

Communities of kin and English landed gentry families of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the kinship networks of the landed gentry of Devon, Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire in the modern period. Using national census household returns, the visitors books of a Devon gentry family and correspondence the article reveals dense and meaningful kinship networks centred on the main country house but also woven into the wider familial world of the gentry. Whenever possible, the inheritance of landed estates passed through the male line. But kin networks were bilateral, founded on both birth and marriage, on relations both through the male and the female line. Kin relations provided a range of services within a culture of visiting, epistolary practice and affection, which generated close and cherished family ties.

Yesterday was the end of an era, the end of a wonderfully happy time, for all of us, a totally unexpected renewal of younger married life for Edith and me, with children continually breezing around, and a year and a half of your delightful presence and company...¹

...Edith, Davis, the nursery maid, Martha or Emily or Mary, Mother and Father, Aunts and Uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers, ranged one behind the other in their generations...all these persons played so huge a part in my childish life...²

Landed estates lay at the centre of rural communities both physically and figuratively (or so their owners hoped). Landowners were employers, patrons, and patriarchs to local people. Lavish communal celebrations of births, marriages and deaths with family, tenants and labourers in their local parishes signified their status and benevolence. More immediate and affective communities, though, were constructed and maintained within the country house and between various familial 'sites'. The male inheritor, their marriages and their families have been fixed at the centre of the family story of the country house. A good match could bring substantial wealth and standing to the family estates, but imprudence in marriage, particularly if accompanied by spendthrift ways, could cause serious damage. The distinguishing feature of the marriages and family lives of estate owners was the significance attached to preserving or improving the wealth, status and lineage, respectability of the family. The boundaries of prudential marriage defined the borders of 'gentlemanly' society, of 'the quality', and so had real and palpable impacts on class and social hierarchies. Marriage also established wider kin networks. Such lines of interpretation have been well worn by historians, generally with a focus on the main line of descent and the estate.³

¹ Devon Record Office (henceforth D.R.O.) 1148M Add 14/Series II/853-73, letter from C. J. Cropper to his daughter Eleanor Acland, 30 July 1918.

² O. Sitwell, *Left Hand Right Hand! An Autobiography: Volume One, The Cruel Month* (London, 1945), p. 92.

³ See Sir H. J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estate System; English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford, 1994); the series of articles in J. Goody, J. Thirsk & E. P. Thompson, *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800* (Cambridge, 1978) and E. Spring, *Law, Land and Family; Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300-1800* (Illinois, 1993); F. M. L. Thompson, 'English Landed Society in the Twentieth Century III: Self Help and Outdoor Relief' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, series II, vol. 2 (1992), 1-20; F. M. L. Thompson *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963), 18-20 & 300-303.

But this perspective does have some limitations, particularly in relation to kinship. This first section of the article will focus on reviewing the current scholarship on kinship and as well as introducing the research that follows. The system of primogeniture and entail, whereby estates, if possible, were inherited intact by the eldest sons in each generation, has led scholars to place most emphasis on patrilineage, of descent through the male line, and less emphasis on the wider kin networks of the gentry. This is, perhaps, part of a wider issue in family history, in which filial relations through the male line, between father and son have generally been the focus.⁴ Sources are a problem here. Published genealogies provide few details of wider kin. The birthdates and maternal origins of in-marrying women are rarely noted. The broader and simpler everyday significance of marriage has often also been overlooked in studies of the legal and financial parameters of strict settlement. Marriage and family were about everyday sociability. Marriage often resulted in enduring, complex and intimate relations between the two families based on frequent, detailed communications through correspondence as well as visits. In this sense, marriage was fundamental to the material and mental structure of each individual family, as well as the more material issues of family fortunes.

It is the sociability and family affection within the gentry family as a bilateral unit, constituted of both the maternal as well as the paternal families, that is the focus of this paper. It shows that a rich tapestry of close family relations were maintained after marriage through correspondence and face to face sociability into the modern period. The male line was of paramount importance for inheritance and the continuation of the family line, name and estate. But family affection and identities, a sense of belonging to family, were based on bilateral systems of kinship. The gentry socialised with their paternal and maternal kin on a regular basis. This can be illustrated through a number of different sources. The National Census Enumerator's Books for 1851 and 1881 show persistently strong levels of kin sociability within and beyond the main family house. The household visitors' books of the Fergusson-Davie family, of Creedy Park in Crediton, Devon show these patterns, more dynamically, across several generations and between different owners of the estate. Correspondence reveals the meaning and significance attached to these relationships, indicating that marital kin were not merely tolerated or entertained but played a functional role in landed gentry life. They kept up regular correspondence with maternal and paternal kin. The content of these letters reveals familiarity and affection between them. Kin provided psychological support in times of distress and, if necessary to give assistance in acquiring or maintaining wealth, careers, and reputations. Many studies have illustrated the importance of epistolary practice in family relations for the early modern period, but few have ventured to explore such issues during the modern period.⁵

This has wider implications for understanding the social history of the gentry in this period. The importance of kinship goes beyond the everyday. Kinship has been seen, simultaneously, as the origin and the result of social relations and social structure: the fundamentals of society.⁶ Thus, analysing the landed gentry kinship universe is a way of

⁴ Leonore Davidoff, 'Kinship as a Categorical Concept: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century English Siblings', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 2 (2005), 411-428.

⁵ For examples see James Daybell (ed.), *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke, 2001); James Daybell & Andrew Gordon (ed.), *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain* (Pennsylvania, 2016); Sarah Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2011); Clare Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke, 2006); Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford, 2009); Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2018).

