

Household & Family Session – Upstairs and Backstairs

Was there a move towards greater privacy in the household?

The Nuclear Family

For most of our period, the nuclear family was the basic element in English society, upheld and influenced by religion, literature, law, customs and social pressure. This emphasis on the family was reinforced by the Protestant focus on the household rather than the Church as the primary agency for moral and religious instruction.

As we saw last week, the influence on the family by the wider kinship network declined substantially from the mid-17th century.

Although the nuclear family was at its core, a household would often contain members who were not related directly to its head.

In today's session, we shall look at the makeup of households in England, the bonds and responsibilities between those living in the household, and whether these relationships changed during our period.

Throughout the Early Modern period, the status of the household was determined by the status of its head, who was invariably a man.

Status of the Head of the Family

(Quote 1) In the early 18th century, **Daniel Defoe** categorised English society in the following way:

"The great, who live profusely; the rich, who live plentifully; the middle sort, who live well; the working trades, who labour hard but feel no want; the country people, farmers, etc., who fare indifferently; the poor, who live hard; the miserable, who really pinch and suffer hard."

(HANDOUT - STATUS OF HEADS OF FAMILY HANDOUT)

Patriarchalism

Until the middle of the 17th century, the role of the head of the household was considered equivalent to that of the King in the State. William Gouge, the author of one of the most popular advice books of the period, "Of Domesticall Duties", maintained that the husband and father was "*as a king in his own house*", a view that was founded on an analogy with the theory of the Divine Right of Kings where the monarch was considered to act as the "father" to his subjects. As **James I** declared: "*Kings are compared to fathers in families: for a King is truly ...the political father of the nation.*"

End of The Divine Right of Kings

The theory of the Divine Right of Kings was destroyed by the execution of King Charles I in 1649 and, by literally cutting off the head of the “father” of the Nation, the people had also dealt a severe blow to the patriarchal role of the head of the household.

(Quote 2) In the 1680s, the notion of rule by consent of the people was taken up by **John Locke** in his "Two Treatises of Government":

"All men are naturally in ... a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of law of nature, without asking leave or depending upon the will of any other man."

Locke's contract theory of government also provided ammunition for some who wished to undermine the patriarchal role of the husband and father in the household.

(Quote 3) In 1706, **Mary Astell** declared: *"If absolute sovereignty be not necessary in a state, how comes it to be so in a family? Or if in a family, why not in a state? ... Is it not then partial in men to the last degree to contend for and practise that arbitrary dominion in their families which they abhor and exclaim against in the state? ... If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?"*

However, Mary Astell was clearly a woman born before her time.

Primogeniture

At the beginning of our period, the practice of primogeniture generally meant that the eldest son inherited almost the entire family estate on the death of the head of the family.

In the propertied classes, relationships between male siblings could be embittered, as the eldest gained virtually everything while younger brothers were destined to be cast out into the world to seek their living. In the 18th century, the choice was often the army or the Church.

However, changes in legal arrangements during the 16th century enabled the head of the family to dispose of property as he chose. He could sell land or split it between or withdraw it from his children. This gave him a powerful instrument of control over his children.

Among yeomen and husbandmen, primogeniture resulted in the late marriage of the eldest son, who was unable to establish his own household until he inherited the landholding on his father's death. Younger sons were often unable to afford to marry until they had made their own way in the world, perhaps by migration to the town as apprentices or servants.

The Social "Family" (Servants, Apprentices, etc.)

Apprenticeships and servantry

It was a common and particularly English custom for children to be placed as living-in apprentices or servants in the households of masters or mistresses, often at quite a young age.

The phrase "menial servant" comes from the Latin "intra moenia", meaning "within the walls of the family".

For children who were placed out as living-in servants or apprentices during their childhood and adolescence, the master took over the patriarchal role of the father in the household.

The practice helped maintain order among a potentially unruly group within the community, spared parents some of the expense of bringing up a family, reduced tension between parents and children and provided an opportunity for the young person to save and therefore delay marriage plans.

