

Kinship, Community, Piety and Gender
– An Analysis of the Surviving Wills
within Three Northamptonshire
Parishes 1543-1705.

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Abstract

This thesis contains an analysis of 391 surviving wills, combined with supporting evidence from parish registers and hearth tax records from three Northamptonshire parishes (Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe) 1543-1705. Through these sources, a picture was developed of the societies in which the testators lived and the effects that kinship ties, communal relations, inheritance structures, gender roles and the changing religious mood of the country had. Other regions of the country have been previously examined; however, no work of this nature has so far been undertaken for Northamptonshire. It is hoped this work will complement other regional studies and add new insights in to family relationships within early modern society.

The central thesis of this work is that the three parishes, although having various economic and social differences between them, all operated high levels of kinship recognition between members of the nuclear family. The nuclear family was the dominating force within the parishes under study, and the bequests involved as well as the manner in which they were given was examined to understand the role of kinship and inheritance within early modern Northamptonshire. Wider kin recognition was limited, and people from the wider community appeared more important, playing a more substantial role. Women, despite the legal disability of their gender, acted as a vital function within the inheritance structures. The role of religion and the religious convictions of the testators were also examined to assess the impact of the Reformation and the evolving nature of religious belief within the communities. All the conclusions reached concerning the three Northamptonshire parishes were compared to each other and other regions of the country to assess similarities.

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Abbreviations used

NRO – Northamptonshire Record Office

PCC – Prerogative Court of Canterbury

Introduction

As Michael Drake outlined in his introduction to the 2000 edition of Time, Family and Community, the study of family and community history has rapidly expanded in the last twenty-five years.¹ This expansion has been due both to personal familial studies searching for ancestors and family roots through to wider academic studies analysing social issues and their impact upon groups of people and/or regions. A large number of sources can be used to study family and community history, ranging from personal family documents, such as diaries, wills, and letters to more regional or national sources such as parish registers, probate records, court records, regional laws and taxation records. To cover an analysis involving all of these sources for this thesis would have been a large undertaking, thus it was decided at an early stage to limit the investigation to those sources contained at the record office in large quantities, so that useful quantifiable analyses could be done. Diaries and personal letters are limited to the literate members of the community, and were useless for a general analysis of the people. Wills were contained in large numbers, along with a large number of parish registers that started early in 1538 (when they were first introduced). Hearth tax records also provided a limited source of analysis, which became supplemental to the analysis of the wills and parish registers.

As a result, this study examines the influences of kinship, community, gender and piety upon the people in three Northamptonshire parishes for the period 1543-1705,

¹ M. Drake (ed.), Time, Family and Community, Perspectives on Family and community History, (Oxford, 2000), p.1.

through an analysis of wills, parish registers and hearth tax records. The probate records of the period for the particular parishes under study suffer a lack of surviving inventories, but there is a good quantity of surviving copied wills. Wills are an excellent historical source, personal to the writer and individual in the people recognised and items bequeathed. Records are scarce for those below 'gentry' level, due to a lack of literacy, so wills offer a unique although limited avenue of information. By analysing wills, personal relationships important to the testator (will originator), which people were recognised, what items were important (to be mentioned within the wills as items to be passed on), and which people below the level of the usual literate writing groups felt strongly enough to make a will, can be identified. Parish registers are also a vital source. Analysing baptisms marriages and burials of the local people can develop a picture of the size and interconnectedness of families. The frequencies of baptisms (i.e. births) and burials can indicate population growth and what parties were involved in marriages to examine the density of kin networks. The hearth tax records also show a theoretical picture of the wealth of each parish based on the number of hearths per house. A house with a high number of hearths indicates a greater wealth than those houses with only one hearth. However, the parish registers and the hearth tax records are supplementary to the focus of this thesis, this being the surviving wills. Arguably, church court records can also be examined to develop a picture concerning the local communities, as they concerned themselves with the prosecution of members of the parishes for religious, social and moral misdemeanours. However, due to a lack of these records for the three parishes in comparison to the numbers of wills, and a desire also to specifically examine the relationships within wills themselves, these records were not included in this thesis.

Using the evidence from the analysis of the wills, supplemented by the evidence from the parish registers and the hearth tax records, information will be presented outlining the kinship, family and community networks within the three parishes. Furthermore, the religious beliefs alluded to by the common people in wills and the impact that the Reformation had upon this, along with the development that the Church of England had, will also be examined. This study is the first to undertake an examination of the wills of more than one Northamptonshire parish in an attempt to establish the kinship, community, gender and patterns of piety within Northamptonshire, during the early modern period.

This thesis depends heavily on the examination of the surviving wills in the three parishes under study. This introductory chapter outlines the theoretical background to the development of family and community history, as well as the development of regional studies into other areas of England. The methodology of this thesis will then be examined, followed by an outline of the major themes under study. The geographical and historical background of Northamptonshire will then be outlined, before focusing more closely on the three parishes under examination. This will be accompanied lastly by an examination of how the 'last will and testament' developed into such an important document. The later chapters of the thesis will examine the hearth tax records and what evidence they illustrate concerning the social and economic make-up of the three parishes. This will be followed by individual chapters focusing on the themes of kinship, community and piety as evidenced in the wills, along with an individual chapter analysing the wills of female testators separately

from males and the role of females in male wills, to see if there are any strong differences based solely on gender.

The Theoretical Perspective

The preceding forty years has seen the development of a growing section of family and community historians, both professional and amateur. Genealogy has become an increasingly popular past time for many people interested in discovering family roots, while professional historians have been actively involved in the wider research of the more complex issues of family and community structures, from sources as diverse as parish registers, wills, diaries, probate records, letters and churchwardens accounts.² These studies have also been encouraged by the growing international interest in historical demography and the developing historical social studies.³

Historians have battled with the problems of examining individuals within their own families, and the effects of political, economic and social changes of the period upon them. The constantly evolving nature of the family, and the effects of the movement of time upon the individual and the family unit, further complicates this picture. Other academic disciplines have also had an influence upon the study of the family and community in history. Sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists have all developed theories concerning the nature of the family and its ever-changing role within community and society. Throughout the study of the family, different approaches have

² Ibid, p. 1.

³ T. K.Hareven, 'Recent research on the history of the family', in Drake (ed.), Time, Family and Community, p. 13.

been made in attempting to understand its form and nature. The original sociological view that the family in pre-industrial times was extended and static has been replaced (especially as argued by Laslett since the 1970's) with the view based on historical research that the family was nuclear and mobile.⁴

Since the 1960s, family history and historical demography have developed alongside each other, often overlapping. From 1964, the establishment of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure initiated the academic study of English parish registers and household listings. They identified the existence of nuclear households, which were highly mobile and formed late due to late marriage age.⁵ Since the 1970s, historians have argued that nuclear households were not the same as nuclear families. The nuclear household in some cases contained other people who were not part of the nuclear family unit of husband, wife and children. These other members of the household could include servants, apprentices, elderly parents, or other resident kin from the wider kinship network. The examples found in Europe of co-habiting families were rare in England and the nuclear family household, with or without servants, was the most common form of household in England during this period. These nuclear family households would maintain links with the wider kinship network, outside of their own household unit.⁶

⁴ P. Laslett, Household and Family in Past Times (Cambridge, 1972), p. 29, and P. Laslett, The World We Have Lost, Further Explored (Cambridge, 1965, Reprint 2000), p. 75.

⁵ Laslett, The World We Have Lost, p. xvi.

⁶ For example, see K. Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680, (Chatham, 1982, Reprinted 1998), pp. 44-45 and pp. 68-69.

Starting in the 1950s, regional studies have been one of the most common methods used as a basis of analysis of families and communities. Hoskins, who examined Wigston Magna in Leicestershire, undertook one of the first studies.⁷ Some of the studies that followed this included Spufford examining Chippenham in Cambridgeshire in 1965, Johnston examining Worcestershire and Richardson looking at Lancashire in the 1970's.⁸ Larger, more in-depth, studies followed with Spufford analysing further regions of Cambridgeshire, and Wrightson and Levine examining Terling in Essex.⁹ These latter two works arguably set the benchmark of parochial studies concerning themes of kinship and community based on the study of wills and other local sources. Since these studies were published, historians have examined other regions of England in comparison to these studies, using evidence from wills and other sources to examine the themes of kinship, inheritance and community within parishes or other regional structures.¹⁰

⁷ W. G. Hoskins, The Midland Peasant. The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village (London, 1957).

⁸ M. Spufford, A Cambridgeshire Community, Chippenham from Settlement to Enclosure (Welwyn Garden City, 1965); J. A. Johnston, 'The probate inventories and wills of a Worcestershire parish 1676-1775', Midland History (1971); R. C. Richardson, 'Wills and willmakers in the 16th and 17th centuries: some Lancashire evidence', Local Population Studies 9 (1972).

⁹ M. Spufford, Contrasting Communities, English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Cambridge, 1974; Reprinted Edition 2000); K. Wrightson and D. Levine, Poverty and Piety in an English Village Terling, 1525-1700 (Oxford, 1995; Reprinted 1999)

¹⁰ Some of these other studies include, E. Parry, 'Helmdon wills 1603-1760', Northamptonshire Past and Present, Vol 5, No 3, (1975); C. Howell, 'Peasant inheritance in the Midlands' in J. Goody, J. Thirsk and E. P. Thompson (eds.), Family and Inheritance, Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800 (Cambridge, 1975); R. T. Vann, 'Wills and the family in an English town, Banbury 1550-1800' Journal of Family History, No 4, (Winter 1979); D. K. Coldicutt, A Long Sutton Miscellany, Including a Study of the Wills (1502-1856) and Probate Inventories (1558-1709) From the Parish of Long Sutton and Well Hampshire (London, 1979); M. Chaytor,

The study of death and its impact upon inheritance and the family is also a growing area of investigation, presently in vogue with historians. Cressy, Houlbrooke, Jupp, Gittings, Gordon and Marshall (to name a few) have all published volumes dealing with various aspects of death, inheritance and its impact upon families and communities in the early modern period.¹¹

An analysis of the themes under study

Taking these recent investigations and combining them with the parochial and regional investigations, this thesis will use a combination of approaches to understand the kinship, inheritance and community structures of the three parishes in Northamptonshire under study. Demographic analyses based on the parish registers

'Household and kinship: Ryton in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', History Workshop Journal 10 (1980); L.M. Mumby, Life and Death in Kings Langley: Wills and Inventories 1498-1659 (Kings Langley, 1981); L. C. Attreed, 'Preparation for death in sixteenth century northern England' Sixteenth Century Journal 13 (3) (1982); N. Evans, 'Testators, literacy and religious belief', Local Population Studies 25 (1980); C. Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition, Kibworth Harcourt 1280-1700 (Cambridge, 1983); G. Nair, Highley, the Development of a Community 1550-1880 (Oxford, 1988); K. Wrightson and D. Levine, 'Death in Whickham' in J. Walter and R. Schofield (eds.) Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society (Cambridge, 1989); D. Beaver, 'Sown in dishonour, raised in glory, death, ritual and social organization in northern Gloucestershire 1590-1690' Social History, 17, No 3, (Oct 1992); J. A. Johnston, 'Social change in the eighteenth century: the evidence in wills from six Lincolnshire parishes 1661-1812' Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, 27 (1992); M. Moyse, 'Helpston in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: a study based on wills' Northamptonshire Past and Present, 9, No.4, (1997/98).

¹¹ D. Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, Ritual, Religion and the Lifecycle in Tudor and Stuart England (Oxford, 1997); R. Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750 (Oxford, 1998); P. C. Jupp and C. Gittings (eds.), Death in England, an Illustrated History, (Manchester, 1999); B. Gordon and P. Marshall (eds.), The Place of the Dead, Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (Cambridge, 2000).

and hearth tax records will be undertaken for each parish. The surviving wills will be examined for evidence of family structures, inheritance strategies and community influences. An analysis will be undertaken to see who wrote wills, through an analysis of occupations. Those who received bequests, those who were appointed in a role and those who acted as witness will also be examined to see who they were and what relationship they held to the testator. The role of women in inheritance structures will also be examined to see whether they acted differently to men, and how important wives or husbands were to the passing on of legacies to surviving children. The wills of female testators will also be examined to see what proportion wrote wills, what they bequeathed and to whom, considering the fact that all their possessions legally belonged to their husbands or fathers. The wills and parish registers will be assessed to see how close kinship networks were between members of the family and the members of the wider community. This will be combined with an analysis of the religious changes that were occurring in the period and how these changes affected the people. These results will be presented under the themes of 'kinship', 'community', 'gender' and 'piety'. By comparison, to each other and other regional studies, it will be seen if the results of the three parishes under study in Northamptonshire follow regional patterns.

Kinship

The term kinship is used widely in historical and social studies of people. The term kinsman, kinswoman or kin was a term used amongst individuals related by blood or not. Historians have argued widely over the definition of kinship and how it relates to

society. Stone argued that 'the kin are those members of the lineage who are currently alive and who by virtue of the relationship are recognised to have special claims to loyalty, obedience or support'.¹² However, this is from the viewpoint of the higher levels of society. Regarding the lower levels of society, he argued that lineage was not important and relationships were probably maintained for economic benefits. He argued that amongst those with no property, neighbours and friends were more important than kin.¹³

It could be taken from this assertion that when a testator referred to a member of their kin, they may not have necessarily been referring to a member of their family. Instead, they may have been referring to a close friend or associate within the community with which they held great terms of affection, respect or trust. In fact, members of a person's family may be distant from them in terms of geographical distance, and it may have been difficult to maintain a warm familial relationship. If this was the case, the person concerned may have turned to neighbours and friends within the local community to support them or assist them in times of need or daily routine. Kinship, to people of this social level, may have been between people who were not necessarily related through family ties, but upon shared mutual bonds of friendship and affection.

Houlbrooke also looks at kin and family from the viewpoint of lineage and defines it further by writing that kinship should be distinguished by marriage (affinal) and blood (consanguineal).¹⁴ He sees kin only as members of the individual's family, and not as

¹² L. Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (London, 1977), p. 29.

¹³ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁴ R. A. Houlbrooke, The English Family 1450-1700 (Harlow, 1984), p. 39.

friends or associates within the community. Gottlieb also distinguishes between two types of kinship, writing that blood kinship is what a person is born into, whereas affinal kinship ties are more located in the future, when the person gets married and new kin become introduced through the new family. However, for the children of that marriage, this is now blood kin and they are born into it.¹⁵

As Macfarlane found in his investigation of Ralph Josselin's diary, Josselin regarded his affinal kin as friends, indicating they were considered closer than neighbours but not as close as blood relatives.¹⁶ This indicates that affinal relationships were important but not as important as blood relationships. A male testator could bequeath property to his family on two levels, that of his wife (affinal) and to his children (consanguineal). Arguably, the only important affinal relationship was that of the marriage partner, the rest of the bequests would be concentrated in the hands of the blood family, especially those of direct vertical blood descent.

Wrightson also sees kinship in terms of family relationships. He argues that relations beyond the nuclear family and the grandparents and grandchildren were vague and that terminology was vague, making little distinction between members from the mother's and father's own families.¹⁷ If there were no defined ties of recognition, it will be interesting to note which family members were mentioned in the wills of the three parishes under investigation in Northamptonshire; and whether these ties were the same

¹⁵ B. Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World - From the Black Death to the Industrial Age (New York, 1993), p. 184.

¹⁶ A. Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin – A Seventeenth Century Clergyman (Cambridge, 1970), p. 143.

¹⁷ K. Wrightson, 'Household and kinship in sixteenth century England', History Workshop Journal, 12 (1981), p. 155.

as Macfarlane and Wrightson found. For surely, as Cressy argues, those mentioned in the wills were recognised as those closest to the testator in terms of affection and relations, at the time of death.¹⁸ Arguably, members of the family were kin, but kin may not necessarily have been members of the family.

A wide range of factors could affect the range of family members and wider kin recognised within a will. Geography may be a factor as kin may live in distant locations leading to weaker kinship relations. Topography may also be another element that could affect kin recognition. Highland or difficult terrain may lead to a weakening of communication and kinship links, as people found it difficult to see or contact each other. Wrightson argues that population mobility, settlement patterns, size of settlements, marriage age, life expectation, land availability may also have affected kinship relations, by determining the range and size of kinship groupings.¹⁹

Gottlieb further argues that kinship ties are limited by the personal living memory of the family members.²⁰ A relative can be recognised as kin, no matter how distant they are in relation to one another. A member of the family may be close within the family tree relationship, but if they are no longer recognised or remembered, then they are no longer regarded as kin. Gottlieb also looks at the extended view of the Catholic Church's view of kinship with regard to marriage, where in-laws, godchildren, godparents and second cousins were considered too close in kin relations to be

¹⁸ D. Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England', Past and Present, 113 (1986). p. 53.

¹⁹ Wrightson, English Society, p. 50.

²⁰ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 180.

allowed to marry.²¹ However, as she points out, this is a very wide-ranging and extensive view of the concept of kinship. Within the practical world of human relationships, the recognition of kin was not as far-reaching. Gottlieb further argues (in agreement with Stone) that the range of kin recognised was limited to visible living kin, especially in poorer families. Of course, the higher one went up the social scale, the wider the range of visible kin, and the more important the subject of one's lineage became. Arguably, people of a higher social status recognised a wider range of kin.²²

There is also the existence of spiritual kinship in the form of godparents. Most children who had been baptised had godparents. These godparents could be chosen from friends of the parents or members of the community. As Gottlieb points out, many godparents faded into the background after the baptism and were not important kinship relations, although there were a few who maintained healthy relationships.²³ This was dependent on the personalities involved. These spiritual kinship relationships were arguably not as important or as strong within the daily lives of the majority of the people of early modern England. It was the relationships of those people close to them at home, and who interacted with them on a daily basis, that were of most importance.

Gottlieb argued that the functions of kinship are two-fold, both emotional (the need to belong to a group) and practical (a working relationship that can benefit/help another kin member when required).²⁴ Nephews and nieces often benefited the most frequently

²¹ Ibid, p. 182.

²² Ibid, p. 180.

²³ Ibid, p, 190.

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 193-4.

from kinship ties outside the nuclear household. Aunts and uncles often bestowed affection upon the children of their siblings, most noticeably in the cases of the brother of the mother (the uncle) and the son of the mother (the nephew).

As Wrightson wrote in his postscript to the 1995 edition of 'Poverty and Piety' of the analysis of the surviving wills of the village of Terling, 'the question of kinship needs to be handled with care, for it has become clouded by misunderstanding.'²⁵ Wrightson underlined the fact that his original interpretation of the Terling wills led him to state that Terling had a loose kinship network. Subsequent historians have used the Terling analysis as a comparison to studies on kinship and sought to prove or disprove the Terling theories. This has led to a constantly evolving debate concerning the nature of kinship, whether this was tight or loose within individual communities and the nation as a whole. Wrightson placed his interpretative stance of loose kinship networks in Terling on the current historical climate at the time of writing. It was believed then that early modern communities had large extensive kinship networks, encompassing many wider relations. Wrightson's evidence from Terling did not agree with this general pattern. Wrightson himself argues that he never meant to undermine the significance of kinship as a whole within communities. Rather as Wrightson discovered, it encompassed a smaller group of closer kin, rather than a wider extended base. What is important in this study is to establish which relationships mattered to people who wrote wills, and whether the concept of kinship defined above was important to them. It is also important to identify those groups, which were considered close kin and how those individuals related to one another.

²⁵ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 187.

Through the different analyses made by historians, it can be argued that kinship was the relationship felt between two people of the same blood or affinal tie. Although friendships and relations with neighbours could be close and important, these are not recognised as ties of kinship. Historians stress the importance of the immediate family although (it is arguable that) other members of the family could also be considered kin. For the purpose of this investigation, kinship will be defined as a relationship between members of a testator's family. Every person has an individual kinship grouping, for they form different relationships with each other within the family unit. Where one person may have only close relations with their immediate family, another person may have good relations with other members of the wider kin outside the immediate family of mother, father and children. Although the primary reason for writing a will was to provide for the immediate family (as outlined by the introduction), there may be cases where other members of the wider kin were bequeathed items.

The Family

If the prime motive for writing a will (as Spufford and Oestmann argue) was to provide for the family, then we need to understand what is a 'family' and who was part of it.²⁶ As Gottlieb writes, 'the notions of household and family tend to overlap. Co-residence is often considered more important in defining a family than blood relationship'.²⁷ Stone wrote that the notion of the family in the past was that of a group

²⁶ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 115 and p. 159 and 'Peasant inheritance customs', p. 176; Oestmann, Lordship and Community, p. 191.

²⁷ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 7.

of people collected under one roof.²⁸ Stone's view is also reflected in the fact that family was first defined in Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755 as a household.²⁹ The definition of family evolved and became blurred as later 'the definition went on to embrace both images of kinship...a group of several persons united by the ties of blood or affinity'.³⁰

Throughout the early modern period, the concept of kinship was adapting, reflecting the complex world of family relationships. One must examine what range of kin lived together in one household, to see whether this family was an extended range of kin or a nuclear unit of parents and their children. Wrightson argued that the nuclear family was usual, and when couples married, they formed their own separate households.³¹ Stone argued that marriage took place and families established themselves after the death of the father.³² This suggests that a family is nuclear in origin rather than extended, with the household centred on one family unit of mother, father and children, rather than households of multiple families or wider kin. Stone further argued that the decline of the importance of kinship contributed to the growing number of nuclear families.³³

Rowlands also argues that the general household formation within early modern north-western Europe was nuclear, based on the married couple with their children. She argues that the nuclear household often had much variation within it, containing

²⁸ Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 28.

²⁹ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 7.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 185.

³¹ Wrightson, 'Household and kinship', p. 154.

³² Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 45.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 100.

servants, grandparents and/or other kin.³⁴ Laslett argued that the word household merely indicated people having a 'shared location, kinship and activity'.³⁵ O' Day went on to expand this thought by stressing that 'common subjection to a 'head of household' or acknowledged fount of domestic authority made servants, apprentices, journeymen, trade assistants, and live-in agricultural labourers as much of the householder's 'family' as his or her own offspring'.³⁶ As Macfarlane observed, up to a third of households in the seventeenth century contained servants, and moralists argued these servants should be treated as part of the family.³⁷ Stone also noted that the family unit included apprentices, servants, lodgers and other non-kin.³⁸ Wall notes that apprenticeships of young adults or putting children in other households working as servants were also common practices.³⁹ However, Laslett found in his study that the nuclear family with or without servants was the most common household.⁴⁰ Wrightson agrees with this view, but did argue that some newly married couples may live with their parents briefly until they can establish their own household, and that sometimes a father or mother may live with a son or son-in-law in return for handing over the land or farm-holding early to them. Other occasions may lead to young orphaned relatives becoming part of the household or other relatives moving in for a

³⁴ A. Rowlands, 'The condition of life for the masses' in E. Cameron (ed.), Early Modern Europe, an Oxford History (Oxford, 1999), p. 32.

³⁵ Laslett, Household and Family, p. 28.

³⁶ R. O'Day, The Family and Family Relationships 1500-1900: England, France and the United States of America (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 6.

³⁷ Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, p. 145.

³⁸ Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, p. 28.

³⁹ R. Wall, 'The age at leaving home', Journal of Family History, No 3 (1978), p. 182.

⁴⁰ Laslett, Household and Family, p. 29.

period. Wrightson believes that despite these household anomalies the nuclear family unit was the norm in early modern England.⁴¹

Even though the household included such a range of people, it is debatable as to whether all these extra people were included in the wills or considered as part of the family.

Cressy argues that wives, children and grandchildren were the principal beneficiaries of wills, other relatives outside the nuclear family tended not to be recognised.⁴² However, although wives and unmarried children would live in the same household as the testator, married couples generally did not live with their parents and it would be unusual for grandchildren to be resident in the same house as grandparents, unless it was a widow residing in a houseroom of her son or grandparents caring for orphaned grandchildren.

Consequently, if as Stone argues, the family unit was identical with the household, then grandchildren and married children would have been classed as wider kin and would not have been beneficiaries within wills. Regional studies have shown this is not the case; rather, the opposite is true and many grandchildren and wider kin received bequests.

Cressy's investigation of the wills from the diocese of Salisbury and the

Archdeaconry Court of Essex discovered that wives and children received nearly seventy per cent of bequests and grandchildren received twenty-five per cent of

bequests as opposed to the wider kin group. These bequests to grandchildren

commonly were of token items in comparison to the larger bequests to wives and

children.⁴³ Wrightson and Levine found in their study of the wills of Terling that kin recognition was shallow, focused on children, the testators' own immediate nuclear

⁴¹ Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 69.

⁴² Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction', p. 56.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 54.

families or the spouses' families.⁴⁴ This supports Spufford's argument that male testators largely made a will to provide for minors.⁴⁵ The concentration of bequests into the hands of the nuclear family illustrates the desire of the testator to provide for his immediate family. If the testator's family were already self-sufficient, there would be no need to make a will and concentrate the bequests into the hands of his immediate kin.

So, if wills merely acknowledged the nuclear family, what was the relationship with the members of the wider kin that were outside the household? As Cressy argues, it is easy to suggest that wider kin were not important due to the testator being largely concerned with the welfare of the nuclear family.⁴⁶ However, as has been discovered in other studies this was not necessarily the case. Wrightson and Levine found in Terling wills that although the nuclear family was focused upon, testators with no children or young children often mentioned their own siblings or their spouse's siblings. This was because either the testator had no direct heirs or they had young children whose welfare needed to be looked after.⁴⁷ Furthermore, male testators without any close kin or women would often leave bequests to nephews, nieces and even godchildren. It has also been noted that, even in the roles performed within the wills, the nuclear family was preferred, and outside of this group the wider kin were not used, but rather neighbours.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 187.

⁴⁵ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 115.

⁴⁶ Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction', p. 41.

⁴⁷ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, pp. 93-4.

⁴⁸ K. Wrightson, 'Kinship in an English village: Terling, Essex 1500-1700' in R. M. Smith (ed.), Land, Kinship and Lifecycle (Cambridge, 1984), p. 332.

Wrightson argues that kin recognition was flexible, some people recognised a wider kin group than others, and it was dependent upon that person's particular situation.⁴⁹ There is also the question of whether the social status of the testator had any impact on the recognition of kin. Wrightson argues that extensive kinship networks did exist in the higher levels of society, for example due to marriage within county society.⁵⁰ Wrightson argues that further down the social scale, wider kinship ties became less significant. Outside the nuclear family unit, for the majority of the population, kinship links with members of the wider kinship network had less importance the further one descended the social scale.

These observations regarding the kin group will be examined in the three Northamptonshire parishes under investigation. An analysis of the bequests can be made to see which members of the kin group benefited. A close examination will also be made of the relationships seen in wills between parents and their siblings. One can also examine the role that grandchildren played in kinship relations and how the spiritual bond of godchildren fitted in. For, 'although a statistical analysis of the bequests in these wills has considerable limitations, it can help to illuminate the attitudes of individuals at the ends of their lives towards various forms of kin.'⁵¹

The range of bequests to be found in wills is a good indication of the wealth of families, as well as of the kinship relations. Bequests can be examined to indicate the wealth of testators and the wealth of the parish. The division of land was an important factor in the

⁴⁹ Wrightson, English Society, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 48.

