



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Waddell, Brodie (2018) Writing history from below: chronicling and record-keeping in Early Modern England. *History Workshop Journal* 85 (1), pp. 239-264. ISSN 1363-3554.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/20709/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

‘Writing History from Below: Chronicling and Record-Keeping in Early Modern England’

Brodie Waddell

Forthcoming in *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 85 (Spring 2018).

Abstract:

Over the course of the early modern period, a remarkable number of people below the ranks of the gentry and clergy produced manuscript chronicles, registers and historical miscellanies. This article examines several of these ‘lay’ historians, particularly Joseph Bufton (1651-1718), a tradesman from Coggeshall in Essex who filled more than twenty volumes of notebooks. It shows that these relatively lowly writers created a ‘usable past’ by anchoring their texts in the social and economic realities of their own local communities. They recorded both the ‘merry England’ of seasonal festivity and the perennial struggle to earn a living in often difficult circumstances. Alongside this, some drew on the widening circulation of printed and oral news to chronicle national political and religious events, usually from a distinctly local perspective. The histories and archives that they preserved for posterity often served a practical purpose by providing evidence of parochial affairs, extraordinary weather or local customs. Yet they also helped to reinforce the social bonds that tied together their communities – whether based on neighbourhood, denomination or occupation – by recording a shared past for their members.

Writing History from Below: Chronicling and Record-Keeping in Early Modern England

On 8 August 1716, an Essex tradesman named Joseph Bufton sat down to take stock of his little archive. For about forty years, he had been filling the margins and blank pages of old almanacs with notes. He now had a substantial collection and his terse list hints at their contents.

'I reckon I have here 22 almanacks', he wrote in a tidy, confident hand. Most were 'filled up chiefly with things taken out of other books' and 'with notes of sermons'. Several others were old financial accounts and family letterbooks. Another 'I keep on my board and write in dayly', though its precise contents remain a mystery. The final two were primarily historical in focus, recording miscellaneous events from 1659 onwards. One was 'filled chiefly with buriall and marriage', chronicling the lives and deaths of his neighbours as well as local affairs in his town of Coggeshall. The last volume recorded the rules, proceedings and officers of his trade and, in later section, a 'yearly account of remarkable things' from the Glorious Revolution to the Hanoverian Accession.¹

This extraordinary collection has only partly survived the ensuing centuries. Only eleven volumes are known to remain, though thankfully the final two are among these. Eight are held in his native county at the Essex Record Office and another three can be found at the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds.² Still, the fact that *any* escaped the rubbish heap is surely a sign of providential favour – most jottings of this sort were long ago destroyed by unfortunate fires, damp basements or over-enthusiastic spring cleaning.

The survival of a substantial written legacy is especially rare for people of Bufton's modest social standing. He was an inconsequential provincial tradesman with little schooling and even less wealth, far below men such as Samuel Pepys or John Evelyn in the social hierarchy. Yet he was not entirely alone. Craftsmen, shopkeepers and farmers across England – and a smaller number of women of similar rank – filled innumerable notebooks with their scribblings and then worked to preserve them for posterity. By examining a broad selection of such material from other individuals alongside Bufton's unusually diverse collection, we can begin to unravel how and why people with minimal formal education sought to compile records of their own lives and of the world around them. Such manuscripts show that gentlemen and clergymen were not the only ones who worked to create and maintain historical documents. There were, in fact, innumerable individuals who wrote histories 'from below' in this period.³

As will be seen, Bufton and the many others like him did not limit themselves to purely utilitarian information, nor did they concentrate exclusively on recording the state of their soul, though both

I am very grateful to Liesbeth Corens, Henry French, Mark Hailwood, Julia Laite, Laura Sangha, Tim Somers, Hilary Taylor, Filippo de Vivo, Susan Wiseman, the commenters on the Many-Headed Monster blog and innumerable conference audiences for their invaluable questions and suggestions.

¹ Essex Record Office [ERO], D/DBM Z9, unpaginated (back flyleaf).

² ERO, D/DBm Z7-Z14; Brotherton Library, University of Leeds [BLUL], MS 8-10. Images of the latter three are now available online: <library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/167025/diaries_of_joseph_bufton>. Five of the eleven extant volumes (four untitled notebooks and one *Compleat Tradesman*) were not included in his 1716 inventory of '22 almanacks' ('13 Riders and Gellen, pretty broad, 6 Goldsmith narrow ones, 1 Partridge, very large one, 1 Raven's, of a particular sort, 1 Tanner is a stitched one'), so the latter was an incomplete list of his personal writings which must have included at least 27 volumes.

³ The phrase was popularised by E.P. Thompson as a way to refer to modern scholarship about 'the history of the "common man"' in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 7 April 1966. For a recent discussion of this approach, see Mark Hailwood and Brodie Waddell (eds), *The Future of History from Below: An Online Symposium* (2013) <<https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/history-from-below>>

types of texts were popular. Instead, they wrote in a wide range of ways, switching frequently and sometimes jarringly between different genres. Modes of writing that modern observers would consider distinct – such as national chronicles, burial registers, family genealogies and financial accounts – often crowd together on the page. This demonstrates both the remarkably confident, versatile historical literacy found among ordinary laypeople and the inadequacy of conventional categorisations which tend to label such volumes simply as ‘diaries’ or ‘autobiographies’.

Bufton wrote very little about himself, and less still about his inner thoughts and feelings. Instead, he devoted most of his literary energies to studiously archiving information about the things he read, heard or witnessed himself. Scholars have often presented such material as ‘self-writings’ or ‘ego-literature’.⁴ When they have focused on the writing of people like Bufton – ‘godly’ individuals of ‘middling’ social status – they tend to become examples of the rise of an ‘individualist self’, built on ‘self-examination’ and ‘interiority’.⁵ Yet, as Sheila Ottway, Andrew Cambers and Adam Smyth have so ably demonstrated using the writings of aristocratic and clerical elites, much early modern ‘autobiography’ defies this narrative by mixing different genres and switching between perspectives.⁶ This article further undermines the traditional view by drawing on texts produced by less socially privileged individuals to show that they too often lack the ‘interiority’ we might expect to find. However, the writings of Bufton and his many contemporaries allow us to go further. They show that the social role of supposedly ‘personal’ manuscripts was even stronger for the men and women who comprised the majority of the literate population. These were not inward-looking ‘diaries’ or ‘autobiographies’. They were outward-looking ‘personal chronicles’, designed to be useful to family members, neighbours and future generations.⁷ This was *social* writing rather than ‘ego-literature’. It was written about – and usually *for* – a wider community rather than the ‘individualist self’.

Meanwhile, most scholars studying the ‘historical culture’ of early modern England have focused on either the oral traditions of ‘plebeians’ or the literary production of the elite.⁸ Of course, we have long known that people in this period had a strong sense of the past and put a high value on particular types of historical knowledge. Thanks to the work of E.P. Thompson, Andy Wood, Alexandra Walsham and many others, we have a good understanding of how people at the lower end of the social scale deployed unwritten ‘custom’ and ‘memory’ to defend their interests or support their faith.⁹ That educated elites applied their own written histories and archives to similar

⁴ David Booy (ed.), *The Notebooks of Nehemiah Wallington, 1618-1654: A Selection* (2007), p. 1; Tom Webster, ‘Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality’, *Historical Journal*, 39:1 (1996), pp. 35-6.

⁵ Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-identity in England, 1591-1791* (1996), esp. ch. 4; Paul Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (1985), pp. 6-11, 43-4; Booy (ed.), *Wallington*, pp. 9-14, 23-5; Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (2013), ch. 12, esp. pp. 309-14; Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier: The Life of an Eighteenth-Century Protestant Capitalist* (2013), ch. 3.

⁶ Sheila Ottway, ‘Autobiography’, in Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing* (2002), pp. 231-47; Andrew Cambers, ‘Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580-1720’, *Journal of British Studies*, 46:4 (2007), pp. 796-825; Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (2010).

⁷ James Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (1998), p. 36.

⁸ Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (2003), pp. 8-13.

⁹ E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (1991), ch. 3; Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern* (2013); Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (2011), ch. 3-4, 7. The historiography on this topic is huge, but for some other key works, see Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500-1700* (2000), ch. 4-5; Woolf, *Social Circulation*, ch. 8-9; Nicola Whyte, *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom and Memory, 1500-1800* (2009), ch. 4-5; Simon Sandall, *Custom and Popular Memory in the Forest of Dean, c. 1550-1832* (2013).

ends is also clear.¹⁰ Indeed, feminist scholars such as Megan Matchinske have made a strong case for studying the ‘parahistories’ produced by wealthy women outside the boundaries of a literary mode that was increasingly narrowly defined over the course of the period.¹¹ However, the ways that undistinguished laypeople used historical writing and record-keeping in their own lives has been much less fully explored. There are important exceptions. For example, Daniel Woolf has discussed the ‘official or semi-official chronicles’ kept by civic governors and Andy Wood has analysed the testimony of some ‘village archivists’.¹² But the texts created by Bufton and others with little or no formal authority have generally been read for their content rather than for what they can reveal about their author’s role as a chronicler and record-keeper.