⁶ C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (Harmondsworth, 1963), 303; A. Plakans, *Kinship in the Past: An Anthropological History of the European Family* (Cambridge, 1990), M. Segalen, *Historical Anthropology of*

studying the social position of the gentry and their connections in society. Kinship is a measure of the fluidity and depth of social relations. It reflects the self-perception of the gentry and their position in society according to the groups they chose to interact with on an everyday basis. Sociability with kin relations was an important element in the 'social fluidity' often associated with the gentry, for instance in terms of the careers of younger sons.⁷

Also, bilateral family relations and the overall significance of kinship in their lives are significant because, in the past, historians had argued that there was a general decline in kinship and loyalty to kin amongst aristocratic and gentry families from the early modern period onwards. As the nuclear family became a more important focus for affection, within an increasingly 'domesticated' and 'privatised' family setting, relations with more distant family became less significant as sources of support and succour. There have been various different versions of this argument. Stone and Trumbach both argued for a gradual restriction of the breadth of family loyalties in the period preceding that of this study.⁸ Stone, for example, argued that there was a shift, over a three hundred year period, from the 'Open Lineage Family' of the Sixteenth century to the 'Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family' of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.⁹ Whilst the wider history of the 'decline of kinship' has been debated the kinship of the landed classes have rarely featured in these discussions since Stone and Trumbach's interventions and scholars have often taken as writ that the decline occurred in this social group.¹⁰ Historians such as Girouard have shown how the interior design and layout of country-houses reflected the privatisation of family life in later periods, as the areas for sociability became smaller and more intimate.¹¹ Others, such as Gerard, whilst recognising that kin were sometimes resident in country houses, have continued to focus primarily on the nuclear family household. The nuclear family may have been 'the norm', as Gerard puts it, but this detracts attention from the continued significance of kin networks.¹²

The primacy of patrilineal kinship systems amongst landed families has also been questioned. Hurwich has argued that aristocratic kinship systems in early modern England were both bilateral and patrilineal: bilateral in terms of structure and relationships, but patrilineal in terms of inheritance.¹³ Whilst admitting that kinship systems became more limited and that primary loyalty had always been to the core nuclear group, Hurwich argues that the newer systems of inheritance based on patrilineal descent were 'super-imposed' on more ancient bilateral systems of structure and relationship. Maternal kinfolk, along with paternal relations, provided a range of services to aristocratic families and were central elements in landed life.¹⁴

More generally, the decline of kinship and development of the privatised nuclear family has been questioned. In the early 1960s Young and Willmott, showed that kinship did

the Family (Cambridge, 1986) and D. W. Sabeau, *Property, Production and Family in Neckerhausen, 1700-1870* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁷ See L. Stone and J. C. F. Stone, *An Open Elite: England 1540-1880*, (London, 1984), 228-239 and Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System*, 97-137.

⁸ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1977); Ralph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1978).

⁹ Stone *Family, Sex and Marriage*.

¹⁰ On this debate and the participants see Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), 3-5.

¹¹ Jessica Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants 1815-1914* (Oxford, 1994), 32-4.

¹² M. Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (Yale, 1978), 299-319; Gerard, *Country House Life*.

¹³ J. J. Hurwich, 'Lineage and Kin in the Sixteenth Century Aristocracy- Some Comparative Evidence on England and Germany' in A. L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J. M. Rosenheim (ed.) *The First Modern Society: Essays in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), 33-65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

not seem to have declined as a result of urbanisation and industrialisation. They found strong kin networks amongst the working classes of the East-End of London.¹⁵ Historical anthropologists, such as Segalen, have emphasised the ongoing importance of kinship for social and psychological support.¹⁶ Also, it has been shown that the idea of the modern nuclear-privatised household, deriving mainly from Laslett's work on the 1821 census, may have been overstated due to the focus on agnatic kin and the reliance on surname matches.¹⁷ Cooper and Donald have investigated the cognatic kinship connections of middle-class families, as well as the identity of their domestic servants, and have found far higher number of kin relations in the household on census night as a result.¹⁸

These perspectives are lent weight by the material on the family relationships of the landed gentry in this article. Primary loyalty was to the nuclear group but the gentry also took their responsibilities as kinfolk seriously. Changes in patterns of marriage and fertility served to alter these networks. The number of available kin declined as the gentry gave birth to smaller numbers of children and, as a result, the complexity of kin networks was reduced.¹⁹ As the period progressed, the gentry were less likely to marry within their own kin group.²⁰ In this sense, the social horizons of the gentry were expanding and kin systems becoming more open. However, the vitality and extent of sociability and interaction with kin continued. Kin relations were a vibrant feature of gentry family life well into the modern period.

I. Sociability

The gentry were engaged in a culture of kinship involving face-to-face sociability between both paternal and maternal kin. This was the case both within the 'primary world' of the country house and throughout a broader 'collateral world' of households connected through family and kin. The experiences of Charles Cropper and Osbert Sitwell detailed in the opening excerpts were very common amongst the gentry.

A glimpse of the scale and significance of sociability with kin can be gained by analysing the Household Schedules of the National Census Enumerator's Books. In total, for the data on the main country households, one hundred and fifty-four families resident in Devon, Lincolnshire have been sampled from the census returns in 1851 and 1881, sixty of whose households have been located in both census years.²¹ For the Hertfordshire gentry, the data was restricted to 1881 because the sample was too small in 1851. There were a further

¹⁵ M. Young & P. Willmott, 'Family and Kinship in East London' (London, 1953-5).

¹⁶ Segalen, *Historical Anthropology*, 44.

¹⁷ D. Cooper & M. Donald, 'Households and "Hidden Kin" in Early Nineteenth Century England: Four Case Studies in Suburban Exeter, 1821-1861', *Continuity and Change*, vol. 10, 257-78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Mark Rothery, 'The Reproductive Behavior of the English Landed Gentry, 1800-1939', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (July, 2009), 674-694. For broader discussions of the relationship between demography and kinship see Michael Murphy, 'Changes in family and kinship networks consequent on the demographic transitions in England and Wales', *Continuity and Change*, 25:1 (2010), 109-136 and Zhongwei Zhao, 'The demographic transition in Victorian England and changes in English kinship networks', *Continuity and Change*, 11:2 (1996), 243-272.