⁵¹ Coster, Kinship and Inheritance, p. 10.

economy. If land within the parish was divided by partible inheritance strategies (dividing inheritance between several heirs), this would lead to more landowners with small weaker holdings. However, if land was divided by impartible inheritance (one inheritor), this would lead to larger landholdings, possibly squeezing out smaller landholders. If land was bequeathed to one son, other sons could be left with little means of subsistence. If the land was split between all sons, this could lead to problems of insufficient land to support the family and poverty and starvation may have set in. Common law dictated that primogeniture was the primary rule of inheritance. However, regional differences can be clearly seen. Howell found that areas of sparse population, or dense population supported by other industries, favoured partible inheritance.⁵² Impartible inheritance tended to be practised in areas of land shortage, manorialisation or open field cultivation. Testators in Retford in Nottinghamshire, rejected primogeniture and spread land through their children.⁵³ Macfarlane argued that primogeniture was common amongst the lower levels of English society.⁵⁴ However, examples of impartible inheritance were also evident, indicating that primogeniture was accepted in some areas of the country. In the Midlands, land went to one son and the tools and livestock to the remaining children.⁵⁵ In Cambridgeshire, the people practised a mixture of impartible and partible inheritance.⁵⁶ With this view in mind, the wills of the three Northamptonshire parishes can be examined to see how land was bequeathed, and how the economies of these three parishes differed. Land and other

⁵² Howell, 'Peasant inheritance in the Midlands', p. 117. See also Smith, Land, Kinship and Lifecycle who agrees with Howell.

⁵³ D. Marcombe, English Small Town Life: Retford 1520-1642 (Nottingham, 1993).

⁵⁴ A. Macfarlane, The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition, (Oxford, 1978), pp 87-8.

⁵⁵ Howell, 'Peasant inheritance in the Midlands', p. 117.

⁵⁶ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 85, p. 106 and p. 159.

items may already have been pre-bequeathed before the will had been written. The testator may have merely followed the legal norm and felt no need to note it in the will. The non-mentioning of land in a will did not necessarily mean that there was no land to bequeath. The treatment of daughters and wives in wills is also interesting, and will be examined to see how they fared in receiving bequests (especially with regard to land).

Bequests can be analysed to discover the range of people bequeathed to and to assess the wealth of the testator and family. Bequests could vary depending on geographical location and the wealth of the family. A group of related individuals not limited by geography would be more likely to be remembered in wills. Those testators with more wealth may have included a wider range of bequests to a wider range of people, as money was no object to including a large number of people. The wills of the three Northamptonshire parishes will be examined to see what bequests were given to whom and what range of kin and non-kin were involved.

Community

Studies of communities have developed rapidly, but the definition of what a community is has divided historians.⁵⁷ The German sociologist Tönnies in 1887 was one of the first to analyse the concepts of society and community, and he argued that there were three types of community.⁵⁸ The first type was kinship, largely found

⁵⁷ B. Kümin, 'Parishioners in court litigation and the local community 1350-1650' in S. Wabuda and C. Litzberger (eds.) Belief and Practice in Reformation England (1998, Aldershot), p. 20.

⁵⁸ Ferdinand Tönnies, Community and Society (Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft) edited and translated by C. P. Loomis, (Michigan, 1957).

between people living under one roof, who shared the same daily routine, and the dead were still remembered as part of the family and kin group. Neighbourhood was the second type of community, which involved people living together in close proximity in a rural environment, allowing daily interaction and detailed knowledge of all the inhabitants.⁵⁹ Friendship was the third type, based on common intellectual abilities, work ties and frequent interaction between the people involved.⁶⁰ Tonnies extended friendship to include spiritual kinship centred on a deity, which bound people together mentally giving the group a commonality, not restricted by locality. The anthropologist Pitt-Rivers also argued that friendship is based on a reciprocated mutual emotional attachment between two people.⁶¹

Hillery Junior examined ninety-four differing definitions of what a community was and how these could be collated to provide a common theme. From these he found that area, social interaction and common ties were the main threads of a community.⁶² Frankenberg found that a community was an 'area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence' thus bringing in the idea of area and common social identity.⁶³ Carpenter argues that a community is an 'arena of social activity', not just a village or a group of farms. A community could range from something as small as a group of people in a household to the people of a whole state.⁶⁴ She states that the

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 43.

⁶¹ J. Pitt-Rivers, 'The kith and the kin', in J. Goody (ed.), The Character of Kinship, (Cambridge, 1973), p. 96.

⁶² G. A. Hillery Jr., 'Definitions of community: areas of agreement' Rural Sociology 20 (1955), p. 118.

⁶³ R. Frankenberg, Communities in Britain (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 15.

⁶⁴ C. Carpenter, 'Gentry and community in medieval England', Journal of British Studies, 33 (Oct 1994), p. 378-379, quote from S. Wright, 'Image and analysis: new

word community is misused and misinterpreted.⁶⁵ She argues that communities can transcend social, geographical and neighbourhood boundaries, and that a community is a group of people who share a common feeling of belonging to a group.⁶⁶

In this analysis of the three parishes in Northamptonshire, a testator could identify with the feeling of belonging to a community on two separate levels. The first level of belonging to a community of neighbourhood, part of the village and parish, of people closely interacting with each other on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. The second level could be a community that had a wider social area, not bounded by geographical boundaries, of people who less frequently interacted with each other than those in the neighbourhood, but perhaps with other common ties, such as of social level, friendship or occupation. Examples of this could be guilds, county gentry or people who had interacted closely in the past, had since moved out of the geographical area, but were still friendly and in contact.

Razi noted that the term community was used in court records to describe the people living in the manor and the people in the townships controlled by the manor. This illustrates that area was important in this definition of a community and that the term could incorporate different sizes of area and ranges of people.⁶⁷ The parish communities were part of the wider county community and in turn the community of the country as a whole. Mitson and Marshall argued that high levels of mobility

directions in community studies' in B. Short, The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis (Cambridge, 1992).

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 340.

⁶⁶ Carpenter, 'Gentry and community', pp. 343-4.

⁶⁷ Z. Razi, 'Family, land and the village community in later medieval England'. Past and Present, 93 (Nov 1981), p. 12.

existed among the people of parishes, and that parish boundaries were regularly crossed over by family members moving around. Parishes were not isolated from each other and some could be quite closely connected. Marshall also argues that each community would be made up of families and possibly neighbourhoods.⁶⁸ Different types of countryside and landscape separated these neighbourhoods. Arguably, different areas of land with different types of land had different types of communities. For example, a woodland area may have a different community structure to an area of arable land. Thirsk identified two types of community in early modern England, forest and fielden, but these communities were differentiated by the type of farming and the economy rather than by the type and organisation of the people.⁶⁹ Wrightson differentiated between open and closed communities, based on the layout of streets and houses, along with population structures and land usage. Wrightson argued that closed parishes tended to be lowland with concentrated land holding and open communities were upland, fens or forests with dispersed land holding.⁷⁰

Family networks could cross over parish boundaries and several parishes could be quite heavily connected and linked through high mobility. Arguably, the forces of localisation centred a person's daily attention on the influences and needs of the local parish community and not the wider communities of which they were part. In turn, it can be argued that the parish community was made up of smaller communities of

⁶⁸ Mitson, 'The significance of kinship networks' and J. D. Marshall, 'Communities, societies, regions and local history, perception of locality in high and low Furness', The Local Historian Vol 26, No 1 (Feb 1996), pp. 36-37 and p. 45.

⁶⁹ J. Thirsk (ed.), The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 4 1500-1640, (Cambridge, 1967).

⁷⁰ Wrightson, English Society, p. 171.

households and families interacting with one another to form the parish community centred on the church. The influence of this smaller community of the family and household would also arguably play a bigger part in the life of a person than the notion of the wider community of county and nation. Only when the smaller communities of family or parish were threatened would attention be turned to the larger governing forces of the wider communities.

Kümin argued that the parish unit, as a form of community, centred on the parish church and developed effectively between 1400 and 1560. Although the church had been the centre of the local village before this date, this period effectively saw the strengthening of a network of defined parishes, with a growth in communal and secular activities.⁷¹ Tudor legislation effectively turned the parish into an administrative centre of local government initiatives as a means of effectively governing the people. The community could thus be defined as these people falling within these parish boundaries, centred on the church. Theoretically, every stage of a person's life, from baptism to burial, was recorded from 1538 with the introduction of the parish registers. Furthermore, the church was used as a meeting place for social, economic or political reasons as well as for religious purposes. Palliser also argued that the community was defined by the attendance of the majority of the people at church.⁷²

⁷¹ B. A. Kümin, The Shaping of a Community. The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c1400-1560 (Aldershot, 1996), p. 1.

⁷² D. M. Palliser, Tudor York, (Oxford, 1979) p. 294.

For the purposes of this study, the community will be defined as the group of people that fall within the parish boundaries centred on the parish church. This definition falls within the common threads that Hillery found, with the area being defined by the parochial boundary, and the common thread and social interaction being governed by the interaction of people within the local church.

Wrightson states that society in the early modern period changed little, being centred upon small nuclear family households sharing a common area, and bound by ties of neighbourliness, kin and patronage.⁷³ A community, based on networks of kin, must have an element of inter-relation between them. Friendships and relationships outside of the kin network also contribute to the existence of a community.⁷⁴ Most communities did not have a high number of people connected through ties of blood or marriage.⁷⁵ As a result, communities must have been based more on friendship and social networks than kin and these forces must have governed communal ties.

Anderson notes that there was little room for privacy in early modern communities. Houses were small, crowded, and some contained non-family members. Thin walls between houses meant neighbours knew each other's private business. Any available leisure time was spent outside of the family within the neighbourhood.⁷⁶ As a result,

⁷³ Wrightson, English Society, p. 13.

⁷⁴ J. D. Marshall, 'Communities, Societies, Regions and Local History, Perception of Locality in High and Low Furness', The Local Historian 26, (1) (February, 1996), p. 45.

⁷⁵ B. Coward, Social Change and Continuity, England 1550-1750 (London, 1997), p. 28.

⁷⁶ Anderson, 'The relevance of family history' in M. Anderson (ed.) Sociology of the Family (Aylesbury, 1980), p. 49.

neighbours were arguably closer to each other than members of the kinship network who lived at some geographical distance. Coward argues that closer ties existed with neighbours than with wider kin.⁷⁷ Gottlieb also argues that neighbours were strong influences upon each other, and strong relationships could be developed. However, she does argue that despite this people would still rely on kin when they could, rather than non-kin.⁷⁸ It has been stated that, neighbourhood was based on a mutual relationship between neighbours of equal commitment irrespective of wealth. Proper behaviour to one another and practical help between people who lived close to each other were also features.⁷⁹ The neighbourhood was an evolving body of people who lived together in one geographical area. Social level could also form a different level of neighbourhood, for one gentry family may be in close contact with another gentry family of some distance away. The local government of the parish further strengthened ties of neighbourhood.⁸⁰ Population mobility between geographical areas may have affected relations between neighbours. However, this mobility of the people must have created a vibrant moving network of relationships between members of the community. Ties of friendship combined with the notion of neighbourliness created connections between unrelated householders.⁸¹

An examination will be made of the wills within the three parishes to see which members of the local community who were not members of the testators' nuclear families were bequeathed items. In addition, the role that non-kin played in wills as witnesses, supervisors, overseers or executors can also be examined. An analysis can

⁷⁷ Coward, Social Change and Continuity, p. 28.

⁷⁸ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 192.

⁷⁹ Wrightson, English Society, p. 51.

⁸⁰ Coward, Social Change and Continuity, p. 28.

⁸¹ Wrightson, English Society, p. 55.

be done of those bequests made to the community, the poor or the local church. If these communal bequests decreased this shows possible evidence of a disintegration of community responsibilities and a breakdown of communal ties. If there is an increase of bequests to the family, this may correspond with an increasing interest in family preservation. A comparison can also be made between the parishes to see if the different societies and economies prevalent in each parish had an effect on the non-kin recognised. The results concerning the inheritance practices in the Northamptonshire wills are unique, as no other regional study has been undertaken previously for this county. These results can be compared to the results from other regions of the country and especially with the influential studies of Wrightson, Levine and Spufford.

Gender

Prior to the nineteenth century, historical studies concerning women were not undertaken, with women being 'hidden from history' due to a lack of interest by historians in examining them separate from men.⁸² It was not until the nineteenth-century that historians began investigations into the history of women, through studying individual women of high social standing. Later on in the 1890s, investigations into women of lower social hierarchies began to be undertaken. Slowly, those investigations began to move into sixteenth and seventeenth century history.⁸³ During the twentieth

⁸² A. Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, A Social History (London, 1994), p. 3.

⁸³ J. Thirsk (Foreword) in M. Prior (ed.), Women in English Society 1500-1800 (London, 1985, Reprint 1996), pp. 2-13.

century, separate studies focusing solely on women have been increasing in frequency with numerous studies into various social and economic aspects of women's history.⁸⁴

Arguably, gender is the most defining characteristic that can dictate the way a person is treated within society. During the early modern period, women had no legal right to make a will unless they had permission from their husbands, fathers or they were widows. If married, a woman could only bequeath items she had secured as her own in a marriage contract. However, under an act in 1540, a husband could make long leases over his wife's estate of up to twenty-one years.⁸⁵ Despite these legal restrictions, some women did write wills, and this thesis will examine whether there were any marked differences between the inheritance, kinship and community patterns to be found between the wills of men and women. However, those wills written by women are low in number, so large quantifiable analyses are difficult to make. Despite these low numbers, analyses can be made of those women who wrote wills, why they made a will and how they managed to be able to make one. Social status will be examined, along with marital status. Items bequeathed and to whom, as well as whether women favoured other women with bequests. Furthermore, an analysis can also be made of the role women played within the wills written by men.

⁸⁴ M. Prior (ed.), Women in English Society, p. xv.

⁸⁵ Stone Lawrence, 'The rise of the nuclear family in Early Modern England: The Patriarchal Stage' in Rosenberg Charles E (ed.), The Family in History (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 49-50.

Piety

The examination of the religious convictions held by the people has been a growing field of historical interest in recent years, especially with regard to the dramatic changes that the events of the Reformation inflicted upon the pre-Reformation Catholic Church. The church dominated the daily lives of all and held a strong social control over the community. Thus these changes to the church would have also had a dramatic effect upon the lives of the people within the communities. Official church records outline the religious stance of the church in England; but these do not illustrate the beliefs of the people at the grass roots level. Few sources exist that reflect the religious views of the common people, but it has been argued by historians such as Marsh that the wording and phrases used in the religious preamble dedicating the soul to God at the beginning of the will could be used to illustrate actual religious beliefs.⁸⁶ Dickens was the first to examine preambles in 1959 and further studies have examined the preambles of other regions of the country.⁸⁷ The examination of will preambles has many difficulties, which will be outlined in chapter six, but it could

⁸⁶ C. Marsh, Popular Religion in Sixteenth Century England, (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 128-129.

⁸⁷ Dickens argued in 'Early Protestantism and the Church in Northamptonshire', Northamptonshire Past and Present 7 Number 1 (1983-4), p. 37, that he is the originator of the method in his book Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York (London, 1959). E. Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England c1400-c1580 (London, 1992), Chapter 15; M. Spufford, Contrasting Communities, English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, (Cambridge, 1974; Reprinted Edition, 2000), and G. H. Mayhew, 'The progress of the Reformation in East Sussex 1530-1559: The evidence from wills', Southern History Volume 5 (1983), also argue that Dickens began the method of studying will preambles for popular religious beliefs. Richardson, 'Wills and willmakers', p. 33, also cites Dickens, but stresses eighteenth century scholar John Strype who had previously noted the value of wills in representing religious opinion in his Memorials

still be argued that as they are the only source in sufficient number to undertake a quantifiable examination of popular religious belief, the evidence collected from them is crucial. Thus the religious preambles to be found at the beginning of the Northamptonshire wills, will be examined for evidence of personal religious convictions. Analyses will be done to assess the impact the Reformation had upon the wording and religious beliefs expressed by the testators. The conclusions reached will be compared between the three parishes and to other regional studies.

The County of Northamptonshire

With the summary of the themes under study within the wills having been outlined, the background to the county of Northamptonshire will now be covered along with a small overview of the three parishes under analysis. Geographically, Northamptonshire is roughly in the middle of England. Greenall in 1979 stated that the county is seventy miles long and approximately twenty miles wide.⁸⁸ The geology of the area is a strip of liassic rocks and limestone, mixed with Oxford clay. In the river valleys, there is some glacial boulder clay, alluvium and gravel. The Rivers Avon, Welland, Cherwell and Great Ouse all run through parts of Northamptonshire, although the main river is the Nene. The land surrounding the Nene River was rich arable land, and was used for corn growing. Grazing and pasture lands were common especially in the southwest. Generally, the whole of Northamptonshire was excellent farming land.⁸⁹ Forest also ran

of the Reformation (Oxford, 1822) and historian W. K. Jordan who analysed wills for his Philanthropy in England (London, 1959).

⁸⁸ R. L. Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough (London, 1979), p. 13.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

through parts of Northamptonshire, to the south there are three - Yardley Chase, Whittlewood and Salcey - while to the north is Rockingham forest. The place names mainly derive from English or Danish origin, although such names as Castor, Towcester, Floore and Irchester are Roman.⁹⁰

Northamptonshire, due to its land fertility, up to the medieval period attracted many people. This county and other lowland areas began to suffer overpopulation and associated land problems. During the succeeding two centuries, this led to frequent harvest failures, disease and starvation, which in turn led to a decline in population totals, and in some cases the desertion and desolation of villages. It is believed that Northamptonshire in the period 1350-1500 had eighty deserted villages due to this mass depopulation.⁹¹ There were outbreaks of plague in Northamptonshire in 1578, 1603, 1605, 1638, 1647, and 1665-6, which contributed to a falling population in the county.⁹² There was also a prolonged fall in real wages between 1540 and 1640 for the peasants, which forced many peasants to become landless labourers. Some moved into commercial farming, which later enabled them to move into yeomanry. During the seventeenth century, on average every fourth harvest was bad, and during the civil war period there were ten bad harvests in a space of fifteen years, which led to high bread prices, and the danger of famine and disease.⁹³

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the main groups of people living within Northamptonshire were manorial lords, yeomen farmers and landless labourers, with

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 23.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 33.

⁹² Ibid, p. 49.

⁹³ Ibid, p.49.

smaller farmers occupying small areas of land.⁹⁴ The start of Elizabeth I's reign saw the population of Northamptonshire beginning to stabilise and in some areas grow. Cloth-making was replaced by wool production as the predominant industry, with the enclosure of much land for pasture. Leather-working and tanning grew as cloth weaving declined, along with a growth in shoe making.⁹⁵ Rising wool prices in Europe encouraged the development of sheep farming in Northamptonshire and the rapid enclosure of land. Some Northamptonshire pastures had already been enclosed by the fifteenth century.⁹⁶ Enclosure of the open fields was not appreciated by some of the common people. In June 1607, a peasant uprising occurred near Kettering, of approximately one thousand armed people. The group called themselves levellers (or diggers) and they believed enclosure was causing depopulation and the disappearance of the peasant farmer.⁹⁷ Men, women and children grouped together in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, filling in ditches, tearing up hedges and opening up enclosed land, with many local people assisting them with food and tools.⁹⁸ Enclosure had already been occurring for approximately 150 years already in the Midlands region, and it was bitterly resented by the people. The rising was quashed and some of the leaders were executed and displayed as a warning. In the long run, enclosure created permanent pasture for sheep and cattle (which encouraged the wool trade) and also from about 1560, strips of enclosed arable land, encouraged mixed farming, which was less likely to exhaust land resources,

⁹⁴ P. J. Harris & P. W. Hartop, Northamptonshire, its Land and People (Northampton, 1950), p. 35.

⁹⁵ Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire, pp. 34-8.

⁹⁶ J. M. Steane, The Northamptonshire Landscape (London, 1974), pp. 184-5.

⁹⁷ Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire, p. 48.

⁹⁸ W. E. Tate, 'Inclosure movements in Northamptonshire', Northamptonshire Past and Present, 1, Number 2 (1949), p.023.

encouraging varied crop growing and the introduction of new crops. In the period 1578-1607, 27,335 acres were enclosed, and 118 places affected.⁹⁹ However, enclosure was slower in Northamptonshire than in the surrounding counties. By the early eighteenth century, three-quarters of the county was still not enclosed, but Parliamentary enclosure resulted in fifty-four per cent of land being enclosed.¹⁰⁰ By 1793, only eighty-nine parishes in Northamptonshire still had open land, eighty-eight of these enclosed in rapid succession, with the last parish to be enclosed being Castor and Sutton in 1898 (one of the parishes in this study).¹⁰¹

During the Reformation the monastery of Peterborough was dissolved, along with smaller religious houses. The reign of Edward VI saw the removal of rood screens, medieval altars and images and lights, and all wall paintings were whitewashed over. Thirty Northamptonshire chantries were suppressed and the endowments for stipendary priests were seized, along with the property of religious guilds. In 1552 vessels, vestments, ornaments and other parish property was seized.¹⁰² The accession of Mary and the restoration of Catholicism did not meet with any notable resistance. The clergy appear to have accepted the restoration easily, with only one in every ten priests being deprived of their livings for not reaccepting the old faith (against a national pattern of one in five).¹⁰³ When Elizabeth acceded to the throne in 1558, there was a move away from the Catholic faith and there was little resistance with only sixteen priests losing their livings, along with the Bishop of Peterborough and

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 22-6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 30.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 30-3.

¹⁰² Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 47.

the Dean of Peterborough. In the following years, there were incidents of both Catholic and Puritan resistance in the county.¹⁰⁴ From 1571 the Elizabethan Church Settlement came under attack from more radical Protestants who wanted to change the structure of the church to be based upon Calvin's Genevan church. This movement was strong in Northamptonshire, with large numbers of 'prophesying' centred upon Northampton for over a century.¹⁰⁵ During the civil war, Northamptonshire supported the parliamentary cause, and when the monarchy was restored, the town was punished with the castle and town walls being demolished, the men of the corporation replaced and all new members having to be sworn members of the Church of England. Furthermore, the town had to pay two hundred pounds to renew its charter. With the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which required all schoolmasters, clergymen, and university fellows to accept the 'Book of Common Prayer', the majority in Northamptonshire took the oath. Only forty-six refused and lost their livings. After this Act, Puritanism lost its support in Northamptonshire and faded after 1662.¹⁰⁶

The background to the parishes and the motives for studying them

Spufford in her analysis of people from Cambridgeshire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the need to analyse more than one location. If merely one location was analysed this would lead to a single picture of a community from which no comparisons could be made. She argued that it was difficult to build a regional picture based on one individual study, as no regional comparisons can be made. A study needs to incorporate

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, pp. 56-57.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, pp.72-74.

more than one area of a region to assess whether a single location is normal or abnormal to the regional pattern. What patterns may be prevalent in one area, may not be the case in a neighbouring area of the same region. If only one area is analysed this may not reflect a true pattern of the region, merely the pattern of that particular location.¹⁰⁷

To gain an overall impression of Northamptonshire, and to analyse whether the local communities had regional differences within the county, three parishes were chosen from differing parts of the county (north, central and south). Each parish was chosen for its differences in economy, society and topography. The geographical dispersal of each parish was important within the county, along with its economic makeup. Another significant factor concerned the numbers of wills available, it was necessary to select a parish with good records. Parish registers and hearth tax records were checked to see if a full record existed for the parish under study. The three parishes chosen for this study were Castor, north of the county, close to Peterborough with an urban economy; Blakesley in the south of the county, highly pastoral; and Kingsthorpe located in central Northamptonshire, next to Northampton town with a mixed agricultural/urban economy. Each parish also had a different soil type and land altitude. Castor has a light gravel soil mixed with limestone, Blakesley's soil consists of clay, sand and some small areas of limestone and Kingsthorpe has a light porous red earth with stiff marley loam in the higher elevations.¹⁰⁸ The shape and location of the county of Northamptonshire within

¹⁰⁷ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. xxii and pp. xxvii-xxix.

¹⁰⁸ G. Baker, History and Antiquities of the County of Northamptonshire (London, 1822), p. 13, and W. Page (ed.), Victoria County History of Northamptonshire (London, 1913), p. 40 and p. 472.

England, the split of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions and the placement of the three parishes under study is illustrated in the map in Figure 0.1.

Kingsthorpe was part of the Spelhoe Hundred along with nine other parishes, the town of Northampton and an extra-parochial district, (a hundred being a group of villages/towns placed together for administration purposes). The Domesday Book recorded the place name as 'Torp', not being recorded as 'Kingstorp' until 1190.¹⁰⁹ Kingsthorpe was centrally placed in the county (being north of the county town of Northampton) with the river Nene running to the west of the parish. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several important and wealthy families resided in Kingsthorpe. Robert Cooke was bailiff during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, and in 1547 went to the Star Chamber concerning the rights of warren (involving Lord Vaux of Moulton Park who put holes in the walls of Moulton Park to allow rabbits to run into the fields of Kingsthorpe and ruin crops, the suit against him was successful).¹¹⁰ His great great granddaughter, Sarah Cooke, married Sir William Pritchard, Lord Mayor of London in 1682, and she was a great benefactress to the parish. Her brother Thomas, established a schoolhouse, and his granddaughter married James Fremeaux, who built the present Kingsthorpe Hall. Richard Lane (also related to the Cookes) lived in Kingsthorpe and was Deputy Recorder of Northampton in 1615. He was made Attorney-General to the Prince of Wales in 1634. In 1641, he defended the impeached Stratford in the House of Lords.¹¹¹ Since the Domesday

¹⁰⁹ A. Mawer and F. Stenton (eds.). The Place Names of Northamptonshire. English Place Name Society, Volume X, (Cambridge,1933), p.133.

¹¹⁰ L.F. Salzman, Victoria County History of Northamptonshire, Volume IV, (Oxford,1937), p. 82 and p. 84.

¹¹¹ Ibid, pp.82-83.