I. Finding chroniclers

The vast majority of annalists and diarists who have caught the attention of modern historians were noblemen, gentlemen, clergymen, merchants, lawyers, scholars, professional authors or aristocratic women. This is particularly true of those whose work reached print, but also applies to those who left only manuscripts. The historian William Camden, the chronicler Narcissus Luttrell and the diarist John Evelyn were all wealthy and highly educated. Those who were not especially wealthy – such as the martyrologist John Foxe and the diarist Ralph Josselin - had usually spent time at Oxford, Cambridge or the Inns of Court. Those who lacked a university education – including Lady Anne Clifford and other well-known women – were normally ensconced among the nobility or the mercantile elite.

Yet Joseph Bufton, who was neither especially wealthy nor very well educated, almost certainly represents a more typical early modern chronicler than Camden, Josselin or Clifford. In the late seventeenth century, the 62,000 gentry, clerical and professional families together amounted to only about one in twenty English households. Much more numerous were the nearly half a million families of traders, artisans and farmers, who comprised almost one third of the total.¹³ Moreover, unlike the poorer families below them, this middle group was remarkably literate. If judged by the ability to sign one’s name, then most shopkeepers, tradesmen, skilled manufacturers and yeomen farmers possessed at least basic writing skills.¹⁴ Among women, the proportion was lower but still

¹⁰ Again, the literature is vast, but for some key work since 2000, see Woolf, *Reading History*; Woolf, *Social Circulation*; Paulina Kewes (ed.), *The Uses of History in Early Modern England* (2006); Jan Broadway, *No Historie So Meete: Gentry Culture and the Development of Local History in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (2006); Angus Vine, *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (2010); Matthew Neufeld, *The Civil Wars after 1660: Public Remembrance in Late Stuart England* (2013).

¹¹ Megan Matchinske, *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (2009), p. 3. On the extra-disciplinary history writing of elite women, see also Mihoko Suzuki, ‘Anne Clifford and the Gendering of History’, *Clio*, 30:2 (2001), pp. 195-229; Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing and Poetry in Seventeenth-Century England* (2006), esp. ch. 7; Kate Chedgzoy, *Women’s Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place and History, 1550-1750* (2007); Katharine Hodgkin, ‘Women, Memory and Family History in Seventeenth-Century England’, in Ericka Kuijpers et al. (eds), *Memory Before Modernity* (2013), pp. 297-313.

¹² Woolf, *Reading History*, pp. 59-76; Wood, *Memory*, pp. 256-71. See also Fox, *Oral and Literate*, pp. 282-5; David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (1992), pp. 46-59.

¹³ Tom Arkell, ‘Illuminations and distortions: Gregory King’s Scheme calculated for the year 1688 and the social structure of later Stuart England’, *Economic History Review*, 59:1 (2006), p. 49.

¹⁴ Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (1981), ch. 2; David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (1980), pp. 124-7, 129-37; R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1660-1800* (1985), pp. 33, 40-1; Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660-1800* (2009), pp. 23-30, 78-82. Figures for ‘signature literacy’ are likely

substantial, with perhaps one in three 'middling' women able to write at this time.¹⁵ Rising literacy rates ensured that a clear majority of men and women in prosperous urban households could at least scrawl their name by the late seventeenth century.¹⁶ So when our Essex tradesman confidently inscribed 'Joseph Bufton His Almanac' inside the front cover of a *Rider's British Merlin* in 1677, he was merely one of tens of thousands of people of his rank to have the skills to do so.¹⁷

One of the reasons why such writers have received so much less attention than their social superiors is that fewer of the texts they produced have survived. This is most obvious in the case of published histories and biographies, which were dominated by gentry and clerical authors throughout the early modern period. Even town histories were usually written by highly educated elites until the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁸ When poorer laypeople did publish in their own name, it was often due to their radical religious beliefs as Quakers or Baptists, making them just as unrepresentative of ordinary people as clergymen or aristocrats. Unfortunately, similar biases afflict the surviving corpus of hand-written texts, especially those seen as most interesting to scholars. For example, Elaine McKay found that around 80 percent of the 244 'diaries' by identifiable men from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries belonged to gentlemen, clergymen, lawyers or other elites.¹⁹ Among women, the upper classes were even more over-represented. One explanation for this unbalance is the relative archival security enjoyed by social elites – a notebook left in an aristocrat's muniment room or a lawyer's study is much more likely to survive the ensuing centuries than one tucked into the wooden chest of a shopkeeper or farmer.

Nonetheless, the very existence of Bufton's volumes testifies to the danger of attempting to excuse the neglect of more ordinary chroniclers by claiming a paucity of sources. McKay's count of early modern 'diarists', for instance, includes fifteen tradesmen or merchants, nine yeomen or farmers, one midwife, and perhaps twenty common sailors, soldiers or others of similar social standing.²⁰ In addition, other women from non-gentry families left autobiographical manuscripts, though these are even rarer than those of their male counterparts and frequently only survive because they were extraordinary enough to be edited and printed by contemporaries.²¹ When we expand our scope beyond 'diaries' to include the miscellany of commonplace books, financial accounts and other hand-written historical memoranda left behind by individuals of lower rank, it quickly becomes apparent that there is a wealth of material available to us.

to severely undercount *reading* ability, but should be much more accurate as a rough measure of *writing* ability.

¹⁵ Estimate based on Cressy, *Literacy*, p. 176. For the difficulty of assessing women's writing abilities, see Frances Dolan, 'Reading, Writing and Other Crimes' in Valerie Traub, Lindsay Kaplan and Dymphna Callaghan (eds), *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture* (1996), pp. 142-167; Margaret W. Ferguson and Mihoko Suzuki, 'Women's Literacies and Social Hierarchy in Early Modern England', *Literature Compass*, 12:7 (2015), pp. 575-90; Eleanor Hubbard, 'Reading, Writing and Initialing: Female Literacy in Early Modern London', *Journal of British Studies*, 54:2 (2015), pp. 553-577.

¹⁶ Cressy, *Literacy*, pp. 144-56; Peter Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750* (1995), pp. 119-20.

¹⁷ BLUL, MS 8, inside front cover.

¹⁸ Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (1997), pp. 14-22, 85-6, 288-92.

¹⁹ Elaine McKay, 'English Diarists: Gender, Geography and Occupation, 1500-1700', *History*, 90:2 (2005), p. 201. This figure amalgamates her totals for 'ministers', 'government officials' 'MPs', 'scholars', 'local government' (primarily magistrates), 'landlords', 'lawyers', 'doctors', 'astrologers', and half of the 'sailors' and 'soldiers' ('principally' officers).

²⁰ McKay, 'Diarists', pp. 200-205. She counted 22 sailors and 20 soldiers, but most of the military men were officers and thus presumably gentlemen.

²¹ Sara Heller Mendelson, 'Stuart Women's Diaries and Occasional Memoirs', in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society* (1985), p. 137.

Who were these chroniclers? Reconstructing their lives is often difficult and sometimes impossible, but Joseph Bufton's biography offers a fairly typical example.²² He was born in 1651 to John Bufton, a clothier, and Elizabeth, his wife, in the Essex market town of Coggeshall.²³ Although there is no direct evidence about his education, it is unlikely he did more than study at a local petty school.²⁴ He seems to have spent most of his life working for his father and, later, for other master clothiers in nearby towns, though he apparently ran his own workshop for a few years after his father's death in 1695.²⁵ His status as a skilled tradesman places him firmly in the 'middling' ranks of early modern society – neither as wealthy as the noble and mercantile elite nor as poor as propertyless labourers and cottagers.²⁶ Like the vast majority of his contemporaries, Bufton conformed to the Church of England and he took part in parish worship, though he was not averse to taking further spiritual guidance from dissenting ministers.²⁷ His family situation made him mildly unusual as there is no evidence that he married or had children, though remaining single was not uncommon and he maintained close contact with his siblings and kinfolk.²⁸ As with most people of this era, he did not live out his whole life in the same place, but neither did he stray too far.²⁹ He wrote his will in the village of Castle Hedingham, about 12 miles north of his hometown, and died there at the age of 67 in January 1718.³⁰ Here was a man who was neither metropolitan, nor socially elite, nor even religiously militant – yet he wrote fluently, frequently and voluminously about the passage of time.