²⁰ For a discussion of this see Mark Rothery, 'Transformations and Adaptations: The English Landed Gentry 1870-1939', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Exeter (2005), 89-92.

²¹ *National Census Household Returns 1851: Jesus Christ Church of the Latter Day Saints Index*, (1997) Public Record Office HO/107, *National Census Household Returns 1881: Jesus Christ Church of the Latter Day Saints Index*, (1999) Public Record Office RG11 (hereafter *NCHR HO* and *NCHR RG*). For Lincolnshire, which is not included in the 1851 index, the household returns were obtained from microfiche. The exact numbers for each county are: Devon-eighty-three, Lincolnshire-sixty and Hertfordshire-eleven.

thirty-seven families included in the collateral data, households where the gentry were visiting or households that were related to the main gentry family. ‘Kin,’ whether visiting or resident, has been defined according to the individual’s relationship to the head of the household. The classification of kin has also been defined according to these parameters. In most cases, *Burke’s Landed Gentry*, *Walford’s County Families* and information from correspondence and diaries have been used to establish the kinship relationship. Where genealogical reference books have been consulted, the kinship network has been necessarily limited to the patrilineal line and, thus, the data should underestimate kin visiting. However, for the smaller number of families absent from these volumes who have existing archives of, the relationship listed in the census has been relied on.

Table 1: Kin as a percentage of household occupants 1851 & 1881

County	Households with kin as percentage of sampled households (n)	Kin as proportion of non-servile house occupants (n)	Mean average kin per household
Devon			1.97
1851	35.7 (20)	13 (40)	
1881	22.7 (17)	12.8 (38)	
Lincolnshire			0.68
1851	35.3 (12)	28.1 (43)	
1881	34 (17)	11.2 (34)	
Hertfordshire (1881)	45.4 (5)	17.4 (12)	1.09

Table one shows that, overall, between one third and one quarter of gentry households contained kin relations on census night in 1851 and 1881. Furthermore, kin made up a significant proportion of the non-servile occupant group in 1851, that is occupants that were not employed by the owners as servants. Kin relations were, therefore, central to everyday country house life. The Hertfordshire data for 1881 showed that almost half the households contained kin of some kind on census night, although this was a smaller and less representative sample. The two sets of data, from 1851 and 1881, together suggest a strong presence of kin in everyday life, and a culture of visiting. The material is consistent with the kinds of patterns found by Vickery amongst the Georgian Lancashire gentry, although, as will be shown, of a slightly less ‘commercial’ composition in social and occupational terms.²² There is no way of knowing for sure how representative this snapshot of life is. Nevertheless, other evidence suggests that the patterns here were an indication of wider and more longitudinal trends and processes of sociability.

There were no significant variations according to landed wealth, other than in terms of the numbers of kinfolk entertained in the house. Wealthier gentry families entertained larger numbers of kin, but the principle of sociability cut across divisions of wealth since very similar proportions of the lesser gentry entertained their family relations on the census nights.

²² A. Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England*, (London, 1998), esp. 25-6, 87-90 and 205-6.

Lifecycles and family-cycles were the most significant variables in the dynamics of family sociability. In general higher numbers of visiting kin or residents occurred in households of more elderly bachelors and widowers. The Proctor household, in Hertfordshire, is one fairly typical example of this pattern. On census night in 1881, Leonard Proctor, an unmarried landowner of sixty-five years of age, is listed as the head of ‘Lordship House’, in Bennington, Hertfordshire.²³ With him are his paternal nephew, George, aged thirty-two, and three affinal kin: his nephew’s wife and two children. In the Froude household of 1851, in Dartington, Devon, Robert H. Froude, aged eighty, was the widowed head of a household that, along with his son, included six of his kin relations: his daughter-in-law and her five children.²⁴ This pattern is found in many other returns.²⁵

Table 2: Types of kin as a proportion of total kin occupants 1851 & 1881

County	Paternal kin as percentage of kin (n)	Maternal kin as percentage of kin (n)
Devon		
1851	37.5 (15)	62.5 (25)
1881	48 (24)	52 (26)
Lincolnshire		
1851	65.6 (21)	34.4 (11)
1881	28.6 (10)	71.4 (25)
Hertfordshire		
	75 (9)	25 (9)

As table two shows, and in keeping studies of other social groups, the kin networks of the gentry were limited ones in terms of breadth, even from the perspective of sociability.²⁶ On the whole, these relations were close kin. The majority were married brothers and sisters with their own families accompanying them made up of uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. Cousins of a more distant sort were present but in far smaller numbers. Significantly, though, the statistics show that kin networks through sociability were bilateral, involving both the male and female lines. Marital kin were well represented in both census years in Lincolnshire and Devon and, in 1881 in Hertfordshire. They formed a minimum of a quarter of all kin visitors at all points of analysis and, in 1851 Devon and 1881 Lincolnshire, up to two thirds.

These kin relations were of diverse social origins, often families of the professional middle classes but also merchants. In 1851, John Sillifant, the head of Coombe House, in Devon, was entertaining, amongst others, his daughter-in-law Charlotte, the daughter of a Scottish merchant, John Mackay. Charlotte had recently married John Sillifant’s son, John Woolcombe Sillifant.²⁷ Similarly, in 1881 in Lincolnshire, the Luard household, in Blyborough, included the sister-in-law of the Head, Frances E Luard, (nee. Lawford), the

²³ NCHR RG11/1422/20/3.

²⁴ NCHR HO/107/1874/220/15.

²⁵ For instance see the Chichester Household 1881, Hall, Bishop’s Tawton, in Devon, NCHR RG11/2251/67/4. or the Cracroft-Amcott Household, in Hackthorn, Lincolnshire, NCHR RG11/3246/25/1.

²⁶ The best known exposition of this, although one that served to downplay the overall significance of kin, is A. Macfarlane, *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, A Seventeenth Century Clergyman; An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1970), esp. 105-60. For an example of a similar type of close-kin network amongst the Georgian gentry see the network surrounding Elizabeth Shackelton in Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 206.