Book Kingsthorpe Manor has been in the hands of the Crown, with occasional short leases to private families. Every time the manor was leased to a new family, the rent extracted by the crown was levied on the village tenants. In 1616, the tenants levied a suit to stop this rent being extracted from them each time the manor was leased to a new family. The manor was granted to trustees for the township, and until the present day has remained so, with vacancies being filled by the feoffees choice. In 1672 the fee-farm was sold by the trustees to Sir Richard Rainsford, and remained in the hands of his descendants.¹¹² As tenants of the crown, the men enjoyed certain privileges, one of which being freedom of toll in England, which was reconfirmed to them in 1385, 1438 and 1650.¹¹³ The hospital of St David and the Holy Trinity used to stand on the east side of the village, but was dissolved in 1535, with some of the land being held by lease from the Crown by the Morgan family.¹¹⁴ Three mills existed in Kingsthorpe, and these were also leased from the crown. These mills had various inhabitants, and ground all the meal and malt for the town. In the sixteenth century the North Mill was owned by the Cooke family, and in 1614, the three mills were leased to Edmund Sawyer and William Whitmore. In the seventeenth century, the mills passed to the Morgan family, which then passed to the Robinson family who continued to hold the mills until the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹⁵

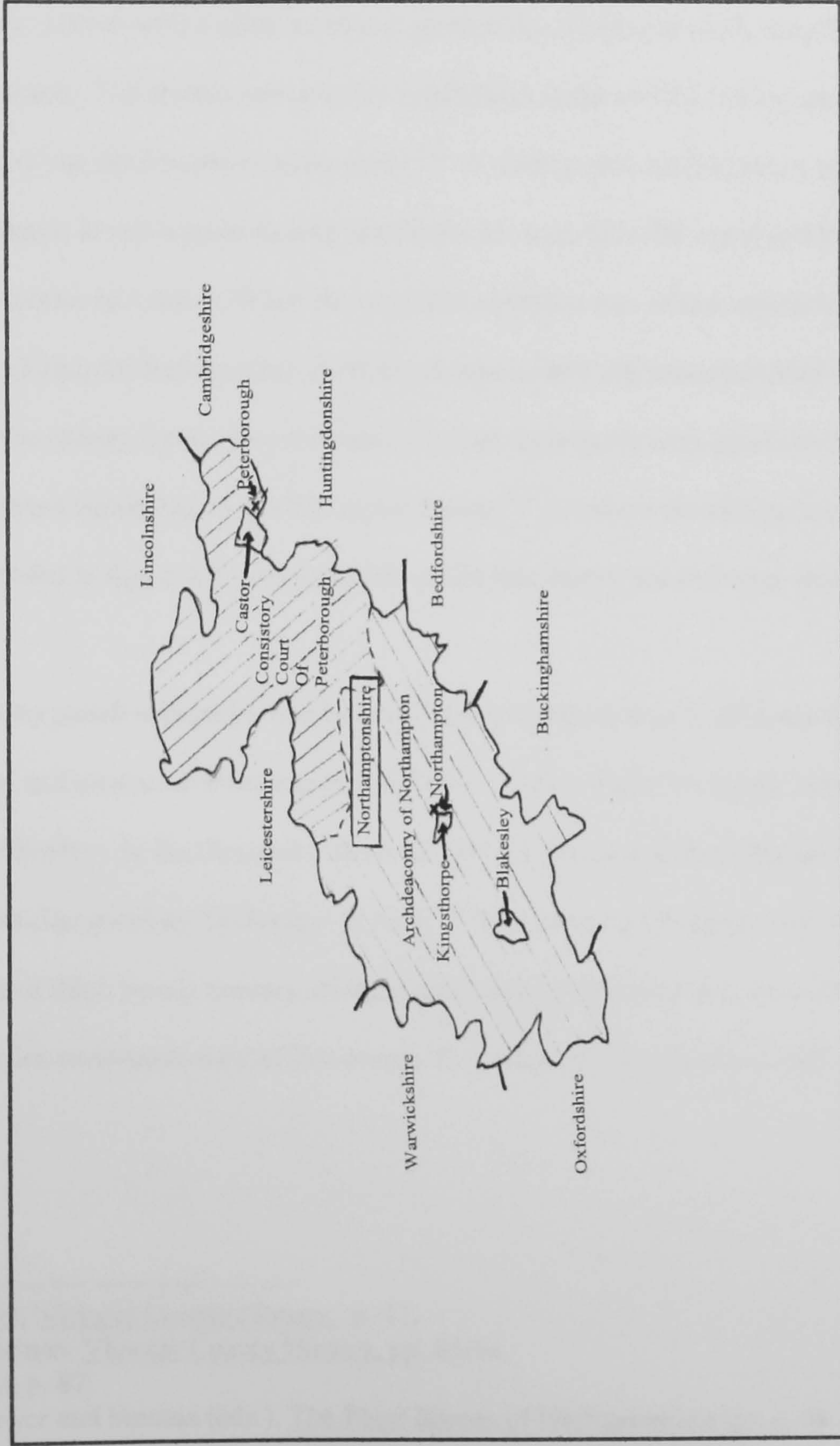
¹¹² Ibid, pp. 83-84.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 84.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 84.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 85.

Figure 0.1: Map of Northamptonshire, illustrating the ecclesiastical districts and the geographical placement of the three parishes under investigation



The parish was enclosed in 1766 with only fifty freeholders. The land was used for agricultural farming, concentrating on turnips and onions.¹¹⁶ Kingsthorpe church is dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and lies next to the village green. It contains a chancel, a tower with a spire, north and south aisles, north and south chapels, a nave and a porch. The church was possibly established in the twelfth century and is the largest of the three parishes under study.¹¹⁷ A chantry was established in 1471 by John Bacon to pay a priest to sing forever for his soul, his wife's soul and the souls of his mother and father. When the wealth of chantries was seized nationally by the crown during the Reformation, the Kingsthorpe inhabitants unsuccessfully tried to argue the chantry lands were copyhold. Parts of these lands were leased to the Mottershed family and to the Pilkington family.¹¹⁸ A map of the village layout is represented in figure 0.2, a reprint of the ordinance survey six inch map from 1886.

Blakesley parish was part of the Greens-Norton Hundred, was in the south of the county, and consisted of the hamlets of Kirby, Green's Park, Woodend, Sewell and part of Foxley. In the Domesday Book of 1086, it was recorded as 'Blachesleuue, and was first noted as 'Blakesley' in 1468.¹¹⁹ The village of Blakesley was set in the middle of thick woody country, thirteen miles from Northampton town centre and four miles west-north-west of Towcester. The village of Woodend was half a mile

¹¹⁶ Page, Victoria County History, p. 41.

¹¹⁷ Salzman, Victoria County History, pp. 85-86.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 87.

¹¹⁹ Mawer and Stenton (eds.). The Place Names of Northamptonshire, p. 38.

southwest of Blakesley village. In 1886, the parish contained around 4,000 acres, nearly two thirds of which were permanent pasture.¹²⁰

In the reign of Henry III, land was given to establish the hospital of St. John of Jerusalem. This hospital was dissolved during the dissolution of the monasteries, and was later given to Princess Elizabeth (who later became Elizabeth I) by Edward VI, but was revoked when in 1553 the manor was given to the Duke of Northumberland, in exchange for a castle and manor in Tunbridge, Kent. In 1558 the hospital was restored by Philip and Mary, but later suppressed again by Elizabeth I and in 1559-60 the manor was granted to Thomas Watts, in fee, and became known as Blakesley Hall.¹²¹

The church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and sits on a road just off the village green. It comprises a nave, chancel, tower, north and south aisles.¹²² A local school was established in 1669/70 by William Foxley. He dedicated a messuage and land to be established as a school under the guardianship of trustees, with a school master to be appointed from Oxford or Cambridge. This school lost its grammar school status in 1850.¹²³ The village layout is unique in the county, with two units joined by a central green, with the north containing a straight street and the church and the south containing an 'L' shaped arrangement of streets. Arguably, this village layout was due to three possible reasons. Firstly, it may have developed in this manner due to

¹²⁰ H. Dryden, An Account of the Parish of Blakesley (Towcester, 1910), p. 1.

¹²¹ Ibid, p.3 and p. 13.

¹²² Ibid, p. 4.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 9.

the north end being the original village and the south a planned extension, or the village was polyfocal with two centres joined by the green, or thirdly the green was an old centre and there was later expansion to the north and south.¹²⁴

Surrounding Blakesley village were the two villages of Seawell and Foxley. Seawell lay north of the parish, and appeared in 1086 in the Domesday Book detailing a population of thirteen living on one manor. In the later medieval period, it had two manors with non-resident families. In 1547 there were four hundred sheep grazing on the land. Foxley is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, and the earliest reference to the village by name is in 1190, but there is no reference to the size of its settlement. A reference from the early eighteenth century indicated that it had three houses, but the earliest map of the village from 1819 indicates five. Both of these villages today are non-existent, with the last remaining cottage in Seawell and farm in Foxley demolished in the early twentieth century.¹²⁵ The land in Blakesley was not enclosed until 1760, whereas Seawell and Foxley appear to have been enclosed in the sixteenth century.¹²⁶ A map of the village layout is represented in figure 0.3, a reprint of the ordinance survey six-inch map from 1901 (Second Edition).

Castor was part of the Nassaburgh Hundred, and included the hamlets of Ailsworth, Milton and the chapelries of Upton and Sutton (these last two became separate

¹²⁴ Baker, History and Antiquities, pp. 13-14.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.

parishes in 1831).¹²⁷ During the Roman period, Castor was part of the important area named 'Durobrivae', an important market town. The area was a heavy grower of cereals and in the second and third centuries, Castor became a centre of pottery production, with 'Castor-ware' exported throughout the northern region of the Roman Empire.¹²⁸ Castor was noted in the Domesday Book as 'Castre', and first appeared as 'Castor' in 1189.¹²⁹ The parish contained 7,110 acres, of which 2,748 were arable, 2,360 pasture, 750 acres woodland and fifty acres water, indicating a slight leaning towards arable agriculture rather than sheep or cattle farming, and the chief crops were wheat, barley, turnips and mangolds.¹³⁰ Castor lies next to Peterborough, (which is now a city in the present day) giving this parish a less agricultural nature. Ailsworth is northwest of Castor and Milton Hall lies to the east. Sutton and Upton were both former hamlets of Castor and contained a manor house each, a chapelry and a few houses. Abbot's Manor in Sutton was established during Saxon times and was confirmed as a monastery by Richard I and Henry III. In 1537, the manor was surrendered to Henry VIII and he granted it in 1541 to the Dean of Peterborough.

¹²⁷ R.M. Serjeantson and W. Ryland D. Adkins, Victoria County History, Volume 2 (London, 1970), p. 472.

¹²⁸ Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire, p. 20.

¹²⁹ Mawer and Stenton (eds.), The Place Names of Northamptonshire, p. 232.

¹³⁰ Serjeantson and Adkins, Victoria History, p. 472.

Figure 0.2: Map of Kingsthorpe Parish (OS 6") 1886 45NW.



Figure 0.3: Map of Blakesley Parish (OS 6") 1901 (Second Edition) 55.4



Figure 0.4: Map of Castor (OS 6") 1901, 8SW



During the reign of Philip and Mary I, the manor was newly leased for ninety-nine years to Robert Wingfield, and then during the Commonwealth it was sold to Thomas Matthew and Thomas Allen, both grocers from London. In 1660, the manor was restored to the Dean of Peterborough, and in 1836, it passed to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.¹³¹ Upton manor was also established during Saxon times and was held by the Watervilles until the thirteenth century. Descendants of the Watervilles, the Camoys sold the land to Queen Eleanor, wife of Edward I. The manor remained in royal hands, being granted to various families in return for loyal service etc, and in 1492, the manor was granted as part of the jointure of Elizabeth, queen of Henry VII. In 1543, the manor was granted to Sir Richard Wingfield, a diplomat who worked for Henry VII and Henry VIII, and in turn, the manor was then sold to Sir William Dove in 1625. Later the Doves sold the manor to the Fitzwilliams in 1750.¹³²

Milton Hall is in the east of the parish and there is evidence that a village existed once, but is no longer. This manor was also established in Saxon times and passed through several families' through inheritance until the Whittlebury's owned it from 1391 to 1502, when they bequeathed it to William Fitzwilliam, and it has remained in Fitzwilliam hands since then.¹³³ The family was active in public affairs, and in the time of Wolsey's disgrace took him in, in return for the earlier years that Wolsey had trained William Fitzwilliam, alderman and sheriff of London. Henry VIII took

¹³¹ Ibid, pp. 473-474.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 483-484.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 476.

William to task for this, but William replied he wanted to show gratitude to the one who had helped him secure his fortune and place in the world. Henry VIII impressed with this show of gratitude to one who had fallen rewarded William with a knighthood and a place as a member of the Privy Council. The grandson of Sir William was lord deputy of Ireland five times, and constable of Fotheringay Castle for Elizabeth I. During the civil war, it is likely they were parliamentarian in their leanings (no evidence yet has been found of this), and with the accession of the Hanoverians they grew into prominence, with one of the females marrying Sir Christopher Wren.¹³⁴

Ailsworth is mentioned in the Domesday Book as an area of land that belonged to Peterborough monastery. Until the dissolution, the land in Ailsworth was incorporated into the manor of Castor. In 1541, the Dean of Peterborough received from the crown the possessions of the monastery of Peterborough, which included this land. In 1650, the Commissioners sold land and cottages to Margaret Venne of Middlesex, a widow. In 1660, this was recovered by the dean and passed from them to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1836. No families of any importance appear to have lived in Ailsworth, and the cottages appeared in a list of property owned by the Fitzwilliams in 1620.¹³⁵

The church in Castor is dedicated to St. Kyneburga (the possible founder of a nunnery in Castor in the seventh century), and contains a central spired tower,

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 477.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 475.

chancel, north and south transepts, a nave and a south porch, and was consecrated in 1124.¹³⁶ The church in Sutton was a chapelry to Castor church until 1851, and is dedicated to St. Giles. It contains a small chancel, chapel, nave and aisle, and has no tower. The registers for this chapel do not start until 1758, with records before this date recorded in Castor.¹³⁷ A chapel also existed in Upton, which was not made parish church of Upton until 1851. This church is dedicated to St. Helen, and is small, with a chancel, nave and north aisle. The registers start late in 1770, with all records before this being recorded in the Castor registers.¹³⁸ A map of the village layout is represented in figure 0.4, a reprint of the ordinance survey six-inch map from 1901.

Thus the different location of these three parishes within the county, and the differing economies and land types, are the reasons for choosing them as representative examples of the county of Northamptonshire. The differences between them will also illustrate whether Northamptonshire had common patterns or whether each parish operated individually within its own right.

The development of the last will and testament

Sheehan argued that the 'last will and testament' was introduced by the early medieval Church as a means for bequeathing alms, for charitable and religious purposes. Germanic family customs of succession by the end of the Norman

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 478.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 482.

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 484-485.

Conquest in England had moulded this document with the bequeathing of alms to evolve into a mechanism that allowed the bequeathing of one-third of all moveable property. In some areas of the country, by the thirteenth century, a testator could leave land to his wife and children. The use of the will was combined with local customs of land inheritance to ensure the effective inheritance of property.¹³⁹ Houlbrooke argued that the Church promoted the need by people to make a will, to assist the soul towards heaven and for the testator to make a good death. Priests attending the dying encouraged bequests beneficial to the church.¹⁴⁰ Later the 1549 Book of Common Prayer tried to encourage early will making and stated that men should settle their estate in good health, so on the deathbed they could concentrate on the business of dying well and focusing upon God.¹⁴¹ The statutes of 1540 and 1543 allowed the free transmission of land (unless it was held through knight service and then only two thirds could be bequeathed, which was later removed in 1660 with the eradication of knight service).¹⁴² The medieval Church allowed girls of twelve and boys of fourteen to make a will. However, the act of 1540 set the age limit of twenty-one for anyone to be able to bequeath land.¹⁴³ Common law dictated that a woman could only make a will if her husband gave consent.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ M. M. Sheehan, The Will in Medieval England, from the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to the End of the Thirteenth Century (Toronto, 1963), pp. 303-6.

¹⁴⁰ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 81.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 83.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 83-4.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 84.

In 1625, Henry Swinburne defined the last will as ‘a lawful disposing of that which any would have done after death’.¹⁴⁵ However he also pointed out that even though contemporaries used the terms ‘last will and testament’ to describe the same thing, the two descriptions actually had different connotations. The ‘last will’ indicated the last intentions and wishes of a testator on their deathbed, regarding their personal estate and property; while the ‘testament’ ensured (through an executor) that these last wishes were fulfilled.¹⁴⁶ In this study, the word ‘will’ is to be used to indicate the entire document for the three chosen parishes within Northamptonshire.¹⁴⁷

The wills for the three parishes under investigation are to be found in the records of the ecclesiastical courts, which had probate jurisdiction. Before 1541, Northamptonshire and Rutland were part of the Diocese of Lincoln. The ecclesiastical records from this period are to be found in the records of the Archdeaconry of Northampton, which begin in 1469, although a few wills were proved in Lincoln. In 1541, the See of Peterborough was created, and the majority of the parishes previously part of the diocese of Lincoln now came under the jurisdiction of the Consistory court at Peterborough. From this date, wills could be proved in either the Archdeaconry court or the Consistory court. Testators who had property in more than one diocese that was over a specific value (usually five pounds) could be proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. In 1653, the

¹⁴⁵ H. Swinburne, A Treatise of Testaments and Last Wills (London, 1635, reprinted Amsterdam, 1979), p. 16.

¹⁴⁶ See also S. Coppel, ‘Wills and the Community: A case study of Tudor Grantham’, in P. Riden, (ed.), Probate Records and the Local Community, (Gloucester, 1985), p. 72.

¹⁴⁷ See also Coppel, ‘Wills and the community’, who also used this method.

jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical local courts was abolished and all probate was transferred to Canterbury, but after 1660, the local courts were restored. The wills from the Prerogative court of Canterbury (PCC) are to be found in the Family Records Centre in London.¹⁴⁸ The wills of the Archdeaconry and the Consistory court are held at the Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO). The wills under this study have been collected from the NRO, with the exception of seven wills that were proved at the PCC. The largest proportion of the wills were dealt with in the Archdeaconry Court, however a growing number of wills from Castor were dealt with by the Consistory Court at Peterborough.

Methodology

Historians have previously used the study of wills as one method to investigate kinship, inheritance, religion and many other social patterns prevalent in the early modern period.¹⁴⁹ They have extended the methods of analysis and begun to incorporate other sources, such as church court records and parish records. Before this study, for Northamptonshire there are only two small separate studies of wills for Helmdon and Helpston.¹⁵⁰ Erickson touched upon Northamptonshire in her

¹⁴⁸ P. I. King, A Guide to the Northamptonshire and Rutland Probate Records (Northampton, 1964), p. 4, states the wills of the two Prerogative courts of Canterbury and York are held at the public record office, however these wills are held now in the family records centre in London. For this study seven wills from 1671 to 1699 were found for the three parishes.

¹⁴⁹ See Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, Spufford, Contrasting Communities, Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance, C. Cross, 'The development of Protestantism in Leeds and Hull 1520-1640, the evidence from wills', Northern History 18 (1982), Mumby, Life and Death in Kings Langley.

¹⁵⁰ Moyse, 'Helpston' and Parry, 'Helmdon wills 1603-1760'.

study of women and property in Early Modern England, and Laslett and Harrison studied Cogenhoe parish registers for the period 1545-1636.¹⁵¹ Concerning religion, Sheils examined the Puritans in Peterborough diocese from 1558 to 1610.¹⁵² However, no single study has examined, through an analysis of the surviving wills, the kinship, community, gender and patterns of piety within Northamptonshire, during the early modern period. By examining the wills of more than one Northamptonshire parish, this research will attempt to illuminate the social and community patterns prevalent in the county. These results can then be compared with the results found in other areas of the country, to see if there are any common behavioural patterns apparent.

The three parishes were chosen due to the availability of their records. There is a lack of churchwarden's records for the majority of Northamptonshire's parishes, and not all parishes have complete parish registers. Primarily, the three parishes were chosen due to their geographical locations within the county. An attempt was also made to represent the farthest northern and southern ends of the county, to see if there were any disparities between parishes within the same county. Originally, the idea was to examine the parishes to see if the patterns they illustrated fitted into any national pattern, and the three parishes were chosen (based on availability of records), north, south and central in the county to gain an overall perspective of

¹⁵¹ A. L. Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England (London, 1995); P. Laslett and J. Harrison, 'Clayworth and Cogenhoe', in H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard (Eds.) Historical Essays 1600-1750, presented to David Ogg (Edinburgh, 1963).

¹⁵² W. J. Sheils, The Puritans in the Diocese of Peterborough 1558-1610 (Northampton, 1979).

Northamptonshire. However, initial investigations outlined differences between the three parishes themselves, and these differences between the parishes were then examined. The three parishes were also chosen secondarily for the availability of a substantial number of available wills, near-complete parish registers and hearth tax records. With the parish registers starting in 1538, the wills were also chosen beginning from this date, with the first will after 1538 appearing in 1543. The wills are to be set within the context of the parish registers to understand the family structure from which the will writer came. By placing the wills alongside the parish registers, it can also be seen, at what age and stage of life the testator wrote his or her will. Furthermore, a picture can also be developed of family structures and relationships. The hearth tax records combined with the parish registers should also indicate the density of kinship, allow estimated population totals, and suggest the possible wealth of the parish.

A further reason for choosing the three parishes was related to Wrightson's analysis of open and closed parishes.¹⁵³ Wrightson's analysis of open and closed parishes bases itself on the different characteristics of the economy and society and geographical layout of a village or town. This analysis suggests that the pastoral nature of Blakesley, combined with its open sprawl of houses and streets made it an open parish. The village appeared to have developed two centres and had numerous houses that splayed off from these two separate centres. Kingsthorpe with its nucleated unit of housing centred on the village green and church, and its highly

¹⁵³ Wrightson, English Society, p. 171.

structured land holding concentrated into the hands of a small number of families indicated its closed status. Castor with its leaning towards agriculture and its nucleated centre indicates closed qualities. However, Castor's spread of land and houses to Upton, Sutton and Alesworth, its leaning towards industrial occupations, and closeness to Peterborough indicates 'open' qualities. Arguably, Castor is a mixture of both categories, although arguably more open than closed due to its large size and mixture of land use. The differences between these three open and closed parishes will further assist the analysis of the kinship, inheritance, gender, community and religious patterns to be found in the wills. Greenall also notes the existence of open and closed parishes in Northamptonshire, as he also found was the case with other areas in the Midlands region. He argued that those open parishes in Northamptonshire, displayed evidence of early enclosure, population migration, depopulation, higher number of poor, religious diversity and a wide range of small industries. Closed parishes displayed a low toleration of religious diversity, smaller neater houses, a better number of schools and charities, and a fewer poor.¹⁵⁴

Although the period 1543-1705 may appear rather arbitrary, there were clear reasons for choosing this period. The parish registers for the three chosen parishes all started in 1538, and it was felt important to start the will analysis as close to this date as possible to coincide with the registers themselves. This was important as there was a lack of churchwardens' records to compare with and the parish registers were the only available parish resource to use. Furthermore, before 1543 the surviving wills were

¹⁵⁴ Greenall, A History of Northamptonshire, p. 50.

fragmentary and difficult to analyse. The analysis stops in 1705 because the focal point of the study was early modern Northamptonshire in the seventeenth century (and later sixteenth century), and it was felt that a few years after 1700 was a suitable end point, to capture those testators who died within a few years of this. Furthermore, arguably, it was at this point that society was beginning to become more industrialised which was beginning to impact upon the small rural communities, and this study wanted to examine the parishes before industrialisation began to make a strong impact.

For the period 1543-1705, 391 wills were collected for the three Northamptonshire parishes under study. Within these 391 wills, there were 119 male testators and 29 female from Castor, 124 males and 33 females from Kingsthorpe and 72 males and 14 females from Blakesley. Moyse, in her analysis of the wills of Helpston, argued that there was a severe drop in the number of wills from the mid seventeenth century, possibly due to the civil war and the Commonwealth.¹⁵⁵ However, it is difficult, looking at the will totals for the three Northamptonshire parishes to state the same, as the number of wills per year is quite low anyway. It is noticeable however that there are no wills at all for some years during this period.

Wills, through the numerous human relationships described and the wealth of items bequeathed, expose a large amount of data waiting to be analysed and understood. They arguably illustrate the relationships that were most important to the testator in

¹⁵⁵ Moyse, 'Helpston', p. 334.

the last few moments before death. The larger the sample of wills and the longer the period examined, the more reliable the results.

However, it has been argued that the study of wills is a problematic area; they are a limited source and can only reveal limited evidence about patterns of testamentary bequests.¹⁵⁶ They cannot show the complete process of bequests to the family, for many may have been made before the will was written and may not have been recorded.¹⁵⁷ Wills only give information on those kin identified by testators in the wills.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, not all wills survived, some may have been made but not proved (due to various reasons) and not survived in the records.¹⁵⁹ In Coster's study of three parishes in Yorkshire, only four per cent of the dying population had wills proved. Other studies have indicated between five and forty-five per cent of people made a will. It has been argued that increasing numbers of people made wills during the seventeenth century.¹⁶⁰ If only a small minority of people made wills, then they are unlikely to reflect the social make-up of the area under study. Bonfield further argues that a large number of males did not make wills, either because they had already settled their estate before death, or because they were happy for local custom to dictate their

¹⁵⁶ Coppel, 'Wills and the community', p. 87.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 74.

¹⁵⁸ R. Smith, 'Some issues concerning families and their property in rural England 1250-1800', in R. Smith (ed.), Land, Kinship and Lifecycle (Cambridge, 1984), p. 56.

¹⁵⁹ W. Coster, 'Community, piety and family in Yorkshire wills between the Reformation and the Restoration', in D. Wood (ed.) Life and Thought in the Northern Church c1100-1700, Essays in Honour of Claire Cross, Studies in Church History, Subsidia 12 (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 515.

¹⁶⁰ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 32.

estate upon death.¹⁶¹ Evans agrees with Bonfield's observations, but also argues that if the heir was obvious the testator did not feel the need to write a will and that the poor would not have bothered to make a will, as they had nothing to leave.¹⁶² Macfarlane, Spufford and Amussen also argue that a large number of people settled their estate upon their children as they matured and became independent, usually at their time of marriage.¹⁶³ As Bonfield argued, those who wished just to follow the laws of inheritance had no need to make a will, only those who wished to depart from the norm.¹⁶⁴ English law had set rules of inheritance that were followed concerning the distribution of property and estate. If land was not mentioned in a will, this did not necessarily mean that there was no land to bequeath; the land may already have been passed on. Coppel argues that prior to 1540; it was illegal to bequeath land held by descent away from the rightful heir. Much land was bequeathed by means of the 'use', where land was held in trust during the testator's lifetime by feoffees or trustees. Through this, land could be later bequeathed as the testator wished by a statement in a will dictating to the feoffees or trustees where/who the land was to go to. The 1536 'Statute of Uses' tried to stop this by

¹⁶¹ L. Bonfield, 'Normative rules and property transmission: reflections on the link between marriage and inheritance in early modern England', in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith & K. Wrightson (eds.), The World we have Gained, Histories of Population and Social Structure. Essays Presented to Peter Laslett on his Seventieth Birthday (Oxford, 1986), p. 161.

¹⁶² N. Evans, The Wills of the Archdeaconry of Sudbury 1630-1635, Suffolk Records Society 39, (Suffolk, 1987), pp. x-xi.

¹⁶³ M. Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance customs and land distribution in Cambridgeshire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries', in Goody, Thirsk and Thompson (eds.), Family and Inheritance, p. 176; S. Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society, Gender and Class in Early Modern England (Columbia, 1988), p. 70; A. Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, A Seventeenth Century Clergyman (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 64-7.

¹⁶⁴ Bonfield, 'Normative rules and property transmission', p. 161.

prohibiting the inheritance of land through a will. However, this was ineffective, and the 1540 'Statute of Wills' legalised the disposing of land through the will. By the sixteenth century, the inheritance of land through the will was common practice.¹⁶⁵ Land may already have been disposed of by trust, marriage or pre-mortem legacies, and may not have been mentioned within the context of the will. However, if inheritance customs did exist regarding land, a testator may have merely replicated this in the bequest of land within the will. Alternatively, the testator may have gone against this and bequeathed land in the will to other members of the family.

All wills must be studied carefully, keeping in mind the influence of family members and scribes upon the form and content of the will. Some historians argue that most wills contain conventional clauses and formulas, but this does not render them useless historical documents. The testator still had an influence over the content and dictated bequests as they saw fit.¹⁶⁶ Another problem with the study of wills is that they are heavily skewed towards propertied males, with little representation from the poor and females. A large percentage of men and nearly all women did not write wills. In these cases, local laws in England mainly gave the land to the eldest son. One third of the estate went to the widow and the other two-thirds to the surviving children.¹⁶⁷ For females, this low percentage of will writing was because married women were not legally allowed to make a will unless they had permission from their husbands. A further problem in the study of wills is that because

¹⁶⁵ Coppel, 'Wills and the local community', pp. 72-3.

¹⁶⁶ Helt, 'Women, memory and will-making' in Gordon & Marshall (eds.), The Place of the Dead, pp. 191-2.

¹⁶⁷ Vann, 'Wills and the family in an English town Banbury 1550-1800', p. 347.

no monetary value was placed on the bequests, it is difficult to compare and quantify in money the amount that a person had received within a bequest.¹⁶⁸ Results can become skewed and although one child may receive the land, another child may have received an equal portion in personal items, but with no monetary value evident, it is difficult to place a value on personal bequests.

It has also been suggested that wills have become extremely overused as a source in recent years, and that they should not be used alone without supporting evidence.¹⁶⁹

To balance out the negative arguments for studying wills in isolation, a study should also incorporate other sources. Consequently, this study will incorporate an examination of the hearth tax records and parish registers of the same period.¹⁷⁰

However, there are also problems with studying hearth tax records and parish registers. The surviving hearth tax records for the three parishes under study are of poor quality and difficult to read. Figures from only three years survive, these being 1662, 1669 and 1674. The three parishes were in different hundreds, and different measures of counting appear to have been employed. It is difficult to compare results successfully within the county and with other results from other regional studies. Wrightson and Levine also noted that the hearth tax records are often incomplete, and many names may be missed due to poverty and non-recording.

