landowner.

A widow's experience of the estate stood the family at large in good stead also. Widows continued to provide economic assistance and backup for family members especially their sons who had inherited the estate, hence safe-guarding the financial future of the family. Disruptions such as the death of the landowner were smoothed over much more easily if he left behind a knowledgeable widow, who was intimate with the tenants, stewards, bailiffs, lawyers, agreements, leases, lawsuits and anything else connected with the estate.

Women were also important to the family outside the economic sphere in the influence they exerted in younger generations of the family. This importance did not end when their own children reached adulthood but extended to cover grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Not only did experienced women make contributions in the life-shaping decisions of marriage and education, they also showed activity and concern in the health, happiness and daily

care of younger family members. Their input ranged from the giving of advice to total control over these areas.

In a wide range of activities women were the safety mechanisms of the family, protecting it against the vicissitudes of seventeenth-century existence. They provided an element of continuity and stability within the family which helped to mitigate the effects of absentee landownership, threats of sequestration, or changes to ownership because of death. By their activity in such areas as marriage and education, as well as business, women also passed down long-standing values, experience and support which greatly benefitted the younger generations. It is safe to say that a long-lived woman in the family gave that family a better chance of success and financial health. In attempting to understand how elite families functioned and survived in early modern times study of women is crucial.

In studying the role of women in family life the importance of avoiding generalisations is clear. No two women were alike and personality and individual situation had much influence on the role and power enjoyed by these women. Although from the same class, with certain similarities of experience, their personality and that of their family members and those with whom they came in contact, exerted a powerful influence.

These women also demonstrate that gender was not the most important factor influencing power and status in seventeenth-century society. Wealth was the key to power and influence and if a woman was wealthy she could enjoy much freedom and independence. The legal restrictions on women did constrain them and must not be ignored. However it was still possible for women to be respected, powerful individuals if they possessed the wealth to support this. Within their different situations and limitations they did what they could. They stretched their abilities to the limits of their restrictions, being flexible enough to adapt themselves to the needs of the family.

The well-being of the family was a top priority for individuals in the seventeenth-century, most especially for women. However, the role and work done by women was not only important to the family as a whole, it was important for the woman herself. Their contribution and activities gave women a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. This was especially necessary after their own children had grown-up and set up their own families. The satisfaction they received from business negotiations, settling marriages, caring for grandchildren and being sought for advice, lasted all

their lives as they were involved in these tasks until their deaths. As wealthy widows, some women also had the satisfaction of completely running their own affairs and enjoying total independence and power. These women also developed emotional ties to younger family members and the comfort and enjoyment this brought helped them to adjust to old age and widowhood. They did not suddenly find themselves with no aim in life but had a wide role of continuing importance and managed to live satisfying lives.

There was much to test women in seventeenth-century England. They had important tasks to perform and difficulties to overcome. The majority of women in elite families seemed to respond to this positively and in so doing ensured the future of their families. Family members did not ignore these women - they were too valuable a resource to be treated slightingly. Consequently their activity and advice was sought and they were much respected. Historians should not ignore them either. They are crucial to our understanding of women and the family in early modern times and must be given their due.

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