²⁷ NCHR HO/107/1887/17/10 and *Burke’s Landed Gentry* (London, 1914), 1713.

daughter of a Barrister.²⁸ There were many other examples of this type of visit involving individuals either with careers or family origins in the military, the Church, law, banking, the Indian Civil Service and medicine.²⁹

Landed gentry and aristocratic families were, of course, well represented as visitors in the sampled households in both census years.³⁰ Many had direct family connections. Weston Cracroft-Amcotts, in 1881, entertained his daughter-in-law, Cecily Sophia Mary, the daughter of Henry Neville, a landowner in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire.³¹ These connections could be of a grander nature. On the same night, in Devon, Henry Studdy and his family played host to his son-in-law, Martin Leslie, the eldest son of the Countess of Rothes.³² This illustrates the importance of marriage ties for the gentry, irrespective of the social origins of their affinal kin. The collateral world of social life beyond the family home and as visitors in other households lends further support to this.

Table 3: Collateral kin networks, 1881

Household Type	Percentage of households with kin occupants		
	Devon (n)	Lincolnshire (n)	Hertfordshire (n)
Main country house	22.7 (17)	34 (17)	45.4 (5)
Collateral gentry	27.4 (17)	6.7 (1)	---
Married gentry Daughters	35 (24)	44.1 (15)	33.3 (2)
Whole gentry families in other residences	44.4 (8)	10 (1)	50 (1)
Gentry individuals visiting	62.5 (10)	90.9 (10)	100 (3)
Future gentry brides	26.9 (7)	42.9 (3)	---

This data has been obtained from the 1881 National Census Index by using name searches for those families where the details of marriage partners and kinship networks were known. In total, a further two hundred and thirty-three household returns relating to sampled families in the three counties have been included: one hundred and forty-two in Devon, seventy-seven in Lincolnshire and fourteen in Hertfordshire. Because information relating to marriage was required for this part of the analysis the sample has been restricted to those families listed in genealogical reference works, mainly *Burke's Landed Gentry*. Names that were unidentified may have been misspelt in the census (although variations were tested) or may simply not have been present or recorded in household returns. Equally the genealogies limit the analysis to kin relations of the male line and it is possible that broader networks of affinal kin visiting are hidden in the census. These households had various kinds of

²⁸ *NCHR* RG11/3293/99 and *Burke's Landed Gentry* (London, 1937), 1427.

²⁹ For examples see, respectively, The Angerstein Household, in Thetford, Norfolk, *NCHR* HP/107/1832/239/2; The Swan household, in Sausethorpe, Lincolnshire, *NCHR* RG11/3256/85/1; The Acland Household, Killerton, Devon, *NCHR* HO/107/1866/67/14 and *Burkes Peerage* (London, 1967), 17-20; The Fane Household, Fulbeck, Lincolnshire, *NCHR* RG11/3379/97/15 and *Burkes Landed Gentry* (London, 1937), 742-3; The Acland Household, Killerton, Devon, *NCHR* RG11/2141/10/14 and *Burkes Peerage* (London, 1967), 17-20.

³⁰ Overall, around fifty to sixty percent of kin visitors had landed origins.

³¹ *NCHR* RG11/3246/25/1 and *Burke's Landed Gentry* (London, 1937), 29-30.

³² *NCHR* RG11/2171/135/12 and *Burke's Landed Gentry* (London, 1937), 216.

relationship to the main country houses: whole gentry families visiting other households; gentry individuals visiting other families (here the figure is the proportion of households visited); collateral gentry families, such as those of eldest sons before inheritance, younger sons, unmarried daughters and widows and the households of married daughters. Another small group of household returns were related to the households of future brides, before their marriages into gentry families.

The figures show that the culture of sociability was widespread throughout the collateral world of gentry society indicating fluid and porous boundaries between families. The numbers of kin, as with the main country houses, always outweighed the incidence of other types of non-familial visitors. The visits of members of the gentry to other families reflects even higher levels of interaction with kin relations than was observed in their own houses. Over sixty per cent of the households visited by the Devon gentry, had a kin relation as the head of the household. The Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire gentry were more likely to be in the households of their kin on census night, with between ninety and one hundred per cent of their visits to kinfolk. If the whole household is taken into account, then both maternal and paternal kin occurred in large numbers, as they were in the main country houses.

Incoming brides were also part of a rich culture of kin. Twenty-seven per cent of brides marrying into the Devon gentry and forty-three per cent of future Lincolnshire brides were socialising with their kinfolk on census night. For both the Devon and Lincolnshire brides, around half of these kinfolk were maternal and half paternal. The Lincolnshire sample is a notably active one in terms of kin visiting of this kind and there appears to be even more dense kin networks operating there. The families that were, later, to become part of gentry family networks through marriage were involved in a similar culture of visiting. The country house, as viewed through the late nineteenth century census was merely one nodal point of a wide-ranging, intricate and complex kinship network.

The census has its limitations and the visitor's books provide a more longitudinal perspective. The visitor's books for Creedy Park, in Crediton, the home of the Fergusson-Davie family, are amongst the best examples. The books are made up of a series of simple entries written by the guests themselves.³³ In the great majority of cases the entries provide details of the name and address of the visitor, along with the date of arrival and the date of departure.³⁴ The two volumes cover the period from 1886 to 1950. During this time there were four different owners of the Creedy estate, two world wars and a whole range of changes in family, social and economic life, some of which are reflected in the books. The books record a total of one thousand three hundred and sixty-five visits to the house between these dates.³⁵ There was a total of ten years during which none of the family was resident at the house. These were during the First World War and reconstruction period between 1915 and 1921, when there was a change of ownership and the house was being rebuilt after a fire, and during the Second World War between 1941 and 1945, when the British Army made use of Creedy Park. In view of these gaps in occupancy the books record an average of 25 visits to the house each year for the whole period.