It was not only children from the labouring classes who entered service. The children of yeomen, craftsmen and husbandmen, and even the younger sons of the lesser gentry, were equally likely to spend part of their childhood or youth living in the household of a master. This probably represented up to 60% of all 14 to 21 year olds, or some 12% of a parish's population.

Throughout most of the period, about one third of all households contained living-in apprentices or servants. Studies of late 16th century communities estimate some 84% of gentry households, 72% of yeomen's and 42% of husbandmen's included non-family members living in.

There were four main categories of live-in service in the period; **Craft apprentices; parish apprentices; servants in husbandry; and domestic servants**

Craft apprenticeships

Craft apprenticeships were almost entirely for sons of families from the merchant and yeoman class downwards. In 16th century London fewer than 2% of the apprentices were girls, and about 6% in 18th century Warwickshire.

The child was often recommended through the extended kin and clientage network, and was engaged from about the age of 14.

In corporate towns, apprenticeships were regulated by the craft Guilds.

In order to become a freeman of the town and able to set up an independent business, it was necessary to undergo seven or more years' training as an apprentice, followed by another seven as a journeyman.

The apprentice entered a bond, or indenture, with his master, agreeing to live in his house, obey his commands, keep the "secrets" of his craft, avoid taverns, dice and cards, and to forgo marriage during the period of his service.

In return the master was to provide an adequate instruction in the "*craft, mystery and occupation which he useth*", and to supply bed and board and some items of clothing. The parents of the apprentice paid a money sum to the master towards the cost of training, board and lodging.

Towards the end of the 17th century, the servile aspects of the apprentice's indenture began to be questioned. In 1688, a lad called Daniel Newcombe broke down in tears when he went to sign his indentures because he was afraid he was selling himself into slavery.

Some guilds required those entering apprenticeship to have achieved a certain level of education. In the case of the Medical Companies, an understanding of Latin was necessary, and those entering the commercial guilds needed an adequate standard of reading and writing. However, the members of some handicrafts guilds, such as slaters, carpenters or blacksmiths were often illiterate until late into the 17th century.

Relations between masters and apprentices varied, of course. A fortunate youth may eventually enter partnership with his master, or marry into his family and inherit the business. However, some masters abused their apprentices badly, or failed to give them proper instruction. As a result, some dropped out of their apprenticeships or ran away but for those who stayed the course the rewards could be great.

Parish apprenticeships

Parish apprenticeships were part of the poor relief system, taking paupers children or orphans, both boys and girls, and 'fostering' them out to families in the parish.

Parish apprenticeships often began at a younger age than craft apprenticeships, sometimes as young as five years, and lasted until the age of 24 (or 18 for women). It was frequently a poor form of Youth Training Scheme, comprising menial work rather than proper training.

Elizabeth Clark, a Somerset widow, told the local assizes that she had no work for the nine-year-old girl who had been placed with her and that she was "*of mean capacity to do service*".

Less than half the parish apprentices completed their indentures.

Servants in husbandry

Throughout much of our period, at least 50% of farmers' households employed servants-in-husbandry. They provided a reliable constant workforce and were usually employed in the more skilled work as ploughmen, carters or dairymaids, while the seasonal work in the fields was increasingly carried out by wage-labourers hired by the day or the week as required.

The practice of employing servants-in-husbandry suited the cyclical needs of the family for labour on the farm.

For example, a young married couple would need extra labour on the farm; the need would decrease as the family's children grew to an age when they could help, then increase again when the children left home to set up their own households.

The 1563 Elizabethan Statute of Artificers (which was only repealed in the 1820s) set 12 years as the lower age limit for servants in husbandry. The Statute restricted servants in husbandry to the boundaries of the parish, unless they obtained a testimonial sealed by the parish constable and registered with the vicar stating that the servant was licensed to depart his master and seek new employment.

