Families and households in early modern London, c. 1550-1640

Introduction

In October 1585, Isaac Kendall, a young man in his mid-twenties, lay sick at the house of his former master and present employer, Cornelius Nealman, a free denizen and Stationer, in the inner-city parish of St Mildred Bread Street. From the depositions made in a lawsuit over the young man's will, we learn that he lay in an upstairs chamber over the kitchen, looked after by a succession of older women neighbours, while downstairs the business of family life went on. The rector of the parish and members of Kendall's family came to see him and were conducted upstairs to his bedside. On the evening of the night Kendall died, the family sat at supper at a table in the kitchen, and afterwards around the fire, parents, children, and neighbours who had dropped in to see how Kendall was doing. This glimpse of neighbourly sociability reveals something of the material culture and domestic practices of a middling London household in the later sixteenth century. The Nealmans occupied a house with several rooms, used for distinct functions, though informal family life focused on the kitchen. Sickness, nursing care, and death took place in the home. Family and household membership, while not fully delineated, are indicated: the household group included employees as well as the nuclear family, and the relationship between former apprentice and master was, in this case, warmer than that between Kendall and his siblings. The household was not an isolated unit, but enmeshed in a web of neighbourly and parish relationships.[1]

But this narrative also reminds us that domestic culture and material life are shaped by many factors: household size and composition, location in space and time, and the obvious variables of occupation and economic status. The population of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London was growing rapidly and the size and shape of the metropolis were changing; settlement density increased, property values rose, and houses were built, rebuilt, and altered to meet new needs and new patterns of living. Economic change was also dramatic, as overseas trade extended, new industries developed alongside traditional ones, and the range of services provided for and by Londoners expanded. Patterns of work changed too, as the guilds' control of economic activity weakened, and casual employment and wage labour increased, and probably employment outside the home. Standards of living were under stress as prices rose far faster than wages, and the 1590s saw widespread hardship and some unrest in the capital. But at the same time many individuals profited from

[1] London Metropolitan Archives [LMA], DL/C/B/046/MS09585 (Deposition books, testamentary causes, 1581-93), ff. 67v-75v. Not all details of the case are given, but it appears that Kendall's siblings challenged his will, in which he left all his goods to his former master, Nealman. The depositions show that Kendall had made his will (LMA, DL/C/B/004/MS09171/12B, f. 115) some 18 months earlier, in good health, and was given every opportunity to alter it on his deathbed but refused to do so.

the expansion of overseas and inland trade, and some of this wealth trickled down: London became a centre for new consumer goods, services, information, and entertainment.[2]

Family and household, at the centre of London society, were undoubtedly affected by the social and economic transformations of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but they also resisted change. Patterns of living and household composition probably became more diverse, but the cycle of family formation and reproduction continued and the institution remained recognisably the same. Individual families and households inevitably change over time, expanding with new members, replacing or closing ranks after departing ones, accommodating the changing age and roles of individuals; they can adjust to external change as well.

It is telling too that 'family' and 'household' are somewhat ambiguous terms in early modern usage, resisting hard and fast definition. The statistician John Graunt, discussing the demography of London in 1662, supposed that 'there were about eight Persons in a Family, one with another, viz. the Man, and his Wife, three Children, and three Servants, or Lodgers'.[3] He thus blurs the (modern) distinctions between the conjugal family of parents and children, the larger household which includes dependents such as servants and apprentices as well, and the looser group, or 'houseful', which includes lodgers and possibly other independent individuals who happen to live in the same house.[4] This essay will explore family and household, in their changing and overlapping configurations, in London between around 1550 and 1640, beginning with the role of migration in shaping London's population and continuing with the formation of family and household and their setting in a wider neighbourhood.

Migration and London's population

London's population in the sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries comprised a mixture of London-born and migrants, with the latter including both recent and long-settled immigrants, coming from provincial agricultural backgrounds, market towns, and continental towns and cities. Probably a majority of the adult population had been born outside London, though they may have had connections in the capital that helped them to settle there, while mechanisms such as apprenticeship, service, and guild membership helped to integrate and assimilate at least some of the new arrivals and teach them how to live in the metropolis. Citizens' children may have had some advantages, but migrant origin was no bar to success in the city. Except for some of the alien immigrants, membership of the Church of England and subjection to its rules and practices was universal.

---

[2] See Bibliography for works on early modern London's economy and society.

[3] John Graunt, *Natural and political observations on the Bills of Mortality* (1662), p. 59.

[4] Mark Merry and Phil Baker, '"For the house her self and one servant": Family and household in late seventeenth-century London', *London Journal* 34:3 (2009), pp. 205-32.

While there can be no such thing as a 'typical' London family or household, the Nealmans and their neighbours amply illustrate the diverse origins and subsequent integration of middling Londoners, as well as mobility within the city. Cornelius Nealman came to England from Holland around 1568, and obtained letters of denization in 1571. He became free of the Stationers' Company, probably by redemption (purchase), though his actual trade was that of bookbinder. By 1571 he had married an English wife, and attended the English church, not the Dutch. To begin with they lived in the parish of St Mary Magdalen Old Fish Street but by 1582 had moved the short distance to St Mildred Bread Street.[5] They had at least two young children at home in 1585.[6] Isaac Kendall probably became Nealman's apprentice in the mid-to late 1570s, if his term (conventionally for seven or more years) ended at Michaelmas 1585. For that period he would have lived with the family, except for possible trips on his master's business, and he clearly stayed on after his apprenticeship ended as a resident journeyman or servant to his master.[7] Kendall's birthplace is not known, but he had both a brother and a sister living in London, or at least within a convenient distance, as they came to see him on his deathbed.

The Nealmans' neighbour, John Marchant, aged 34, another Stationer, one of those who had called in to see how Kendall was doing, had known Nealman for twelve years, probably through the Stationers' Company, as he had only been a neighbour in Bread Street for two years. As a younger man he had lived in Blackfriars, but his wife Jane, aged 26, had lived in St Mildred's parish since birth. Jane's mother Emma Tompson, one of the women nursing Isaac Kendall, said she had lived in the parish for forty years or more; Goodwife Arret, the other nurse and neighbour, had lived there for twenty years and more, and had known Nealman for four years. The scrivener who drew up Kendall's will in February 1584 lived in the nearby parish of St Margaret Moses in Friday Street. He had been born in Yorkshire and apprenticed to a London scrivener, becoming a freeman of the company in 1565. At the time of making the will he was probably in his late forties, and had two apprentices, his own son, aged 19, and another aged 22 who had been born in Hertfordshire.