The family was not resident for the whole year. The frequency of residency varied across the sixty-five year period and from one owner to the next. In general, they were

³³ Devon Record Office (Hereafter D.R.O.) 2346M/F89-90, Fergusson-Davie Family Papers, Visitors Books For Creedy Park 1886-1950, in two volumes.

³⁴ The most common items missing from a small proportion of the entries are the address and the full names of those visiting. In some cases, visitors have merely signed in as 'Mr' or 'Mrs Fergusson-Davie', although many of these identities can be deduced through the surrounding signatures and comparisons of handwriting with other entries. There were very few entries rejected from the analysis due to illegible entries.

³⁵ Here 'visit' does not equate to 'visitor' since the number of separate visits has been counted and individuals could often visit the house on several occasions.

resident for a minimum of three months a year and, often, for longer periods of up to eleven months.³⁶ The latter was especially the case during the Edwardian period, while in the ownership of Sir William Augustus, and between 1947 and 1950, after Sir Arthur Patrick had inherited. So overall the family were visited, on average, at least once a week at Creedy Park, each year.

The data on sociability at Creedy Park largely supports the data in the National Census for other gentry families. A significant proportion of visits to the house involved kin relations and kin were far more prominent than other types of visitor. Across the whole period, the seven hundred and ninety-one visits of family and kin of the Fergusson-Davies made up almost sixty per cent of total visits. So across the whole period up to 1950, kin formed the predominant fodder for sociability.

There was a remarkably even distribution of kin visitors between maternal and paternal relations, reflecting a cognatic network. Marital kinfolk made up forty-eight per cent of total visits by family and kin. Many of the individuals who married into the Fergusson-Davie family during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries signed the visitors' books. They came from a variety of backgrounds, from landed gentry families such as the Bullers or the Newman family, to professional upper-middle class families such as the Colvilles or the White-Thompsons. These visits frequently lasted a significant period of time. The Colvilles, for instance, visited many times during the period between 1892 and the 1930s. Most of these visits were by Captain George Colville, the husband of Eleanor Frances Fergusson-Davie. Fifteen different members of the White-Thomson family visited Creedy Park between 1886 (the start date for the books) and 1926. They had married into the Fergusson-Davies in 1857 and it is likely that these visits were a continuation of sociability that predated the visitors' books.³⁷ Either way, this pattern of sociability across a long period of time and through least two changes of ownership, reflects sustained and close ties to marital kin.

In general the Fergusson-Davies mainly played host to a close set of kin rather than more distant relations.³⁸ Brother-in-laws, Sister-in-laws, Uncles, Aunts, Nieces and Nephews appear in the books most frequently and regularly, whether through the male or female line. Obviously future inheritors of the estates were amongst the most frequent visitors, and often stayed for longer periods of time. But this patrilineal loyalty and hospitality was enveloped by broader bilateral ties of sociability. Further evidence suggests such sociability was not a mere obligation, but was an important focus for affection, solidarity and identities.

II. The Meaning and Function of Kinship

Cultures of visiting were important in fostering and maintaining family relations amongst the landed gentry. This section shows that these were not merely 'duty visits' generated by expectation and obligation, although duty did play a part. The gentry and their kin invested their relationships with significant meaning and these relationships played affective and functional roles in everyday life. Connections gained through both birth and marriage, were of practically equal importance. Correspondence between family members shows how valued and deeply felt kin attachments were. The correspondence between them

³⁶ D.R.O 2346M/E5-E8, Fergusson-Davie Family Papers, Household Accounts 1893-1946. The Visitors' Books themselves were not a good guide to these residency patterns since the family were, for short periods, at home without visitors. As a result the data has been taken from the household accounts in which there are many notes relating to the number of weeks the Fergusson-Davies were resident.

³⁷ *Burke's Landed Gentry* (London, 1967), 696-9.

³⁸ This is consistent with other findings for earlier periods. See Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 206.

was also, itself, a way of forming and developing lines of communication and good relations. They provided a wide range of services for each other.

Some of these services were psychological in nature and related to particular events and problems. At times of national crisis, for instance, the family formed part of a coping strategy in the face of danger and hardship. With retrospect, Alice Acland recalled how the presence of her family and kin helped her cope under such difficult circumstances in early August 1914:

...The chances for peace grew less and less. But my own mind was far more occupied in providing for the family party arriving on 31 July than by public affairs...On Friday August 31 Eleanor [her daughter] brought the little boys and Ellen the baby in the afternoon. A long and delightful holiday was ahead of us...The Fletchers [Eleanor's married sister and family] children came from their lodgings to join ours. It was altogether a most jovial and peaceful day. 'The first of many to come' I thought as I went to sleep.³⁹

The 'long and delightful holiday' expected by Alice did not happen, since Killerton was soon after occupied by the War Office and the party was dispersed. But her expectations reflected the way that sociability provided emotional succour for the gentry.

More often though, kin provided support during events such as a death in the family and periods of bereavement and mourning. In 1891 Caroline Hotchkin contacted Edith Hotchkin on the death of her husband, Thomas John Stafford.⁴⁰ She said he had been '...like a true brother to us all.'⁴¹ Clearly, there was a certain level of expectation that relations such as these would give their condolences when members of the family died or were ill. This behaviour certainly fits into Vickery's category of 'duty' sociability. However, most of the letters expressed genuine grief and concern and kinfolk were almost always a significant proportion of correspondents at such times of difficulty, just as they were in everyday life through personal contact.⁴²

The emotional and psychological aid provided was often accompanied by services of a more practical kind. When his wife, Susan Fane, died in 1877, William Dashwood Fane received almost daily support correspondence from his sister-in-law, the Honourable Emma Gore. A letter sent in mid-December illustrated how the kin network could act as a source of practical support:

I do hope you and Gary and Milly are coming on Wednesday or as soon as you can. It would be such a very great pleasure to me, and the poor dear children. It will be good for them to have their holiday, usual at Christmas, and to have a change. What is the good of going directly to your lonely home? After the holidays I daresay one of your sisters or your brothers will be able to join you. If Julia would give Willy a bed, he could be here as much

³⁹ D.R.O., 1148M/Add 14/Series II/45-124, Papers of the Acland Family, Correspondence and papers of Sir Francis Dyke Acland, 14th Bt., 1903-15, Diary and Scrapbook of Alice S. Acland being a personal record of the events of World War One as these affected the Acland family, 31 July 1914-15 September 1918.