(Quote 4) The Statute of Artificers (1563) – Clause 7

“That none of the said retained persons in husbandry or in any the arts or sciences above remembered after the time of this retainer expired, shall depart forth of one city, town or parish to another, nor out of the hundred, nor out of the county or shire where he last served, to serve in any other city or county, unless he have a testimonial under the seal of the said city.”

Conditions of service

From 1562, maximum wages for servants-in-husbandry were set by each the justices of the peace in each county, and they could vary greatly. In the 18th century, agricultural servants' wages could range from about £2 10s to £5 15s. per year. Between one third and a half of the servant's wages went to the master to pay for board and lodging.

There were no wages for the very young and adult wages began from the age of 16 to 20 years.

Servants-in-husbandry were often content to accept their wages in a lump sum at the end of the contract as a form of savings.

Unlike apprentices, who were contracted to serve a master for a period of seven years or more, servants-in-husbandry, or "hinds" as they were known in Northumberland, were hired annually.

Hinds seeking new positions would offer themselves at the hiring fairs held in market towns, or hear about potential employers through the kin network or by word-of-mouth in the alehouse. With the spread of literacy and growth of county newspapers during the 18th century, it became increasingly common for positions to be advertised in the local press.

The bond was usually established verbally and then sealed with the "hiring penny", though by the end of our period a written contract was becoming more common.

As well as his own service, the hind was required to provide a female labourer, who was often related in some way to the hind. As the female was included in the contract, or bond between the hind and his employer, she was referred to as a "bondager". The bondager was paid wages daily, according to the work that she was required to do on the farm.

The hind's wages were paid largely in kind and he was provided with a cottage to be shared by him and his bondager, and a small plot of land where he could keep a couple of cows and some pigs and grow potatoes during the period of his contract. Together with the goods he received in lieu of cash wages, the produce from his smallholding would sustain the hind and his bondager, and any surplus that could be sold in the local market would add to his income.

With an annual contract and having few possessions and no-dependants, the hinds frequently moved on at the end of their year's bond in search of improved conditions or perhaps to seek marriage partners. Between 50% and 60% of the hinds changed masters after one year, usually travelling less than ten miles to find a new position

Domestic servants

The final category was the domestic servant.

Live-in domestic staff included adult as well as youthful members.

Unlike apprentices and servants-in-husbandry, domestic servants were not usually bound by fixed-term contracts.

The relationship between master and domestic servant was still based on the medieval order laid down in a contract of recognised duties and rights, with the master able to exercise considerable control over his servants' personal behaviour.

(Quote 5) In the 18th century, **Lord Chesterfield** remarked to his godson: *"Service is a mutual contract: The master hires and pays his servants - the servant is to do his master's business."*

As was the case for apprentices, the master was responsible for the servant's board and lodging, and often provided clothing in the form of a livery or uniform suitable to the servant's position in the household.

Domestic servants might change employer frequently, with 3 to 4 years in one household being about the average term of service in one household. John MacDonald recorded that in 39 years of service he had 28 different masters. In one year he changed employer no less than eleven times!

By the end of our period servants became increasingly rebellious against their masters' rule.

(Quote 6) A **Portuguese visitor** in about 1800 wrote that English domestic servants: *"are become the general plague of the nation, both in town and country they are not to be countered, or even spoken to, but they immediately threaten to leave their master's service."*

The Household of the Nobility

(HANDOUT - HOUSEHOLD OF THE EARL OF DORSET, 1613)

In large households, there was an established hierarchy of servants, and the standard and type of accommodation, food and clothing provided varied according to the servant's status in the household.

Upper staff such as the steward, housekeeper and butler might lodge near the master's family, while the lower staff were accommodated in the basement or attic rooms, often sharing three or four to a room.

Upper servants often enjoyed a degree of comfort. A steward's room at Bedford House was furnished with a reading desk, bureau, leather upholstered chair, a Persian rug and a Tompion clock. Senior staff would also have first choice of the food, sometimes leaving the juniors half-starved.

Livery servants, such as coachmen, footmen and gamekeepers could expect one or two complete suits, a hat, greatcoat and work clothes each year.