¹⁶⁸ Johnston, 'Social change in the eighteenth century', p. 28.

¹⁶⁹ W. Coster, Kinship and Inheritance in Early Modern England: Three Yorkshire Parishes (York, 1993).

¹⁷⁰ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 38, found only two inventories but a large amount of wills (as did this study of the three Northamptonshire parishes). They argued that the wills provided an excellent picture, but still need to be incorporated with other sources to support their arguments concerning the evidence in the wills.

However, for those people recorded on the hearth tax records, they do provide a good indication of the wealth of that person and to some extent the community.¹⁷¹ Comparing hearth tax records can also give a picture of whether a community or individual family was increasing or decreasing in wealth and prosperity, based on the number of hearths increasing or decreasing.

Parish registers are limited in the fact that they do not start until 1538, and in many parishes, registers that do start this early are now missing. For those people who were born before this date, there is no parish record of their existence. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess the life span of those born before the registers started, as there is no record of their baptism date to compare against burial date. The registers are also reliant upon the correct factual accounting by the clergy, and this is often marred by human error. A large number of registers have missing years, where the records have been lost, and in some cases not even recorded originally. In addition, events may not have been recorded immediately when they happened, but may have been recorded some months after and been reliant upon memory, and thus may have been incorrect. However, despite all these issues with the registers, they are the only surviving records that exist which give a glimpse at the people who lived within the parishes, and are still useful, even if all that can be gauged is a name, their gender and the approximate age at death. From the registers, family networks can be sketched based on marriage records to see which families were related. Burial and baptismal records can be used to analyse life span, numbers of children per family,

¹⁷¹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, pp. 34-6.

and in some cases if there were any indicated years of disease with high burial rates. Furthermore, the registers also can give an indication of mobility. Those parishes with low population mobility will have a low number of families with only one or two records, and those parishes with high mobility will have a higher number of families with only one or two records.

If a large proportion of people did not make wills, then the motivation of those people that did make wills must be understood. As stated earlier, some men made wills firstly to avoid intestacy, or secondly because a direct heir was present and the testator wished to deviate from the legal norm. It was not until 1670 and the 'Statute of Distributions', that the division of an intestate's estate was regulated.¹⁷² This statute provided one-third of the estate to the widow with the remainder to go to the children.¹⁷³ It has been argued that those with property made wills, so single men and women would have been under-represented, and that status and wealth were the prime motives for making a will.¹⁷⁴ Spufford disagreed with this arguing that owners of a half yard land or more were less likely to leave a will than those with smaller pieces of land or landless. She argued that men with small children would be likely to make a will because the testator felt the need to protect the interests of his children and to

¹⁷² Bonfield, 'Normative rules and property transmission', pp. 169-170.

¹⁷³ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 178, also argues that although this act merely restated a method that was already occurring in the country, it actually penalised women as it was strictly enforced. Whereas women before this date may have received more than a third, after the act, they never received more than a third.

¹⁷⁴ Vann, 'Wills and the family in an English town Banbury'; Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety; Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society; Johnston, 'Social change in the sixteenth century', p. 28.

appoint guardians (usually the widow) until the child or children were of inheriting age.¹⁷⁵

To further understand the motives of writing a will in the Northamptonshire parishes an analysis of the social status of the testators can be undertaken to see what social groups wrote the wills and this will be analysed in chapter one. Chapter one will also undertake an analysis of the hearth tax records to assess kinship density, and the relative wealth of each parish. In chapter two, the role of kinship will be assessed by examining what was bequeathed and which members of the immediate family received them. Non-kin groups will be examined in chapter three, along with what role the community and neighbourliness played in the lives of people within the parishes. Chapter four will investigate the roles that kin and non-kin performed, in the successful execution of a will, to see if there were any trends in the people chosen to perform the roles needed. Was the successful execution of a will placed in the hands of close members of the nuclear family, or spread out to members of the non-kin group? Females are the focus of chapter five, examining the inheritance structures used by the female testators in comparison to males. The roles that women also played within the wills of males will also be investigated, to see how important they were within the inheritance structures of early modern Northamptonshire. Finally, chapter six will analyse the evidence of religious belief, through an analysis of

¹⁷⁵ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 115 and p. 159 and Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance customs', p. 176. Oestmann also agrees with Spufford's arguments on this point in C. Oestmann, Lordship and Community, the Lestrange Family and the Village of Hunstanton, Norfolk in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century (Suffolk, 1994), p. 191.

the religious preambles concerning the disposition of the soul and the religious bequests that are to be found within the wills. The results will be compared between the Northamptonshire parishes to see if there are any similarities and measured against other regional studies, to assess if there are any regional patterns.

Despite the problems with studying wills, it can be argued that 'they remain a major source of information about the changing social attitudes of the lower orders of society.'¹⁷⁶ This is underlined by the fact that apart from wills, very few documents still exist that illustrate the lives of the common people so effectively, and thus wills are an excellent source to be used. Surviving wills provide an excellent window into the world of the testator, for 'as long as their limitations are kept in mind, the evidence of wills provides an invaluable glimpse at the ways in which property was passed from one generation to another.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Johnston, 'Social change in the eighteenth century', p. 29.

¹⁷⁷ Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society, p. 81.

Chapter 1 – The Demographic Background

This chapter will examine through analysing the parish registers the life cycles of families from the three Northamptonshire parishes. Baptismal and burial figures will be measured from the registers, to estimate population size and growth. Family networks will be reconstituted to assess the density of families within the parishes, and to see how prolific some became. Marriage records will be assessed to examine kinship networks and density. The hearth tax figures will be looked at to analyse the wealth of the three parishes and to estimate the population totals and growth rate.

The Hearth Tax Returns of 1662, 1669 and 1674

The surviving hearth tax records for the three parishes under study are of poor quality and difficult to read. Figures from only three years survive, these being 1662, 1669 and 1674. The three parishes were in different hundreds, and different measures of counting appear to have been employed. It is difficult to compare results successfully within the county and with other results from other regional studies. As Wrightson and Levine noted, the figures of the hearth tax do not often appear complete, and many names may be missed due to poverty and non-recording. However, for those people recorded on the hearth tax records, they provide a good indication of the wealth of that person and to some extent the community.¹ Table 1.1 illustrates the breakdown of the hearth tax figures. This shows that the number of

¹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, pp. 34-6.

houses and the number of hearths increased throughout the three tax years. In general, the highest number of houses had only one hearth, with the second highest having two hearths.

In Blakesley in 1662, 62.8 per cent (twenty-seven) had one hearth, in 1669, this stayed at 63 per cent (twenty-nine) and in 1674 this dropped to 40.4 per cent (nineteen). The number of houses with two hearths increased from 20.9 per cent (nine) in 1662, to 28.3 percent in 1669 (thirteen) to 40.4 per cent (nineteen) in 1674. This suggests that the lower sections of the parish were slowly increasing in wealth, with the addition of another hearth (and another room to the house). However, those with three hearths or more in 1662 may have enjoyed a worsening of fortunes in 1669, as the number of houses above three hearths decreased. In 1662, there were seven houses (16.3 per cent) with three hearths or more, which dropped to four houses (8.7 per cent) in 1669 although in 1674 this did increase again to nine houses (19.2 per cent). In 1669, the houses that had three and four hearths in 1662 have disappeared (although there is one more house in 1669 with five hearths). In 1674, these houses with three and four hearths have re-appeared but also increased by two in number. One house also appears in the records with seven hearths.

Castor also had a high proportion of houses with one or two hearths. Thirty-six houses had one hearth in 1662 (54.6 per cent) and fifteen had two hearths (22.7 per cent). By 1669, this had changed to 71.4 per cent (sixty) with one hearth and only 14.3 per cent (twelve) with two hearths. By 1674, this had changed to 67.1 per cent (fifty-nine) with one hearth and 12.5 per cent (eleven) with two hearths. Castor gives

the impression of having different fortunes to Blakesley with the number of houses with one hearth increasing and those with two decreasing. This fact of the lower sections of society increasing in number indicates a possible increase in poverty.

Table 1.1 – Breakdown of Hearth Tax records per year and number of hearths per record for Blakesley, Kingsthorpe and Castor

	No. of Hearths	No. of Houses	Total Hearths	No. of Houses	Total Hearths	No. of Houses	Total Hearths
Year of Tax		1662	1662	1669	1669	1674	1674
Blakesley	1	27	27	29	29	19	19
	2	9	18	13	26	19	38
	3	3	9	0	0	5	15
	4	1	4	0	0	1	4
	5	1	5	2	10	0	0
	6+	2	12	2	12	3	19
	Total		43	75	46	77	47
Kingsthorpe	1	9	9	31	31	35	35
	2	11	22	14	28	16	32
	3	5	15	4	12	4	12
	4	9	36	5	20	4	16
	5	1	5	1	5	1	5
	6+	7	62	7	74	7	71
	Total		42	149	62	170	67
Castor	1	36	36	60	60	59	59
	2	15	30	12	24	11	22
	3	6	18	3	9	2	6
	4	7	28	6	24	13	52
	5	0	0	1	5	1	5
	6+	2	15	2	17	2	17
	Total		66	127	84	139	88

Source: NRO, Ref M 25/1 and M25/2 - Hearth Tax Records 1662, 1669, 1674

This is supported in the fact that those houses with three hearths and above only accounted for just fewer than 22.7 per cent (fifteen) in 1662, decreasing to just over 14.3 per cent (twelve) in 1669 rising slightly to 20.5 per cent (eighteen) in 1674. It

may also be that those with three or more hearths in 1662 may also have decreased to one hearth by 1669. However, it must be noted that in 1669 there was the introduction of a substantial house with ten hearths, which was still there in 1674. Furthermore, the number of houses with four hearths increased substantially from six houses in 1669 to thirteen houses in 1674.

Kingsthorpe appears to follow a similar pattern to Castor with its increase in the number of houses with one hearth throughout 1662-1674. Kingsthorpe is the same as Blakesley and Castor in the fact that the highest percentage of houses had one or two hearths in the parish. In 1662, 21.5 per cent (nine) had one hearth and 26.2 per cent (eleven) had two hearths. In 1669, this had changed to 50 per cent (thirty-one) with one hearth and 22.6 per cent (fourteen) with two hearths. By 1674, this had changed to 52.2 per cent (thirty-five) with one hearth and 23.9 per cent (sixteen) with two hearths. The percentage of houses with three or more hearths is slightly different to Castor and Blakesley, with 52.4 per cent (twenty-two) in 1662, dropping to 27.4 per cent (seventeen) in 1669 and 23.9 per cent (sixteen) in 1674. Although the percentage of houses with three or more hearths appears to drop substantially, this is arguably due to the substantial increase in the number of houses between 1662 and 1669. Kingsthorpe has a wider range of houses with more than three hearths, indicating a larger number of wealthier houses. In 1662, there were twenty-two houses with three or more hearths, only dropping to seventeen in 1669 and sixteen in 1674. In 1662, there are also two houses with nine hearths, one with eleven hearths and one with fifteen. By 1669 this had changed to one with nine hearths, one with ten hearths, one with eleven hearths, one with fifteen hearths and

one with seventeen hearths – an indication of some very wealthy houses. By 1674, this picture had hardly changed, except for the house with ten hearths disappearing and the appearance of one house with seven hearths. Out of all three parishes, Kingsthorpe appears to have a higher proportion of wealthier residents, with Castor having houses only up to ten hearths and Blakesley only having one house with seven hearths. This difference in the hearth tax results may be due to the different economies existing in the three parishes. Using Wrightson's analysis, Blakesley with its open community, would have encouraged a moving population and little stability. Families were less likely to place roots and stay in the community, thus explaining the low number of houses with higher numbers of hearths. Another characteristic of the open community is that of the population quite often being poor, this is evidenced in Blakesley with the high number of houses with one hearth. Castor also leans towards the open community, with its high number of houses with one hearth. In comparison to Blakesley, Castor has a greater proportion of its houses with one hearth, indicating it was of a poorer status and these houses were increasing in number. Blakesley was actually decreasing in the number of houses with one hearth. Kingsthorpe in comparison illustrates a closed community. This is supported by the wealthier proportion of the residents having houses with a high number of hearths. This is evidence of a stable community, most likely nucleated concentrating wealth and land into the hands of this small number of families. Although there are still a high number of houses with only one hearth, this is offset by the evidence of this parish having the highest number of houses with the most hearths. ²

² Wrightson, English Society, p. 171.

In Castor and Kingsthorpe the number of houses counted in 1662 and 1669 increased by twenty in Kingsthorpe and eighteen in Castor, whereas it only increased by three in Blakesley. In line with this, it is also noticeable that the number of houses with one hearth increased in Kingsthorpe from nine to thirty-one between 1662 and 1669 and from thirty-six to sixty in Castor. This was this due either to the introduction of a new wave of poor immigrants into these parishes or a change in the method of counting. What is still undoubted is that the number of houses with one or two hearths was more in all three parishes than those houses with three or more hearths. The general population of all three parishes was quite poor. Moyse also discovered this was the case with the 1662/3 hearth tax results for Helpston in Northamptonshire. She found that out of seventy-one households, forty-nine of them had one hearth.³

These rough hearth tax figures can be used to assess approximate population size for any given parish. This can be done through using the mean household size multiplication factor. Although the multiplying factor is a figure that is under much debate as to what it should be, historians use the hearth tax as one of a number of methods to assess population size and growth. Arkell and Whitemann warn of the limitations of using this method, arguing that these figures are crude, and limited in

³ Moyse, 'Helpston', p. 340.

their reliability.⁴ It should also be noted that the actual practice of collecting hearth tax figures varied regionally and possibly even from village to village.⁵

Laslett suggested an average of 4.75 people per family grouping. However, he paid little attention to the problems of using the mean household size as a means to gauge population size. Laslett's figure has been accepted by a large number of historians as valid for all households before the nineteenth century. Arkell disagrees with Laslett's figure and suggests that for all areas outside London, a general multiplying factor of 4.3 should be used.⁶ This was because households were generally of a smaller size than in the capital. However, Laslett's study also used a mean household size figure of 5.3 for Cogenhoe (the only Northamptonshire village in his study). This figure is significantly higher than his average of 4.75.⁷ From these two separate analyses, three different multiplying factors can be suggested. To develop a multiplying factor for the three parishes of this study would be a study in its own right, and the mean household size is merely being used in this study as a background to gauge population totals. Therefore, to gain an impression of the estimated populations of these three parishes using the hearth tax figures collected in 1662, 1669 and 1674 the three multiplying factors will be used to show the population range of the three parishes. As mentioned previously the dates of the hearth tax collection are limited within the space of twelve years and do little to tell

⁴ T. Arkell & A. Whitemann, 'Mean household size in mid-Tudor England: Clackclose hundred, Norfolk', Local Population Studies, 60 (Spring 1998).

⁵ T. Arkell, 'Multiplying factors for estimating population totals from the hearth tax', Local Population Studies, 28 (1982), p. 51.

⁶ Arkell and Whitemann, 'Mean household size'.

⁷ Laslett, Household and Family in Past Times, Table 4.1, p. 130.

us of population figures before or after this twelve-year collection period. These results will at least give an approximate population total for the parishes, and indicate whether the population was increasing or decreasing. Combined with these figures, we can also use the parish registers, which detail baptisms, marriages and burials to assess the impact on these estimated population totals from 1662 to 1674.

Table 1.2 indicates the estimated population from the three hearth tax surveys.

Castor has the highest population out of the three parishes. Increasing by approximately 100 people between 1662 and 1674 based on the three multiplication factors. When using the multiplication factors the population increased on average 12.9 per cent between 1662 and 1674. Kingsthorpe also indicates significant population increases, and although not having more population than Castor, it had a 21.1 per cent increase in the twelve years – nearly double that of Castor, indicating a strong population growth in the parish. Blakesley, despite having the smallest estimated population out of the three parishes also demonstrates a healthy growth in the twelve-year period of 21.1 per cent. Even though Castor initially appears to have the strongest population, its growth is not as strong as Kingsthorpe and Blakesley. If Castor experienced another 12.9 per cent increase after 1674 based on its estimated population from the 5.3-multiplying factor, it would only total approximately (figure rounded up) another 117 people, giving 1,023.

Table 1.2 – Estimated Population Totals for Castor, Blakesley and Castor based on Hearth Tax records multiplied by the suggested three variations of the Mean Household Size figure

	Total Hearths	Total Hearths x 4.30	Total Hearths x4.75	Total Hearths x5.30
Blakesley 1662	75	322.5	356.3	397.5
Blakesley 1669	77	331.1	365.8	408.1
Blakesley 1674	95	408.5	451.3	503.5
Castor 1662	149	640.7	707.8	789.7
Castor 1669	170	731.0	807.5	901.0
Castor 1674	171	735.3	812.3	906.3
Kingsthorpe 1662	127	546.1	603.3	673.1
Kingsthorpe 1669	139	597.7	660.3	736.7
Kingsthorpe 1674	161	692.3	764.8	853.3

Source – NRO, Ref M 25/1 and M25/2 - Hearth Tax Records 1662, 1669, 1674

Kingsthorpe based on its percentage growth rate of 21.1 per cent would add another 180.2 to its total figure after 1674 from the 5.3 multiplication estimate, totalling 1,034 people (again rounded up). This effectively illustrates that even though Castor shows the highest population in the table; Kingsthorpe would effectively increase at a faster rate than Castor and have the highest population. Table 1.2 using the various mean household multiplication rates indicates a healthy population in all three parishes, for the twelve-year period, which is increasing substantially as the year's progress.

These population estimates, when compared to Mary Moyse's estimates for Helpston (also in Northamptonshire) indicate that these were larger settlements in comparison. Helpston based on the 1662/3-hearth tax had a small population of 200

to 250.⁸ Blakesley was the closest settlement in population size to this figure. Although Helpston was in the same hundred as Castor, its settlement size was considerably smaller. Comparing these estimated population totals with Laslett's discussion of settlement sizes, places the three areas in Northamptonshire into specific settlement groups. Blakesley with its low population of 397 to 503 people between 1662 and 1674 indicates that it was the size of a small village. Kingsthorpe ranging from 673 in 1662 to 853 in 1674 indicates that it was a medium sized village developing into a larger village. Castor with the largest population of 789 in 1662 to 906 in 1674 indicates that it was moving from a substantial sized village into a small township.⁹ How does this initial impression fit into the yearly totals found in the parish registers?

Parish Registers – Baptism, Burial and Marriage Rates

Using the parish registers, the records can be used to indicate population growth within the three parishes. Population totals for each parish can also be estimated when combined with the hearth tax records. In Blakesley, the total number of baptisms for the period 1538-1709 was 1,288. The period 1640-79 appears to be lacking in information for burials, indicated by gaps in the registers. The earlier period in the 1640s may have recorded little information due to the disrupting effects of the civil war. Arguably, the disruption of the ruling Cromwellian period in the 1650s may also have had an effect upon the recording of information in the

⁸ Moyse, 'Helpston', p. 333.

⁹ Laslett, The World we have Lost, pp. 54-5.

parish registers. The abolition of the jurisdiction of the local courts from 1653 and the transfer of all records to the Prerogative courts could also have had an effect. However, the fact that these missing records extend well after the end of the civil war and the abolition of the local courts may be just due to the simple fact of loss of the records rather than the non-recording of parish events. Taking into account these forty years, there appears to be an approximate average of 9.8 baptisms a year (1,288 baptisms divided by 132 years). During the same period, there were fewer burials, totalling 750. There appears to be a lack of information for burials for the period 1640-89. Taking this fifty-year period into account there appears to be an average burial rate of 6.2. Thus, the population grew by approximately 3.6 people a year. Substantially less than the indicated growth rate in table 1.2 based on the hearth tax records. Whereas the total population increase indicated is only 538 people, this is a lot less than the estimated population growth in table 1.2. Concerning marriages, this total is very low. There were only 189 marriages accounted for, during 1540-1708, in the parish of Blakesley; and again considering the apparent fifty-year gap, this indicates an average of only 1.6 a year - although some people will have undoubtedly married outside the parish. Considering the size of the parish and the baptismal rate this is a very small figure indeed.

In Castor, the total number of baptisms for the period was 2,806 and the total number of burials was 2,375, substantially more than Blakesley. However, the general increase in the period is only 431 people, less than Blakesley, indicating a higher death rate. The average baptism rate for the year appears to be 16.3 a year and the average burial rate per year appears to be 13.8. This gives an average

increase per year of only 2.5 people, a lot less than Blakesley and again indicating a higher rate than Blakesley. Marriages only account for 674, an average marriage rate of 3.92 a year, more than twice the rate of Blakesley.

Kingsthorpe accounts for 2,387 baptisms and 1,886 burials for the period. Although having fewer total baptism and burial records than Castor, there is a greater increase in the total population of 501. The average baptisms accounts for fourteen a year (the total divided by 171 years) and the average burial rate accounts for eleven a year, indicating an average population increase of 2.9 a year, less than Blakesley but more than Castor. Marriage totals for the period are only 479, giving an average marriage rate of only 2.9 a year.

The parish registers indicate that due to the low number of burials in Blakesley, they had a greater increase per year in the number of people. This was despite Castor having the highest number of baptisms for the period total and Kingsthorpe having a proportionately low burial rate. This is probably due to Castor's high burial total and Kingsthorpe's low baptismal rate. Despite the apparent smallness of Blakesley's population size, Blakesley had the highest population increase of 538 during the period, with Kingsthorpe second with 501 and Castor third with 431.

Looking at the differences between the baptismal and the burial rates for the three parishes over the years 1540-1709, there are a number of years where the burial figures outstrip the baptism figures. Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 illustrate the nine-year moving average of the baptism, burial and marriage rates of the three parishes.

Figure 1.1 illustrates that in Castor, the 1650s and 1680s witnessed the most significant peaks of burials higher than baptisms. The largest peak is in the 1680s, however if table 1.3 is referred to, it can be seen that population decline began in the 1670s and carried on declining from this point. In the parish registers there appears to be no data in the burial section for the years 1540-6, 1554, and 1614-5. For baptisms there appears to be no data for the periods 1614-8, and 1708-9. Despite the two large burial peaks and the smaller peak in the 1550s, baptisms can be seen to be a steady line on the graph consistently higher than burials. This is all except in the case of the 1660s where both burial and baptism figures fell heavily. Marriage rates also appear steady in the parish, maintaining a healthy level, apart from a small dip in the early 1600s and again in the 1660s. This dip in marriage, burial and baptismal rates in the 1660s indicate a disturbance in the collation of records, or perhaps the loss of some of the records. Without this dip, it can be seen from figure 1.1 that all the trend lines would have continued to rise to join the peaks in the 1680s. Arguably, the trends in figure 1.1 indicate a slow and steady rise in population until the 1650s, and then a decreasing population after this point.

Figure 1.2 shows that in Kingsthorpe the 1540s, 1590s and 1680s witnessed higher burials than baptisms. Of these, the most significant peak was in the 1550s. The period most noticeable was 1540-9, which witnessed a deficit of sixty people. It must be noted that the years 1654-9 appears to have no data at all in the parish registers and 1554-6, 1558 and 1708-9 no burial and/or baptism data. The only year that stands out with a higher burial total than normal is 1549, with fifty-three burials, as compared to twenty-one in 1548 and ten in 1550. As was the case with Castor, the

trend indicates that baptisms generally outstripped burials. In addition, as was the case with Castor, the 1660s witnessed a severe drop in figures, indicating missing data.

However, in Kingsthorpe, the dip in the trend line is more severe than in Castor, and this time, the general trend appears to be a reducing population, with baptism and burial figures lower in the 1670s in comparison to the 1650s. Burials dip in the early 1560s and the early 1600s in comparison to rising baptism figures. The trend in figure 1.2 for marriages indicates that these are more erratic than in Castor, with more peaks and troughs than in figure 1.1. There is also a major increase in marriages in the 1640s. Arguably, the trend in Kingsthorpe is that of a steadily rising population, faster than Castor, with only three peaks of burials to undermine the steady rise.

Figure 1.3 illustrates the fact that Blakesley generally witnessed higher baptisms than burials. There are no significant peaks, in contrast to figures 1.1 and 1.2, where the burial figures significantly outstripped the baptism figures. Thus, it could be argued that this parish experienced the most significant population increases. A large amount of data is missing from the 1640s to 1680s and if one looks at the figures either side of this missing data, the baptisms and burials were still increasing in the parish, with the baptisms still higher. Marriages, as was the case in the other two parishes, appear steady, and if the missing data is discounted, it can be said that marriages were steady throughout the whole period.