The bigger demographic picture within which the Nealmans and their neighbours fit is that of large-scale, long-distance migration to London from the English provinces and from the nearby European continent. Migration was the key to early modern London's rapid growth, the principal factor accounting for the capital's expansion from some 80,000 inhabitants in the mid-sixteenth century to around 200,000 by 1600 and perhaps 350-400,000

[5] R.E.G.Kirk and E.F.Kirk, eds., *Returns of aliens dwelling in London, 1529-1605* (Huguenot Society vol. X, 1900-08), pt. 1 p. 478; ibid. pt. 2 pp. 88, 189, 237, 285, 323; William Page, ed., *Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization in England, 1509-1603*, Huguenot Society vol. VIII (1893), p. 178; R.G.Lang, ed., *Two Tudor subsidy rolls for the city of London: 1541 and 1582* (London Record Society, 1993), no. 370 (under 'Strangers').

[6] LMA, DL/C/B/046/MS09585, ff. 73, 75. For Cornelius Nealman's will, see LMA, DL/C/B/004/MS09171/18, f. 282v.

[7] LMA, DL/C/B/046/MS09585, f. 73v.

by the middle of the seventeenth. England's population as a whole was increasing, and both push and pull factors brought thousands of people to London every year.[8]

The migration of young men to take up apprenticeships in the city is the best-documented of these streams: analysis of the city's freedom registers for 1551-3 suggests an average of 640 annual admissions to the freedom, of whom four-fifths had been born outside London. These new freemen were the survivors of a much larger cohort of apprentice migrants – perhaps as many as a thousand a year - of whom the remainder must have died or otherwise failed to complete their apprenticeships. Some may have returned to the provinces, but others no doubt remained in London to swell the ranks of the unfree population.[9]

The connections and contacts that enabled country boys to find masters in London are not usually traceable, but many must have benefited from the mobility of an earlier generation. Francis Langley, the theatrical entrepreneur, and his brother Thomas were born in rural Lincolnshire, but following their father's death in 1556 they were taken to London by their uncle, an earlier migrant and by now a successful goldsmith. When they reached their mid-teens, they were apprenticed to well-to-do masters, a draper and a haberdasher respectively.[10] Undoubtedly family resources were useful in obtaining a good place and in helping a young man on his way, but opportunity was not restricted to those who started from the gentry. While a significant number of the 140 men who held office as alderman between 1600 and 1624 were the sons of gentlemen or citizens, more than half appear to have been sons of provincial tradesmen, yeomen, or husbandmen.[11]

A large and increasing number of migrants to London, however, fell outside the traditional pattern of recruitment into apprenticeship. These included men seeking work but not apprenticeship; women; poor vagrants; refugees from the continent; and temporary visitors, including the gentry and nobility. Migrant men could evidently find work in and around the city without having to undertake formal apprenticeship, though their options and opportunities may have been limited. As London expanded, numbers of non-citizen workers increased considerably, settling in the suburbs rather than within the city itself where economic regulation was most effective. A City proposal of 1610 complained of this phenomenon, but it was effectively impossible to limit or control such activity.[12] The growth of the service sector, and the appearance of new trades and industries with different work

---

[8] Jeremy Boulton, 'London 1540-1700', in P.Clark , ed., *Cambridge Urban History of Britain* vol. 1, *1540-1830* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 315-46, at p. 316.

[9] Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 52-3

[10] W.Ingram, *A London life in the brazen age. Francis Langley, 1548-1602* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 7-19

[11] R.Lang, 'Social origins and social aspirations of Jacobean London merchants', *Economic History Review,* 2nd series 27 (1974), pp. 28-47.

[12] Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan communities. Trade guilds, identity, and change in early modern London* (Stanford, 1997), p. 18.

practices, including more wage-earning and casualisation, rendered traditional apprenticeship and guild membership unnecessary for many. The development of London theatre from the 1570s, for example, drew on traditional skills fostered by apprenticeship such as construction and decoration, but also called for distinctive talents and a new kind of entrepreneurship. Likewise, men with skills gained in practice outside London migrated thither for better employment opportunities. The growth of London's economy attracted provincial tradesmen from as early as 1580: 'Retaylers and Artificers, at the least of such thinges as pertayne to the backe or belly, do leaue the Countrie townes, where there is no vent, and do flie to London, where they be sure to finde ready and quicke market'.[13]

From the late middle ages, the Inns of Court, situated between the city and Westminster, served as both a training-ground for would-be lawyers and government servants and a finishing-school for gentlemen. Admission registers support a picture of a dramatic rise after 1550. Between 1590 and 1639, over 10,000 young men entered the Inns, more than 90 per cent of them coming from outside London.[14] Most were short-term residents, but their collective presence had an important impact on London, and some remained to pursue careers there. Other opportunities included lesser legal and clerical employment, as the national and civic bureaucracies expanded and the need for literate services for business increased: Buckinghamshire-born Richard Smyth, son of an Anglican clergyman, came to London in the early years of the seventeenth century, found a place on the City's legal staff thanks to a kinsman, and made a profitable career there.[15] Clergy also headed for London in search of employment, after as well as before the Reformation.[16] Most of the city incumbents in Elizabeth's reign were London-born, perhaps because most of the city livings were in the patronage of Londoners or London institutions, but there were many other openings, as parochial curates, stipendiary or occasional lecturers, and sermonisers.[17] Of the 412 lecturers in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London whose place of origin Paul Seaver has been able to identify, over three-quarters were born outside London.[18]

Women migrants to London are usually harder to trace: they did not often obtain apprenticeships, and an individual's entry to metropolitan society is not usually recorded. The huge demand for domestic servants in later seventeenth-century London was much less apparent before 1600. Not only was London much smaller, but the still-widespread family

---

[13] John Stow, *A Survey of London (1603)*, ed. C.L.Kingsford (Oxford, 1908), vol. 2, pp. 211-12.

[14] W.R.Prest, *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the early Stuarts, 1590-1640* (London, 1972), pp. 5, 7, table 6 p. 33

[15] Vanessa Harding, 'Smith, Richard (*bap.* 1590, *d.* 1675)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25887, accessed 20 May 2014]

[16] I.Darlington, ed., *London Consistory Court Wills, 1492-1547* (London Record Society, 1967), nos. 7, 12, 39, 56.

[17] H.G.Owen, 'The London parish clergy in the reign of Elizabeth I', unpublished PhD thesis, London 1957, pp. 33-6.