⁴⁰ The exact relationship has not been identified here since neither the correspondence nor *Burke's Landed Gentry* reveal the crucial details, but Caroline is most likely to have been a cousin or an aunt.

⁴¹ H.R.O., HOTCHKIN/6/4, Hotchkin Family Papers, Family Correspondence from the Late Nineteenth Century, Letter from Caroline Hotchkin, of Scarborough, to Edith Hotchkin, of Woodhall Spa, Hertfordshire, 1 September 1891.

⁴² For example, see D.R.O. 1148M/Add 14/Series II/941-53, Letters of Condolence to Eleanor Acland on the death of her Mother, 1923 and 1148M/Add 14/Series II/961-77, Letters of Condolence to Eleanor on the death of her Father in a Hunting Accident, October 1924.

as you and he liked.⁴³

Childcare and support at moments of childbirth were services readily provided on an everyday basis and not merely at times of crisis. As Michael James has found in the case of the East family, kin were very important more generally in the care of family members, including children.⁴⁴ In the case of the sampled gentry families involved both maternal and paternal kin relations.⁴⁵ Margery and Charles Cropper, the parents of Eleanor Acland, frequently provided this service. A series of letters written between 1908 and the interwar period refer to the visits of Eleanor and Francis' children, including Richard, who later inherited the estates and the title of Fifteenth Baronet. They provided hospitality to the Acland children for three months in the later part of 1908 and after the birth of Eleanor and Francis' second child, Arthur.⁴⁶ William Vere Reeve King-Fane, later the owner of Fulbeck, in Lincolnshire, recalled similar assistance from his Uncle and Aunt Welby, in 1875, when they cared for him and his siblings whilst his parents moved into a new house.⁴⁷

Gentry families also provided financial and legal services for each other, often connected to the landed estate or careers. Fanny Skipworth, of Moortown, Lincolnshire, acted as a guarantor on a bank loan for her nephews, Lionel and George, when they set up as farmers in the 1880s.⁴⁸ Edward Fursdon, of Fursdon, acted as the executor of his parents will and in the course of his duties drew on the support of wider kin. He corresponded very frequently with his Uncle, Edward Rodd, as well as many other members of the Rodd family and often discussed quite private financial and investment matters.⁴⁹ A typical letter ran as follows:

... You will also have received from me a list of the property I have sold in the past and the mode of investment of the proceeds. We have done very well by these sales so far, recollecting how many points higher the India 3% are now than when we made the first investment.⁵⁰

Charles William Giles-Puller, a landowner and a barrister, lent his professional expertise to the De Biel family, who were kin relations of the Blake family, of Hertfordshire.⁵¹ Although

⁴³ L.A., FANE/6/10/8/L, Letter from Hon. Emma Gore to her brother-in-law, William Dashwood Fane, 17 December 1877.

⁴⁴ Michael, R. James, 'Healthcare in the Georgian Household of Sir William and Lady Hannah East', *Historical Research*, 82: 218 (2009), 694-714.

⁴⁵ This is in contrast to findings of Leannora Davidoff and Catherine Hall in relation to the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Middle-Classes, whereby childcare was mainly restricted to the paternal kinfolk of the family. See L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *Family Fortunes; Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 2002), 353-4.

⁴⁶ For instance, see D.R.O. 1148M/Add 14/Series II/529-72, Acland Family Papers, Family Letters 1906-14, Letters 534-41 from various members of the Cropper Family at Ellergreen, to Eleanor Acland, October to December 1908 and D.R.O. 1148M/ Add 14/Series II/853-73, Correspondence between the Croppers and the Aclands 1918-40.

⁴⁷ L.A. FANE/6/11/1/7, Fane Family Papers, Handwritten Reminiscences of William Vere Reeve King-Fane, 1868-1942.

⁴⁸ L.A. DIXON 13/3/2, Skipworth Family Papers located in the Dixon Family Archive, Correspondence of Miss R. Fanny Skipworth 1846-99, Three letters from A. H. Melville, a banker in Lincoln, to Fanny Skipworth, 30 September-25 October 1889.

⁴⁹ D.R.O. 1926B/FR/F4/2 & 5, Fursdon Family Papers located in the Archive of Anstey & Thompson, Solicitors, Family Correspondence 1889-1928 and Correspondence in Family Matters, 1909.

⁵⁰ D.R.O. 1926B/F4/2, Letter from Francis Rodd to his cousin, Edward Sydenham Fursdon, 18 June 1899

⁵¹ H.R.O. D/EGP/C15, Papers of the Giles-Puller Family, Family Letters 1831-69, Two letters from 'De Biel' to Emily Puller (nee. Blake), 8 October 1840 & 26 August 1841. The De Biels were a Swiss family, apparently with business interests in England, who had married into the Blake family, of Danesbury in Hertfordshire, at

the exact identity of the De Biel correspondent and the nature of the court case are both unclear, the personal significance and value of such assistance are apparent from his letters. For instance, at the end of the proceedings, in 1841, he states:

...we are delighted at getting the news of my lawsuit being decided entirely in my favour by the Lord Chancellor... Puller, I am sure, has rejoiced at that happy result too, which I consider to be owing in a great measure to him, for so frantically and fully drawing up the case, and pleading it so very ably at the first hearing.⁵²