Figure 1.1: Castor - Weighted Nine Year Moving Average 1538-1708

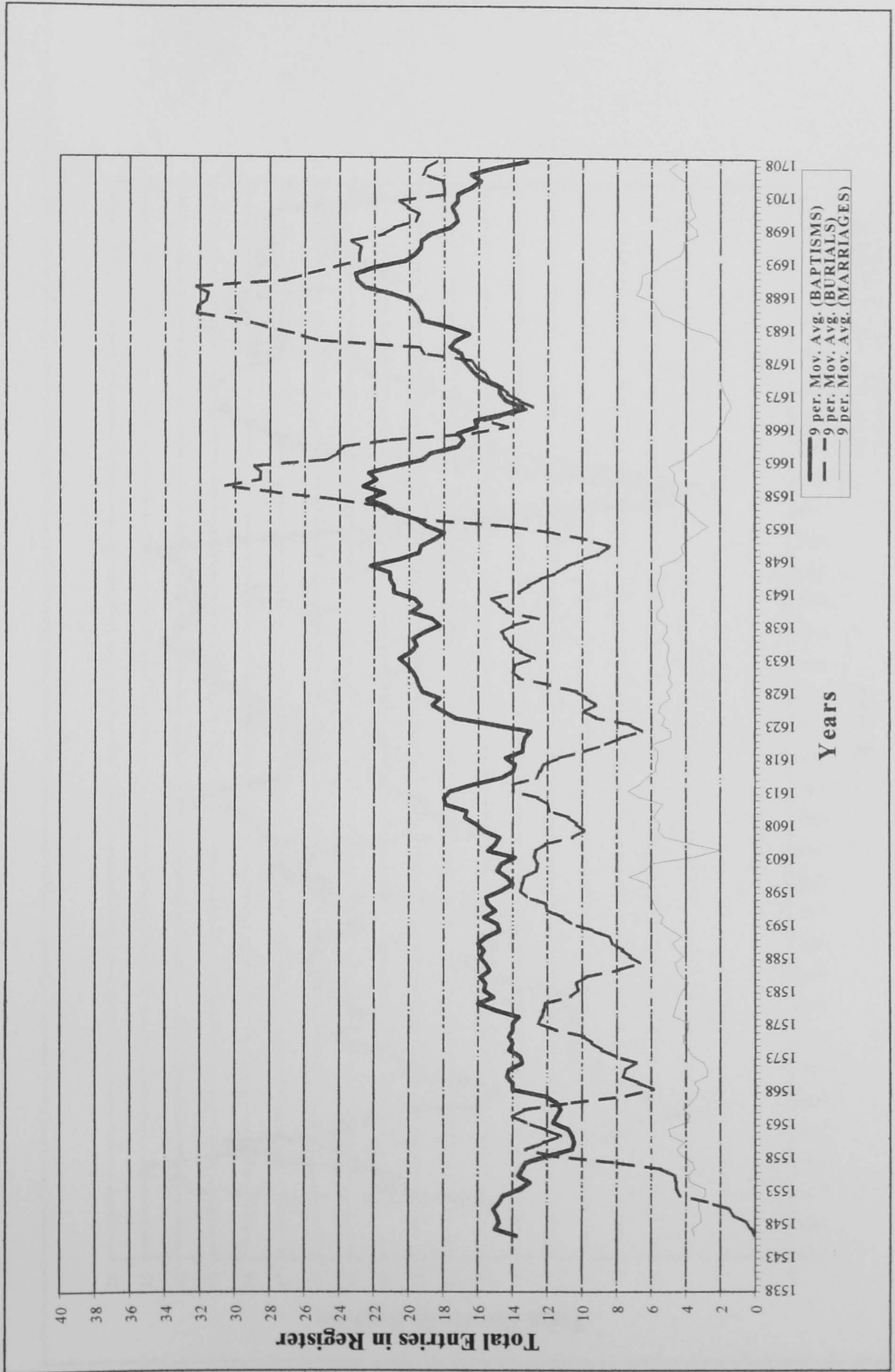


Figure 1.2: Kingsthorpe - Weighted Nine Year Moving Average 1538-1710

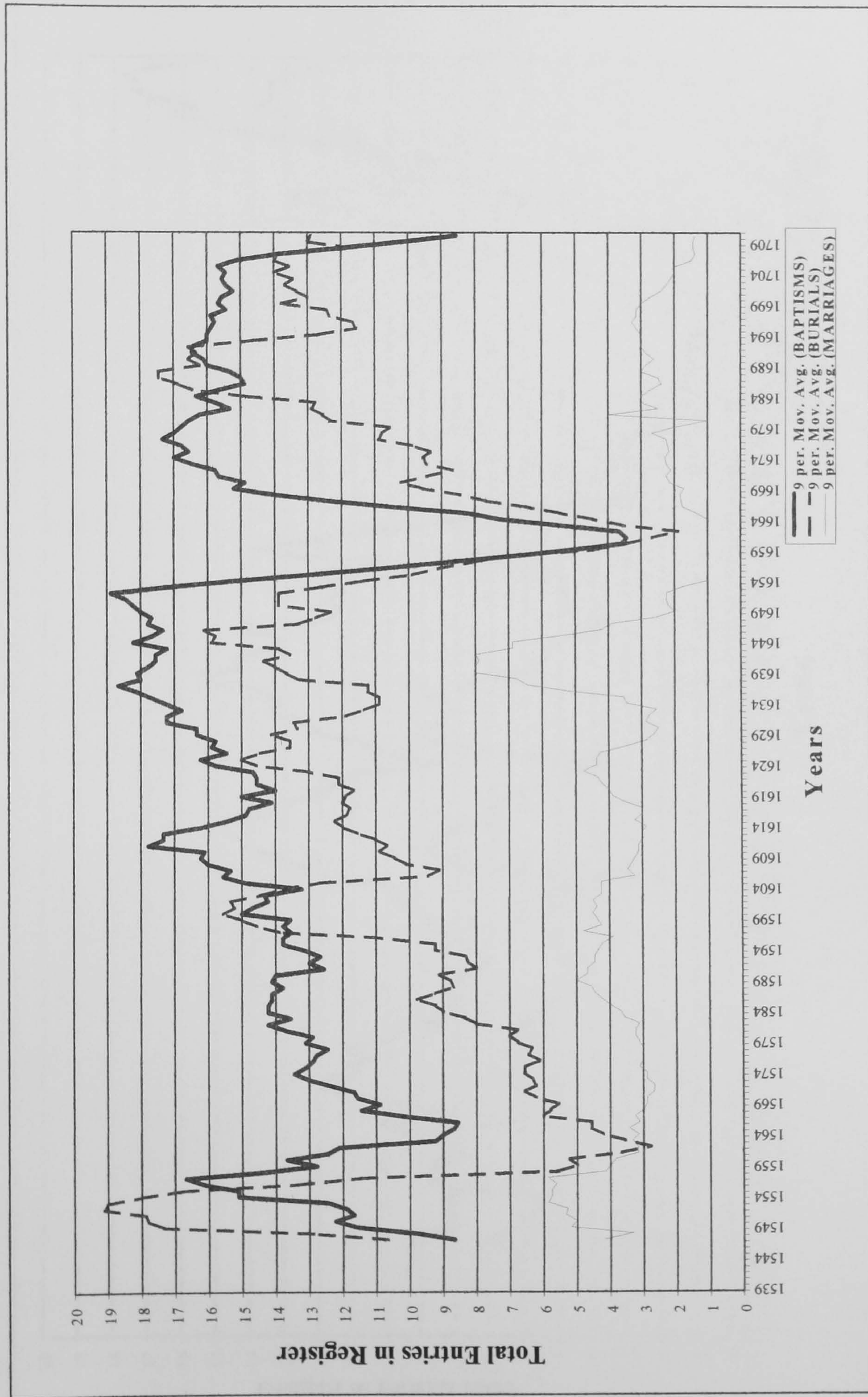
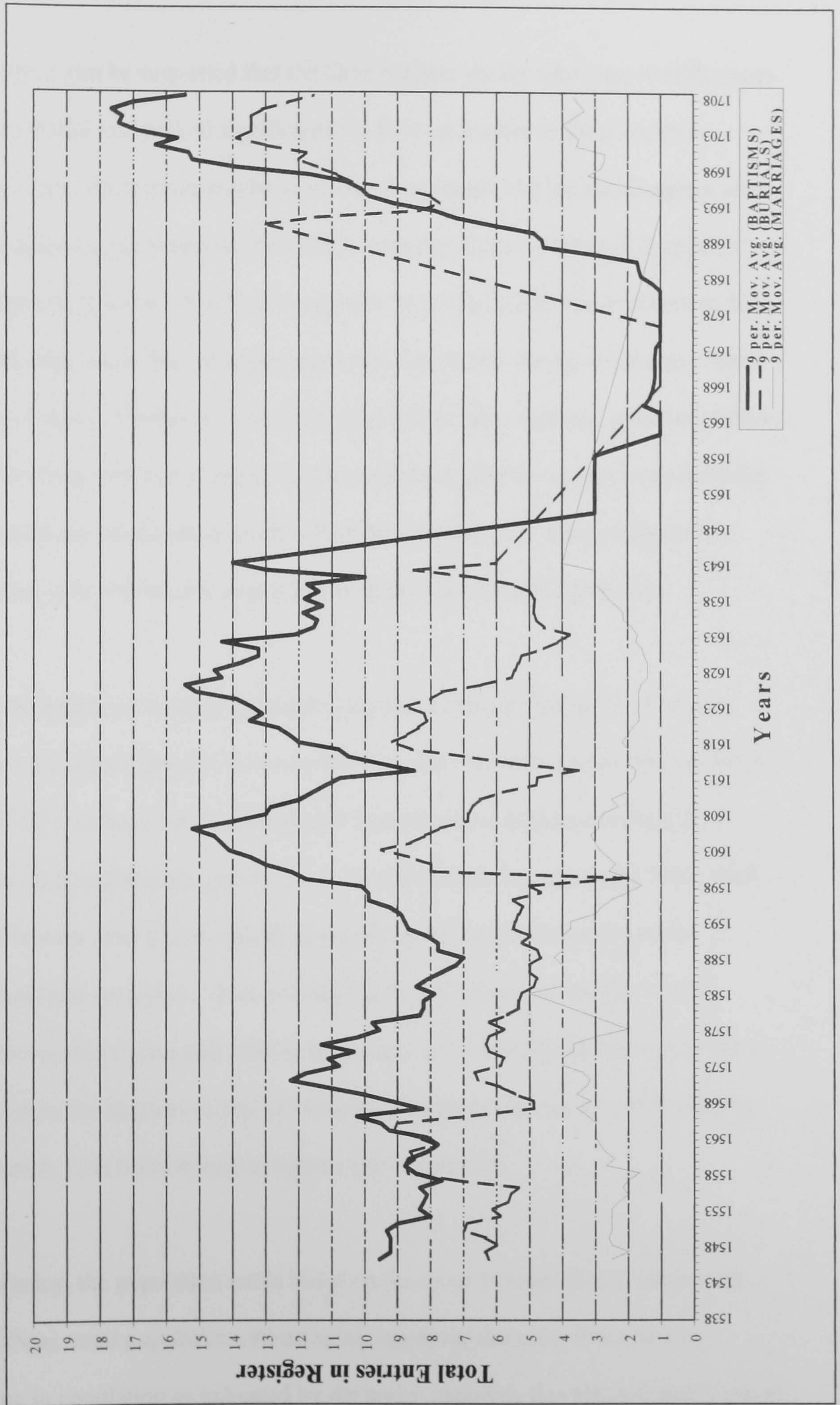


Figure 1.3: Blakesley - Weighted Nine Year Moving Average 1538-1708



Generally, it can be suggested that the three parishes do not show any specific years when the burial rate peaked significantly to have an impact on the population growth. Even where peaks can be seen to have occurred, the baptismal figures after this are high enough to negate any deficit. Although Castor witnessed four years with higher burial rates than the average total in a year, Kingsthorpe witnessed five and Blakesley a possible three, they were not sufficiently severe to have an overall negative impact. Furthermore, the three parishes show completely different years to the others in these years of higher burials, indicating that the county as a whole did not witness any county incidents to affect the mortality rate. The parishes were individual units within their own rights with unique birth and death rates.

Using the hearth tax records and combining them with the multiplier factors to estimate the population size, it is possible to merge this with the growth and deficit rates of the parishes over the period, and a graph can be drawn estimating the population size during the period. To do this, the hearth tax figures for 1662, 1669 and 1674 were placed in the graph as population figures based on the mean household size multiplier. Then working back to 1538 and forward to 1708 in Kingsthorpe and Castor and 1700 in Blakesley, using the natural increase or deficit indicated by the baptism and burial records, the population size was estimated for each parish. This is illustrated in figures 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6.

In Blakesley, the population totals based on the mean household size were small.

Using these small population estimates, and applying the natural increase or decrease in population as indicated by the parish registers, this resulted in a negative

population estimate for the period 1580-1589 when the multiplication factor was 4.3 and a deficit in the 1570s for the multiplication factors of 4.7 and 5.3. Figure 1.4 shows a negative population start in 1538, but despite this poor start, a strong and steady rise in population is noted with the steepness of the climbing line in the graph indicating a rapid and healthy population rise. Whereas in 1538 the population total can be estimated to be in the range of -49 to -125 (figures for the 4.3 and 5.3 multiplication factors) by 1700 it was estimated to be in the range of 480 to 575.

As can be seen in figure 1.5, Kingsthorpe in 1538 had a relatively healthy range between 179 and 312, but suffered a slight drop after this initial start. However, the graph can be seen to show a steady and healthy rise in population, which although not as steep as the rise in Blakesley, is still healthy enough to show a growing population. Figure 1.5 also shows that Kingsthorpe experienced a slight levelling off of the population, staying stagnant in the range of 572 to 706 in the 1650s and 1660s. Despite this stagnant period, the graph in figure 1.5 once again shows a rising population, resulting in an estimated population in the range of 685 to 846 by 1708.

Figure 1.6 illustrates the estimated population totals for Castor. The 1530s and 1540s witness an estimated population that remained stable in the range of 119 to 278. However, after this period, the population estimates show a steady rise, peaking in the 1650s with an estimated population in the range of 750 to 909. The estimated population totals begin to fall, only regaining slightly in the 1670s to be near the same level as the peak in the 1650s. This level is then seen again to drop, and the

estimated population total, then continues to fall into the 1700s. By 1708, the estimated population total is in the range of 584 to 755.

By 1708 in Castor, the estimated population was similar in size to the 1630s. In Kingsthorpe, the estimated population totals had the same estimate in population in 1708 as in the 1680s. Blakesley was the only parish (despite its estimated negative population total in 1538) to show a strong population rise. Despite the initial figures of 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 illustrating no specific mortality impact to the population totals, it can be seen in figures 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6, that in the case of Kingsthorpe, and especially in Castor, there were periods of population decrease.

Numbers of families in the parishes

Using the parish registers, it can also be seen how many families resided in the parish by counting the number of surnames that appear per parish register. This analysis assumes that all those collated under one surname were part of the same family, although not necessarily living in the same household. What should be noted is that, as Souden stated, those who resided in the parish unmarried, mobile servants who left home and did not marry, immigrating widows and widowers and transients are highly unlikely to appear in the registers, but are yet still part of the local community.¹⁰

¹⁰ D. Souden, 'Movers and stayers in family reconstitution populations', Local Population Studies, 33 (1984), p. 15.

Figure 1.4: Estimated Population totals in Blakesley 1538-1700 (per 10 year grouping)

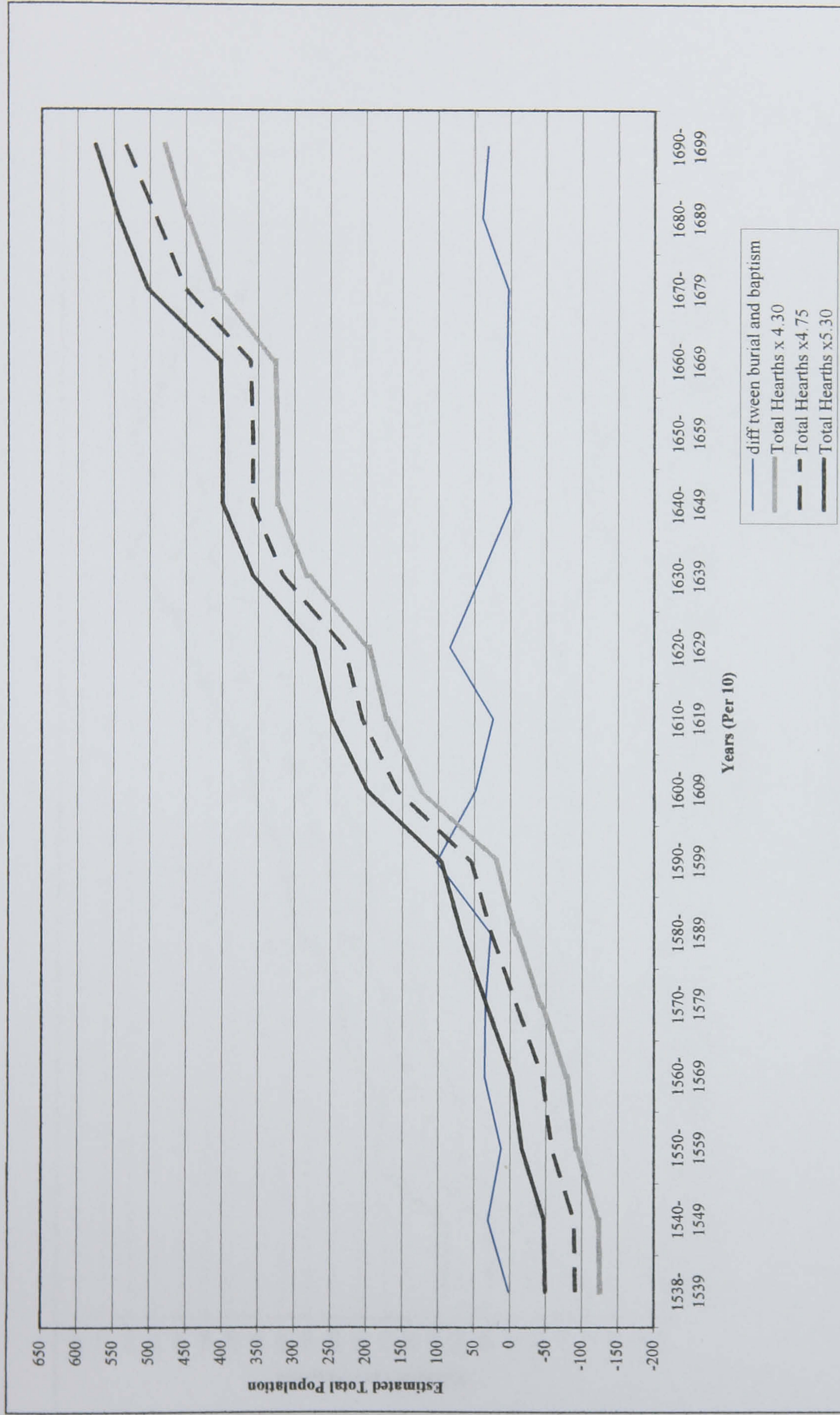


Figure 1.5 – Estimated Population totals in Castor 1538-1708 (per 10 year grouping)

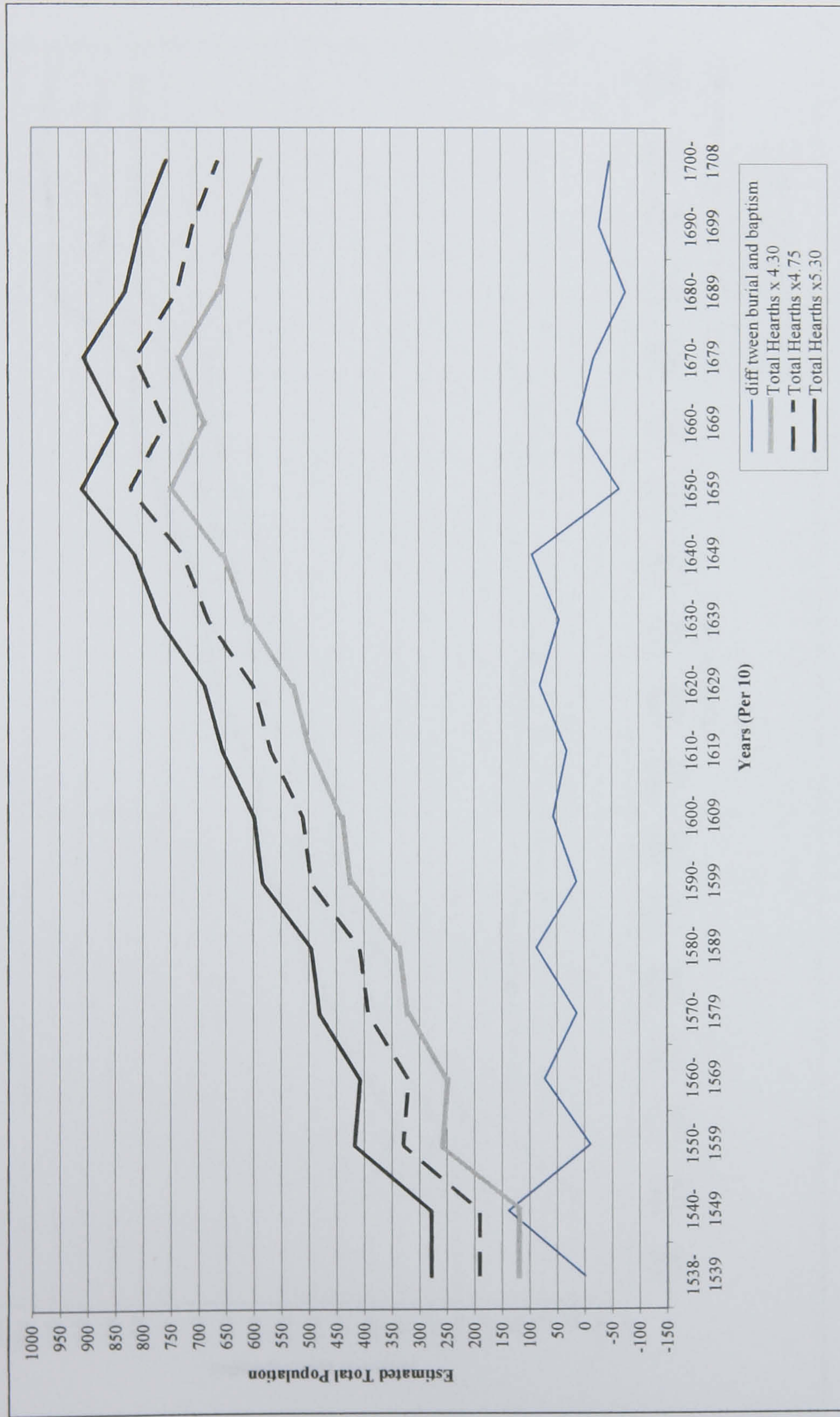
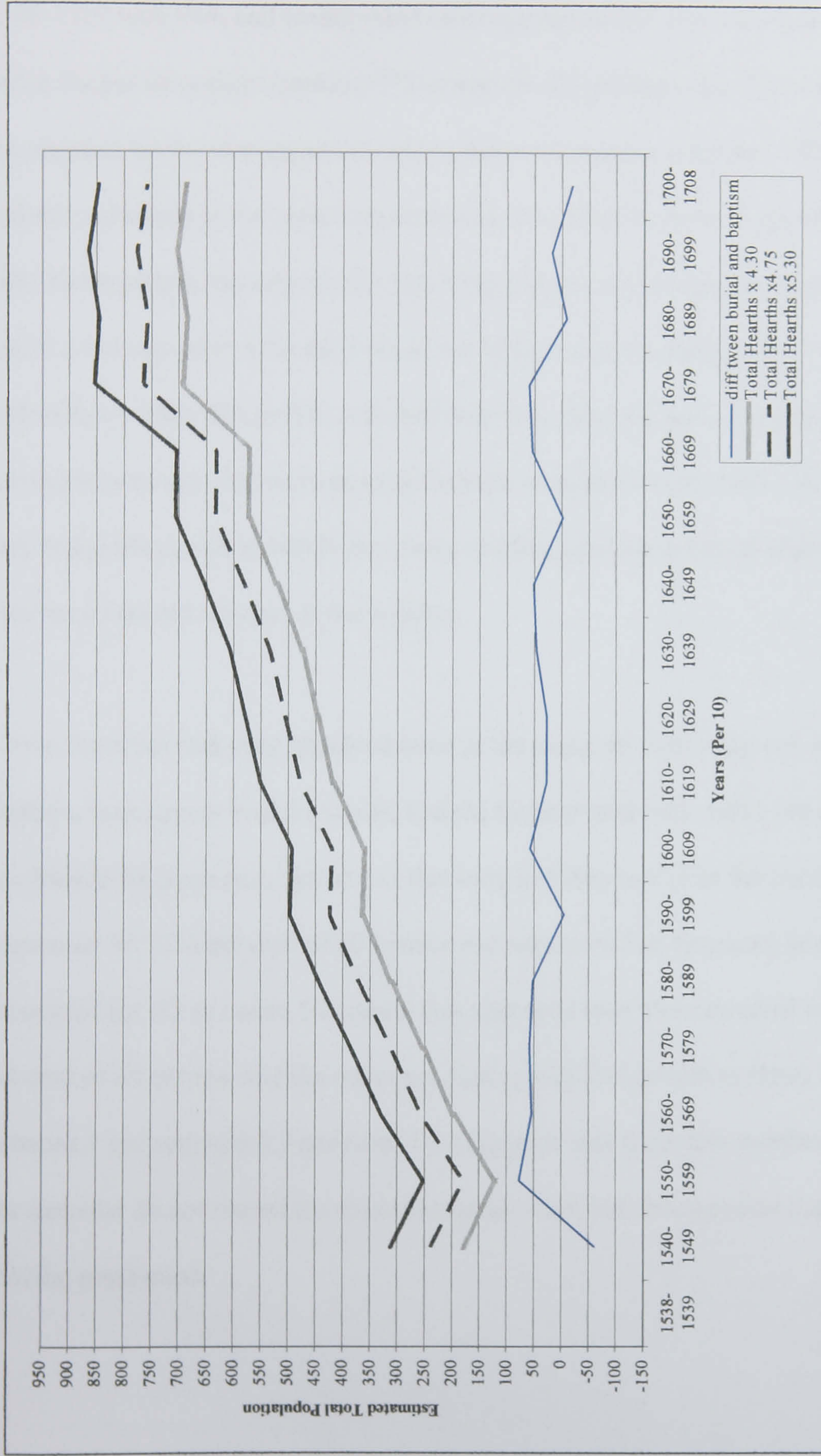


Figure 1.6 –Estimated Population totals in Kingsthorpe 1538-1708 (per 10 year grouping)



Those people that were recorded in the registers were collated according to surname. Castor had the greatest number of surnames that appeared in the parish register 1538-1709 with 944, and twenty-nine other surnames that appeared in the wills and not in the parish register, making 973 surnames. Kingsthorpe had 716 surnames in the register, twelve that appeared only in the wills, making a total of 728. Blakesley had 465 surnames in the parish registers and only an extra three in the wills, making 468. Those people that appeared in the wills, but not in the registers may have been due to a clerical error, with their burial not being recorded, despite their will proved and written within that parish. Alternatively, they may not have actually lived in the parish permanently, but were passing through when they wrote their will (in which they stated the parish in which they were residing) and were buried elsewhere, thus their burial record was not in the register.

Those surnames that only appeared once in the registers, with only one entry in baptism, marriage or burial records, had the highest total with 1,011 out of 2,169 resulting in 46.6 per cent. Surnames that only had two entries in the parish registers accounted for 12.6 per cent of all entries and surnames that appeared three times accounted for 6.2 per cent. Surnames that appeared four times resulted in only 4.1 per cent of all entries, and the surnames that appear five to twelve times occur between 1 per cent and 3.9 per cent. This suggests that these low numbers of entries per surname do not record the existence of families, but rather events concerning a moving population.

A stable core of twelve very prolific families occur in the parish registers over 100 times ranging from 101 to 172 times. They account for only 0.6 per cent of the total surname entries. This figure breaks down with one family in Blakesley, five in Castor and six in Kingsthorpe, with the top two families with 172 and 155 entries occurring in Castor. Despite the appearance of these twelve prolific families, the majority of surnames in the parish registers had few baptisms, marriages or burials recorded. This could be due to the high mobility of the population, with these people staying for only short periods in the parishes, most likely for as long as there was work. This breakdown of surnames with only one entry can be seen in table 1.3, which shows that marriages initially accounted for the highest number of surnames with only one entry. It must be noted that for one marriage entry in the register this would involve two separate family names and thus two entries in the family reconstitution. Although the total is 505, if this marriage total is split into two to indicate the actual number of marriages, rather than people involved, this only accounts for 252.5, which is less than the burial figure.¹¹ Of this marriage total, Castor had the highest number, followed by Kingsthorpe and then Blakesley. Thus, burial entries actually accounted for the highest number of names with only one entry. Of these, Castor was the highest however; Kingsthorpe and Blakesley had an equal number. Baptisms had the lowest total of entries in the registers, with Castor once again having the highest number of single name entries, Blakesley second and Kingsthorpe third.

¹¹ The marriage total in the parish registers of 505 is an odd number and is due to the fact that one surname was illegible and thus not catalogued under a family name.

Table 1.3 – A Breakdown by parish and type of surnames with only 1 entry in the registers

Family Surnames with only 1 entry			
	Baptism	Burial	Marriage
Blakesley	64	74	94
Castor	95	136	224
Kingsthorpe	63	74	187
Total	222	284	505

Source: NRO Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe Parish Registers

Evidently, 50 per cent of people stayed long enough in the parish to register only a marriage (25 per cent actual marriage acts) and then moved on, with no records of children or burials. Arguably, these people were travelling workers or apprentices to families who had married and moved on to another area to establish the trade they had trained in. Alternatively, the more probable explanation was that these people lived outside of the parish, and were only in the registers because they were marrying someone from that parish. Of those that were buried, 28.1 per cent had only one record and 22 per cent had only one baptism entry.