The fertile culture of vernacular reading and writing from which Bufton emerged also nurtured innumerable other would-be chroniclers of similar social standing. Of course for most of them no evidence survives, but in some cases it is possible to get a sense of their place in society and a few have received substantial scholarly attention. The most well-known is Nehemiah Wallington, a London wood-turner whose extreme Puritan piety drove him to fill fifty notebooks with religious meditations, including several which focused on recording the providential meaning of historical events.³¹ Although Wallington was unusual in the intensity of his spiritual drive, his status as a skilled artisan and retailer is typical of many historically-minded writers. Farming households produced several others who have since been examined by scholars, including Richard Gough, a small freeholder who composed a detailed manuscript account of his parish of Myddle in Shropshire in around 1700, as well as the Wheatcroft and Soresbie families in Derbyshire who left diverse archives.³² John Cannon, who worked as a ploughboy, exciseman, maltster and then parish schoolteacher in the West Country, produced a volume of 'Annales' that began with his birth in 1684

²² For the most significant work on Bufton, which examines his social position and his religious outlook, see Henry French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England, 1600-1750* (2007), pp. 244-50. Other previous work on Bufton focuses primarily on his trade guild: Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 58-63; Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism* (2000), pp. 28-31; Brodie Waddell, *God, Duty and Community in English Economic Life* (2012), pp. 199-202.

²³ BLUL, MS 10, f. 39; ERO, D/P 36/1/1, p. 110.

²⁴ His lack of Latin means a grammar school was very unlikely and a formally endowed school was not set up in Coggeshall until at least 1666: G.F. Beaumont, *A History of Coggeshall in Essex* (1890), p. 157.

²⁵ ERO, D/P 36/25/32; ERO, D/AMW 12/129; BLUL, MS 10, fol. 27r-32r, 58r-61r.

²⁶ The social and economic position of the 'middling sort', including the problematic nature of this label, is summarised in Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (2000), ch. 13; French, *Middle Sort*; Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (2015), pp. 4-7, 84.

²⁷ ERO, D/DBm 27-Z10.

²⁸ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 28-32.

²⁹ Bufton repeatedly travelled to other Essex towns and to London, removed to Colchester in 1699 and later to Castle Hedingham: BLUL, MS 10, fol. 55v-61r, 76r-77r

³⁰ ERO, D/AMW 12/129; ERO, D/P 48/1/2.

³¹ Seaver, *Wallington's World*; Booy (ed.), *Wallington*.

³² Richard Gough, *The History of Myddle*, ed. David Hey (1981); French, *Middle Sort*, pp. 93-4, 110; Whyman, *Pen*, pp. 77-88.

and continued almost to his death in 1743.³³ In addition, some middling women such as Sarah Savage, a Cheshire farmer's wife, wrote manuscript journals that dealt with grand historical events.³⁴ Although the expanding secondary literature on women's autobiographical writing has focused primarily on aristocrats, these scholars have also found more than a few works by less wealthy Quaker and Baptist women.³⁵ There were even a handful of individuals who earned a modest income as writers despite their lowly backgrounds and minimal schooling. For example, John Taylor, the so-called 'water-poet', became a minor celebrity and published a couple light histories such as *A briefe remembrance of all the English monarchs* (1618).³⁶

The cast of characters can be widened much further if we include chroniclers whose manuscripts have received little or no attention from historians. In the 1710s, for example, we find William Storr at his farmhouse in the village of Wistow near York, filling 'A book of severall things' with notes about manorial customs, unusual weather, medieval royalty and a variety of other useful tidbits.³⁷ From the late sixteenth century onwards, other farmers such as John Ryle in Cheshire, Thomas Gardiner in Wiltshire, and James Fretwell in Yorkshire all found time to regularly jot down chronological memoranda.³⁸ These were all well-established and prosperous men, but they were also all farmers and apparently religiously orthodox, which should remind us that most lay writers did not conform to the stereotype of the spiritually anxious trader or merchant.³⁹ Likewise, in towns, many of the people who kept extensive written records seem to have been much more socially conventional than Nehemiah Wallington. In Durham, for instance, a skinner and glover named Jacob Bee recorded, among other things, details about the births, deaths and marriages of hundreds of his fellow townspeople from 1681 to 1707, suggesting his close integration into the mainstream parochial community.⁴⁰ The London barber Thomas Rugg was an even stronger loyalist to the established church, as seen in his 'Diurnal' begun in 1659.⁴¹ Lawrence Lee, a butcher in Surrey, was a proud dissenter but seems to have been more interested in chronicling his family and his town than in minuting his spiritual anxieties.⁴² Meanwhile, Elizabeth Thompson, a Westmorland midwife, kept a list of her clients that doubled as a register of local births.⁴³ These men and women are largely

³³ John Cannon, *The Chronicles of John Cannon, Excise Officer and Writing Master*, ed. John Money (2 vols; 2009-10).

³⁴ Harriet Blodgett, 'Savage, Sarah (1664–1752)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45822>>. See also the wealthier examples discussed in Sheila Ottway and Helen Wilcox, 'Women's Histories', in N.H. Keeble (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution* (2001), pp. 148-61; Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (2006), esp. ch. 7.

³⁵ For a good survey of the overall literature, see Pacheco (ed.), *Companion*. For sectaries specifically, see David Booy (ed.), *Autobiographical Writings by Early Quaker Women* (2004); Rachel Adcock, *Baptist Women's Writings in Revolutionary Culture, 1640-1680* (2016).

³⁶ For Taylor's career, see Bernard Capp, *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet, 1578-1653* (1994).

³⁷ Borthwick Institute for Archives [BIA], MD.112, p. 5.

³⁸ Cheshire Archives and Local Studies [CALs], DDX 23/2; Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre [WSHC], PR316/9/1; James Fretwell, 'A Family History' in *Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Surtees Society, 1877). For an earlier example of a yeoman recording a substantial historical account, see Stephen May and Arthur Marotti, *Ink, Stink Bait, Revenge, and Queen Elizabeth: A Yorkshire Yeoman's Household Book* (2015), ch. 1.

³⁹ For a review of this archetype, see Margaret Jacob and Matthew Kadane, 'Missing, Now Found in the Eighteenth Century: Weber's Protestant Capitalist', *American Historical Review*, 108:1 (2003), pp. 20-49.

⁴⁰ Durham University Library [DUL], SRA 21.

⁴¹ Thomas Rugg, *The Diurnal of Thomas Rugg, 1659-1661*, ed. W. L. Sachse (Camden Society, 3rd ser., vol. 91; 1961).

⁴² Lawrence Lee, 'A Late Surrey Chronicler', ed. Hilary Jenkinson, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, XXVII (1914), pp. 1-15. The same might be said about the Quaker tradesman William Stout, *The Autobiography of William Stout of Lancaster, 1695-1752*, ed. J.D. Marshall (1967).

⁴³ Elizabeth Thompson, *Diary of a Kendal Midwife*, ed. Loraine Ashcroft (2001).

absent from the existing studies of historical writing, yet they demonstrate the social breadth of chronicling at this time, encompassing many provincial farmers and mainstream protestants alongside the urbanites and religious radicals who have dominated scholarly analysis to date.

So, despite the undeniable influence of social hierarchy on literacy rates and archival attrition, there remains a substantial corpus of chronicles and other historical texts created by men and women lacking landed wealth or a university education. Such texts exemplify the well-developed habits of historical writing among the trading and farming classes of early modern England. The gentry and clerical elite may have seen most of their neighbours as 'unschooled' and 'vulgar', but many of the hundreds of thousands of families of lesser social rank possessed a vibrant manuscript culture of their own. They actively contributed to the creation of a shared historical literature, rather than merely consuming the 'pleasant histories' that flew off London's printing presses.⁴⁴ Moreover, thanks to the fortuitous preservation of a great many of these fragile paper bequests, it is possible to look more closely at how and why these individuals wrote.

II. Chronicling community

In his copy of *Rider's British Merlin* for 1680, Joseph Bufton filled every available inch of blank paper with his own writing. Midway through the almanac, packed tightly into the margins of Rider's 'Description of the four Quarters of the Year', we find the tradesman's versified reflection on the nature of time and mortality.