[18] Paul Seaver, *The Puritan lectureships: the politcs of religious dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford, 1970), pp. 174, 309.

economy of household/workshop production limited the need for hired female labour.[19] The growth of male apprentice numbers in the sixteenth century may also have kept down employment opportunities for women. But long-distance female migration for service in London was sufficiently common for the tale of Long Meg of Westminster, printed in 1582, to be plausible. Meg, supposedly born in Lancashire in the reign of Henry VIII, came to London at the age of eighteen, along with 'some other lasses', brought by Meg's neighbour, a waggoner. Following a disagreement over the fare, Meg belaboured the carrier and his man, who then agreed to get all the girls 'good mistresses' or 'good places'.[20] By the end of the sixteenth century, it seems clear that more women were coming to London. The individual stories of 600 women born outside London but marrying there by licence between 1599 and 1619 reveal that most of them had migrated, like apprentices, in their late teens, though some were older. One-third of them were in domestic service, and most of the rest were working in some way, even if not for regular wages. At least a third had kin in London, though not all were living with them.[21]

The regional origins of these new Londoners varied. Apprentices were likely to have come the furthest, with a third of the migrants travelling between 80 and 150 miles, and a third more than 150 miles, principally from the midlands and north of England.[22] Young men entering the Inns of Court between 1590 and 1639 came predominantly from the Home Counties, the west country and East Anglia.[23] The London lecturers came in almost equal numbers from near, middle, and distant counties.[24] Two-fifths of the country-born deponents in the Commissary Court of London between 1565 and 1644 had been born in the Home Counties and midlands, but many had come from much further afield, including one-fifth from the north of England.[25] Welsh migration increased after the Acts of 1536 and 1543, and included apprentice migrants and young men for the Inns of Court;[26] Scottish migration

---

[19] Stephanie Hovland, 'Apprenticeship in later medieval London', iunpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 2006. Cf. P.J.P Goldberg, 'Marriage, migration, and servanthood; the York cause paper evidence', in idem, ed., *Woman is a worthy wight. Women in English society, c. 1200-1500* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 1-15. Peter Earle argues that the changing nature of both men's and women's employment in the later seventeenth century increased the need for domestic service: *A City full of people: men and women of London, 1650-1750* (London, 1994), pp. 110-13.

[20] Quoted in Lawrence Manley, *London in the age of Shakespeare, an anthology* (London, 1986), p. 125.

[21] Vivien Brodsky Eliott, 'Single women in the London marriage market, 1598-1619', in R.B.Outhwaite, ed., *Marriage and society: studies in the social history of marriage* (London, 1981), pp. 81-100.

[22] Rappaport, *Worlds*, p. 83.

[23] Prest, *Inns of Court*, Table 6 p. 33.

[24] Seaver, *Puritan lectureships*, pp. 174, 309.

[25] Rappaport, *Worlds*, pp. 78-9; Vivien Brodsky, 'Mobility and marriage in pre-industrial England: a demographic and social structural analysis of geographic and social mobility and aspects of marriage, 1570-1690, with special reference to London', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge 1978, p. 167.

[26] Prest, *Inns of Court*, Table 6 p. 33; E.Jones, ed., *The Welsh in London, 1500-2000* (Cardiff, 2001), esp. pp. 8-53.

increased considerably after 1603, when Scots ceased to be aliens.[27] The end of the sixteenth century also saw more Irish-English migration, more often of a subsistence kind, of people displaced by war and the policies of the English government. In 1606 the Privy Council noted that 'these parts about London and elsewhere are exceedingly pestered with a great multitude of beggars of that country [Ireland] being most of them peasants and wives and children'.[28]

In addition to migrants from the English provinces and from other parts of the British Isles, significant flows came from continental Europe. These migrants were usually labelled as ‘aliens’ or ‘strangers’, though the implications of these terms for parentage, place of birth, religion, and even domicile are not unambiguous. There were at least 1,500 aliens in London in 1541, many of them long-term residents,[29] but the next years saw a much more dramatic scale of migration, as French- and Dutch-speaking Protestants fled political and economic upheaval and the beginnings of religious persecution.[30] In 1567/8 there were over 4,000 aliens in the city and Southwark, and 2,500 in Westminster and the surrounding parishes and liberties. The majority were Netherlanders, at least a third of whom had arrived in the last year.[31] At over 5,400 in 1593, the alien-born comprised 2 to 3 per cent of the capital's total population.[32]

Unlike most English provincial migrants, these immigrants often came as family groups rather than young single people. Of urban origin, they often had skills and some resources to help them make a living in London straight away, if they were allowed to. Cornelius Nealman was the only stationer among sixty-eight Netherlandish-born aliens in Castle Baynard Ward in 1571, but there were also a printer, a surgeon, a clockmaker, and a number of skilled textile workers.[33] Despite the timing of the migrations, only about half the new migrants claimed religion as the reason for moving. Though the majority of those resident in the city belonged to the Dutch and French churches, many others, like Nealman, attended their local Anglican parish church.[34]

---

[27] Kirk and Kirk, *Returns of aliens*, pt. 1, pp. 439, 441, 459, 469-73, 477; ibid., pt. 2, pp. 390-4; G.G.Cameron, *The Scots Kirk in London* (Oxford, 1979), p. 7.

[28] Quoted in N.G.Brett-James, *The growth of Stuart London* (London, 1935) p. 482.

[29] T.Wyatt, 'Aliens in England before the Huguenots', *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society* of London, 19.1 (1953), pp. 74-94.

[30] Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign protestant communities in sixteenth-century London* (Oxford, 1986); Ole Peter Grell, 'The French and Dutch congregations in London in the seventeenth century', *Proc. Huguenot Soc.* 24 (1987), 362-77.

[31] I.Scouloudi, 'Alien immigration into and alien communities in London, 1558-1640', *Proc. Huguenot Soc.* 16 (1938), pp. 27-49.

[32] Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, p. 299; Scouloudi, 'Alien immigration’.

[33] Kirk and Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, pt. 1 pp. 477-8

[34] Kirk and Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, pt. 3 pp. 330-439.

New migrants were assimilated into the London population in a number of ways. As already noted, many had kin in London already, who must have eased the newcomers' entry into London society and offered some sense of connection and continuity.

Apprenticeship explicitly aimed at the creation of new citizens and reproduction of the skills and social character of the citizenry, disciplining and socialising young men and (it was hoped) imbuing them with an appreciation of city custom and loyalty to company, ward, and civic community. The master's patronage was important in promoting a former apprentice's career, and helped to establish him in the city company to which both belonged. Apprentices spent seven years or so living with the master and his family, and expected to be treated as junior but equal; they could effectively become surrogate sons and heirs of their masters, and sometimes married into the master's family. Isaac Kendall's decision to leave his goods to his master rather than his siblings may have originated with a family quarrel, but examples of legacies from masters to apprentices and vice versa were very common.[35]

Service also, while less formal, combined training and domestication, and like apprenticeship could create enduring relationships of emotional warmth and practical patronage. Employers seem sometimes to have vetted or approved servants' marriages, taking a parental interest.[36] Small legacies and gifts of clothing are not uncommon, but a number of testators made significant bequests to their female servants, enhancing their chances of marriage or helping them to set up a household.[37] The increasing prevalence of female domestic service also helped to link families and households within the city, as young women moved from one household to another or became wives with maidservants of their own.