Sometimes the liveries were quite extraordinary. For example, in the 18th century, Lord Derby's coachmen and footmen were adorned with red feathers and flame coloured silk stockings.

(Quote 7) One correspondent to a London newspaper in 1800 complained:

"The poor labourer in your field toils throughout the day upon his slender pittance of bread and cheese, while the pampered menial fares sumptuously every day."

For most servants, though, life was hard and meant working very long hours. However, they did lead a rather sheltered existence, free from worries about the rising cost of food, rent and fuel.

Decline of live-in service

In the 18th century, the increasing population, opportunities for unskilled waged-work in industry and the towns, and the reduction in the number of small landholders all contributed to a decline in the custom of taking on live-in apprentices or servants.

At the same time, growing inflation was affecting food more than wages, and live-in servants became less affordable than day labourers.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

Changing Rooms (The withdrawal into privacy)

During the Early Modern period, there was an increasing stress on personal privacy in all but the poorest households.

This move is reflected in the changing arrangement of rooms within the houses of all but the poorest classes.

The Long House

Throughout our period, the typical rural household in most Northumberland villages would live in a building called a long house

(HOUSE PLANS 1 on Screen)

1. Circa 1600

In its original late medieval form, the long house comprised a single storey cottage with three rooms and a cross-passage. The roof would be thatched with heather, or perhaps covered with stone slates. The only entrance led into the cross-passage that divided the living quarters from the cow-house, or byre where the animals were kept.

A doorway to the left from the cross-passage led into the main living room, the hall. This was partitioned off from the other rooms with planking, up to about head height.

The hall was heated by an open fire, with the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. A snug area where the family could cook and sit close to the fire was known as the ingle-nook. Additional warmth was provided by the cattle in the neighbouring byre.

The smaller room beyond the hall was the parlour, which also served as bedroom for head of the family. The rest of the household would live and sleep in the hall.

2. Circa 1650

By the mid-17th century, the partition between the hall and the parlour has been increased to the height of the rafters. A chimney has been built to carry away the smoke from the fire and a ceiling added to the living area to create an upper loft. This would be used for storing hay and children or servants may also sleep there.

A staircase leads up to the loft from the parlour, which has been divided to form a pantry or small dairy.

The cow-byre now has a separate entrance.

3. Circa 1700

The thatch roof has been replaced with slates made from local stones and the cow-byre heightened with the hay-loft above.

A staircase has been added at the rear of the building, leading to more substantial bedrooms on the upper floor.

4. Circa 1750

There is now a separate front door into the house, which is no longer connected directly with the cross-passage. A new pantry has been added to the extension beside the staircase at the rear of the building and a fireplace has replaced the ingle-nook in the living room. The parlour has its own fireplace and chimney and the bedrooms on the upper floor have been made more spacious by raising the height of the ceiling.

The Large House

(HOUSE PLANS 2 on screen)

1. Circa 1450

At the beginning of our period, the larger houses were often built in the form of a "T". The main living area was the Great Hall, where the family and servants sat down to eat together and most members of the household would also sleep at night. The hall was open to the height of the roof. In the centre of the room there was an open fire, with the smoke exiting through a hole in the ceiling.

A cross-passage separated the Great Hall from the domestic buildings behind, which would usually include a pantry and buttery and perhaps kitchens, although these were sometimes located in a separate building to avoid the spread of fire.

A staircase from the cross-passage led up to the solar, or private chambers of the head of the household and his wife.

2. Circa 1550

Although the hall is still open to the roof, a fireplace and chimney have replaced the old open hearth.

A wing has been added to the end of the hall, to match the one at the other end that contains the domestic buildings. This new wing has heated parlours, with the lord's great chamber above.

3. Circa 1650

The Great Hall has been given ceilings, the roof raised and the main bedrooms transferred upstairs.

There are more and smaller rooms including parlours to which the family can withdraw. Corridors and servants' back stairs are introduced, allowing access to rooms without affecting the privacy of the family.