Written communication need not necessarily involve large numbers of kin relations. Quite often an individual or a series of individuals would act as nodes through which information could be passed and links maintained. Henry Edward Fane acted as an important contact in the Fane network during the late 1830s whilst the family were living abroad in India. He corresponded with his cousin Louisa, a daughter of the main family living back in England, passing on news to be distributed amongst the Fanes and their kindred there and vice-versa.⁵³ Emily Tennyson also provided a conduit through which information and news could be passed between the kin of the Fytches and the Tennysons, and family relationships maintained. To her sister, May Fytche, she wrote 'Dear Aunt Tilly and Celia Lushington enquire about you. I must write again and tell them how well you are doing.'⁵⁴ Similarly, Gertrude Cunningham, the maternal aunt of Sir Francis Dyke Acland was an important contact in the Acland-Cunningham network, passing on news of the exploits of his cousin and 'best wishes' from other members of the family.⁵⁵

Of course, relationships broke down for various reasons. Some relationships had either never been activated or had, at some point, extinguished through lack of contact between family members. This is clear, at times, from comments on the dearth of correspondence between certain members and the lack of knowledge relating to them. Sir John Kennaway, the fourth Baronet, noted in his diary whilst visiting Cambridge that he had '...called on some new found cousins...'⁵⁶ In a letter of 1905, sent on the occasion of Sir Francis Acland's engagement to Eleanor Cropper, Henry Cunningham, one of Francis' paternal Uncles, softly berated Francis for his lack of contact whilst he had been living abroad. He requested '...occasional papers & co., which tell of your doings and

some point in the Nineteenth Century and were connected to the Giles-Pullers through Emily Puller, nee. Blake, the wife of Charles W. Giles-Puller.

⁵² H.R.O. D/EGP/C15, Letter from 'De Biel' to Mrs Emily Puller (nee. Blake), from Bierow, Switzerland, 26 August 1841.

⁵³ Lincolnshire Archives (hereafter L.A.) Fane/6/13/13, Fane Family Papers, Papers of William Vere Reeve King-Fane, Three Letters sent from Henry Edward Fane, in India, to his Cousin, Louisa Fane, from Cawnpore, 23 November 1836 and from Simla, 27 January and 30 July 1838. The existence of three letters does not necessarily indicate a frequent correspondence. However, the content of the letters shows a high level of familiarity, on both sides, with everyday family events, within the restrictions imposed by the distance the letters had to travel.

⁵⁴ L.A., DIXON 14/3/6, Fytche Family Papers within the Dixon Archive, Correspondence to Miss A. M. Fytche 1895-1924. Letter 1. From Emily Tennyson, Farringford, Isle of Wight, to May Fytche, 16 May 1895.

⁵⁵ D.R.O., 1148M/Add14/Series II/45-124, Acland Family Papers, Correspondence of Sir Francis Dyke Acland, 14th Bt., 1903-15, Letter 84, From Gertrude Cunningham to her nephew, Sir Francis Dyke Acland, 28 June 1905.

⁵⁶ D.R.O., 961M/Add 5M/F32a, Kennaway Family Papers, Diary of Sir John Kennaway, 4th Bt., 1910, 27 June 1910.

happenings.⁵⁷ An earlier letter from Henry's wife, Gertrude, his aunt, indicated Francis' lack of knowledge about the existence of his 'cousin Noel.'⁵⁸

In many of these cases, although not all of them as the Acland example shows, the families concerned were distant relations, usually cousins. It was rare for close kin to grow apart and lose contact. The kin networks revealed in the correspondence correlate closely to those found in the census and the Fergusson-Davie Visitors' Books in terms of the breadth of relations. The gentry mainly corresponded with close kin relations: Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Nephews and Nieces, Brothers by marriage and Sisters-in-Law.

Other relationships had been damaged through family conflict, which, as most would recognise, could be caused by any number of issues. The disagreements of Sir Frederick Halsey and his cousin, Rev. William Tyrwhitt-Drake, are one such example. Tyrwhitt-Drake was, in the early Twentieth Century, the incumbent at the Vicarage in Gaddesden, the home manor of the Halseys. Conflict was centred on the building of the 'parish room' and resulted in the resignation of William from the vicarage and a significant period of bad relations between the two families, of at least two years.⁵⁹ At one point, in 1905, an outside mediator, Lady Brownlow, was required to smooth things over in time for the upcoming county elections.⁶⁰ The overall impression, however, is of a series of strong and sustained family relationships, the kind of 'consideration, duty, solidarity, and reciprocity' found by Naomi Tadmor in her study of the eighteenth century middling sort.⁶¹ The dramas of family life were less significant than the everyday and often mundane amicable familial intercourse between kin.

III. Conclusion

General changes in the potency and vitality of relationships with kin over time are difficult to assess for gentry society as a whole, since so much of the qualitative evidence is concentrated amongst a small number of families and occurs in quite limited clusters. However, the available suggests that bilateral kin networks formed a vital part of gentry life and identities across this period. There seems to have been little prejudice according to lineage or any sense of overriding loyalty to the male line, other than for the purpose of inheritance. This sociability, whether face-to-face or through correspondence, was not merely seen as a 'duty' but was invested with significant amounts of meaning by those participating. Kin provided services for each other within a world view that stressed familial support and succour beyond the male line. The patterns observed here are reminiscent of those discovered

⁵⁷ D.R.O., 1148M/Add 14/Series II/45-124/, Acland Family Papers, Correspondence of Sir Francis Dyke Acland, 14th Bt., 1903-15, Letter from H. A. Cunningham to Francis Dyke Acland from Watertown County, Ireland, to Killerton, 30 June 1905. The connection between this individual and Francis was through the marriage of his father, Arthur, to Alice S. Cunningham, the daughter of a clergyman.

⁵⁸ D.R.O., 1148M/Add 14/Series II/45-124/, Letter from Gertrude Cunningham to Francis Dyke Acland from Watertown County, Ireland, 28 June 1905.