For aliens, their compatriots and co-religionists, and especially the well-organised French and Dutch churches, supplied a network of contacts, support, and sometimes employment: many came as servants or journeymen and served with alien masters before establishing themselves.[38] The technical skills in textiles, metalwork, printing, brewing, and fine art production that many brought with them meant they were both valued and resented as members of London society. Some changed their status by seeking denization, a necessary step to obtaining London citizenship and company membership (several companies welcomed or at least accepted alien-born members), while marriage into the English-born community was not uncommon. Other aliens, however, remained less assimilated,

---

[35] Patrick Wallis, 'Labor, law, and training in early modern London: apprenticeship and the City's institutions', *Journal of British Studies* 51.4 (2012), pp. 791-819; idem, 'Apprenticeship and Training in Premodern England,' *Journal of Economic History* 68.3 (2008), pp. 836–38; Vanessa Harding, 'Sons, Apprentices, and Successors: The Transmission of Skills and Work Opportunities in Late Medieval and Early Modern London', in Finn-Einar Eliassen and Katalin Szende, eds., *Generations in towns: succession and success in pre-industrial urban societies* (Newcastle, 2009), pp. 153-68.

[36] Elliott, 'Single women', pp. 92-7.

[37] E.g. LMA, DL/C/B/004/MS09171/8, f. 191v; The National Archives, Kew [TNA], PROB 11/43 f. 402 r-v; PROB 11/44 ff. 201r-203r; PROB 11/136, f. 194v.

[38] Kirk and Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, pt. 2 p. xvii.

particularly those who clustered in the city's liberties and suburbs where the companies' control of economic activity was weaker.[39]

Poorer migrants, however, and those who failed to gain entry to London's networks of households, parish communities, and companies, led a more precarious existence, relying on casual employment opportunities and probably temporary accommodation. Tudor governments tried to stem the tide of migration, and successive legislation targeted vagrants and vagabonds, alternately threatening physical punishment, enslavement, deportation, or a forced return home.[40] The numbers of vagrancy cases in London's Bridewell rose from sixty-nine a year in 1560-1 to 815 in 1624-5. Not all these 'vagrants' were in fact migrants: about a quarter of those dealt with in the 1560s came from London, and by the 1630s nearly half did. These people did not necessarily come to London as vagrants: it was their experience in the metropolis that brought about the condition of 'vagrancy'.[41] The immigrant poor merged with the mobile poor circulating within an expanding metropolis.

Making the London family

Most migrants sought to establish themselves in life, most directly by finding employment or securing the prospect of making a satisfactory living, but also by marrying, forming a household, and thus assuming full adult status. Early modern society was deeply invested in the institution of marriage, promoting it as a universal aim while controlling it in practice. In the sixteenth century the church increasingly took over the marriage process, insisting on church solemnization and limiting the viability of traditional marriage practices; both the community and church court officers helped to police the boundaries of legal marriage and marital behaviour.[42] Social sanction was also important, with family and friends helping in the choice of a partner and supplying the essential resources. The wealthy merchant William Holles left £100 to his granddaughter in 1541, provided she married with the consent of his executors, whom he did 'hertelye desire and requyre to provide an honest

[39] Kirk and Kirk, *Returns of Aliens*, pt. 1 pp. xv, xvii-xxi, 317-65; ibid. pt. 2 pp. xi-xx; Page, *Letters of Denization*; Lien Bich Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500–1700* (Aldershot, 2005). Cf. Laura Yungblut, *Strangers settled here amongst us: policies, perceptions, and the presence of aliens in Elizabethan England* (London, 1996); Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and difference in early modern London* (Farnham, 2010).

[40] Hughes and Larkin, *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, vol. 2, *The later Tudors, 1553-1587* (New Haven and London, 1964-9,) nos. 416, 445, 622; Paul Slack, *The English poor law, 1531-1782* (1990).

[41] A.L.Beier, 'Social problems in Elizabethan London', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9.2 (1978), pp. 203-221; cf. idem 'Vagrants and the social order in Elizabethan England, *Past and Present* 64 (1974), pp. 3-29; idem, *Masterless men: the vagrancy problem in England 1560-1640* (London, 1985).

[42] Richard Wunderli, *London church courts on the eve of the Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); Martin Ingram, *Church courts, sex and marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987); Laura Gowing, *Domestic dangers: women, words and sex in early modern London* (Oxford, 1996).

man of good name and fame and good substaunce' as her husband, promising further chattels and household stuff to see her well married.[43]

In London as elsewhere, it was normal for a couple to marry only when they could afford to establish a separate and economically viable household.[44] Many social practices helped to ensure or facilitate this. Accurate assessment of a potential partner's assets was important at any social level, while agreement with his or her family or friends over how they would be settled played an important part in the negotiations of the better-off. Would-be independent craftsmen and traders needed premises and stock, and city companies could help members with loans and preferential lease agreements. Some security of employment would be complemented by savings, inheritance, endowments, or gifts on marriage; as noted above, employers as well as families could enhance a dependent's eligibility with bequests of money or goods. Citizens' children were guaranteed a share of their father's estate, while a few charities existed to distribute modest portions to support poor maids' marriages.[45]

The expectation of economic autonomy for a new couple pushed age at marriage for most partners into the mid-twenties. The prohibition on marrying while an apprentice meant that young men aiming for citizenship were unlikely to be able to marry before then. Several city companies complained to the Mayor in 1556 that too many apprentices were getting their freedom too young to be competent craftsmen, and setting up shop before they could really afford to do so. The result was an Act of Common Council, setting twenty-four as the minimum age for freedom by apprenticeship or redemption.[46] Even so, some years working as a journeyman were normal before marriage was possible. Men who became citizens in the early 1550s took on average 3.2 more years to become householders, and a quarter of the cohort took six or more years to do so.[47] The high proportion of males in the population may also have raised their average age at marriage.