An Almanack [is] but for one year,
And then tis out of date
And every year Some men depart
& leave this mortall State
That year which is to some the first,
to others is the last.
And all of us our time is short
our years are quickly past⁴⁵

The theological lesson of this poem is simple – our lives on this earth are brief, so we should focus on the hereafter. More intriguing is his use of 'An Almanack' as symbol of the ephemeral.⁴⁶ In reality, his annotated almanacs embody the opposite impulse. They offer conclusive evidence that Bufton used the medium, if not the content, of almanacs as a space for engaging with the passage of time and for preserving records for the future.

His earliest and most sustained attempt to craft a historical record began with what we would today call 'local history'. This was already a genre with a long pedigree thanks to the medieval tradition of the town chronicle and the more recent surge of gentry interest in local antiquarianism.⁴⁷ For Bufton, it began in the 1670s when he started to habitually record the exciting, and not so exciting, events in the life of his town. He adopted the format of a chronicle, covering two decades of Coggeshall's history through about 180 entries of a line or two, from February 1678 to May 1697.⁴⁸ In it, we find local festivities, church business, unusual weather, fatal accidents, highway robberies and much else besides. The entries from 1693, a fairly typical year, give a sense of the whole:

⁴⁴ Spufford, *Small Books*, ch. 9.

⁴⁵ BLUL, MS 9, p. 91.

⁴⁶ For the prevalence of this image, see Smyth, *Autobiography*, pp. 18-19, 25.

⁴⁷ Sweet, *Urban Histories*, ch. 2; Woolf, *Reading History*, ch. 1; Wood, *Memory*, p. 112; Vine, *Defiance of Time; Broadway, Gentry Culture*.

⁴⁸ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 45, 65-92.

11 January 1693. [My cousin] John Bufton went to Combing
4 February 1693. My Cousin Sparhawk was carried to prison
15 February 1693. There was a bonfire made by the Crown for joy that Squire Honeywood got the [election] day of Sir Eliab Harvey & was not cast out of the parliament & when he came home from Chelmsford through Coxall the night after he was chosen abundance of Candles were lighted for joy
24 March 1693. King William went through Kelvedon & went back again through Kelvedon March 28.
Spring 1693. The new Kings arms & the 10 commandments new writ were set up in the church
April 1693. The Quakers made a new burying place in Crouches
1 May 1693. The soldiers set up a maypole at the Woollpack door
18 May 1693. The poor did rise because the Bakers would not bake, because some of their bread was cut out the day before for being too light
About that same time. My Cousin Sparhawk came home
Beginning of May 1693. Francis Clark Broke [i.e. went bankrupt]
End of May 1693. The Poor had Badges given them to weare which tis said were made of Pewter and Coggeshall Poor 1693 set upon them
In 1693. Mr Mayhew sold Coxall Lordship to Mr Nehemiah Lyde of London. May 11, he came first for his rent & June 5 being Whitson munday kept court & Counsellor Cox was his Steward
June 1693. Our 4th bell was carried to Sudbury to be new shot & brought home and the other were chipt to make them tuneable. They were first rung July 6
30 October 1693. King William went through Kelvedon
2 November 1693. John Ancil had hung himself but was cut downe in time
In 1693. A new pound was set up on Grange hill & the Shambles was repaired.⁴⁹

In these brief entries – and in his Coggeshall chronicle as a whole - we can see the strength of Bufton’s attachment to his local community expressed through the writing process. The importance of the parish church is obvious, with many entries about adding new pews, repairing the bells, painting the walls, choral singing and visitations by ecclesiastical authorities.⁵⁰ Likewise, he placed a great value on maintaining a full record of local festivity. Bufton noted May Day celebrations, grand funerals and the celebration of Shrove Tuesday 1677, when ‘Abraham Emming roasted a Small bullock, whole, on Church greene’.⁵¹ Preserving memories of these communal events clearly gave him a sense of belonging, inscribing into this notebook a bond among the people of Coggeshall in ways that fruitfully overlapped with parish piety. Here, even the high politics of king, parliament and foreign policy are presented from an intensely local angle. King William III appears almost exclusively as a passing celebrity – travelling through the nearby town of Kelvedon and, on one occasion, staying there and dining at the Angel Inn.⁵² The Nine Years War is described not as an abstract struggle for the balance of power in Europe, but rather as the cause of death for deserters executed at neighbouring Colchester.⁵³ Similarly, the parliamentary elections in 1693 are much more about his town’s bonfires and illuminations than about national partisan politics.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 72-75. The italicised dates have been standardised.

⁵⁰ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 45, 70, 72, 76, 87, 88, 91.

⁵¹ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 45, 75, 118, 120.

⁵² BLUL, MS 8, pp. 72, 75, 76.

⁵³ BLUL, MS 8, p. 70.

⁵⁴ BLUL, MS 8, p. 75.

Reading Bufton's account of local events leaves an impression of a man unapologetically parochial in his priorities. This perception is reinforced by the fact that the largest of Bufton's 'historical' texts are his long lists of births, deaths and marriages. He recorded, according to Henry French's calculations, over 900 vital events over several decades.⁵⁵ Some entries were merely unvarnished names and dates, but most included some additional information such as occupation, family connections, nicknames or other incidental details. Widow Ringer, for example, was reported as John Ilger's sixth wife when they married in 1682.⁵⁶ Likewise, William Cunington married 'a lame maid whose name was Skinner' in 1685 and 'Widdow Rawlin was buried among the Quakers' in 1696.⁵⁷ However, the most important criterion for inclusion Bufton's register seems to have been locality. The vast majority of individuals lived in Coggeshall and it was only if someone came from outside the town – such when Richard Purcas 'brought home his 2d wife from Bockin' – that Bufton felt the need to note a place of residence.⁵⁸ This makes sense when one remembers that this was a town of less than 500 households - every birth, death and marriage mattered to the whole community and perhaps to Bufton in particular. This tradesman evidently took very seriously his job as self-appointed town chronicler and mirrored the work of a parish clerk. His conscientious entries suggest the sort of sense of 'civic responsibility' which Judith Pollman has found among chroniclers in other parts of Europe.⁵⁹ He recorded both the mundane and the extraordinary in equal measure, as long as it had a link to his local community.

From this angle, Bufton might seem like a nostalgic or romantic annalist, producing a history of his town in which the neighbourliness and conviviality of 'merry England' obscured the daily struggles of seventeenth-century living. However, hard material realities crowd onto every page. His decision to include the occupations or marital status of many individuals in his lists reflected his constant awareness of the need to support oneself. These people were more than just his neighbours – they also had a social and economic role as weavers, combers, clothiers, widows or maids. Moreover, Bufton had no illusions about the limits of communal harmony. It was not all church bells and maypoles – the harsh realities of poverty, crime and social conflict remained. He did not shy from recording murders, suicides, robberies, bankruptcies and executions. With grim assiduousness, he noted both when 'the poor' rioted against high bread prices in May 1693 and when the vestry ordered paupers to wear stigmatising badges later than same month.⁶⁰ In most villages we have been bequeathed only a dry chronology of names as presented in parish registers, but in Coggeshall we are blessed with a crowd of living, breathing individuals who can be seen fighting and failing, working and playing, over twenty tumultuous years. Here we have a chronicler who was well aware of the precarious, unstable nature of local community, and who wrote this instability directly into his historical record.

The historiographical priorities that shaped Bufton's town chronicle and pseudo-parish register – with their emphasis on the locality, the lifecycle and the need to get a living – reflected more than just his own predilections. They were, in fact, the spurs that drove many other humble lay historians to take up the quill. As Daniel Woolf has shown, one can find seventeenth-century examples of town and parish annals in almost every part of the country, though most were written by civic worthies or

⁵⁵ French, *Middle Sort*, p. 244.

⁵⁶ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁷ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 12, 107. Bufton also recorded brief biographical information about the subjects of the 70 funeral sermons in ERO, D/DBm, Z9.

⁵⁸ BLUL, MS 8, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Judith Pollmann, 'Archiving the Present and Chronicling for the Future in Early Modern Europe, *Past & Present* (supplement 11; 2016), p. 245.

⁶⁰ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 72, 75. For pauper badges, see Steve Hindle, 'Dependency, Shame and Belonging: Badging the Deserving Poor, c. 1550-1750', *Cultural and Social History*, 1:1 (2004), pp. 6-35.

university-trained clergymen.⁶¹ For example, Richard Gough's well-known history of the village of Myddle in Shropshire bears more than a passing resemblance to Bufton's town chronicle. As a freeholding farmer with a good knowledge of Latin, Gough undoubtedly benefited from a higher social position and better education than the Essex tradesman. Yet he too focused squarely on his neighbours and did not shy from including murders, gaol-breaks and numerous tales of families impoverished through 'ill husbandry'.⁶² Framing the whole history was the parish community itself, for Gough arranged his text as a series of microhistories of individual families according to the pew they occupied in the village church. This yeoman thus produced a history of Myddle that inscribed both the parochial bonds that encompassed the whole community and the sharp edges of social stratification that divided it.