The main entrance to the building is now through a multi-storey porch and the kitchen has its own fireplace.

An increased interest in tracing and displaying family lineage during the 17th century led to the introduction of the Long Gallery; a place to walk up and down admiring portraits of ancestors or important family friends. In some houses, this could extend along the frontage of the hall at first floor level.

4. Circa 1750

Newer houses might have a more modest-sized dining room, or salon, with adjoining withdrawing-rooms. The more ostentatious members of the elite might add a banqueting house in a turret on the roof, which offered views of the surrounding estate and landscaped parkland.

Increasing privacy in the household

In the houses of the rich the fork, the handkerchief and the nightdress all appeared at about the same time in the late 17th or early 18th century.

These simple items illustrate the move towards greater concern for privacy and the individual.

The fork was for personal use and replaced the practice of dipping finger-held food in communal dishes. The handkerchief was a symbol of increasing concern for personal hygiene, and the nightdress of bodily privacy. Basins, bathtubs and the habit of regular washing spread among the wealthy later in the 18th century.

The Middling Sort

Meanwhile the houses of yeomen and husbandmen were also being altered to afford greater privacy and lofts were converted into bedrooms for the family and live-in servants.

(Quote 8) William Harrison wrote in his “Description of England”, in 1577:

“Every man almost is a builder, and he that hath bought any small parcel of ground, be it never so little, will not be quiet till he have pulled down the old house (if any were there standing) and set up a new one after his own device.”

Conditions were even improving for some of those living in the remoter parts of the country.

(Quote 9) Richard Carew wrote in the 1580s, remembering how most husbandmen's houses had:

“walles of earth, low thatched roofes, few partitions, no planchings (FLOOR-BOARDS) or glasse windowes, and scarcely any chimnies, other than a hole in the wall to let out the smoke: their bed, straw and a blanket. To conclude, a mazer (DRINKING BOWL) and a panne or two, comprised all their substance: but now most of these fashions are universally banished, and the Cornish husbandman conformethe himself with a better supplied civilitie to the Easterne patterne.”

Conditions for the Poor

However, for most of the population of England, circumstances hardly changed from the beginning of the 16th century until the early part of Queen Victoria’s reign. Privacy remained a practical impossibility for the majority of the poor in both the towns and the countryside:

The majority of houses in most parts of the country continued to comprise only one or two rooms and probate inventories on death show the value of domestic goods was usually £2 or less.

(Quote 10) In the 1690s, **Celia Fiennes** wrote in her “Tour in the Lake District”: *“Here I came to villages of sad little huts made up of drye walls, only stones piled together and the roofs of same slate: there seemed to be little nor no tunnels for their chimneys and have no mortar or plaster within or without; for the most part I took them at first sight for a sort of houses or barns to fodder cattle in, not thinking them to be dwelling houses.”*

(Quote 11) Little had changed in the next hundred years, as **William Hutchinson's** description of cottages in Northumberland in 1797 revealed: *"The cottages of the lower class of people are deplorable, composed of upright timbers fixed in the ground, the interstices wattled and plastered with mud; the roofs, some thatched and others covered with turf; one little piece of glass to admit the beams of day; and a hearthstone on the ground, for the peat and turf fire. Within there was a scene to touch the feelings of the heart The damp earth, the naked rafters, the breeze-disturbed embers ... the midday gloom, the wretched couch, the wooden utensils that scarce retain the name of convenience, the domestic beast that stalls with his master, the disconsolate poultry that mourns upon the rafters, form a group of objects suitable for a great man's contemplation."*

(Quote 12) **George Crabbe's** comments made in 1807 show that privacy remained a practical impossibility for the poor until the end of our period:

*"See! Beds but ill parted by a paltry screen
Of papered lath or curtain dropped between.
Daughters and sons to yon compartments creep
And parents here beside their children sleep."*

Growth of a Market Economy

Beginning in the 16th century, there is evidence of a growing market economy in England that expanded further as our period progressed.