⁵⁹ Hertfordshire Record Office (hereafter H.R.O) D/EHL/F176-82, Halsey Family Papers, Correspondence re: Parish Affairs and Charities 1897-1916, Eight letters from William T. Drake to Sir Frederick Halsey, 10 May 1905-8 March 1907.

⁶⁰ H.R.O., D/EHL/F176-82, Four Letters from Lady Brownlow to Sir Frederick Halsey, 15 August 1905-6 September 1905.

⁶¹ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 275.

by Davidoff and Hall amongst the middle classes of an earlier period.⁶² The kin networks of the gentry included a blend of middling and landed families within a gentlemanly milieu.

Naming practices are a telling indicator of cultures of kinship, signifying affection and belonging as well as capital inputs to the estate. Large numbers of children, including eldest sons, were given their mother's maiden name, the matronymic, as their second Christian names. The owner of Fursdon House, in Devon, from 1942, George Hume John Fursdon, owed his second Christian name to the marriage of his grandfather, George Fursdon, with Charlotte Mary Hume-Nicholl, in April 1892.⁶³ Edmund Bacon Hutton, the third son of William Hutton, of Gate Burton, in Lincolnshire, was so-called due to his father's marriage to Jane Bacon, a daughter of another local gentry family. Edmund's elder brother, George Morland Hutton, received his name as a reminder of the marriage of his great-grandfather, Thomas Hutton, to Elizabeth Morland, in 1749.⁶⁴

Inheritance, family finances and lineage sometimes lay at the centre of such naming practices. Successive cohorts of Sebright children, throughout the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, were given 'Saunders' as their matronymic Christian name as an acknowledgement of the financial input made by the Saunders family to the Sebright estate. This was in commemoration of the marriage of Sir Edward Sebright, Third Baronet, to Anne Saunders, the daughter and heiress of a local businessman, in 1688.⁶⁵ However, family finances were not the only reason. The uses made of matronymics reflected a sense of group identity fostered by interaction and sociability. They represented a system of kinship recognition that was deeply engrained in landed culture, a system of belonging that was both diachronic and synchronic. Matronymic Christian names show how the landed gentry fused and merged their identities with their affinal kin at the fundamental level of naming and at the very beginning of an individual child's life.⁶⁶

The kin networks amongst English gentry families are reflective of wider trends across the European nobility, in their own unique way. Sabean and Johnson emphasize the ongoing significance of kinship into the modern period, although one that was in flux. They argue that from the mid-eighteenth century the 'old lineage model' of family relations broke down under the weight of meritocracy and growing social equality.⁶⁷ Inheritance was more likely to be shared rather than concentrated with the eldest son and cousin marriage became increasingly acceptable. Along with this came a '...new kinship regime where affection was a prerequisite...vertical patrilineages gave way to horizontally organised consanguineal kindreds...' They found a 'habitus of present-bound familiarity' in family correspondence defined by intimacy and emotions, rather than a hankering after lineage.⁶⁸ The English gentry continued the practise of primogeniture, of inheritance concentrated with the eldest male, and kin marriages declined in number throughout the period that Johnson and Sabean discuss, contrasting with their findings in central and western Europe. But the vibrant kin networks they found were at work amongst the gentry. The affection noted amongst the European nobility, the 'pool created by friendship, mutual interests and concerns...' was clearly a

⁶² *Ibid.*, 353-6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Burke's Landed Gentry*, (London, 1937), 1200-1.

⁶⁵ *Burke's Peerage*, (London, 1949), 1803-4.

⁶⁶ Very little work has been done on this subject. Lawrence Stone has discussed changes in naming-practices, but mainly with reference to inheritance rather than identity and sociability. See Stone and Stone, *An Open Elite*, 126-42.

⁶⁷ Christopher H. Johnson & David Warren Sabean, 'From Siblingship to Siblinghood: Kinship and the Shaping of European Society (1300-1900)', (in) Christopher H. Johnson & David Warren Sabean (ed), *Sibling Relations & The Transformation of European Kinship* (Oxford, 2011), 1-31.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

feature of these gentry networks.⁶⁹ This research confirms the findings of Hurwich and shows that the bilateral ties found in that research persisted into the modern world.⁷⁰

Rather than emphasizing the decline of kin systems and the ‘rise of the nuclear family’ as Stone and Trumbach did, historians now tend to nuance their perspectives and allow for overlapping spheres of family belonging in the past.⁷¹ More often historians stress the significance of kinship in the early modern period and the persistence of kin networks into the modern period despite growing levels of geographical mobility, a persistent feature of gentry family life throughout the early modern and modern periods, dispersed as kin relations were across large areas of the country.⁷² This research aligns the history of the landed classes, too often considered a ‘special case’ in the wider history of the family, with these perspectives. Their everyday experience of ‘family’ was a rich and diverse one, involving members of the maternal as well as the paternal lines, maintained in person and through the post. Systems of inheritance that excluded younger siblings and their offspring from the family patrimony and passed through the male line did little to damage these broader affective relations.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ J. J. Hurwich, ‘Lineage and Kin in the Sixteenth Century Aristocracy’

⁷¹ See for example Tadmor, *Family and Friends* and her earlier article ‘Early modern kinship in the long run: reflections on continuity and change’, *Continuity and Change*, 25:1 (2010), 15-48. Also see Andrejs Plakans & Charles Wetherell, ‘Households and kinship networks: the costs and benefits of contextualization’, *Continuity and Change*, 18:1 (2003), 49-76.

⁷² See David Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 113:1 (November 1986), 38-69 for an early rebuttal of the insignificance of Kin in early modern England. For examples stressing the persistence of kin see Barry Reay, ‘Kinship and the neighbourhood in nineteenth century rural England: The myth of the autonomous nuclear family’, *Journal of Family History*, 21:1 (January 1996), 87+ and Motoyasu Takahashi, ‘Family Continuity in England and Japan’, *Continuity and Change*, 22:2 (August 2007), 193-214.