The spread of parish registers after they became legally required in the sixteenth century offered another archetype for amateur chroniclers, ensuring that Bufton's practice of keeping his own detailed list of local births, deaths and marriage was surprisingly common.⁶³ The Durham skinner and glover Jacob Bee provided a magnificent illustration of this impulse when he filled almost 200 pages of a notebook with an unofficial register running from 1681 to 1707. Bee was an established freeman of the city, substantial enough to vote in parliamentary elections, but also precarious enough to have to become an 'out-pensioner' of Sherburn House Hospital in his old age.⁶⁴ His manuscript shows that he habitually recorded the key events in the lifecycles of his fellow townsfolk, often supplementing the entries with brief contextual narratives, such as on 17 January 1686 when

John Borrow [died] being Satterday: 'twas reported that he [did] see a coach drawne by 6 Swine all Black, and a black man satt upon the Cotch Box; he fell sick upon't and dyed, and of his Death severall apparitions appeared after.⁶⁵

Similarly, Bee noted when Nann Allison's 'two Bastards gotten by Reachey an Exciseman' were born, when a local couple were married by 'a lawles minister at Newcastle', and when an excommunicated maltman was 'buried in his owne garden'.⁶⁶ More prosaically, the skinner also acknowledged social reality by frequently listing the occupations of men and women in his register. The inclusion of some nicknames – 'Mother redcap' and 'Sackless Willy' among them – indicate his impressive familiarity with his community.⁶⁷ Indeed, Bee's historical writing was notably different from a clergyman's conventional parish register. While the latter was the product of the jurisdiction of a specific church and normally only recorded ecclesiastically pertinent information, this chronicle encompassed all of Durham's parishes and resulted in a sort of collective portrait of its people. His aim of presenting a

⁶¹ Woolf, *Reading*, pp. 65-75. For a close reading of the unofficial mid-Tudor chronicle of Henry Machyn, a London parish clerk and wealthy Merchant Taylor, see Andrew Gordon, *Writing Early Modern London: Memory, Text and Community* (2013), ch. 1. For a broader analysis of chronicling as an act of civic engagement, see Amelang, *Icarus*, ch. 8, esp. pp. 221-2.

⁶² Gough, *Myddle*, pp. 121, 133-4, 133, 198, 276.

⁶³ See, for example, Roger Lowe's local obituary list at the end of his diary, Lawrence Lee's lists of Godalming smallpox victims and Joseph Ryder's lists of funerals of co-denominationalists: *The Diary of Roger Lowe, of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, 1663-74*; ed. William L. Sachse (1938), p. 12; Lee, 'Chronicler', pp. 16-20; Kadane, *Watchful Clothier*, pp. 204-20. For examples of augmented registers authored by clergymen and other professionals, see Smyth, *Autobiography*, ch. 4; Vanessa Harding, 'Mortality and the mental map of London: Richard Smyth's *Obituary*', in R. Myers and M. Harris (eds), *Medicine, mortality and the book trade* (1998), pp. 49-71.

⁶⁴ County Durham poll books for 1675 and 1678 in *UK Poll Books and Electoral Registers, 1538-1893* (ancestry.com database; 2012); 'Diary of Jacob Bee of Durham' in *Six North Country Diaries*, ed. J.C. Hodgson (1910; Surtees Society, vol. 118), pp. 43, 61.

⁶⁵ DUL, SRA 21, p. 29.

⁶⁶ DUL, SRA 21, pp. 1, 24, 261.

⁶⁷ DUL, SRA 21, pp. 133, 147.

history of the city as a whole also manifested itself in a shorter section towards the end of the volume in which Bee entered various notes akin to those found in Bufton's chronicle of Coggeshall. Here he documented the 'day that men and women servants presented themselves to be hired at Durham market', a glazier pilloried 'for takeing a brib[e]' from a Quaker, a footrace between a butcher and a countryman, and many other events worthy of local remembrance.⁶⁸ He created, in short, a distinctly unofficial civic chronicle for posterity.

A few years earlier, the Kendal midwife Elizabeth Thompson created another quasi-historical text by recording details of every birth she attended from 1669 to 1675. Over this relatively short period, Thompson listed an extraordinary 424 entries following a simple format, as in this example from 1671: 'Mary the Daughter of James Langfellow [of] fellside Stufweaver borne the 21 of Aprill about 11 a clock att night being good Friday'.⁶⁹ Almost every entry included the baby's name, father's name, residence, occupation, date and time. Although Thompson listed her annual earnings from midwifery at the beginning of the volume, averaging around £15 to £20 per year, this register is clearly not an accounting ledger as no monetary figures were included in the entries. Nor is it purely a self-interested memorandum to be referred to in case legal issues arose, as it regularly includes non-essential details such as the father's occupation.⁷⁰ Instead, it seems to be at least partly intended as a pseudo-parish register, much like those of Bufton and Bee, which recorded for posterity her role in maintaining this Westmorland community. In this, she was remarkably successful as she included almost three fifths of all the births listed in the parish's official register for 1673-4.⁷¹ Thompson's register may have lacked colourful examples, but it nonetheless served a historical purpose. Indeed, the parallel registers kept by Bufton, Bee, Thompson and others may have given their creators a status in their communities belied by their humble livihoods. Through careful recording, they turned themselves into figures akin to parish officials, whose genealogical knowledge would be invaluable to their neighbours.

The place of what we might call vernacular 'economic history' in the manuscripts of working townspeople is evident in their notes about bankruptcies, poor relief, hiring-days and the reflexive listing of neighbours' occupations. This aspect looms even larger in the memorandum books of used by farmers. For instance, John Ryle farmed about 80 acres of land at Etchells in Cheshire and left a short notebook entitled 'Times & seasons & things extraordinary' covering the years 1649 to 1691, and continued irregularly by his son to 1721. In the very first entry, the yeoman recorded the shockingly high prices of corn sold at nearby Stockport in April 1649, while neglecting to mention the regicide which had occurred a few months earlier.⁷² He also chronicled the 'great frost' which 'hindered plowing' in 1664, the 'extraordinary long drought' in 1681, and the 'cold late spring' that ruined the hay harvest in 1688, when 'the cucoo did sing before ha[w]thorns were greene'.⁷³ Thomas Gardiner, a tenant farmer with 110 acres in Wiltshire, kept a similarly careful record of severe weather and notable harvests. Like many of his fellow chroniclers, he took pains to document the events that had a direct impact on the livelihoods of himself and his neighbours, often explicitly fitting such incidents into a much longer chronology. In 1681-2, for example, Gardiner set down 'A memmorandum of two most strang Unwonted seasones of weather'. The first was a drought 'which brought soo great A scarsity of grass that Cattell was lickt to bee starved', and the second a 'most unwonted flood' after rainfall that had no precedent in 'the dayes of Any of this generation, nor I

⁶⁸ DUL, SRA 21, pp. 264, 275, 294.

⁶⁹ Thompson, *Diary*, p. 17. For further discussion of Thompson and another midwife's accounts, see Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (2000), pp. 88-94, 98-101, 127-30.

⁷⁰ For the role of midwives in legal cases, see Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Touch: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (2003), pp. 42-44, 159-63.

⁷¹ Thompson, *Diary*, p. xi.

⁷² CALS, DDX 23/2, p. 5.

⁷³ CALS, DDX 23/2, pp. 5-6, 9, 12.

suppose in lat Ages befor us'.⁷⁴ According to Ryle and Gardiner, the farmer's struggles against the unpredictable and often hostile conditions of pre-industrial agriculture deserved to be memorialised.

These historians put the locality at the centre of their chronicles, recording the hardships and inequalities experienced by their neighbours alongside the 'bonfires and bells' of communal festivity.⁷⁵ This is not to say that such texts offer a truly candid view of early modern life – they are selective histories, heavily influenced by well-established genres such as the urban chronicle and the parish register. But they do show that the priorities which drove tradesmen and farmers to begin to document 'things extraordinary' were not quite the same as those of their superiors. In 1592, the university-educated satirist Thomas Nashe derided 'lay chronigraphers that write of nothing but of Mayors and Sheriefs and the deare yeere, and the great Frost'.⁷⁶ Such words were unkind but not entirely inaccurate. To 'lay chronigraphers' like Bufton, Bee, Ryle and Gardiner, such things ought to be remembered because the holding of local offices, the high prices of a 'deare yeere' and the hazards of a 'great frost' mattered deeply to their communities. However, as will be seen, they were not the only events recorded by 'lay chronigraphers'.