By the early seventeenth century, if not sooner, two distinct marriage patterns had emerged among London's middling and upper groups. Men of the merchant and professional class married comparatively late, as a result of the long apprenticeship and training that they undertook. First-time bridegrooms were usually in their late twenties or older, but they married younger women, aged perhaps twenty or twenty-one. Where the groom was a labourer or tradesman, couples tended to be closer in age, and in their mid-twenties when they first married: both men and women needed several years of earning before they could afford to

[43] TNA, PROB 11/29, ff. 109v-111v. Cf. Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and constraint: rethinking the making of marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000).

[44] See e.g. Rosemary O'Day, *The family and family relationships, 1500-1900: England, France and the United States of America* (Basingstoke, 1994), esp. pp. 58-63

[45] R.B.Jordan, *The charities of London 1480-1660: the aspirations and the achievements of the urban society* (London, 1980), pp. 184-5.

[46] Rappaport, *Worlds*, p. 323.

[47] Rappaport, *Worlds*, pp. 340-1.

marry, but men of this class reached their peak earning potential sooner than merchants and did not need to wait to build up a business before marrying. Broadly speaking, London-born women – perhaps still under the control of family or friends – married earlier than women who had migrated to London.[48]

Finding a partner was a complex process, in which friends, family, masters, and employers might take a role. For the most part, we can only guess how two people met and moved towards marriage, though the litigation over failed marriage plans documents a variety of possibilities.[49] London may have been a particularly complicated context for the making of marriage: a wider range of choice, but less reliable information, and perhaps higher expectations of profit or advantage. Loreen Giese has shown how uncertain the 'way to marriage' could be for early modern Londoners: how many false starts, how many misunderstandings, how important it was to secure the right partner on the right terms and avoid an indissoluble commitment to the wrong one.[50] But as David Cressy notes, 'the infinite variety of social interaction concealed a remarkably robust framework of expectations. From contact to contract, from good liking to final agreement, most couples passed through a recognizable series of steps'.[51] Following the calling of banns, the wedding itself most often took place in the bride's parish, often on a Sunday in the presence of the parish congregation, indicating community interest and oversight. However, a small but growing minority of couples in the early seventeenth century sought the greater privacy of marriage by licence, which often meant they married outside the parish of residence of either. Private and clandestine marriage locations such as the Fleet and certain parishes with special status were increasingly popular by the 1640s, and boomed after the Restoration.[52]

Changing families over time

London families evolved over time, with births and deaths and changing economic circumstances. Interestingly, London couples were slower to start families than might have been expected. In a group of city parishes analysed in detail by Roger Finlay, the mean period between marriage and the birth of the first child was 16-17 months, when the national average was close to 10 months. One factor contributing to this was that rates of bridal pregnancy were slightly lower than the national average.[53] Once they had begun, however, London wives commonly bore children at fairly short intervals. In wealthier city-centre

[48] Elliott, 'Single women'.

[49] Ingram, *Church courts*; O'Hara, *Courtship and constraint.*

[50] Loreen Giese, *Courtships, marriage customs, and Shakespeare's comedies* (New York, 2006).

[51] David Cressy, *Birth, marriage and death: ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 234

[52] Jeremy Boulton, '"Itching after private marrying"? Marriage customs in seventeenth-century London', *London Journal* 16:1 (1991), pp. 15-34

[53] Roger Finlay, *Population and metropolis: the demography of London, 1580-1650* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 134-6, 150.

parishes the mean interval between births was only 21-25 months; in poorer suburban parishes it was 30-31 months, closer to the national average. It seems likely that these very short birth intervals could only have been achieved if the mothers did not breastfeed their own babies. Wetnursing appears to have been practised in sixteenth-century London, though probably not widespread across social classes, and to have become more popular in the seventeenth, but even as it attracted more sustained criticism.[54]

Londoners often sent their infants to nurse in country parishes in Essex and Hertfordshire,[55] but they also placed them elsewhere in the city, where perhaps closer parental oversight might compensate for the town air. Daniel Waldoe of All Hallows Bread Street in the centre of the city sent his child to nurse in Chancery Lane in 1596; Richard Smyth of St Olave Old Jewry had one or both of his twin sons nursed in the neighbouring parish of St Michael Cornhill in 1628.[56] Nehemiah Wallington's children, on the other hand, were only put to nurse when their mother could not feed them herself, or when, in Samuel's case, he failed completely to thrive with his mother.[57] The parish of St Helen Bishopsgate recorded the burials of several nurse-children in the early seventeenth century, three of them from Richard Atkinson's house, suggesting that he or his wife was taking in a succession of children. Their parents, who included a serving man and a labourer, may have put them to nurse to free the mother for earning.[58]

The total number of children born to a long marriage could be very high. Many parish registers record the births of five, six, seven or more children to a single couple; a few women are known to have borne ten or more children. In practice, infant and child mortality reduced actual family size: baptisms were interspersed with deaths, and the names of deceased children were given to later-born siblings.[59] Although data for mortality across the city are not available until the mid-seventeenth century, when infants made up one-third of the dead, individual parish registers from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries suggest that

---

[54] Finlay, *Population*, pp. 94-5, 134-6, 144-8; Gill Newton, 'Infant Mortality Variations, Feeding Practices and Social Status in London between 1550 and 1750', *Social History of Medicine* 24:2 (2011), pp. 260-280.

[55] Finlay, *Population*, pp. 94-5, 144-8

[56] W.Bruce Bannerman, ed., *The registers of All Hallows, Bread Street (1538-1892) and of St John the Evangelist, Friday Street (1653-1822)* (Harleian Society 43, 1913), p. 168; H.Ellis, ed., *The Obituary of Richard Smyth, secondary of the Poultry Compter* (Camden Society, old ser. 44, 1849), p. 3.

[57] Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World: a puritan artisan in seventeenth-century London* (London, 1985) pp. 89-90, 229.

[58] W.Bruce Bannerman, ed., *The Registers of St Helen Bishopsgate* (Harleian Society 31, 1904), pp. 263-8.

[59] E.g. W.Bruce Bannerman, ed., *The Registers of St Mary le Bowe, Cheapside. All Hallows, Honey Lane, and St Pancras, Soper Lane, London*, pt. 1, *Baptisms and burials* (Harleian Society 44, 1914). Grace Rawstorne bore eleven children 1643-56: ibid. pp. 157-8.

similar levels prevailed then.[60] Nehemiah Wallington (b. 1598) was the tenth of thirteen children born to John Wallington, twelve by his first wife and one by his third; when the adult Nehemiah recorded the names and birthdates of his siblings, however, he omitted their godparents' names 'because I thinke it not so matirriall for they be all most dead'. Of his own five children, only one lived to adulthood.[61] Barely half the children born in early modern London survived to age fifteen.[62]

Family size was also limited by the possibility that one parent would die prematurely, leaving the survivor to support and bring up the children. Adults died in every decade of life, from a variety of causes: 17 per cent of deaths in the parish of St Botolph Aldgate between 1583 and 1599 were of adults aged between thirty and fifty, principally due to consumption, ague (influenza), and flux, and childbed.[63] Apart from cutting short the reproductive potential of that marriage, the death of a mother in or soon after childbirth made the survival of her newborn baby, and any other children, much more doubtful;[64] the loss of a breadwinning father imperilled the family's economic viability.