(Quote 13) In 1577, **William Harrison** reported in his "Description of England" that the typical Essex farmer or husbandman might have:

"a faire garnish of pewter on his cupboard, three or fur featherbeds, so many coverlids and carpets of tapestry, a silver salt, a bowl for wine ... and a dozen of spoons to furnish up the suite."

Harrison's account is backed up by surviving inventories of the time which provide a valuable source of evidence about the growth of a consumer economy.

On the death of a householder, it was required that a neighbour make a list of the man's possessions and their value.

This is an extract from the Inventory of Richard Prin, scythesmith, who died in 1605.

INVENTORY ONE – RICHARD PRIN, SCYTHESMITH - 1605

Furniture and possessions in the hall and chambers were basic, even in the households of the reasonably well off yeomen and craftsmen like Prin.

The tools of Richard Prin's craft as scythesmith are listed in the Smithy.

At the beginning of the 17th century, many householders in all but the largest towns still had a smallholding where they raised crops and animals to provide food for their families.

Corn and malt within the house	£5 0s 0d
Corn unthreshed and corn on the ground	£7 0s 0d
Seven kine and one weaning calf, price	£14 0s 0d
Sheep, praised at	£12 0s 0d
One mare and a colt, praised at	£3 6s 8d
Store swine	£1 0s 0d
Poultry, praised at	18d

INVENTORY TWO THOMAS HIGGINS. SHROPSHIRE WEAVER - 1685

Later in the 17th century, the Shropshire weaver Thomas Higgins still had a cow for milk and his possessions included a churn for making butter.

His inventory includes bedding and pewter items that would have been considered luxuries a century earlier:

1 feather bed and 2 feather bolsters, 1 pillow, 3 rugs, 2 blankets, 1 coverlid and 1 flock bed	£3 0s 0d
8 pairs of sheets, 1 dozen and a half of napkins, 4 pillows, 2 towels and 2 tablecloths	£2 10s 0d
1 brass pot and 3 brass kettles, and 2 iron pots	£1 0s 0d
6 pewter dishes, 1 candlestick, 1 porenger , 1 dozen and a half of spoons, 1 pewter cup	12s 0d

INVENTORY THREE John Day, Carpenter - 1726

Forty years later, John Day could boast a clock among his possessions.

He still had a couple of cows and the cheese press suggests that he made good use of their milk.

The accounts of Sir Harbottle and Sir Samuel Grimston show some of the items of expenditure that could be afforded in the households of the gentry at the end of the 17th century.

ACCOUNTS OF SIR HARBOTTLE AND SIR SAMUEL GRIMSTON 1683-1700

Inflation

Between 1500 and 1650, there was almost a fivefold increase in commodity prices, while wages only trebled.

PRICES AND WAGES INFLATION, 1521-1651 on Screen

Average Commodity Prices (1501 rate = 100)

1521	1551	1571	1601	1621	1651
117	141	245	302	436	546

Average Agricultural Wages (1501 rate = 100)

1521	1551	1571	1601	1621	1651
106	118	177	219	230	296

Average commodity prices 1701-1801 (1701 rate = 100)

1701	1721	1751	1771	1801
100	95	92	112	186

Prices were more stable during the 18th century. There was a fall in commodity prices in the first half of the 18th century, but prices remained stable until near the end of our period when inflation rose again as a result of the Wars with revolutionary France.

As more people became reliant on waged labour and moved away from the land, more milk and dairy products, bread, meat, vegetables and beer were being bought than were being made or grown at home. Even the “lesser sort” of labourers were becoming consumers too.

ACCOUNTS OF OXFORDSHIRE LABOURER, 1790s

The accounts of this Oxfordshire labourer in the 1790s show the increasing reliance on the purchase of staple food items:

4 and a half peck loaves a week at 1s 2d each	£13 13s
Tea and sugar	£2 10s
Butter and lard	£1 10s
Beer and milk	£1
Bacon and other meat	£1 1s

This man's expenses exceeded his income by over £5 per year, which was partly made up by relief from the parish.