III. From news to history

The parochialism of Joseph Bufton's Coggeshall annals is important but also partly illusory. Bufton felt compelled to chronicle grand historical events alongside the minutia of his own locality. He took advantage of England's ever-growing print culture to widen his perspective and, as a result, the other records he left us show a man constantly seeking out news about the wider world. Every year Bufton spent a few pence to buy himself a new almanac, each of which contained a hodgepodge of information including a two-page list of the 'most remarkable' events that had occurred 'from the Creation, to this present year'.⁷⁷ Although he could not afford to buy other books frequently, this did not stop him from learning about national and international news through the circulation of published texts. He 'saw a printed paper in London of an inundation in Monmouthshire' in 1688, read a 'newsletter' about the effects of an earthquake in Holland in 1692, and 'saw a penny printed book' describing a 'dreadful tempest' in Hertfordshire in 1697.⁷⁸

Some of his social superiors used such material to record the rolling storm of national political and religious conflict that deluged seventeenth-century England. In London at this time, for example, the parliamentarian and magistrate Narcissus Luttrell filled hundreds of pages with his 'Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs'.⁷⁹ As Mark Knights has shown, men like Luttrell devoted countless hours to sorting and refining the innumerable snippets of news they received into something suitable for a

⁷⁴ WSHC, PR316/9/1, p. 15. For similar historical referents, see Storr in BIA, MD.112, pp. 25, 55-6; Stout, *Autobiography*, pp. 71, 80.

⁷⁵ For the latter, see David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (1989); Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400-1700* (1994).

⁷⁶ Thomas Nashe, *The apologie of Pierce Peniless* (1592), sig. D3v-D4r.

⁷⁷ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 38-40. Bufton lists his almanacs for 1685 to 1699 inside the front cover of this volume. For more on the genre, see Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800* (1979); Louise Hill-Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine, 1550-1700* (2013), ch. 2-4.

⁷⁸ BLUL, MS 8, pp. 69, 75-6, 83. The last of these was *A Full and True Relation Of the most Terrible and Dreadful Tempest* (1697).

⁷⁹ Narcissus Luttrell, *A Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs* (6 vols; Oxford, 1857). For a similar example, see *The Entring Book of Roger Morrice*, eds Mark Goldie, John Spurr, Tim Harris, Stephen Taylor, Mark Knights and Jason McElligott (6 vols; Woodbridge, 2007).

historical narrative.⁸⁰ Bufton did not attempt anything as vast as that. He did, however, write his own briefer history of 'State Affairs'. Specifically, he left a fifteen-page 'yearly account of remarkable things', beginning with the royal proclamation against the threat of a Dutch invasion on 28 September 1688 and ending with the sighting of 'a meteor (as it was called)' on 6 March 1716.⁸¹ He must have sensed that grand events were afoot – that he was living *in history* – when he decided to begin this new chronicle at the launch of the Glorious Revolution. Here we see Bufton making use of his access to news – drawing on both print and word-of-mouth – to create a coherent chronology of the grand political struggles of his day. The successful deposition of James II, the subsequent constitutional settlement and the progress of William III's military campaigns abroad are all concisely described. Although most of the events are reported in a purely factual style, Bufton's own sympathies and concerns do occasionally inflect his account, as when he records the official 'day of Thanksgiving ... for our great deliverance from Popery & Slavery' or when he perhaps resentfully lists each of the new taxes imposed in the years that followed.⁸² He also could not escape the habit of adding a local angle, noting for example that the coronation of William and Mary at Westminster was followed by a procession at Coggeshall led by a drummer and a garland hung with oranges.⁸³ Yet overall the 'yearly account' attests to a strong interest in documenting the events unfolding in the wider world, especially threats to England from international Catholicism. He expressed his sense of a national, Protestant political identity even more clearly in 1710 when he composed a short poem asserting that 'God us preserved from popery when it we much did fear'.⁸⁴ Over twenty years after he had recorded the news of the Glorious Revolution as he received it, here was Bufton returning to these events and rewriting them as a snippet of versified patriotic history.

Equally keen to record the political and religious tumults under the later Stuarts was the dissenter Lawrence Lee. Born in the Surrey market town of Godalming in 1668, he had spent his youth splitting his time between attending the local school and doing 'business for my Father' before he finally 'began tradeing for my self' as a butcher at age nineteen.⁸⁵ His 'Memorandum' book includes an annal which mixes autobiographical material, national politics and, inevitably, local events. Like Bufton, Lee is hardly polemical, but he nonetheless produced a history that borrowed from both the wider triumphalist narrative of English Protestantism and the more guarded story then current among the non-conformist community. Thus, he records how 'all our hopes of being delivered from Popery by the Duke of Monmouth as an instrument were disappointed' by the collapse of the rebellion in 1685. This was soon followed, he wrote, by James II's attempt 'to perswade the Dissenters to joyn with him to take off[f] the Test & penal Laws' and the raising of a standing army with 'a great many' soldiers quartered in his neighbourhood 'which were so rude that we knew not how to live with them'.⁸⁶ In this account, Lee's commitment to the grand cause Protestant liberty was closely linked to his immediate loyalties to the dissenting community and to the town of Godalming.

⁸⁰ Mark Knights, 'Judging Partisan News and the Language of Interest', in Jason McElligott (ed.), *Fear, Exclusion and Revolution: Roger Morrice and Britain in the 1680s* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 211-13.

⁸¹ BLUL, MS 10, fol. 68r-75v.

⁸² BLUL, MS 10, fol. 70v-73v, 74v. Some of this information came from the publications which he selectively transcribed in his other volumes such as *An historical account of the memorable actions of the most glorious monarch William III* (1689) in BLUL, MS 9, pp. 49-92.

⁸³ BLUL, MS 10, fol. 74r.

⁸⁴ BLUL, MS 9, p. 74.

⁸⁵ Lee, 'Chronicler', pp. 8, 11. For Lee's will, in which he lists only 'the House I now live in', 'that Field of mine on hallow hill', and five shillings in cash bequests, see London Metropolitan Archives, DW/PA/05/1735/064.

⁸⁶ Lee, 'Chronicler', pp. 11-12. For other tradesmen who mix autobiography, local history, national history and denominational history, see Stout, *Autobiography*, pp. 77-8, 81-2; Edmund Harrold, *The Diary of Edmund Harrold, Wigmaker of Manchester 1712-15*, ed. Craig Horner (2008), pp. 106, 121-2.

Such intermixing of personal, local and national can be found in most manuscript annals written by those without a university education. However, the amount of attention devoted to each aspect varied enormously. We find, for example, that Sarah Savage, a zealous dissenter and wife of a Cheshire farmer, filled most of her many volumes with spiritual self-examination and meditations. However, she also recorded the providential progress of William III through the county on his way to campaign in Ireland and the ‘good tidings’ of his victory at the Battle of the Boyne. Twelve years later, Savage sadly noted that ‘our good King William submitted to the stroke of death’ and that same year reported the failure of a parliamentary bill against ‘occasional conformity’.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Jacob Bee seamlessly integrated a few national events into his register as when he wrote, amidst the deaths and marriages of 1688, ‘The Supposed Prince of Wailes was borne’, just before the local birth of ‘Joseph, son of John Richardson, merchant’. The inclusion of ‘Supposed’ suggests that Bee was well aware of the political controversy that the swirled around the new heir to the throne.⁸⁸ The parish schoolteacher John Cannon included brief histories and topographies of everywhere he had lived in his autobiographical ‘Annales’, and then concluded each year from 1707 onwards with a summary of ‘remarkable occurrences’ in national politics.⁸⁹ Although Cannon drew much of this information from published sources, he also recorded an ‘account’ of the South Sea Company bubble that ‘I myself heard’ from a local MP.⁹⁰ Even John Ryle and his son, who focused almost entirely on unusual weather and agricultural conditions in their memorandum book, included brief mention of the Great Fire of London in 1666 and plague in France in 1720.⁹¹

At the other end of the spectrum was Thomas Rugg’s two-volume manuscript, which he entitled ‘Mercurius Politicus Redivivus or A Collection of the Most Materiall Occurances and Transactions in Publick Affaires’. From 1659 to 1670, this London barber snatched all sorts of news from the whirlwind of topical publications and political gossip that swirled through the streets of the metropolis. Adopting a firmly royalist and religiously conservative perspective, his narrative began with the deposition of Richard Cromwell which ‘turned the whole face of government quite of[f] its hinges’ and later joyously reported ‘the truly noble English spiritt’ animating ‘the restauration of our most famous Charles the Second’.⁹² Overall, despite lacking the landed wealth or public influence of many of his neighbours in Westminster, Rugg produced a ‘Diurnall’ that was much more like the detailed ‘Relation of State Affairs’ by Narcissus Luttrell than like the more patchy accounts left by Bufton or Lee.⁹³ The manuscript nonetheless emerged from a specific time and place. Just as

⁸⁷ J. B. Williams, *Memoirs of the life and character of Mrs Sarah Savage* (1845), pp. 79-82; Amanda Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (2014), p. 189. For similar examples of the integration of political events into providentialist narratives by non-elites, see Wallington, *Notebooks*, pp. 214-34; Seaver, *Wallington’s World*, pp. 61-6, 152-81; Joseph Lister *The autobiography of Joseph Lister of Bradford, 1627–1709*, ed. A. Holroyd (1860), pp. 5-8. For the importance of providential interpretations of history more generally, see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (1999), esp. ch. 2; William E. Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics and Providence in England, 1657-1727* (2002), ch. 1 and ch. 4.