Remarriage, and the re-formation of a family group, was common. Twenty-six per cent of grooms and 35 per cent of brides in Elliott's early seventeenth-century sample of marriages by licence had been married before; in Stepney at the same period, 45 per cent of all marriages were remarriages for one or both parties.[65] London citizens' widows were unusually well-protected by the custom of London, which gave them one-third of the couple's movables for life (half if there were no children), as well as the right to remain in the marital home for life. The widow of a well-off citizen might have little financial motive to remarry, but she was herself an attractive marriage proposition, for both older and younger men; the stereotype of a former apprentice marrying his master's widow had some foundation in reality.[66] Dorothy Robotom, widow of a London draper, married her late husband's former apprentice Robert Rowe (probably several years her junior) in 1546, a year after Robotom's death, when she was already pregnant with his child; she married for a third time, to another

---

[60] Finlay, *Population*, pp. 83-110; T.R.Forbes, *Chronicle from Aldgate. Life and death in Shakespeare's London* (New Haven and London, 1971), pp. 61-76. Cf. Hannah Newton, *The sick child in early modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford, 2012).

[61] David Booy, ed., *The notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654, a selection* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 88; Seaver, *Wallington's World*, pp. 86-91.

[62] Finlay, *Population*, pp. 100-3.

[63] Forbes, *Chronicle from Aldgate*, p. 103.

[64] Vivien Brodsky, 'Widows in late Elizabethan London: remarriage, economic opportunity and family orientations', in L.Bonfield, R.Smith, and K.Wrightson, eds., *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 122-54; Roger Schofield, 'Did the mothers really die? Three centuries of maternal mortality in *The world we have lost*', in ibid., pp. 231-60.

[65] Elliott, 'Single women'; Brodsky, 'Widows'; Jeremy Boulton, 'London widowhood revisited: the decline of female remarriage in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', *Continuity and Change*, 5:3 (1990), pp. 323-55.

[66] Barbara J.Todd, 'The remarrying widow: a stereotype reconsidered', in Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), pp. 54-92.

young draper, six weeks after Rowe's death in 1547.[67] Husbands often foresaw that their widows might remarry; some in effect wished them well, while others sought to ensure that their wealth should not fall into another man's hands, strictly limiting the assets that a widow could keep if she remarried, or seeking to protect their children's inheritance.[68] Widowers and the widows of citizen craftsmen had the best prospects of remarriage, while poorer and older widows were more likely to remain single; widows' remarriage also seems to have declined over the seventeenth century.[69]

Either party might bring children to the second marriage, creating a complex blend of relationships. Dorothy Robotom brought six children from her first marriage to her second, and probably five children from the first marriage and one from the second to her third marriage.[70] Nehemiah Wallington's father had several children living when he remarried, and his second and third wives, both widows, each had two children already. One of these step-brothers became a close friend of young Nehemiah's, and in later life he refers to his second stepmother as 'my Mother'.[71] It was indeed common to use simple terms like mother, brother, and sister for step- and half-relations and in-laws, perhaps implying a similar emotional relationship, but at least indicating the roles individuals were expected to occupy.

On the other hand, it was not very common for households to include adults of two generations, [72] though certainly cases are known, as for instance the family of John Stow the chronicler, where John's widowed mother lived with another son, Thomas, and his wife, the cause of much domestic and familial friction.[73] Widows of independent means might head households, though predictably they were in the minority. Thirty-one of forty households in the parish of St Mary Colechurch in 1574 were headed by a married couple, two by women, and seven by unmarried men, who probably included some widowers. The women householders were both titled 'Mrs'; one was responsible for four other communicants, the other only for herself and her manservant, though either might have had under-age children.[74] In St Helen Bishopsgate in 1578, ten of seventy-two householders were women, at least nine of them, including the redoubtable Lady Anne Gresham, widows.[75] In the citywide tithe survey of 1638,

---

[67] Darlington, *Consistory Court Wills*, no. 237; J.L.Chester, ed., *The parish registers of St Michael Cornhill, 1546-1754* (Harleian Society 7, 1882), pp. 5, 74, 177.

[68] E.g. TNA PROB11/35, ff. 23v-24.

[69] Todd, 'The remarrying widow'; Boulton, 'London widowhood revisited'; Barbara J.Todd, 'Demographic determinism and female agency: the remarrying widow reconsidered ... again', *Continuity and Change*, 9:3 (1994), pp. 421-50.

[70] See above.

[71] Booy, *Notebooks*, p. 2; Seaver, *Wallington's World*, pp. 69-70.

[72] In 1695, 3-5 per cent of families in the samples studied were 'extended', i.e. including family members in addition to the conjugal couple and their children, but 0.1-0.2 per cent contained three generations: Merry and Baker, "For the house her self and one servant", p. 222.

[73] Stow, *A Survey of London (1603)*, ed. C.L.Kingsford, (Oxford, 1908), vol. 1, pp. vii-xxviii, xliv-lxvii.

[74] Mercers' Company Register of Writings II, ff. 13-14, at Mercers' Hall.

[75] LMA, P69/HEL/B/004/MS06836, pp. 281-2

the proportion of widow householders varied across space and time, with more being found in poorer and peripheral parishes such as All Hallows Staining inside the city wall, where twenty-seven of 165 households (16 per cent) were headed by widows, most of them in houses valued at £3 a year or less.[76]

Graunt's proposed 'family' of two parents and three children, then, presents a misleadingly simple picture of the London family. Even as a snapshot, it overestimates the size of the average family: at the end of the seventeenth century, when census-type data allows analysis of family and household, a third or more of households contained no children, and the mean number of living children per couple or single parent was less than two. Of course some couples had three or more children, and those with fewer may have borne and lost them, but at the census moment (and therefore at any other single moment) average family size was comparatively small. The same survey indicates a large number of single-parent families, more commonly as lodging families within larger households.[77] While many things had changed in London by 1695, ongoing research suggests that the patterns revealed then were long established, and it seems likely that average family size in 1600 was similarly small. Large families like those of Dorothy Robotom or John Wallington existed, but were exceptional.