A proportion could be people who married or had children before the parish registers started in 1538, but another group must have been of visitors or people passing through the parish with no direct family name to which they could be linked to. A high number of baptisms exist in the registers, which only had one entry per surname (22 per cent). A proportion may have been of children born to parents who married before the register began, but this does not account for the lack of burial figures for the parents or children. One can only conclude that these children were of

people passing through the parishes, and that there was a high degree of mobility. Blakesley had 232 entries of families with only one entry. Castor had the highest number with 455, and Kingsthorpe was second with 324. This high number in Castor underlines the argument that the community was open, with a mobile population. Castor had 944 families appearing in the registers, and this proportion of 455 appearing only once indicates just under half of the families appeared once. Blakesley has also been suggested to have an open community, however the small number of families with only one entry does not support this, for an open community would have a high number of families with only one entry, as the high population mobility of the community would result in few families with high numbers of entries. However, Blakesley has a small population and in proportion to the small number of families that appear in the registers (468) just under half of the families only appear once, indicating a highly mobile and open society. Kingsthorpe had the lowest percentage of the population appearing once, with only 324 of the total 728 family surnames that appeared in the registers. This indicates once again a more stagnant, closed and stable community.

Twenty-seven families have between fifty and ninety parish register entries, with four in Blakesley, eleven in Castor and twelve in Kingsthorpe. Two hundred and twenty families appear between thirteen and forty-nine times (10.1 per cent). If the number of surnames that appear only once in the parish registers are removed from the surname total, this brings the percentages of families that appear more than once into a more significant figure. If one takes away the 1,011 surnames that appear only

once, this leaves a working total of 1,158 family names. Of these surnames, the majority of these have higher baptism records than any other entry.

Table 1.4 illustrates the total number of baptisms, burials and marriages for the surname groupings based on the parish register entries. Out of 13,733 entries for all three parishes, baptisms take the greatest chunk of that with 6,364 entries (46.3 per cent). Burials account for 35.1 per cent and marriages 18.6 per cent. What must further be noted is the discrepancy between the number of entries calculated by family surname and the number of entries calculated by year in the parish registers. This is because the results for the number of entries based on family surname are not inclusive of the large number of miscellaneous entries that have been catalogued. Any entries in the parish registers that did not detail a surname or were illegible were grouped under miscellaneous entries, and not incorporated into the results collected of the number of entries by surname.

Table 1.4 – Total Sum of entries for Surname grouping for all 3 Parishes

Parish	Total Entries Per Surname	Total
Blakesley	Baptisms	1234
	Burials	697
	Marriages	341
Castor	Baptisms	2741
	Burials	2268
	Marriages	1285
Kingsthorpe	Baptisms	2389
	Burials	1848
	Marriages	930
Total three Parishes	Baptisms	6364
	Burials	4813
	Marriages	2556
	Total all three parishes	13,733

Source: NRO, Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe Parish Registers

Out of the 391 collected wills 11.3 per cent of testators, did not have their burial recorded in the parish where they had written their will. If the equivalent percentage of 11.3 per cent of the total baptismal, burial and marriage entries in the registers were missed this would account for 1,545 people that may have been absent from the registers (11.3 per cent of total number of surname entries of 13,733). What is encouraging is that within the three parishes 347 of the testators were captured in the registers (88.8 per cent). It should be further noted that due to the hearth tax records being incomplete and difficult to transcribe, no families discovered in the parish registers could be discovered in the hearth tax records. This may also have been due to the fact that there were only three hearth tax years collected, and those families entered in the hearth taxes may have not have had a baptism, marriage or burial in those years for them to be recorded in the parish registers.

Prolific families and family surname density

The parish registers can be examined to see which families appear prolific in the parishes. Historians using the hearth tax records have assessed kinship density, however the records of the three parishes are of poor quality and difficult to interpret. So to assess kinship density of the three parishes, the parish registers were examined, to see which families appear prolific and to see how many families appear in the registers throughout the period under study.

In Blakesley, there were 465 surnames, with 2,190 entries. Warwick, Woodfield and Tayler are the most prolific with 101, eighty-four and fifty-six entries in the parish

registers respectively. Of the 101 entries for the Warwick family, fifty-seven were baptismal entries, twenty-nine burial entries and fifteen marriage entries, indicating a growing family, with baptism figures outstripping burial figures. Of the eighty-four entries for the Woodfield family, fifty-four were baptisms, twenty-six were burials and four were marriage records: an average of two times more baptisms than burials indicating a rapidly increasing family. The family name Tayler had the third highest number of entries in the parish registers, with fifty-six, of these twenty-nine were baptisms, nineteen were burials and eight were marriages.

There were also thirty families with between ten and twenty parish register entries. Eleven families had between twenty-one and thirty entries, and seven families between thirty-one and forty entries. There were four families with between forty-one and fifty-four entries. There were 232 surnames with only one entry in the parish registers (arguably, those with only one entry were not evidence of a family, but just a record of a person passing through the parish). Sixty-four families had two entries, thirty-three families had three entries, sixteen families had four entries, twenty-three families had five entries, eighteen families had six entries, thirteen families had seven entries, six families had eight entries, and five families had nine entries.

Castor had 944 surnames with 6,150 entries in the parish registers. The highest number of entries in the parish registers was for the Waren family with 172. The Wilson family had 155 entries and the Gardiner family 128 entries. These three families had the highest number of entries within the baptism records, these being

eighty-four, sixty-two and seventy-four respectively. There were also eighty families with parish register entries between ten and twenty. Thirty-three families had between twenty-one and thirty entries, and eighteen families between thirty-one and forty entries. There were eleven families between forty-one and fifty-eight entries. There were also six families with between fifty and sixty-two entries. Five families had between sixty-four and ninety entries. One family had 117 entries and one family had 122 entries. There were 455 families with only one entry in the parish registers, 113 families had two entries, sixty-one families had three entries, thirty-six families had four entries, thirty-four families had five entries, twenty-four families had six entries, twenty-five families had seven entries, twenty-three families had eight entries, and fifteen families had nine entries.

Kingsthorpe had 716 surnames with 5,167 entries. The highest number of entries for any one family in Kingsthorpe was 146, and this was by the Morris family. The second highest count belonged to the Smith family with 140, and thirdly the Dickinson family with 133. Six families had entries over 100, as compared to Castor with five and Blakesley with only one family. For Kingsthorpe there was also a total of sixty-eight families with parish register entries between ten and twenty. Twenty-six families had between twenty-one and thirty entries, and ten families between thirty-one and thirty-eight. There were thirteen families between forty-one and sixty entries. Sixty-one to seventy-eight entries were accounted for by seven families. There were 324 families with only one entry in the parish registers, ninety-six families had two entries, forty-one families had three entries, thirty-six families had four entries, twenty-eight families had five entries, twenty families had six entries,

sixteen families had seven entries, sixteen families had eight entries, and nine families had nine entries.

It can be seen that Blakesley had the lowest number of established families. Most families in the parish had few entries in the parish registers, indicating that they were small and had few family events occurring. Castor had the greatest number of established families with over forty events occurring per family, with Kingsthorpe coming a close second. It can be argued that few families stayed for a long time in the parishes, with the majority only registering one event and then disappearing from the registers. Once again, kinship density must have been low, evident in the high number of surnames appearing and disappearing in the registers, and the high evidence of mobility. Using the Wrightson analysis of open and closed communities, Blakesley had a low number of established families due to its open community. This is in comparison to Kingsthorpe, which was closed, and Castor, which was a mixed open/closed community. The dispersed settlement (of the open community) encouraged moving populations and may explain the low number of established families. In comparison Kingsthorpe with its closed community characteristics of a nucleated settlement and a high concentration of a small number of families upon a small area of land, explains the existence of a stable community with a large number of established families. Castor is a little more difficult to place in this analysis, with it having a combination of open and closed community characteristics, however the high number of established families indicates an alignment to the closed rather than an open community.

Kinship Density

Wrightson and Levine used the hearth tax of 1671 to assess kinship density within the parish. This hearth tax record was particularly detailed, enabling a reconstitution analysis to be done connecting the network of kin.¹² The hearth tax records for the three parishes in Northamptonshire are not as detailed and are difficult to read, so it is impossible to use this method to assess kinship density. The only suggested method available is to analyse the parish registers, to see which surnames became connected through marriage. As can be seen from table 1.5, the greatest number of surnames had no other surnames linked to them through marriage. Those surnames with no marriage connections accounted for 54.8 per cent of the Blakesley records, 39.8 per cent of the Castor records and 33.2 per cent of the Kingsthorpe records. Families connected to one other family through marriage accounted for 33.1 per cent in Blakesley, 37.1 per cent in Castor and 45.3 per cent in Kingsthorpe. Those families linked to two other family surnames through marriage accounted for 6.7 per cent in Blakesley, 10 per cent in Castor and 9.9 per cent in Kingsthorpe.

The interconnectedness of families through marriage is very shallow. Blakesley had one family linked to fifteen others through marriage (0.2 per cent). Two families were linked to nine other families each through marriage (0.4 per cent). Kingsthorpe had one family with an incredible twenty-nine other families linked through marriage (0.1 per cent). Two families were linked to fourteen other families (0.3 per cent). Castor had the highest range, with one family being interconnected to a

¹² Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 84.

staggering thirty-one other families through marriage (0.1 per cent). There was also one family connected to twenty-three other families (0.1 per cent), and two families connected to twenty-one other families each through marriage (0.2 per cent). These families with higher connections are arguably representative of the stable core of families resident in the parishes. The difficulty with this analysis is that for all those surnames with low numbers of marriage connections, it is difficult to argue as to whether these people were resident in the parish or marrying people from outside.

Table 1.5 – Count of number of surnames linked to a family surname within the parish registers for each parish.

Number of Connections through Marriage	Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total Number	%
0	255	375	238	868	40.9
1	154	350	324	828	39.0
2	32	94	71	197	9.27
3	8	43	28	79	3.72
4	5	24	14	43	2.02
5	5	18	11	34	1.60
6	2	6	6	14	0.66
7	1	7	10	18	0.85
8	0	7	3	10	0.47
9	2	4	2	8	0.38
10	0	2	2	4	0.19
11	0	1	1	2	0.09
12	0	2	2	4	0.19
13	0	2	1	3	0.14
14	0	1	2	3	0.14
15 +	1	7	1	9	0.42
Total	465	943	716	2124	100.04

Source: NRO, Parish Registers of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Out of the 2,124 interconnections, the largest group of surnames to have marriage connections was those with only one connection (39 per cent). 40.9 per cent did not

have any marriage connections at all. This shows how shallow the kinship levels were in the three parishes, and agrees with Wrightson and Levine's findings in Terling of 39.3 per cent.

Blakesley especially illustrates low kinship levels with the lowest number of families connected through marriage, supporting its open highly mobile society. Kingsthorpe with its higher number of marriage connections supports the argument of it illustrating characteristics of a closed society with a small population linked closely together. In general, with such a low level of kin connection within the three parishes, community relations must have been based on high levels of non-kin interaction. Community strengths must have been built on interpersonal relationships between neighbours, friends, guilds (though these dissolved in 1547), and members of the same levels of society, rather than blood ties or ties of marriage.

The Longevity of Families

Mitson argued in her study of Nottinghamshire that there was a high rate of mobility throughout the parishes and, using Souden's conclusions, argued that less than 25 per cent of the population remained in one place over a sustained period.¹³ By looking at the registers, the length of time that passed between the first and last parish record per family can be seen. This will indicate how many families remained in one parish rather than constantly migrating between areas.

¹³ A. Mitson, 'The significance of kinship networks in the seventeenth century: south west Nottinghamshire, in C. Phythian-Adams (ed.), Societies, Cultures and Kinship 1580-1850 (London, 1996) and Souden, 'Movers and stayers', pp. 11-28.

Table 1.6 illustrates the range of years that entries appeared for families in the parish registers of Castor. For those families in Castor that appear only twice in the registers, the range of longevity ranges from seven families with entries that appear in less than one year, twelve that appear twice in one year, eleven families that appear in two years and eleven that appear in three.

Table 1.6 – Castor - Total year span Per Surname group of total entries

Total Entries	Years Covered total									Total
	Less than 1 yr	1 Year	2 years	3 years	4 to 10 years	11 to 50 years	51 to 100 years	101 to 150 years	151 to 168 years	
1	455	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	455
2	7	12	11	11	13	38	14	7	0	113
3	1	3	3	1	11	23	13	5	1	61
4	0	0	1	0	12	18	5	0	0	36
5	0	0	0	0	9	15	5	5	0	34
6	0	0	0	0	5	13	3	3	0	24
7	0	0	0	0	6	14	5	0	0	25
8	0	0	0	0	1	14	4	4	0	23
9	0	0	1	0	0	9	2	2	1	15
10-19	0	0	0	0	0	35	20	18	2	75
20-29	0	0	0	0	0	4	14	15	3	36
30-39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
30-39	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	11	1	18
40-48	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	5	2	13
50-59	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	4
62-64	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
78-90	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
117-172	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	5
Total	463	15	16	12	57	183	97	81	20	944

Source: NRO, Castor Parish Registers

Thirteen families appear between four and ten years, with thirty-nine families appearing between eleven and fifty years. Surprisingly despite there only being two entries on the registers for these families, twenty-seven appear between fifty-one and 100 years apart and eleven between 101 and 150 years apart, with no other entries

in-between. Kingsthorpe has ten families with only two entries appearing in less than a year, and twenty-one families appearing in one year. Eight families with two entries in the registers appear in three years and three in three years. Seventeen families with two entries appear in four to ten years and twenty-two appear between eleven and fifty years. A smaller number appear over fifty years (as compared to Castor), with only nine families appearing between fifty-one and 100 years and six families having gaps ranging from 102 to 149 years.

Blakesley, as illustrated in table 1.7, did not have such an extensive range of years. Those families with only two entries in the parish registers had fourteen in less than one year, five in one year, five in two years, seven in three years, fourteen in four to ten years, and twelve in eleven to forty-nine years. Those families with two entries in over fifty years only accounted for six in fifty-six to ninety-nine years and one in 137 years. For those families with only three entries, the majority in Castor (28 of them) fall between eleven and fifty years, with one family that spread the entries over 158 years and two over 146 years. Table 1.8 shows that Kingsthorpe also had the majority of families with three entries fall in the eleven to fifty years range. Only four families had a year range of over 100, with the maximum range being 149 years.

Blakesley follows the same pattern as Castor and Kingsthorpe, with those families with three entries falling mainly in the eleven to fifty year ranges. Only one family (with three entries) appeared in the registers for over one hundred years. These long gaps between entries are difficult to explain, for even if the gap was between a birth

and death of one person then this gap is far longer than the average life span. This could be due to inefficient record keeping or the fact of active mobility.

Furthermore, the entries may be of people not even related though they have the same surname.

Table 1.7 – Blakesley - Total year span per surname group of total entries

Total Entries	Years Covered total									Total
	Less than 1 year	1 year	2 Years	3 Years	4 to 10 Years	11 to 49 Years	56 to 99 Years	103 to 150 Years	151 to 171 Years	
1	232	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	232
2	14	5	5	7	14	12	6	1	0	64
3	1	2	3	3	6	12	2	3	1	33
4	0	0	0	1	6	5	4	0	0	16
5	0	0	0	1	6	8	6	1	1	23
6	0	0	0	0	4	8	3	2	1	18
7	0	0	0	0	1	7	3	2	0	13
8	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0	6
9	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	5
10-19	0	0	0	0	1	10	6	10	2	29
20-28	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	3	11
30-37	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	7
40-46	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
52-58	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
82-101	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Total	248	7	8	12	39	67	38	29	17	465

Source: NRO, Blakesley Parish Register

For those families with four entries in Blakesley, table 1.7 shows that they fall mainly in the four to ten year range, and families with five to seven entries fall mainly in the eleven to fifty year range. Families with eight entries are split evenly between eleven to fifty years and between 103 and 150 years.

Families with ten to twenty entries in the registers appear mainly between eleven and forty nine years, with families between 103 and 105 coming a close second.

Families with twenty-one to forty entries in the registers fall between 103 to 171 years evenly. Those families between forty-one and 101 entries all have a year span of between 151 to 171 years, except the family with fifty-two entries only having eighty-four year coverage.

Table 1.8 – Kingsthorpe - Total year span Per Surname group of total entries

Total Entries	Years Covered total									Total
	Less than 1 yr	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 to 10 years	11 to 50 years	51 to 100 years	102 to 149 years	151 to 166 years	
1	324	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	324
2	10	21	8	3	17	22	9	6	0	96
3	1	5	6	2	5	15	4	3	0	41
4	0	1	1	0	9	14	6	4	1	36
5	0	0	1	1	8	11	2	5	0	28
6	0	0	0	0	3	8	6	3	0	20
7	0	0	0	0	0	8	7	1	0	16
8	0	0	0	0	1	9	6	0	0	16
9	0	0	0	0	0	5	2	2	0	9
10-19	0	0	0	0	0	26	20	10	5	61
20-29	0	0	0	0	0	2	10	15	4	31
30-38	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	5	1	12
41-49	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	1	8
50-58	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4
60-69	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	6
70-78	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
105-140	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
Total	335	27	16	6	43	122	78	65	24	716

Source: NRO, Kingsthorpe Parish Registers

In Castor, table 1.6 illustrates that those families with four to eleven entries had mainly a year span of eleven to fifty years. Those families with twelve to twenty entries also fell mainly between eleven to fifty years. Families with twenty-one to

forty entries fell in the 101 to 150 year span range mainly. The families with forty-one to ninety entries fell evenly between the 101 to 150 and 151 to 168 year span range. The remaining families that had between 117 and 172 entries fell in the majority between 151 to 168 year spans, although there was only a difference of one more than the 101 to 150 year span.

Kingsthorpe in table 1.8 shows that those families with four to nine entries mainly appeared in a period of between eleven and fifty years. Families with ten entries were mainly spread in the registers between fifty-one to one hundred years and those between eleven and twenty entries also fell mainly in this range. Families between twenty-one and seventy entries in the registers spanned between 102 to 149 years mainly and those from seventy-eight to 140 entries all fell into the 151 to 166 year span of longevity.

The family with the highest number of entries was the Waren family with 172 from Castor spanning 168 years. The Wilson family from Castor is the second highest with 155 entries in 161 years. The families with the next highest number of entries were the Morris family in Kingsthorpe who had 146 entries in 165 years and the Smith family of Kingsthorpe who had 140 entries in 163 years. Kingsthorpe also had the Dickinson family with 133 entries in 166 years, the Wright family with 131 entries in 166 years, the Billingham family with 119 entries in 164 years and the Brooke family with 105 entries in 162 years.

Kingsthorpe also had eleven families with over fifty entries but less than 100 who spanned between 117 and 166 years. Castor also had three other families with parish register entries over 100, these were the Gardiner family with 128 entries in 115 years, the Wilbore family with 122 entries in 150 years and the Bate family with 117 entries in 167 years. In Castor, eleven families had fifty to 100 entries in the registers, spanning from 127 to 168 years. Blakesley did not have many families with large numbers of entries in the parish registers. Only one family had more than 100 entries, and this was the Warwick family with 101 entries spanning 160 years. There were only four families with more than 50 but less than 100 entries. These were the Woodfield family with eighty-two entries in 160 years, the Tayler family with fifty-eight entries in 160 years, the Wright family with fifty-three entries in 165 years and the Wiggins family with fifty-two entries in eighty-four years.

For Castor, the family with the longest year span in the registers was the Waren family outlined above with 168 years. However also with 168 years were the Chamberlaine family with seventy-eight entries and the Miller family with fifty-nine entries. The Wilkinson family matched the Bate family with 167 years, but they only had forty-eight entries. In Castor, 103 families had spans in the registers of over 100 years.

For Kingsthorpe, there were four families with the longest span of 166 years. These were the Dickinson family, the Wright family, the Childe family and the Silsby family – with 133, 131, seventy-eight and nineteen entries respectively. There were three families with 165 years - the Morris, Cowper and Cooke families (with 146, sixty-eight and fifty entries). There were another three families with 164 years, the

Billingham, Ellis and Stormer families (with 119, thirty-one and twenty-three entries). In total, ninety families had longevity of 100 years and over.

In Blakesley, the family with the longest span was actually the Dry family, who although they only had eleven entries in the register spanned 171 years. The Whitton family had thirty-seven entries in 169 years. After the Wright family, (outlined above with 165 years) there were four families with 164-year spans. These were the Atkins family with forty-six entries, the Maior family with forty-one entries, the Wattes family with thirty entries and the Clarke family with twenty-four. Blakesley had forty-six families with spans over 100 years, less than half of Castor.

Table 1.6 shows that 101 families out of the 489 in Castor had more than one entry that spanned over 101 years (20.7 per cent). The highest percentage of families however spanned eleven to fifty years, with 183 families who encompassed 37.4 per cent of the family total who had more than one entry. In Castor there were 108 out of 489 families with more than one entry less than ten years (22.1 per cent), compared to ninety-seven from fifty-one to 100 years (19.8 per cent).

Table 1.8 shows 392 families in Kingsthorpe with more than one entry and of these eighty-nine spanned over 102 years (22.7 per cent). As was the case with Castor, the highest percentage of families also spanned eleven to fifty years, 122 families who total 31.1 per cent of those families with more than one entry. In Kingsthorpe out of 392 families, there were 103 families with more than one entry under ten years (26.3 per cent), and seventy-eight from fifty-one to 100 years (19.9 per cent).

Table 1.7 indicates 233 families in Blakesley with more than one entry in the registers, and of these forty-six spanned over 103 years (19.7 per cent). The highest percentage of families that spanned eleven to forty-nine years (there were no families with a fifty year span) – a total of sixty-seven out of the 233 who had more than one entry (28.8 per cent). Unlike Castor and Kingsthorpe the highest percentage of families in Blakesley were those with more than one entry under ten years – eighty-two out of the 233 (35.2 per cent). Only thirty-eight families ranged from fifty-six to ninety-nine years (16.3 per cent).

Consequently, the parishes of Castor and Kingsthorpe share the common factor that the majority of families appear in the registers between eleven and forty-nine years. Blakesley as a smaller parish has the main number of families with more entries appearing in less than ten years. It can be suggested that Blakesley is either a younger parish with younger families, or has a higher turnover of population with more mobility. Perhaps because as table 1.1 illustrates, Blakesley had no established houses with more than seven hearths, and a proportionately lower population than Castor and Kingsthorpe, this supports the argument that Blakesley was a smaller parish with less wealth. Families were less established and had fewer families with long periods established in the parish registers. Again, it should be noted that there was only one family established over 100 years in the Blakesley parish registers. These results also support once again the argument of Blakesley illustrating characteristics of an open community, with Kingsthorpe illustrating a closed community. Castor once again appears to fall in between Kingsthorpe and Blakesley, but in this case showing a slight leaning towards a closed community.

These figures also support Mitson and Souden's conclusions that a small percentage of families remained in one parish for a time. A large proportion of the parish population appears mobile and never settles for long in one place.

Lifespan of Individual Testators

Lifespan is difficult to measure as there is so little evidence that connects the will writers and the parish registers. In Castor only sixty-seven of the testators appeared in the parish registers. Out of these sixty-seven, only thirteen testators had a baptismal and a burial record. Three testators had a baptism record that could be compared to the date on which the will was proved. Blakesley only had thirty-eight testators that appeared in the parish registers, and of these, only five had baptism and burial records. In Kingsthorpe, 102 of the testators appeared in the parish registers. Of these, thirty testators had a baptismal and burial record and two testators had a baptism record that could be combined with the date the will was proved.

Table 1.9 details the ages at death for those fifty-three testators for which the information could be gathered. What is immediately noticeable is that the three female testators all died at later ages than the majority of the males. The majority of the males, twenty-nine of them, died before they were forty years old (58 per cent). Seven males died between the ages of forty-four and forty-eight (14 per cent). Only fourteen males (28 per cent) made it past this age. The oldest male was eighty-one, with one at seventy-seven, and one at seventy. If one applies this percentage to the total male wills, then over 182 wills from the 315 male wills would possibly have had testators that died before they were forty.

Table 1.9 – Breakdown of ages of testator at decease based on parish registers and will data

		Age at death								
Parish	Sex	22-25	26-30	31-34	37-39	44-48	50-58	60-69	70-83	Total
Blakesley	Male	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	5
Castor	Male	2	0	4	4	1	3	1	1	16
Kingsthorpe	Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3
	Male	2	3	3	6	6	2	5	2	29
Total		4	4	9	12	7	5	7	5	53

Source: NRO, Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe Parish Registers

What must be stressed is the inaccuracy of the baptismal details, as some families had many Christian names that were identical, and it was difficult in some cases to identify the baptismal details of the testator concerned. Furthermore, in five cases, there were no burial dates, and the date the will was proved was used instead. In Blakesley and Castor, males appear to live to between then ages of thirty-one to thirty-nine whereas in Kingsthorpe they lived longer between the ages of thirty-seven to forty-eight. This could be linked to the idea of Kingsthorpe being a closed community and Blakesley and Castor being open. Arguably, the instability of high population mobility, dispersement of land and competition for work led to a lower age at death and the closed community characteristics of a stable population, low mobility and concentrated land holdings increased the life span of the testators.

What can also be examined (using the testators for whom a burial date was found in the registers) is the period between the date the will was written and the burial date.

Table 1.10 details the results for the fifty-three wills and shows that forty-nine of the testators had a will date within a year of burial (92.5 per cent).

Table 1.10 – Time taken in years between the will date and the burial date for the fifty-three testators that had a burial date in the registers

		Time between date will written and testator burial date			
Parish	Sex	Less than 1 year	1 year – 2 years	2 years +	Total
Blakesley	Male	5	0	0	5
Castor	Male	14	1	1	16
Kingsthorpe	Female	3	0	0	3
	Male	27	2	0	29
Total		49	3	1	53

Source – NRO, Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe Parish Registers

This illustrates that the norm was for testators not to address inheritance issues regarding probate until on their deathbed. Three wills were written over a year before death (5.7 per cent) and one over two years (1.9 per cent). If one applies these percentages to the total wills collected, then 362 out of the 391 would have written them within one year of death, twenty-two would have written then one to two years before death and seven would have been written two years and over before death.

The occupations of the testators

The start of the will normally stated the date it was written, the name of the testator and, in most cases, the occupation of the testator. Female testators also stated name and date, but marital status rather than occupation. In Blakesley, seventeen male

testators did not specify an occupation (23.6 per cent). Yeomen were the most common occupation stated in the wills, appearing in twenty-two out of the seventy-two wills (30.6 per cent). The second most common occupation was that of husbandman (16.7 per cent). Those testators that specified specific trade roles (rather than working on their land – such as carpenter, tailor etc) totalled nine (12.5 per cent) with one testator from the PCC specifying a sailor. Gentlemen and labourers only accounted for four (5.6 per cent) and there were three vicars. The female testators were split between fourteen widows (85.7 per cent), and two unmarried (14.3 per cent).

In Castor, forty-four of the 119 male testators did not detail an occupation (37 per cent). The most common occupations in Castor were those of yeomen and husbandmen (eighteen each, 15.1 per cent for each occupation). Labourers were third highest occupation in Castor, with a total of twelve (10.1 per cent). Those with a specified trade accounted for twenty-one (17.7 per cent) of which six were carpenters. Vicars accounted for only one (0.8 per cent) and gentlemen accounted for five (4.2 per cent). Female testators in Castor followed a similar pattern to Blakesley. Eighteen of the twenty-nine were widows (62.1 per cent) and two were unmarried women (6.9 per cent). Nine women did not specify their marital status (31 per cent).

In Kingsthorpe, thirty-three out of the 124 male testators (26.6 per cent) did not specify an occupation. Husbandmen were the highest occupation with a total of twenty-six (21 per cent). Labourers came second in this parish with twenty-one

(16.9 per cent) and yeomen came third with twelve (9.7 per cent). Those males involved in a trade accounted for twenty-five (20.2 per cent), and there were four from gentlemen (3.2 per cent) and three from vicars/priests (2.4 per cent). Widows accounted for the highest number of females in Kingsthorpe (as was the case in Blakesley and Castor) with twenty-seven out of thirty-three (81.8 per cent). Two female testators did not specify their marital status (6.1 per cent) and there were four unmarried women (12.1 per cent).