⁸⁸ DUL, SRA 21, p. 56. On the same page, he also retroactively added the portentous marriage between the then Prince of Orange and the then Lady Mary in 1677. Elsewhere, under ‘Mortalities’, he listed the deaths of Charles II and Mary II: DUL, SRA 21, pp. 50, 104. He included further notes on high politics in the second section of his manuscript: DUL, SRA 21, pp. 224-298.

⁸⁹ For the first of many local histories, see Cannon, *Chronicles*, pp. 72-3. For the first annual summary, see *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹⁰ Cannon, *Chronicles*, pp. 160-1.

⁹¹ CALS, DDX 23/2, pp. 6, 21.

⁹² Rugg, *Diurnal*, pp. 1-2, 87.

⁹³ His will included about £300 in cash bequests and ‘all the instruments and goods properly belonging to my shoppe and Trade’, but no landed property: TNA, PROB 11/332/436. Rugg had nine hearths in 1666, which was higher than the London average but entirely typical in his wealthy parish of Covent Garden:

Nehemiah Wallington had discovered in the 1640s, a tradesman living in London during a period of political turmoil could maintain a remarkably thorough understanding of 'Publick Affaires' and, if eager enough, compile this information into a substantial chronicle.⁹⁴ In addition, Rugg's own parish of Covent Garden appeared more than a few times in the account as the site of a 'statly' celebratory bonfire, the scene of a gentleman's murder by 'a Scotch man', and the home of much parochial 'affection' for the Book of Common Prayer.⁹⁵ Although this 'Diurnall' had little in common with a local chronicle, it also remained anchored in the streets of its writer's neighbourhood.

High politics did not occupy the same place in all these chronicles and writers of middling rank did not present a shared historical narrative. The partisan royalism of Rugg's 'collection' was very different from the mainstream Protestantism underlying Bufton's account, which was different again from the zealous dissenting tradition that shaped Lee and Savage's records. There was, however, a near universal tendency for such men and women to ground their histories in the events of their neighbourhood. We can see it in the drummer-led coronation procession through Coggeshall, the quartering of soldiers in Godalming and the Prayer Book piety of Covent Garden's parishioners. Abstract political and religious ideology directly influenced the way these stories were written, but so too did the experience of living and working within the bounds of a specific local community.

IV. Makeshift archiving and record-keeping

The survival of Bufton's archive is not merely a happy accident. He compiled his notebooks with great care and, as his inventory of 1716 shows, he saw them as a coherent collection of manuscripts, worthy of preservation. The chronologies of events in his town and in the wider world that Bufton inscribed in two of his almanacs reflected only part of his broader commitment to recordkeeping. He filled at least another twenty other almanacs, as well as five other notebooks not included in the inventory, and they reveal someone well-aware of his place in the march of time. In this, he had much in common with the clerks and secretaries who consciously curated the ever-growing stock of official documents produced by the seventeenth-century state. Early modern administrators deployed 'processes of selection, ordering and usage that produced archives not as neutral repositories of sources but as historically constructed tools of power relations'.⁹⁶ Moreover, the importance of record-keeping was also recognised by people well outside the official state apparatus. As Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alexandra Walsham have recently shown, the habit of gathering and copying texts for posterity was one shared by a very diverse range of people across early modern Europe.⁹⁷

Bufton's own archival intentions are clearest in the *Goldsmith's Almanack* of 1686. In addition to the 'yearly account of remarkable things' discussed above, this volume included the ordinances of the Coggeshall clothiers and fullers, copies of warrants from the county magistrates to protect the craft, minutes of the meetings of the town's woolcombers, several poems lauding the glories of the trade,

'Hearth Tax: Middlesex 1666, Covent Garden', in *London Hearth Tax: City of London and Middlesex, 1666* (2011), *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-hearth-tax/london-mddx/1666/covent-garden>>.

⁹⁴ Seaver, *Wallington's World*, ch. 6. For more on Rugg's use of print, see Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (2013), pp. 75, 103-4, 207-8, 396, 406-8; Knights, 'Judging', p. 215.

⁹⁵ Rugg, *Diurnal*, pp. 86, 127, 154.

⁹⁶ Filippo de Vivo, Andrea Guidi and Alessandro Silvestri, 'Archival Transformations in Early Modern European History', *European History Quarterly*, 46:3, pp. 421-434.

⁹⁷ Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters and Alexandra Walsham (eds), *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe* (Past and Present Supplement 11; 2016).

and two lists of the company officers.⁹⁸ The contents are valuable for what they can tell us about the organisation of the local cloth trade at this time, but they are also a telling example of makeshift recordkeeping.⁹⁹ Notably, the Coggeshall guild failed completely to preserve its own archive. Although there are stray references to it in other documents, only Bufton's unofficial copies and minutes have safeguarded the sort of information so essential to an organisation of this type.¹⁰⁰ The practical value of writing out 'all the orders, ordinances & decrees' of the company is obvious, as are the verbatim copies of judicial warrants authorising a 'diligent search' to prosecute 'all such as intrude themselves into your said Mistery'.¹⁰¹ Without these records it would be impossible for the town's tradesmen to effectively govern local industry and protect their economic privileges against outsiders.¹⁰² However, the laudatory poems that Bufton's included may have been just as important. In 1688, he copied into the almanac a two-page poem 'from Colchester' and 'some verses of my owne making', all praising the cloth industry and those woolcombers who

have indeavord what in them doth lie
That to promote to all posterity
By keeping our Intruders from our trade
According to the laws before were made
Long may their memory be kept alive
By those that shall in after times Survive.¹⁰³

By compiling and preserving these fulsome celebrations of solidarity, Bufton produced a text that could be shared with his fellow tradesmen to uphold institutional pride and brotherly loyalty, while also creating a memorial to their efforts for the next generation. Through this practice, he turned himself into more than just a passive member of the company. Although his name is notably absent from the lists of officers, he seems to have been an unofficial record-keeper for the town's cloth trade, contributing to its strength by recording both the practical and poetic foundations of the 'Mistery'.

Records which, in some sense, belonged to the wider community appear remarkably frequently in the personal manuscripts of relatively lowly individuals. The information in the *Goldsmith's Almanack* and in the pseudo-parochial registers kept by Bufton, Bee and Thompson would have been useful to many of their neighbours, but so too was much of the material which filled the notebooks of their rural contemporaries. Thomas Gardiner, the Wiltshire tenant farmer, wrote about great floods and bumper harvests but he also recorded full lists of the village's ratepayers, with a valuation of their holding beside each name, on ten occasions in the 1680s and 90s. Moreover, just like Bufton, he thought it worthwhile to note the names of local officeholders – in this case tithingmen and overseers of the poor – over several decades.¹⁰⁴ The prosperous copyholder William Storr was equally concerned about such matters. His 'book of severall things' included

⁹⁸ BLUL, MS 10, fol. 1-24, 57. It also included a detailed account of the structure of his master's business and miscellaneous notes about his own finances.

⁹⁹ For Bufton's guild, see Thompson, *Customs in Common*, pp. 58-63; Chase, *Early Trade Unionism*, pp. 28-31; Waddell, *God, Duty and Community*, pp. 199-202.

¹⁰⁰ Stray references can be found in the Essex quarter sessions records (1614, 1710) and in the Interregnum state papers: ERO, Q/SR 206/105; ERO, Q/SO 3, p. 439; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: 1651-2*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (1877), pp. 180-1.

¹⁰¹ BLUL, MS 10, fol. 1-8.