Families and households

However, London households were not composed solely of related family members. The young Nehemiah Wallington's 'articles for my family for the reforming of our lives' were signed by himself, his wife, one apprentice, two male servants, and one maidservant.[78] Graunt assumed that his London 'family' included three 'Servants, or Lodgers'.[79] Apprentices and servants accounted for a significant proportion of the population overall and, together with lodgers, for much of the difference in size between London households. The statistician Gregory King estimated mean household size, including non-family members, for London in the 1660s as ranging from 'almost 4¾' to 'almost 6' persons.[80]

---

[76] T.C.Dale, ed., *The inhabitants of London in 1638* (Society of Genealogists,1931), pp. 17-18; cf. Finlay, *Population,* pp. 70-82

[77] Merry and Baker, "For the house her self and one servant".

[78] Seaver, *Wallington's World,* p. 79; Booy, *Notebooks*, pp. 271-2. By this time the Wallingtons had at least one child.

[79] Graunt, *Natural and political observations*, p. 59.

[80] 'Gregory King on the state of England in 1695', in *Seventeenth-century economic documents*, ed. J. Thirsk and J. P. Cooper (Oxford, 1972), pp. 770-90 at p. 772.

Not all freemen took apprentices, but probably the majority did, starting a few years after they themselves had become free, and possibly continuing through their working life. Wealthier or more senior companymen might take more than one at a time, though three seems to have been the normal maximum. Son-to-father apprenticeships were comparatively rare (only five of the 179 London-born entrants to the freedom of 1551-3 had been apprenticed to their own fathers), though it may have been more common in some trades than others. [81] Apprenticeship within the wider family was more likely, as with Thomas Gresham, apprenticed to his uncle the Mercer (Sir) Richard Gresham, [82] but most apprentices must have been unrelated to their masters, and often far distant from their own birth families. Apprentices were long-term residents of the household, junior in status but potentially the social and economic equals – or betters - of their master. The master was expected to treat his apprentice well, providing him with adequate food, clothing and accommodation as well as teaching him his trade; complaints of being treated poorly or assigned menial tasks were taken seriously.[83]

The term 'servant', when applied to males, is an elastic category. Sometimes the word clearly means a domestic or menial employee, not a potential equal or heir like an apprentice, but sometimes it is used of apprentices themselves and especially of journeymen and junior employees. When William Walle willed in 1542 that James 'my servant' be made free, and three servants more be enrolled, he must be alluding to apprentices, though he also had a servant Harry Gosse to whom he owed wages.[84] Isaac Kendall, recently freed from his apprenticeship, was referred to both as Nealman's servant and as a journeyman.[85] Some trades like brewing entailed the employment of increasing numbers of 'servants', in this case wage-earning employees who might themselves be householders or married,[86] but many male servants and most journeymen lived with their employer and formed part of his household as an economically interdependent and collaborative group.

The relationship might be reinforced by trust and affection, exemplified in post-mortem bequests, or develop into a business partnership. In 1557 Thomas Hunt, skinner, left £20 to each of his three 'servants', John Turner, Roger Evans, and Michael Crowther, including forgiving Turner the money he had lost in 'bad bargains' made on Hunt's behalf; he also left the three servants the use at interest of £200 until the designated legatees were of

---

[81] Charles Welch, ed., *Register of Freemen of the city of London in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI* (London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, 1908), pp. 34, 49, 66, 103, 107. Rappaport, *Worlds*, pp. 76-86 analyses the freedom register in some detail.

[82] Ian Blanchard, 'Gresham, Sir Thomas (*c.*1518–1579)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11505, accessed 20 May 2014]

[83] Harding, 'Sons, apprentices, and successors'.

[84] Darlington, *Consistory Court Wills*, no. 168. Walle requested that his son William 'be made fre by my copy', i.e. made a freeman by patrimony.

[85] LMA, DL/C/B/046/MS09585, ff. 67v-75v.

[86] Luu, *Immigrants*, pp. 259-99.

age. Hunt also left £10 to Thomas Fisher, apprentice, to be paid when he had served seven years of his term. Hunt's widow Anne, who was generously provided for, clearly took on the apprentice and maintained some relationship with the servants even when they were no longer in her employ. In her will of 1561 she left £20 to John Turner of London, skinner, 'my late servaunte', and £10 to Michael Crowther, 'my late servaunte', as well as £10 to Thomas Fisher 'my apprentis'.[87] James Huishe, a mercer, divided his Cheapside property on his death in 1590, leaving the residential premises to his wife, as long as she remained unmarried. The shop, two adjacent warehouses, and counting-houses were to be let for seven years to William Bennett, Huishe's friend, 'servant' and executor, and Huishe's younger son William, trading in partnership and paying £10 a year to the widow.[88]

Many households included women servants, probably mostly younger women, London-born as well as migrant. They undertook a variety of domestic tasks, assisting the householder's wife or perhaps freeing her for productive labour in his business, to which they too might contribute.[89] They were subordinate members of the household, subject to the paternalistic authority of its head and dependent for food and shelter. Sometimes the relationship could be kind and affectionate, but sometimes much less so, one of exploitation, including sexual exploitation. Living at close quarters with the family, women servants were exposed to advances they may not have welcomed, but were also in a position to observe and report on domestic relationships and misdemeanours, as many church court cases demonstrate.[90]

Female domestic service was of its nature often transient and temporary; for many it was a life-stage, to be succeeded by marriage, but it could also alternate with visits home, and unlike apprenticeship was rarely expected to last over a fixed term of years. Londoners acknowledged this in their wills, leaving small bequests to individuals, if they should still be in service at the time of the testator's death. Alderman Sir Thomas Bennett (d. 1626) left a generous £25 'to Bridget my maid which hath dwelt long with me', but still qualified it 'if she be living with me at the time of my death'; other servants, unnamed, were left £5.[91] Richard Smyth, city law officer, employed at least six maidservants over a period of 27 years or more, and kept in touch with several of them after their service ended.[92]

---

[87] TNA, PROB 11/42B, ff. 107- 111; PROB 11/ 44, ff. 201r-203r.

[88] TNA, PROB 11/76, ff. 182v-187v.

[89] Michael Roberts, 'Women and work in sixteenth-century English towns', in Penelope Corfield, and Derek Keene, eds., *Work in towns, 850-1850* (Leicester, 1990), pp. 86-102; Peter Earle, 'The female labour market in London in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series 42 (1989), pp. 328-53; Tim Meldrum, *Domestic service and gender, 1660-1750. Life and work in the London household* (Harlow, 2000).

[90] Meldrum, *Domestic service*; Paula Humfrey, ed., *The experience of domestic service for women in early modern London* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 43-50, 53-60, 62-4; Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 189-92.