The occupations stated in the wills suggest a largely agrarian economy was evident in all three parishes, with the bulk of the testators working on the land. Yeomen and husbandmen dominate the wills that specify occupation. Blakesley had a higher proportion of the wills from yeomen than the other two parishes. Arguably, those testators with greater wealth were represented in the will samples more in Blakesley than in the other two parishes. Especially when one notes that Blakesley has a combined percentage total for yeomen and husbandmen at 47.2 per cent, as compared to Castor with only 30.2 per cent and Kingsthorpe with 30.7 per cent. The large number of labourers in comparison to yeomen in Kingsthorpe suggests that this parish had a higher proportion of landless inhabitants with wills, and the possible existence of a less wealthy population.

Castor had a slightly higher leaning towards non-agricultural occupations than the other parishes. Castor could be argued to be the more urban out of the three parishes, with Kingsthorpe indicating a mixed economy and Blakesley showing to be the most

rural, although this analysis based on occupations is tenuous, as those who specified a trade might also have had a portion of land.

Widows heavily dominate among the female testators, due to the legal restrictions on married women making wills (as everything they owned belonged legally to their husbands or before marriage to their fathers). Widows would have held personal belongings in their own right, but whether they could bequeath land, houses or some form of estate is doubtful, this issue will be examined later on in chapter five.

Wrightson and Levine in their analysis of Terling in Essex categorised the wills based on social status. They split the testators into four distinct categories. Category one consisted of gentry and large farmers. Yeomen, substantial husbandmen and craftsmen were in category two. Smaller husbandmen and craftsmen were included in category three. Category four consisted of labourers and cottagers. They found that most of their testators in Terling fell into categories one to three.¹⁴ There were few testators to be found in category four. The parishes of Kingsthorpe, Castor and Blakesley do not quite follow this pattern. Ignoring the ninety-four male testators that do not specify their occupation, it can be seen that husbandmen were the most common with fifty-six, yeomen come third with fifty-two wills and craftsmen came second with fifty-four. These are all part of the Terling categories two and three. Labourers come fourth with thirty-seven and gentry fifth with only thirteen. Thus for the three parishes in Northamptonshire, 162 testators (41.4 per cent) fall into

¹⁴ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 93.

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categories two and three (or 51.4 per cent if one calculates the 162 wills as a percentage of the male testators only), with category four bringing up the rear. Testators of high social standing (category one) do not figure as highly in the Northamptonshire parishes as they do in Terling.

To conclude, it can be seen from the hearth tax records that Kingsthorpe appears to have a higher proportion of wealthier residents, with Castor having houses only up to ten hearths and Blakesley only having one house with seven hearths. The number of houses with one or two hearths was more in all three parishes than those houses with three or more hearths. Despite the odd exception, the general population of all three parishes was quite poor in wealth, with the highest percentage of the houses only having one or two hearths.

Even though Castor initially appears to have the largest population, its growth was not as strong as Kingsthorpe and Blakesley. Blakesley, despite having the smallest estimated population out of the three parishes also demonstrated a healthy growth. Due to the low mortality rate in Blakesley, the parish had a greater increase per year in the number of people. This was despite Castor having the highest total number of baptisms for the period and Kingsthorpe having a proportionately low burial rate. This is probably due to Castor's high burial total and Kingsthorpe's low baptism rate. Despite the apparent smallness of Blakesley's population size, Blakesley had the highest population increase during the period, with Kingsthorpe second and Castor third. Terling was larger than Blakesley in 1571 but still smaller than Kingsthorpe and Castor. It is difficult to determine whether Terling increased in size

at the same rate as the three Northamptonshire parishes, as the only comparison used in Terling is that based on the taxation records of 1524/5, to which this study does not have access.¹⁵

It can also be suggested that the three parishes do not show any specific years when the death rate peaked high enough to significantly impact the population growth. Although Castor witnessed four years with higher burial rates than normal, Kingsthorpe witnessed five and Blakesley a possible three, they were not severe enough to have an everlasting devastating effect. Furthermore, all three parishes show completely different years in which higher burial rates were the norm, indicating that the county as a whole did not witness any incidents which universally impacted on population. The parishes were individual units in their own rights with unique birth and death rates. This is different to those parishes studied by Wrightson, Levine, and Spufford who identified periods of dearth and high mortality.¹⁶

The parishes of Castor and Kingsthorpe shared the common factor that the majority of families appeared in the registers for a period of between eleven and forty-nine years. Blakesley, as a smaller parish, had a majority of families with more entries appearing in less than ten years. This evidence of high mobility corresponds with the findings of Mitson in her study of Nottinghamshire and Spufford in her analysis of

¹⁵ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 45.

¹⁶ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, and Spufford, Contrasting Communities.

Willingham in Cambridgeshire.¹⁷ Coward argued that records indicated large-scale migration of short distances, which he classified into two types; subsistence migration where people moved due to the unstable economy and the need to find work and food, and betterment migration where people moved by choice to improve themselves.¹⁸ The families that appeared and disappeared within the records of the three Northamptonshire parishes may have been moving due to either type of migration. However, due to the highly agrarian economies of the three parishes, it is highly likely that they were moving due to the need to find food, work and shelter in an unstable economy. Arguably, Blakesley had a low number of established families due to its open nature, with its dispersed settlement, and highly mobile populations. In contrast, Kingsthorpe, with its closed community characteristics of a nucleated settlement and a high concentration of a small number of families upon a small area of land, was a stable community with a large number of established families. Castor has a combination of open and closed community characteristics; however, the high number of established families indicates an alignment to the closed rather than open forms of community.

On average, female testators died at later ages than the majority of the males. Three-quarters of the female testators stated that they were widows. The majority of the males died before they were forty years old. Some 92.5 per cent of the testators had

¹⁷ Mitson, 'The significance of kinship networks' and Spufford, Contrasting Communities.

¹⁸ B. Coward, The Stuart Age, England 1603-1714 (London, 1994), pp. 38-9.

wills written within a year of burial showing that the norm was for testators not to address inheritance issues regarding probate until on their deathbeds.

All three parishes display evidence of agrarian economies, with yeomen and husbandmen dominating the male testators that specify occupation. This agricultural economy is similar to Terling in Essex and Spufford's study of Cambridgeshire. However, arguably Castor shows the strongest leaning towards an urban economy.

Kinship density, in line with Terling appears low. Forty per cent of the population had no other kin connection through marriage, whereas another forty per cent had only one marriage connection. Nearly half of the families recorded in the parish registers appear to be isolated with no other connections to other families through marriage.

It can be seen that there were peaks in the burial records, demonstrating levels of mortality above the norm and that family reconstitution figures added to these peaks do illustrate that death was of a sufficiently high level to be a threat to the survival of family units, hitting suddenly and at quite early ages. However, these peaks could be exaggerated due to the small size of the communities involved.¹⁹ As Wrightson and Levine argue, the high mortality of young men could threaten the survival of a family in the parish and was a factor in the three Northamptonshire parishes under study. However, they also point out that it was mainly the decline in marital fertility, and the related decline in births that was the major factor to influence population

growth.²⁰ The parish registers of the three Northamptonshire parishes illustrate effectively Wrightson and Levine's argument that death was commonplace and occurred with some ferocity in some years.

The hearth tax records are an excellent source to be used, combined with the parish registers, in formulating ideas on a parish's wealth and status. Hearth tax records are also an excellent means of developing population totals, using the mean household size multiplication factor. The evidence outlined above illustrates Blakesley's characteristics of an open community, with Kingsthorpe as a closed community and Castor leaning towards open, but with elements of a closed community. These tax records, combined with the data from the parish records help to build up an image of each individual parish, that can be used in helping to analyse the community, kinship ties and religious opinions that will be examined later in the thesis.

¹⁹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 46.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 65.

Chapter 2 – Kinship

As outlined in the introduction, it can be argued that kinship was the relationship felt between two people of the same blood or affinal tie. Although friendships and relations with neighbours could be close and important, these are not recognised as ties of kinship. Although households in the early modern world may have contained other people (for example servants, tenants, apprentices), the nuclear family was the primary focus of the will writer, and most households solely contained the nuclear family and no other residents. Historians stress the importance of the nuclear family although (it is arguable that) other members of the family could also be considered kin. For the purpose of this investigation, kinship will be defined as a relationship between members of a testator's family. Every person has an individual kinship grouping with other members of the family, forming different relationships with each other within the family unit. Where one person may have only close relations with their immediate family, another person may have good relations with other members of the wider kin outside the nuclear unit. Although the primary reason for writing a will was to provide for the immediate nuclear family (as outlined by the introduction), there may be cases where other members of the wider kin were bequeathed items.

Kin Recognition in Wills

In the 157 wills from Kingsthorpe, there were 482 bequests to members of kin. The total is based solely on a count of one entry per kin per will. For example, if more than one son was mentioned in a will, they were still only accounted for once. This

gives a total number of wills rather than total number of entries per kin category. Sons were the most commonly mentioned kin with ninety-one (58 per cent). Wives were a close second appearing in ninety wills (57.3 per cent) out of the 157, however if one removes the female wills from the sample, this leaves 72.6 per cent of male testators who left a bequest to the wife. Daughters were third, mentioned in seventy-two wills (45.9 per cent). The frequency of these three categories is unsurprising, as they are all immediate nuclear family, close to the testator through blood or marriage.

Looking at wider kin, bequests began to diversify. Brothers are mentioned in thirty-four (21.7 per cent), and sisters are important mentioned in nineteen wills (12.1 per cent). The succeeding generation follows with twenty-two wills containing bequests to grandsons (14 per cent) and nineteen to granddaughters (12.1 per cent). Nephews and nieces are also important in Kingsthorpe, in seventeen (10.8 per cent) and twelve (7.6 per cent) of the wills respectively. It is important to note that if the will totals for grandsons, granddaughters and grandchildren are aggregated, it equals forty-eight; they appear more significant than brothers, and making them the fourth most frequent entry with 30.6 per cent. Godsons appeared in ten wills (6.4 per cent) and godchildren in twelve wills (7.6 per cent). Goddaughters appear further down the list in only three wills (1.9 per cent). Relatives linked to godchildren are also accounted for in two wills, with one each for the sister of a godson and the son of a godson (0.7 per cent each). However if one totals all the wills for all the godchildren together, this comes to twenty-five wills (15.9 per cent), more than individual bequests to sisters, nephews, nieces and even grandsons and granddaughters. It

could be suggested that godchildren in Kingsthorpe were considered an important part of the kinship network.

Surprisingly there were six mothers receiving bequests in the wills, indicating a young death age for the testator, and no immediate family of the testator's own to bequeath property to. Twenty-three wills (14.7 per cent) specified bequests to kinsmen, kinswomen and male or female cousins. It is difficult to assess if they are close or distant blood kin or whether they are mentioned due to their close interaction with the testator. What is important to note is that they are mentioned and thus must have some relation or interaction with the testator.

For some testators, uncles were important, and they appeared in three wills (1.9 per cent). Three testators also showed a concern for an unborn child. Affinal kin also appeared within the wills, for example sisters-in-law and daughters-in-law were bequeathed items in four wills each (2.6 per cent) and sons-in-law in seven (4.5 per cent). Mothers-in-law accounted for three wills (1.9 per cent); fathers-in-law received one bequest (0.6 per cent) and brothers-in-law two (1.3 per cent). There is also evidence that children from previous marriages were not forgotten. There were two wills where a wife's children from a previous marriage were beneficiaries.

These examples illustrate firstly the extent of remarriage within early modern Kingsthorpe and secondly, that children from previous relationships were sometimes incorporated and treated as part of the family.

In Castor, there were 477 bequests to kin in the 148 wills, and the most frequent beneficiaries were once again son, wife and daughter. Most frequent were sons, who appeared in ninety-four of the 148 wills (63.5 per cent). Wives appeared in eighty-six of the wills (58.1 per cent), and as in Kingsthorpe, if we remove the female testators, the percentage of males to mention a wife was 72.3 per cent. Daughters appeared in eighty-three of the wills (56.1 per cent). In all three of these top categories, the percentages are higher than in Kingsthorpe, arguably indicating a stronger kinship emphasis on kinship in this parish.

As in Kingsthorpe, brothers appear to come fourth appearing in twenty-four of the wills (16.2 per cent). Grandsons were the next most frequent beneficiaries with twenty-three bequests (15.5 per cent) and granddaughters come seventh with eighteen bequests (12.2 per cent). However, if one totals all the wills with grandchildren appearing in them, this accounts for fifty-four (including one unborn grandchild), some 36.5 per cent, more than twice the number of entries for brothers. Sisters are also important receiving items in nineteen wills (12.9 per cent) and nephews and nieces totalled together account for thirty-one wills (21 per cent). Mothers also appear in Castor, in seven wills (4.7 per cent) and fathers appear in three wills (2 per cent). Godchildren in Castor also played an important role in wills, although not as important as in Kingsthorpe. Unspecified kin and cousins appear in seventeen wills (11.5 per cent), less than Kingsthorpe, possibly indicating again in Castor a stronger emphasis on close kin. Affinal kin accounted for only eleven wills (7.4 per cent), once again less than Kingsthorpe who had 8.9 per cent accounted for in the wills. Aunts were more important than uncles in Castor, with five wills

mentioning aunts (3.4 per cent) and two mentioning uncles (1.4 per cent). Two wills provided for unborn children and as stated earlier one provided for an unborn grandchild. Three wills detail bequests to children from previous marriages.

In Blakesley, there were 270 bequests to kin and again the son, wife and daughter were the top three family members who were most frequently specified bequests in wills. Sons were most frequent with sixty wills out of eighty-six (69.8 per cent). Wives appeared in fifty-two wills (60.5 per cent) and daughters in forty-seven wills (54.7 per cent). If one removes the wills of the fourteen female testators, it can be seen that wives accounted for 72.2 per cent of bequests made in the wills of male testators. Although not following the same pattern of Castor, the fact that the totals for sons and daughters in Blakesley were so close is important, as this indicates that daughters were just as significant. Grandchildren accounted for thirty-three (38.4 per cent) of the wills (including one unborn grandchild).

In Blakesley, godchildren follow the same pattern as Castor. Godsons and goddaughters appear in only eleven wills (12.9 per cent). However, this is a higher percentage than the individual groups of nephews, sisters, brothers, kinsmen, kinswomen and sons-in-law with their wives. The godchildren in Blakesley appear in a higher percentage of wills than Castor but less than Kingsthorpe. There is even one bequest to the sister of a goddaughter, illustrating that just as in Kingsthorpe, the families of godchildren were also important to the testator. However, these bequests to godchildren and members of their families may have been because they were also kin through blood or marriage.

Those specified just as 'kin' or 'cousins' appeared in twenty-one wills (24.4 per cent) in Blakesley, a higher proportion than in Castor or Kingsthorpe. These unspecified kin also appear higher up in the summary tables in Blakesley than in the other two parishes. This may indicate a wider recognition of family members in Blakesley when bequeathing, or it may be due to the smaller sample of wills from this parish. In-laws in Blakesley appeared in four (not including wills that gave bequests to son-in-law and wife) only 4.7 per cent. This proportion is lower than the other two parishes. Three wills leave bequests to children from previous marriages. Two wills mention grandchildren specifically related to the wife.

Aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces do not appear to have been as important in Blakesley as in the other two parishes. In Blakesley, there were only seven wills that mention nephews or nieces and one that mentioned an aunt. Mothers appeared in only two wills, and one will left a bequest to a father. Brothers only appeared in seven wills (8.1 per cent) and sisters six wills (7 per cent), significantly lower than in Kingsthorpe and Castor.

Any person not specified in the will or was indeterminable was placed under the category unknown male, unknown female or unknown children. These were not included in the family analysis, but placed within the community analysis. The reason for this is that it was difficult to justify any family link. The lack of specified kin relationship in the will (especially if the name of the person receiving the bequest had a different surname to the testator) made it easier to justify these people

as friends, neighbours or local people. These unknown people were few in number in comparison for the most frequent four groups of kin who received bequests in wills. Blakesley had fourteen wills with unknown males, twelve wills with unknown females and two with unknown children. Castor had forty-eight wills with unknown males, thirty-one wills with unknown females and twelve with unknown children. Kingsthorpe had forty-six wills with unknown males, thirty-three wills with unknown females and six with unknown children.

All three parishes show a frequent number of bequests to wives, daughters and sons. Unsurprisingly there are no husbands mentioned, as no married women made a will. Grandchildren are also important amongst the kin, and often receiving items. If one totals the number of wills for these for the three parishes, it can be seen that bequests were concentrated heavily into this narrow kin. In Kingsthorpe, there were 301 total bequests in wills for wives, daughters, sons and grandchildren (66.2 per cent). If one adds to this the entries for the combined bequest to son-in-laws and their wives and the entries classed just under children, this takes the total to 310 (68.1 per cent). In Castor, there were 316 out of 462 entries for wives, sons, daughters and grandchildren (68.4 per cent). If one adds to this the 18 wills accounted for by joint bequests to son-in-laws and their wives and bequests to kin just classed as children, this takes it to 72.3 per cent. Blakesley had 190 entries for wives, sons, daughters and grandchildren (73.6 per cent). If one adds onto this the entries for son-in-laws and their wives, children, and sons and daughters, this takes the proportion to 79.1 per cent. This falls into line with Houlbrooke's argument that bequests were

concentrated into the nuclear family of birth or marriage.¹ Thus despite the parishes illustrating different aspects of open or closed communities, and operating different economies and societies, the concentration of bequests remains in the hands of the nuclear family. There are no significant differences in the testators' behaviour within the three parishes. Differing economies and societies play no effect upon the inheritance strategies and the range of family members recognised in the wills.

The analysis of the Terling wills showed that testators concentrated their inheritance into the hands of a small number of close kin. Male testators provided well for their widows. If there were no children, widows would receive the entire inheritance of all the personal property of the marriage. With land, they would receive a life interest and then, if there were no children this would pass to more distant kin. If the children of the marriage were married, the widow would receive a life interest in the land and house. In the case of minors, the widow would receive a life interest until the children were of inheritance age. In the case of older children, the land or house would usually go to the eldest son, with the daughter provided for by other items in the estate. If there were more than one son, the land would go to the eldest unless he was married and already provided for. Land would never be divided and would pass whole to the inheriting son, but as far as was possible, the male testator would attempt to provide equally for his children within his will, unless some of the children had already been provided for.² Beyond this nuclear family, grandchildren

¹ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion, and the Family, p. 140.

² Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, pp. 97-9.

were important, followed by brothers, nephews and nieces.³ In a wood pasture area of East Anglia, a large proportion of land was passed through the hands of the widow, and the children were well provided for.⁴ Spufford also found that the male testator showed great care of the widow, and children, with Orwell testators tending to split the land and the estate between all the children.⁵ In Willingham, land tended to be kept intact, but when split between sons was more likely to be larger areas.⁶ Yorkshire concentrated bequests into the hands of the nuclear family of widow and children.⁷ Suffolk concentrated bequests into the hands of children, with a smaller percentage of wills mentioning grandchildren.⁸ In Kibworth Harcourt in the Midlands, bequests were concentrated into the hands of the widow and children.⁹ A study of Whickham also found a high concentration of bequests placed in the hands of the male testator's nuclear family. Wider kin of grandchildren and siblings also received items. However, other wider kin were infrequently mentioned.¹⁰ In Essex and Wiltshire, the widow and the direct heirs of the testator, and their own heirs (i.e. the grandchildren of the testator) were the favoured beneficiaries. As was the case with other studies, wider kin were mentioned in some wills, but not of a significant frequency. Wives in Essex and Wiltshire were mentioned in 68.8 per cent of wills,

³ Ibid, p. 92.

⁴ N. Evans, 'Inheritance, women, religion and education in early modern society as revealed by wills', in Riden (ed.), Probate Records, p. 63.

⁵ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, pp. 112-8.

⁶ Ibid, p. 160.

⁷ Coster, Kinship and Inheritance, pp. 9-10.

⁸ R. P. Garrard, 'English probate inventories and their use in studying the significance of the domestic interior 1570-1700', Aag Bijdragen, 23 (1980), p. 67.

⁹ Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance, pp. 255-6.

¹⁰ D. Levine and K. Wrightson, The Making of an Industrial Society, Whickham 1560-1765 (Oxford, 1991), pp. 285-6.

sons in 67.4 per cent, daughters in 66.3 per cent and grandchildren in 25 per cent.¹¹

All of these regional studies are comparable to the results of Northamptonshire.

Kin recognition was versatile and wide-ranging throughout the three parishes. After bequeathing items to the immediate nuclear family, each parish had different kin given bequests. Blakesley had the highest percentage concentrated into the immediate family, followed by Castor and then Kingsthorpe. Kingsthorpe had the smallest percentage of wills that focused the bequests into the hands of the immediate kin, but it was still a high figure of 66.2 per cent.

Recognition of Kin based on Life cycle

Employing a method used by Wrightson, Levine, and Coster in two different studies, the impact of life cycle upon bequests in wills can be examined.¹² Wills can be categorised by the range of kin recognised within them, to identify at what stage in the testator's life the will was written.

Using Coster's methodology, category A includes people who were not married and had no children. These testators were at the beginning of the life cycle and bequeathed to grandparents, parents, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles.

Category B includes those people who have just married and bequests to kin includes spouse, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, and parents in law. Category C

¹¹ Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction', pp. 54-6.

¹² See Coster, 'Community, piety, and family in Yorkshire wills', and Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety.

includes those testators that have been married and now have children. Bequests in these wills include children, nephews, and nieces. Category D is of older testators with grown up adult children, and bequests include spouses of children. The last stage of the lifecycle is category E which includes testators with married children who now had children of their own. Bequests at this stage include grandchildren.

As can be seen from table 2.1, those in stage C of the life cycle made up the majority of the testators. Stage C totalled forty-four out of eighty-six wills in Blakesley (51.2 per cent), eighty-five out of 148 in Castor (57.4 per cent) and eighty-four out of 157 in Kingsthorpe (53.5 per cent), totalling 213 testators (54.5 per cent). In this case, children were the motivating factor for making a will, and it was at this stage in the life cycle that a testator would have most needed to make a will. Stage E was second highest with eighty-nine out of 391 wills (22.8 per cent). Grandchildren were the second motivating factor as a reason for making a will. The testator's own children would most likely have received items of inheritance upon marriage, and would not necessarily have inherited again through the will.

The third highest group were those testators at stages A and B, with thirty-one wills (7.9 per cent). The reason for these two groups having the same results may be because these stages were at the beginning of the life cycle stage, and these groups did not necessarily make wills for they had no minors or families of which they had to take care of. Last were those testators at stage D, a period in life when children were now married and no longer dependent but there are no grandchildren yet. The

married children would have received items as part of their marriage, and with no grandchildren to bequeath to; there may have been little reason to write a will.

Table 2.1 – Categorisation of wills by Lifecycle per parish

Category/ Parish		Category					
Parish	Sex	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Blakesley	Female	1	2	4	1	6	14
	Male	3	4	40	9	16	72
Blakesley Total		4	6	44	10	22	86
Castor	Female	2	1	10	4	12	29
	Male	6	8	75	8	22	119
Castor Total		8	9	85	12	34	148
Kingsthorpe	Female	6	1	13	1	12	33
	Male	13	15	71	4	21	124
Kingsthorpe Total		19	16	84	5	33	157
Total		31	31	213	27	89	391

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

In Blakesley and Castor men follow the general trend, with those at stage C as the highest, however, women have stage E as the highest number of wills. In

Kingsthorpe, men also have stage C as the highest numbers of will writers. Women are very nearly split between stages C and E. Women in Kingsthorpe at stage C have one more will than stage E. Although the overall trend of the three parishes appears to be for testators to appear mainly in stage C, this does not appear to be the case for women. As the majority of the female testators were widows, they are consequently older than male testators when writing their wills, and thus when being at stage E of their lives, have been able to provide bequests for grandchildren as well as children.

This was due to the legal restrictions on married women making wills.

Coster found slightly different results, although his study also found testators from category C with the highest number of wills. However, he found category B second, E third, category A fourth, and D fifth.¹³ The analysis from the Northamptonshire parishes found groups B and E in switched places in comparison to Coster's study. The emphasis in the wills of the Northamptonshire parishes was on children and grandchildren rather than spouses.

Table 2.2 illustrates the breakdown of the kin recognition in the wills of the three parishes based on life cycle stages. Comparing table 2.1 to table 2.2 it can be seen that those testators at the beginning of the adult life cycle stages favoured bequests to their sisters and brothers. Both sets of siblings received an equal amount of bequests. Out of nineteen testators in Kingsthorpe, there were nine bequests to sisters and nine to brothers. In Castor, out of eight testators at stage A, three bequests went each to brothers and sisters.

Blakesley with four at stage A also gave three bequests each to siblings. Mothers came third, but fathers only received one bequest. Aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces, along with godchildren also received bequests from testators at stage A of the life cycle, although to a lesser amount than the testator's immediate blood family.

¹³ Coster, 'Community, piety, family in Yorkshire wills', p. 524.

Table 2.2 – Kin Recognition per parish per life cycle stage - those wills with more than two bequests to kin

Kin / Parish	Stage A			Stage B			Stage C			Stage D			Stage E			Total
	K	B	C	K	B	C	K	B	C	K	B	C	K	B	C	
Son	0	0	0	0	0	0	65	37	60	2	8	9	24	15	25	245
Wife	0	0	0	15	4	8	57	31	55	3	7	6	14	9	14	223
Daughter	0	0	0	0	0	0	54	28	56	2	8	8	16	11	19	202
Brother	9	3	3	2	1	4	13	2	14	2	1	1	8	0	2	65
Grandson	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	13	23	58
Granddaughter	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	12	18	49
Sister	9	3	3	0	1	4	8	1	9	0	1	3	2	0	0	44
Nephew	1	0	0	0	0	0	13	4	11	1	1	1	2	0	0	34
Daughter & Son-in-Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	9	5	6	7	33
Grandchildren	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	5	12	24
Niece	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	9	0	0	1	5	0	0	23
God Children	1	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	3	2	0	0	6	0	1	21
God Son	1	0	1	4	0	0	4	3	5	0	0	0	1	1	0	20
Kinsman	2	1	0	2	2	1	1	4	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	17
Nephews & Nieces	0	1	1	2	0	0	2	0	6	0	0	1	1	0	1	15
Mother	3	2	1	1	0	2	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	15
Daughter-in-Law	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	2	2	4	14
Kinswoman	1	1	1	1	2	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	14
God Daughter	0	0	1	0	1	0	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	10
Male Cousin	2	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	9
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	7
Sister-in-Law	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Aunt	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	6
Male Cousin's Children	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	6
Female Cousin	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	6
Unborn Child	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Brother-in-Law	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Father	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	5
Uncle	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Godson's Sister	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Wife's Daughter	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	4
Wife's Children / Son	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Neph/Niece's Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Kin's Children	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Male Cousin's Wife	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Unborn Grandchild	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2

Key for parish heading is K = Kingsthorpe, B = Blakesley, C = Castor

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

The kin recognised in the wills of those testators at stage B of the life cycle has moved to wives. Wives accounted for fifteen bequests from of all fifteen male testators in Kingsthorpe at this stage of life, all eight of the male testators in Castor and all four males in Blakesley. Wives have arguably replaced mothers in terms of importance to the male testator. Fathers still do not appear important, again only receiving one bequest. However, these low numbers of bequests to fathers may have been because they were actually not alive. For the testators themselves to be now determining their wills, they must have received items themselves previously in the form of inheritance from their own fathers. With no children of their own to focus on, the testators distribute their bequests to godsons, nephews, nieces and their siblings. Due to the now married testator having a new family through the spouse, some bequests are now spread out to this new family. Bequests through marriage rather than simply blood ties are now brought into the equation and in-laws were now focused upon. At stage C of the life cycle, the testator has now a nuclear family of their own with their spouse. As can be seen in the table, the bequests in the wills now reflect this. Bequests to sons were the most common, followed by wives and then daughters.