¹⁰² For the importance of formal company recordkeeping, see Wood, *Memory*, pp. 119-20, 260.

¹⁰³ BLUL, MS 10, fol. 9-10, 12-13.

¹⁰⁴ WSHC, PR316/9/1, pp. 3, 5-11, 19, 21-3, 60-4, 103, 106, 108 112. See also Gough's recording of parish poor relief cases and his lost ratebook: Gough, *Myddle*, pp. 35, 251-64. Similarly, John Cannon kept a 'manuscript of precedents' into which he copied the charter and bylaws of his town in 1731: Cannon, *Chronicles*, p. 202.

exhaustive lists of the acreage and value of all the holdings in the manor of Wistow in the early eighteenth century, as well as the rota of manorial beadles and collectors.¹⁰⁵ However, Storr went further because he also copied out extensive information on the customs of his manor, creating a store of ammunition which could be used in struggles with fellow tenants or with the manorial lord. His archival instinct even extended to precise citations. At the end of one section, for example, he noted 'These Customs was in quene Elizabeth Reign & taken out of An ancient Booke beare date the 27 day of May Anno domini 1578', and another was 'An Abstract' from 'the year 1642 and Copped by William Storr in 1704'.¹⁰⁶ Even more telling was his citation for a tenant's right to take water from a nearby dike, which 'I was informed of about the year 1679 by Mr Needham then of New Hagg & one John Chaddock an old man of Cawood who had been servant at the said hagg many years'.¹⁰⁷ This last case offers a clear example of oral transmission - the traditional method of maintaining local customary rights - being transformed into a words on a page.¹⁰⁸ But whereas most such shifts occurred through court scribes or gentlemen's secretaries, this happened through the pen of William Storr, a mere tenant farmer.

These were, in effect, attempts to use recordkeeping to maintain the formal and informal bonds which held together local institutions. Sometimes this must have developed from the experience of holding a local office, as with Thomas Gardiner who only began noting the names of the overseers of the poor after he served in that role in 1682.¹⁰⁹ However, neither Bufton nor Storr appeared on their own lists of officeholders, so their decision to copy and preserve the archives of their communities must have come from a different source.¹¹⁰ One possible explanation is that these men saw these records as a way to protect or advance their economic interests. As a tradesman, Bufton certainly stood to benefit from the sorts of company privileges and mutual support schemes that he copied into his almanac, and Storr's status as a tenant meant that he had good reason to keep a record of customary rights. Andy Wood and Susan Whyman have found that a small but significant number of yeoman and husbandmen retained their own little archives of deeds, manorial court rolls and other legal documents.¹¹¹ We might, therefore, be tempted to see these as similar to the self-interested financial records that many literate people kept at the time.¹¹²

Yet, another explanation is also possible. Part of this archival impulse came from the fact that possessing these makeshift texts gave these writers a place in the community that they might otherwise lack. By filling page after page with useful information, Bufton and other writers produced a resource that could be shared with family, friends and neighbours. They became 'village archivists', whose advice would be sought on matters of genealogy, property-holding and even state affairs. While they may have lacked the wealth of the squire or the education of the vicar, their access to the past potentially made them influential figures in the neighbourhood.

¹⁰⁵ BIA, MD.122, pp. 342-440.

¹⁰⁶ BIA, MD.122, pp. 32, 442. Likewise, the yeoman John Hanson kept a copy of Sir John Constable's 'byerley bouke' of 1554 for the manor of Clifton: May and Marotti, *Ink*, pp. 231-2.

¹⁰⁷ BIA, MD.122, p. 32.

¹⁰⁸ For more on this process, see Wood, *Memory*, ch. 5; Fox, *Oral and Literate*, ch. 5.

¹⁰⁹ WSHC, PR316/9/1, p. 103.

¹¹⁰ In Bufton's case, he is not only absent from the ranks of company officers but also failed to take on any official role in Coggeshall's parish government: ERO, D/P 36/8/1. The equivalent records do not survive for Storr's parish of Wistow.

¹¹¹ Wood, *Memory*, pp. 266-71; Whyman, *Pen*, pp. 83-8.

¹¹² ERO, D/DBM Z11. Other examples of personal accounting can be found in the manuscripts of almost all the writers mentioned in this article, with Wallington as a notable exception: Seaver, *Wallington's World*, p. 118. See also Smyth, *Autobiography*, ch. 2.

V. Conclusion: histories, archives and posterity

On 22 December 1717, Joseph Bufton wrote his will, 'being weak in body, but of good and perfect remembrance'. He bequeathed his 'Soul into the hand of Almighty God', £50 in cash to various kinsfolk, £5 to local 'honest poor People', and the rest of his goods to his brother-in-law Samuel Sparhake and nephew John Sparhawke. This last bequest comprised a cupboard, bedding, linen, pewter, clothes and tantalizingly unspecified 'books', which must have included at least his eleven volumes that still survive.¹¹³ The audience for his chronicles and company records was thus not limited to Bufton himself, nor even to his immediate neighbours. They were also intended for posterity.

Bequests of this kind were common among middling writers. Those whose manuscripts presented historical events as evidence of divine providence often saw their texts as a means to promote godliness among their successors. Sarah Savage, the dissenter and farmer's wife, hoped her journals 'may be useful' to her descendants 'for their quickening ... in the narrow way', and it seems her hopes were fulfilled.¹¹⁴ Others had more explicitly political intentions, as can be seen in Thomas Rugg's claim that he offered his chronicle of 'passages of state' so that 'after ages may learne constancie from these our inconstant revolutions'.¹¹⁵ The clearest of all was James Fretwell, a successful Yorkshire yeoman, who wrote an extended preface 'To Posterity' before setting out his family history from his great-grandfather onwards. He saw historical writing as a way to both reveal the 'beautiful variety of Divine Providence' and to provide ordinary people with 'knowledge of their ancestors', even if 'they were not in any ways illustrious'. Fretwell also specifically called on his successors to extend his 'history' into their own day.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the legacy of these chronicles and other historical records can be seen in the way many of them were continued by the writer's heirs. The sons of William Storr, John Ryle and Thomas Gardiner all carried on the historical enterprises begun by their fathers, and in Gardiner's case the manuscript was continued by his grandson as well.¹¹⁷ Such chroniclers were looking to the future, as well as charting the present and gathering evidence from the past.

What these writers were producing, then, was a 'usable past'.¹¹⁸ Many of these documents were usable in immediate and practical ways – they allowed their creators or inheritors to check when a loan had been made or a field sown or an apprenticeship completed. But they were also usable in a less material sense. These manuscripts gave those who 'were not in any ways illustrious' a lineage they could be proud of. They offered lessons for godly living and clues to the divinely-ordained trajectory of history. Perhaps most importantly for many of these 'lay chronigraphers', they became an expression of collective identity and community. As such, this was a form of writing more focused on building 'social memory' than indulging in autobiographical introspection.¹¹⁹ By recording and preserving the events that mattered to their guild, denomination or locality, they stitched together disparate individuals into a motley historical patchwork.

¹¹³ ERO, D/AMW 12/129. As one of the eleven extant volumes was actually an account book used by Samuel Sparhawke, he was clearly the recipient of the others too. The subsequent provenience is unclear until the late nineteenth century: Beaumont, *Coggeshall*, p. 220.

¹¹⁴ Blodgett, 'Savage'; Herbert, *Female Alliances*, p. 173. For similar examples, see Wallington, *Seaver*, p. 6; Lister, *Autobiography*, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Rugg, *Diurnal*, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Fretwell, 'Family History', pp. 165-7.

¹¹⁷ BIA, MD.112, pp. 31, 73, 455; CALS, DDX 23/2, pp. 17-21; WSHC, PR316/9/1, pp. 18-19, 37.

¹¹⁸ Wood, *Memory*, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Wood, *Memory*, pp. 22-9.

This was a period of sharpening social polarisation in England, when a minority was growing ever richer.¹²⁰ Some have suggested that this was accompanied by a divergence between the local, oral historical traditions of the 'plebeians' and the national, literary historical writing of the elite.¹²¹ Yet, at the very same time, the spread of literacy down the social scale was enabling Bufton and other undistinguished individuals to begin chronicling their own worlds. As we have seen, they drew on oral and printed sources to record both local and national events, intermixing these supposedly divergent approaches. In so doing, they created a distinctive historical culture that was highly literate but did not rely on a classical education or a substantial estate to support it. They were, in short, writing history from below.

¹²⁰ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, pp. 200-1; Shepard, *Accounting*, pp. 68-72.

¹²¹ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, pp. 273-4, 297, 351; Wood, *Memory*, pp. 40-2, 123-6.