[91] E.g. TNA, PROB 11/135 ff. 365v-366r; PROB 11/151, ff. 170v-175

[92] Ellis, *Obituary,* pp. 24, 36, 63, 64, 65, 66, 81, 89, 101.

Lodgers are even harder to characterise. They could be male or female, single, married, with or without children, of higher, equal, or lower social status than the householder.[93] The relationship could range from that of paying guest eating with the family to independent sub-tenant of a furnished room or rooms within the house. There were already commercial lodging-houses, and there is a sense in which the short-term tenants of whole houses were also lodgers, not settled parishioners and ratepayers. Rising house- and property-values meant that many could not afford independent accommodation, and also offered those who had space to spare, such as widows, an opportunity to make a living from it.[94] Lodging patterns were shaped by supply as well as demand; it seems likely that families took in lodgers when that was the best use of the space available to them, a decision affected by the family's life-cycle, as numbers swelled and shrank, and its changing economy.

Lodgers blur the boundaries of the household, and also highlight the complicated relationship between family, household, and the premises they occupied. A Star Chamber inquiry into divided houses in 1637 (effectively a survey of lodgers and inmates) yielded a mass of evidence for the subdivision of houses and the conversion of sheds, stables and outbuildings into living accommodation.[95] Local as well as national authorities were concerned about overcrowding and health, but particularly about the influx of poor people, with or without claims to poor relief, and the threat to order as the bonds of household weakened. City-centre parishes listed few lodgers, and were quick to assure the inquiry that there was no danger that they would be chargeable to the parish, but lodging was both more common and more of a problem in the poorer outer suburbs, where it seems to have shaded into an underworld of disorderly lodging-houses harbouring 'idle' or 'suspected' people.[96]

Conclusion: neighbours, neighbourhood, and the wider London family

However closely we study the individual family or household and its internal relationships, we need to acknowledge its permeable boundaries and take account of its external relationships. The account of Isaac Kendall's deathbed given at the beginning of this essay was only possible because the Nealmans' household was integrated into a community of neighbours, on whose depositions the court relied. These depositions also illustrate the range of neighbourly relationships and the circulation of information. Goodwife Arret 'being a near neighbour unto Cornelius Nealman and his wife did at the request of him and his wife often look unto Isaack Kendall the testator in the time of his sickness'. John Marchant

[93] Merry and Baker, "For the house her self and one servant"; Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Temporary Lives in London Lodgings', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71:1 (2008), pp. 219-42. Cf. Charles Nicholl, *The lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (London, 2007).

[94] Orlin, 'Temporary lives', pp. 224-36.

[95] *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1636-7* (HMSO, 1867), p. 443; ibid. *Charles I, 1637* (HMSO, 1868), pp. 178-83-457. Original returns in TNA, SP 16/359.

[96] Ibid.; cf. W.Le Hardy, *County of Middlesex. Calendar to the sessions records, 1612*-18, (4 vols., 1935-41).

'understanding that Isaac Kendall was sick by reason that [Marchant's] mother in law named Emma Tompson did keep him in his sickness went to him the said testator to see how he did'; Jane Marchant, his wife, 'came to the house of Mr Cornelius Nealman at about 9 o'clock at night to see how the said testator and her mother being the said testator's keeper, did'. Emma Tompson testified to the 'common voice' of the parish 'that Mr Cornelius is a free denizen and that the testator had been his prentice and was out of his years at Michaelmas last'. John and Jane Marchant went home 'and the next morning they heard say that the said testator was dead'.[97] The other deponents in the case, the scrivener who wrote the will, his apprentices, and the parish minister, made their contribution to the case, but it was the neighbours whose testimony illuminates Nealman's household and locates it in the community.

Neighbours were important witnesses to good character and to misdemeanour, as well as to matters of fact and common report. Cases heard before the church courts, whether they concerned sexual transgression, slander, testamentary dispute, or ecclesiastical censure, illuminate the extent of interest in and knowledge of neighbours' affairs.[98] Londoners lived part of their domestic lives on the streets, or at least the front step, but there were few guarantees of privacy anywhere. London houses were closely packed, often subdivided in ad hoc ways, and structurally porous: neighbours overlooked each other's yards and premises, overheard conversations, and observed interactions through cracks and loopholes.[99] Proximity caused problems too, in disputes over shared amenities such as wells and privies, or the disposal of household waste.[100] Witness depositions in a dispute between the parish vestry of All Hallows Honey Lane and the Mercers' Company over the ownership of the cellar under the church in 1553 reveal knowledge of neighbours, their households, and their activities stretching back more than 50 years.[101]

And many Londoners, London-born or not, had relatives living in the city, expanding the notion of 'family' and its range of interactions and tracing connections across the metropolis. Family members did not need to live in the same household to play a part in one another's lives. Nehemiah Wallington as a young married man lived near to his father, with whom he had frequent contact; he saw something of his brother and sisters, and consulted his stepmother when his wife Grace had a difficult pregnancy.[102] Richard Smyth from Buckinghamshire married the daughter of a Stepney merchant, and acquired a range of London-based in-laws, but one brother also migrated to London, and they maintained a close and lifelong relationship. Richard's writings document a much larger group of family contacts

---

[97] LMA, DL/C/B/046/MS09585, ff. 67v-75v.

[98] Gowing, *Domestic dangers*; Giese, *Courtships*.

[99] Orlin, *Locating privacy*.

[100] Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Boundary disputes in early modern London', in eadem, ed., *Material London, ca.1600* (Philadelphia, 2000), pp. 344-76

[101] Mercers' Company, Register of Writings ii, ff. 219-223v, 226-229v, 231-42, 246-57, 264v-267, at Mercers' Hall.

[102] Seaver, *Wallington's World*, pp. 72-9; Booy, *Notebooks*, p. 59.

in London, not all within the same social milieu, and their constant recirculation from country to city and back over the generations.[103]

While it is possible broadly to characterise families and households in early modern London, therefore, their changing composition and their indefinite boundaries make it impossible to form too strict a definition. The means, medians, and averages of the demographer need to be complemented by the detail of real lives lived over time, drawing on all possible sources, from the life-writings of people like John Stow, Richard Smyth, and Nehemiah Wallington, to the wills, parish documents, and court depositions in which otherwise unremembered Londoners speak – and perhaps also by the lively imaginative literature of London, especially the city plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries.[104]

[103] Ellis, *Obituary*, passim.

[104] Lawrence Manley, *Literature and culture in early modern London* (Cambridge, 1995); Jean Howard, *Theater of a city : the places of London comedy, 1598-1642* (Philadelphia, 2007).