Arguably, the wills are a mechanism to ensure the succession of the son to his rightful legal inheritance, which is why sons are mentioned in the most of the wills. Sons accounted for sixty-five bequests within eighty-four wills in Kingsthorpe (77.4 per cent), sixty bequests in eighty-five wills in Castor (70.6 per cent) and thirty-seven bequests in forty-four wills in Blakesley (84.1 per cent). Wives appeared more important than daughters in the bequests of these testators. Wives account for fifty-

seven bequests of the seventy-one male testators in Kingsthorpe (80.3 per cent), fifty-five of the seventy-five males in Castor (73.3 per cent) and thirty-one of the forty males in Blakesley (77.5 per cent). Even unborn children were a concern to the testator, and these children were taken care of in four of the wills. This demonstrates the importance of the immediate nuclear family to the testator and the great lengths that testators went to protect the family's interests. After the immediate nuclear family was acknowledged, remaining bequests were streamlined towards the wider male kin. Brothers and nephews receive important attention, and it is these parties, that are most likely focused upon when the testator has no immediate family of their own. Two fathers still make an appearance at this stage, despite the testator having a family of their own; mothers have however disappeared. At this stage in the life cycle, mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law also receive a few bequests, possibly because they are now grandparents to the testator's children. Their importance within the kin group has now increased from parents of the spouse to grandparents of the children. Nephews and nieces are still an important group recognised at this stage. They appear fifth and seventh in importance, and only receive slightly less attention than brothers. In fact, it could be argued that they are now receiving more attention than during the previous two life stages. It is also at this stage that a wider range of unidentified kin now appears to receive a wider range of recognition and bequests. Unspecified kin now received bequests, along with non-direct kin groups, that were tenuously linked to the testator. At this stage in life, kinship recognition was widened and less shallow than the previous stages of A and B.

At stage D of the life cycle the range of kin recognised has reduced dramatically from those recognised at stage C. In fact, there is a smaller kin range recognised than at stage A and B. Sons are still top of the recognition table, and daughters have now moved up to second place replacing wives. A new range of kin begins to appear, and these are the spouses of the now adult children of the testator.

Consequently, daughters now receive bequests for themselves combined with their husbands, and bequests to them are fourth in importance in the wills. Daughters-in-law also receive items, though not as frequently as sons-in-law. Brothers, nephews and nieces are still important to the testators, along with some bequests still to godchildren. At this stage in life, it can be argued that the testators begin to withdraw bequests from the wider extended family recognised in stage C, and to some extent A and B. Unidentified kinsmen and kinswomen were less frequent at this stage, and bequests to more distant kin through marriage (excluding spouse's of grown-up children) appear to have decreased. The focus of the testator, although always immediately on the nuclear family through the previous stages, does show some elements of a wider acceptance of bequests in some cases to more distant kin. However, at stage D, this widening of bequests to wider kin begins to restrict back to the immediate kin group, to consolidate the wealth and strength of the immediate kin group's survival.

At stage E of the life cycle, the testator's adult and married children are now producing children of their own. It is at this point that the widest range of kin, now appear to be receiving bequests within the wills. Sons once again top the highest number of bequests; however, wives reduce in importance along with daughters.

Wives and daughters are moved down the table and are replaced in importance by grandsons and granddaughters. Grandchildren become more of a focus to the testators in this life cycle stage than perhaps the sons and daughters. This is also demonstrated by two bequests to unborn grandchildren (especially when compared to only one bequest for an unborn child). Spouses of the testators' children also received bequests, although the grandchildren also receive more bequests than them. This generation is of some importance to the testators. For example, the children of the testators' nephews and nieces receive bequests along with children of the testators' godchildren. The future welfare of the family is obviously of great importance to the testators at this stage in life. There is even a bequest to the fiancé of the testators' son, and she is not yet a permanent member of the kin group (not in the table). Perhaps the reason for the focus of these bequests upon the grandchildren is that many of the testators' estates have already been passed on to the children and heirs of the testators by other means. What also should be noted, is that brothers are still of importance to the testators at this stage, as are to some extent nephews and nieces (as they have been in all the previous stages). Also unusually two wills have bequests to a mother and father, despite grandchildren being present.¹⁴

Missing from the table are those kin that only appeared once in any of the wills from the three parishes. At stage A of the life cycle there was a bequest to a kinsman and

¹⁴ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills, Volume 2, Book K, Fol 143, will of John Walton, Castor, 23 May 1658, gave bequests to his mother, grandchildren and son, and NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 1, Fol 78, will of Roger Tonge, Castor, 30 August 1546, gave bequests to his father, wife, children, grandchildren and godchildren.

his wife in Kingsthorpe. At stage B there was a bequest to a group of brothers and sisters in Kingsthorpe, a brother-in-law and his wife and a wife's kinsman in Blakesley. At stage C there was a bequest to a father-in-law in Kingsthorpe and a wife's daughter's children in Blakesley. At stage D there was a bequest in Kingsthorpe to a nephew's wife. Lastly, those at stage E of the life cycle had the most bequests to individual wider kin. Kingsthorpe had a bequest to the uncle's children, and a godson's son. Blakesley had bequests to a goddaughter's sister, a fiancée of a son and a wife's grandchild and Castor had a bequest to a granddaughter-in-law and a male cousin and his wife. Fourteen wills covered fourteen different wider kin.

Wrightson and Levine in their analysis of Terling wills also looked at whether kin recognition varied with social position, sex and life cycle stage. They found that no matter what stage a testator was at in life cycle, kin recognition was concentrated on close kin, especially the direct heirs and nuclear family. The Terling analysis only found two slight variations. Testators who had no children or very young children would more commonly mention siblings or a spouse's siblings. The second variation was that men with no children, widows and unmarried women referred the most often to more distant kin such as nephews, nieces' godchildren, and unspecified kinsmen.¹⁵ Houlbrooke's analysis of wills that were registered in the Archdeaconry Courts of Norwich and Berkshire also concentrated heavily on close kin, although with some variation dependent on life cycle stage. Young will makers, who were not

¹⁵ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, pp. 93-94.

yet married, could focus on aunts, uncles and parents. This was similarly seen in stage A of the Northamptonshire parishes, although more was focused on siblings than parents, aunts and uncles. However, Houlbrooke does go on to argue that the childless, widowed and single people would be more likely to focus on siblings, nephews and nieces.¹⁶ One difference noted between Houlbrooke's findings and this study, is that Houlbrooke found that grandparents (i.e. those at Stage E of the life cycle) were more likely to mention sons-in-law. In this study, although sons-in-law did receive a noticeable amount of bequests at stage E, in comparison to those bequests to sons, daughters, wives and grandchildren, the number received were negligible.¹⁷

In the three parishes in Northamptonshire, as Houlbrooke, Wrightson and Levine have argued, no matter what stage of the life cycle of a testator, kin recognition was always centred on close kin. Close kin, direct heirs and the immediate family are the three most frequent beneficiaries at stage C and D. Children, grandchildren and wives at stage E, are the most frequent beneficiaries when the immediate family has expanded slightly. When the testator has married (stage B), his wife receives the highest number of bequests. Finally, at stage A, the largest number of bequests went to the immediate family of siblings and mothers, the people with whom they are most likely to be living.

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 141.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 141.

Looking at social hierarchies, Wrightson and Levine found most of their testators in Terling were from the top three groups of gentry and large farmers (group one), yeomen, substantial husbandmen and craftsmen (group two) and smaller husbandmen and craftsmen (group three). Group four consisting of labourers and cottagers hardly figured at all. Within the categories of one to three, the Terling analysis discovered no variation of any significance in the recognition of kin. Category four had the narrowest range of kin recognition.¹⁸

Table 2.3 outlines the occupations of the testators in the three Northamptonshire parishes. As can be seen from the table the most frequent category to be found was category three, made up of eighteen occupations. However, these eighteen occupations were only stated in fifty-four wills. If one places all the wills from husbandmen and yeomen into category two (it is difficult to assess wealth of the testators based solely on wills and no other documents), this gives a total of 108 wills in category two, to which can be added seven wills from vicars. Category one can only be accounted for by wills from gentlemen, which only account for thirteen wills. Regarding category four, there are thirty-seven wills from labourers, and one will from a servant also placed into this category. There are more wills in category four than category one. This result differs from Terling indicating that the wealth of the three parishes in Northamptonshire was less than in Terling, due to the higher number of wills from labourers.

¹⁸ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 93.

Table 2.3 – Social Categorisation of the testators based on Wrightson & Levine

Occupation of Testators	Total Wills	Terling Social Category	Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe
			Range of Kin Recognised in the wills	Range of Kin Recognised in the wills	Range of Kin Recognised in the wills
Not specified	105	N/a	13	26	24
Widow	57	N/a	14	15	18
Husbandman	56	2	10	15	22
Yeoman	52	2	18	13	13
Labourer	37	4	2	11	15
Gent	13	1	10	18	12
Carpenter	9	3	4	7	2
Spinster	7	N/a	2	7	11
Mason	6	3	1	3	5
Shepherd	6	3	2	4	5
Tailor	6	3	2	4	2
Miller	5	3		1	4
Blacksmith	4	3		4	2
Weaver	3	3	1	5	
Baker	2	3	2		2
Farryer	2	3			3
Joiner	2	3			2
Butcher	1	3	1		
Cooke	1	3		2	
Cranslater	1	3			2
Gardner	1	3			1
Maiden	1	N/a	5		
Maulster	1	3		4	
Pulter	1	3			2
Seaman	1	N/a	4		
Servant	1	4			1
Slater	1	3		3	
Tayplike	1	3			2
Vicar/clerk/curate	7	2	4		9
Woolwinder	1	3		2	
Grand Total	391		95	144	159

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

The range of kin recognised per social category is difficult to assess, and consists in counting the number of different kin types recognised in the wills per occupation and social category. Social category one recognised between ten and eighteen

different kin in the wills. Category two recognised a range between ten and twenty-two kin. Social category three recognised between one and five kin and category four recognised between two and fifteen. Although this is a crude method of analysing the range of kin recognised per occupation, it can be seen that it does not agree with the results from Terling.

Based on occupation and social categorisation, the range of kin recognised was highest in category two and least in category three. Social category four recognised a wider range of kin than category two. Category one recognised a wider range than categories four and two. Although Terling had the narrowest range of kin recognition in category four, this was certainly not the case in the three parishes under study from Northamptonshire.

Regarding specific occupations, yeomen (category two) in Blakesley recognised the widest range of kin. In Kingsthorpe, husbandmen (category two) and in Castor gentlemen (category one) recognised the widest range. Thus, there appears to be no common pattern between the specific occupations of the three parishes, apart from the fact that Blakesley and Kingsthorpe share the same occupational category two with the widest range of kin.

The Nature of Bequests

Male testators in Blakesley, with 141 bequests, bequeathed money the most frequently. Money bequests were concentrated mainly in the hands of sons and

daughters, who received sixty-eight (48.2 per cent) of the total. Money was used as a form of bequest to every member of kin within the table, and money could be used with great frequency by the male testators in Blakesley to form a legacy. Money was a flexible bequest that could range from a few pence to substantial amounts depending on the kin recognised.

The second most frequent items bequeathed were land or housing, which appeared sixty-eight times in the wills. These bequests were concentrated into the hands of the widow or son, who received fifty of these bequests. The residue of the estate (all items not specifically bequeathed that were left over) was the third most frequent bequest, with wives this time receiving the bulk of these bequests. Household items were the fourth most frequent number of bequests in the wills of the male testators in Blakesley, with daughters receiving the highest number of bequests in this category. Sons received the most number of bequests in the form of money; the second most frequent bequest was of land or housing. The most frequent number of bequests to daughters was also in the form of money followed by household items. Grandchildren, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and godchildren also received money bequests the most often. Wives most frequently received land or housing, the second most frequent bequest was the residue of the estate. This is somewhat expected, as one would expect the sons to receive the land or housing as being heir. However, it could be supposed that land might already have been settled on the heir before the will was written and thus this issue did not need to be addressed again. Merely the welfare of the widow needed to be taken care of. As was the case in Blakesley, money was the highest item bequeathed in the wills of the male testators

of Kingsthorpe, with 156 legacies. In comparison to Blakesley, money bequests were not given to every member of kin. In Kingsthorpe, bequests of land or houses were the second most frequent bequest with only two less than money. Bequests of animals were the third most frequent bequest (as compared to Blakesley where they were fifth most frequent) with ninety-four bequests. This is perhaps evidence with the high numbers of land and animals of a highly agricultural community. Bequests of residue were fourth.

In Castor, as was the case in Blakesley and Kingsthorpe, money was bequeathed the most often in the parish, with a total of 185 bequests and bequeathed to all but three of the kin categories. The second most frequent item to be bequeathed was the residue of the estate, with 100 bequests. The third most frequent was the bequest of animals, accounting for seventy-five bequests. A close fourth were bequests of land or houses (considerably lower down the list than in the case of Kingsthorpe or Blakesley). The bulk of the bequests of money went to the sons and daughters, with eighty-four of the 185 total money bequests (45.4 per cent). The majority of the bequests of the residue of the estate went to wives who accounted for fifty-six of the 100 bequests (56 per cent), with sons accounting for twenty-nine (29 per cent). Twenty-two bequests of animals went to sons (29.3 per cent). The highest number of the bequests of land or houses went to wives, (as was the case with Blakesley and Kingsthorpe) with twenty-seven (38 per cent), with sons coming a close second with twenty-five bequests (35.2 per cent). Sons and daughters had most bequests involving money, whereas wives were mainly given the residue of the estate. Brothers, grandchildren, sisters, nephews, nieces, nephews and godchildren all had

their highest number of bequests involving money. Castor wills see the appearance of bequests involving thirds. Thirds were the description given to the third part of the estate to which the widow was legally entitled. In some cases (as can be seen from the thirds bequeathed to daughters, brothers and sisters), the whole estate would be split into three parts evenly and simply distributed in that format. Other times the widow's third would be pre bequeathed after her death to other parties. The bequeathing of thirds was not a common feature in the male wills in Castor, as there were only a total of six made.

Some kin that were more distant were given substantial bequests of land or the testator's house. In the case of Blakesley, three unidentified kinsmen and three nephews along with the daughter of a wife received a share or all of the land or the house. In Castor, a nephew, a kinsman and a kinswoman were all given shares of land or housing. Castor was the parish that appeared to keep land or houses within the hands of close kin. Kingsthorpe had the greatest spread of bequests of land or houses to wider kin, with bequests passing into the hands of nephews, godsons, a niece, a kinsman, a mother-in-law, two brothers-in-law, a godson's son and a wife's son. It is noticeable that these bequests of substantial amounts of land and houses passed into the hands of wider kin, in those wills that do not appear to specify any bequests to children. It was only where testators had no immediate close kin as heirs that he would bequeath these substantial items to wider kin rather than no one at all. Noticeably in the majority of these cases, these wider kin were male.

In the bequests given to kin by female testators in Blakesley, there was a smaller range of items given by the females in this parish, with only nine categories accounted for. Money was the most frequent item bequeathed, with twenty-nine instances, the remaining categories are somewhat smaller in comparison. Second most frequent were the eight bequests of the residue of an estate, and third most frequent are bequests of household items and furniture with six bequests each. Granddaughters, grandsons and sons-in-law with their wives had the highest number of bequests involving money. The most frequent bequests of money went to sons and daughters (34.5 per cent), and the bulk of the bequests of residue of the estate go to sons (37.5 per cent). Bequests of jewellery and furniture went primarily to sons, whereas these items would be expected to go towards the female kin. However, these numbers of bequests are so low, that these results are inconclusive.

For the bequests of female wills in Kingsthorpe, once again money was the most frequent bequest, this time with forty-two. Bequests of the residue of an estate (as in Blakesley) came second with twenty bequests, and household items came third. Bequests of money (as was the case with the wills of male testators of all three parishes and the female testators in Blakesley), affected the greatest number of kin categories. Bequests of land or houses accounted for the fourth most frequent number of bequests, with a total of fourteen. Bequests of money are evenly split between sons, brothers, daughters and grandchildren. The highest number of the bequests of the residue of the estate goes to sons, and the majority of the household items go to granddaughters and then to daughters. The female testators in Kingsthorpe had the

greatest range of categories, with a total of eleven, when compared to the female testators in Castor and Blakesley.

Within the wills of the female testators in Castor, once again money is the category with the most frequent number of bequests, with forty-nine. Household items are the second most frequent, with twenty-one bequests made. Third are bequests of the residue of the estate with twenty bequests and fourth are bequests of animals with thirteen bequests. Castor switches around the categories of residue and household items in comparison to Kingsthorpe and Blakesley. Once again, money bequests affect the largest range of kin, as was the case in all the other parishes with both genders. Sons received the bulk of the money bequests, followed by grandsons and then daughters and granddaughters. Daughters, followed by granddaughters and sons received the bulk of the household items. The residue was concentrated mostly in the hands of sons followed by daughters, and this could be the widow following the previous bequest of a deceased husband. Animals were concentrated mostly into the hands of sons. Grandsons, brothers, nephews, nieces and daughters in law were given money. Granddaughters were equally given money or household items.

In all the wills of the female testators, bequests of land or houses are markedly less frequent than in the wills of male testators. There are also fewer bequests of farm tools, crops and animals. Female testators concerned themselves more with money and household objects. In these wills of the female testators a smaller number of kin are recognised in comparison to the male testators, as well as a smaller range of items bequeathed.

To conclude, the analysis of the wills in the three Northamptonshire parishes illustrate that kinship recognition was restricted in its range. No matter at what stage in life the testator was at, the recognition of kin was limited to the nuclear family. As Wrightson and Levine discovered kinship recognition in wills was concentrated on the nuclear family and the sex of the testator or social status did not affect this.¹⁹ Furthermore, the effect of whether the community was open or closed also appears to have had no effect upon the concentration of bequests into the hands of the nuclear family. In fact, in comparison to the wills of male testators, females recognise a smaller range of kin. Maddern argued that the reason for widows to have a wider range of bequests was because the husband may have previously provided for the nuclear family, and the widow could address the wider kin. Alternatively, the husband left all to the wife to distribute at her own will.²⁰ However, with the Northamptonshire wills, older testators (category E) had the widest range of kin recognition, and this category consisted of testators with children of their own and grandchildren. It must be noted though, that even though older testators had the widest range of kin recognised, the majority of the bequests were still focused into the hands of the widow and testators' children. The wider range of kin only had a small number of bequests given to them, which in comparison to the number of bequests given to the nuclear family were a minor number indeed. Despite this, it must be stressed that married testators with children had the greatest number of

¹⁹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 94.

²⁰ P. Maddern, 'Friends of the dead: executors, wills and family strategy in fifteenth century Norfolk' in R. E. Archer and S. Walker (eds.), Rulers and Ruled in Late Medieval England (London, 1995), p. 168.

bequests, and it is at this stage of life, that most testators seem to have made their will.

Some wider kin in the Northamptonshire wills were recognised with small bequests and tokens of affection. Some were installed as guardians of minors, to receive a bequest if the minor died prematurely. This was also the same in Cressy's analysis. Sreenivasan argued that although blood ties were recognised more often than affinal ties, this did not mean that the affinal ties were completely disregarded, as they were still recognised in wills.²¹ This can be seen in the Northamptonshire wills, where in-laws and other kin through marriage, although recognised in some of the wills, were recognised to a lesser extent than blood kin. Laurence argued that unless wider kin such as uncles, aunts, cousins and even brothers and sisters were close geographically, close emotional ties were unlikely to be maintained.²² Gottlieb points out that outside of the nuclear family, nephews were the most frequent beneficiaries.²³ In the Northamptonshire wills, after the nuclear family of wife, children and grandchildren for married testators and mother, father and siblings for unmarried testators, nephews scored the highest number of bequests.

Money was the most commonly bequeathed item in all three parishes regardless of gender, because it was the quickest and easiest way to dispose of items in this form.

²¹ G. Sreenivasan, 'Reply to the debate, the land-family bond in England', Past and Present No. 146 (February 1995), p. 178.

²² A. Laurence, 'Godly grief: individual responses to death in seventeenth century Britain' in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), Death, Ritual and Bereavement (London, 1989), pp. 64-5.

²³ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 194.

However, the executor or executrices may have had to sell items to raise the money bequeathed. In Kingsthorpe and Blakesley, land or houses were the second most frequent item bequeathed in the wills of male testators, whereas in Castor it was the residue of the estate. The female testators concerned themselves with a smaller range of bequests to a smaller range of kin in comparison to the male testators. In Kingsthorpe and Blakesley, the most frequent bequest after money was of the general residue, whereas in Castor it was household items.

Howell found that the tendency in the wills of the male testators was if there were no children or the children were minors, to leave the residue of the estate to the wife.²⁴ She discovered that the care of the wife was of primary concern to the majority of the male testators in Kibworth Harcourt.²⁵ Spufford also found that testators showed great concern in providing for the widow in the wills of the Cambridgeshire testators.²⁶ Arguably, this can be seen to have been the case in the wills of the male testators of the three Northamptonshire parishes, with bequests of residue high to the widows, and furthermore the substantial bequests left to the widows in general. Spufford found that in Willingham, in the late sixteenth century, owners of a half yard land or more were less likely to leave a will than the small landholder and landless.²⁷ She also argued that men who left minors would be more likely to make a will. As his children were below the age of legal inheritance, the testator felt the need to write a will to protect the interests of his children and to appoint guardians (usually the widow)

²⁴ Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance, p. 256.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 257.

²⁶ Spufford, Contrasting Communities p. 112.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 159.

to protect these interests until the child or children were of inheriting age. Oestmann and Howell also agree with Spufford's arguments.²⁸ This can be seen in the wills of the Northamptonshire testators, as those at stage C of the life cycle (those with children, but not grandchildren or married children) made the most wills. Providing for the young family was the key motivating factor.

When comparing the wills from the three parishes, there was, little difference in the range of kin recognised who received the most bequests. Male testators from all three Northamptonshire parishes primarily recognise the nuclear family of wife, son and daughter. Grandchildren had the fourth highest number of bequests. Female testators focus bequests on their children and then grandchildren. Consequently, the differing economies of the three parishes, and the differences of them as open or closed communities had little effect. Regarding the range of kin recognised, in Kingsthorpe this was slightly wider than in the other two parishes. Arguably, the fact that Kingsthorpe was a closed parish affected the higher number of kin recognised, in comparison to the open characteristics of Blakesley and Castor. The high mobility of people within the open parishes, would have led to weakened kinship networks and thus a smaller range of kin that were recognised. The slightly differing economies allow for some variation in items bequeathed, although the item most frequently bequeathed was money, which was common to all three parishes.

²⁸ Oestmann, Lordship and Community, p. 191 and Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance, p. 255.

Chapter 3 –Community and neighbourliness

As outlined in the introduction, there have been many definitions of what a community is, ranging from people living under one roof, to people sharing the area of a neighbourhood, to friendship between people uniting them regardless of geographical location or proximity to one another. However, the reoccurring themes of a community are area, social interaction and common ties.¹

In this analysis of the three parishes in Northamptonshire, a testator could identify with the feeling of belonging to a community on two separate levels. Firstly belonging to a neighbourhood, part of the village and parish and secondly a community that had a wider social area, not bounded by geographical boundaries, of people less infrequently interacted with than those in the neighbourhood, but perhaps with other common ties, such as of social level, friendship or occupation. Examples of this could be guilds, county gentry or people who had interacted closely in the past, had since moved out of the geographical area, but were still friendly and in contact. This second level could even be extended to a sense of national community, of one feeling a tie to the country especially in times when the nation's identity was being threatened (i.e. in times of war).

¹ G. A. Hillery Jr., 'Definitions of community: areas of agreement' Rural Sociology 20 (1955), p. 118.

Kümin argued that the parish unit, centred on the parish church was a community.² Tudor legislation strengthened the parish into an administrative centre of local government. Through the parish registers, people were recorded, from baptism to burial. Thus as outlined in the introduction, for the purposes of this study, the community will be defined as the group of people that fall within the parish boundaries centred on the parish church. This definition falls within the common threads that Hillery found, with the area being defined by the parochial boundary, and the common thread and social interaction being governed by the interaction of people within the local church.

Bequests to people outside of the kin group

Table 3.1 shows the breakdown of bequests to people and groups of people outside of those identified as members of the nuclear family or wider kin. Unfortunately, within all three parishes, some people were named in wills that could not be determined as to whether they were kin or not. These unidentified people were grouped under the heading of unknown male, unknown female and unknown children. As can be seen from table 3.1 unknown males and females top the listings of bequests to people outside of the family. Kingsthorpe had forty-six wills with bequests to unknown males and thirty-three to unknown females. This equates to 50.3 per cent of the wills with bequests to unknown members who may or may not have been members of the kin network, and even may or may not have been

² B. A. Kümin, The Shaping of a Community. The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c1400-1560 (Aldershot, 1996), p. 1.

members of the community. In Castor, forty-eight testators had bequests to unknown males and thirty-one to unknown females, which totalled seventy-nine, the same as Kingsthorpe. Despite this, the percentage of the total wills in Castor was slightly higher equating to 53.4. Blakesley had a smaller number of bequests to unknown males and females, involving twenty-six (30.3 per cent), although these groups still top the list in this parish as the highest number of wills bequeathing items to these people.

Children with no specified relationship to the testator were another group of unidentified people receiving attention from the testators. Kingsthorpe had six wills (3.8 per cent) with bequests to unknown children. Castor had twelve wills (8.1 per cent) and Blakesley had two wills (2.3 per cent). These 'unknown children', could have been grandchildren, children, nephews or nieces not directly indicated as such by the testator. However, these may have also been non-kin such as children of friends or neighbours. So, if these groups of unknown males, females and children are discarded from the results, which people were to receive bequests outside of the nuclear family or wider kin?

In table 3.1, it can be seen that godchildren were important to the testators.

Godchildren are difficult to place inside or outside of kin. Arguably, they may not be related through blood or marriage. In all three parishes, godchildren were sometimes also identified as grandchildren. However, it can be argued that they are kin through a spiritual bond.

Table 3.1 – Count of wills specifying bequests to people outside of the kin groups

Parish	Castor		Blakesley		Kingsthorpe	
	Total	% of total 148 wills in sample	Total	% of total 86 wills in sample	Total	% of total 157 wills in sample
Unknown Male	48	32.4	14	16.3	46	29.3
Unknown Female	31	21.0	12	14.0	33	21.0
Unknown Children	12	8.1	2	2.3	6	3.8
Supervisor	9	6.1	0	0.0	13	8.3
Manservant	7	4.7	3	3.5	6	3.8
Godchildren	6	4.1	3	3.5	12	7.6
Godson	6	4.1	4	4.7	10	6.4
Overseers	5	3.4	5	5.8	16	10.2
Maid	3	2.0	7	8.1	7	4.5
Goddaughter	3	2.0	4	4.7	3	1.9
Servants	2	1.4	0	0.0	3	1.9
Master	2	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Apprentice	2	1.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Preaches Funeral Sermon	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Friend	1	0.7	5	5.8	4	2.6
Housekeeper	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Tenants	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Will Writer	0	0.0	2	2.3	2	1.3
Girl Betrothed to Son	0	0.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Minister	0	0.0	1	1.2	1	0.6
Minister's Wife	0	0.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Servants in Sons House	0	0.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Shepherd	0	0.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Trustees	0	0.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Goddaughter's Sisters	0	0.0	1	1.2	0	0.0
Master's Children	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Good Friend&Neighbour	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Godson's Sister	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Godson's Son	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Total Wills	140	94.9	68	79.4	166	105.6

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

To cover the fact that they may not have been actual kin through blood or marriage, they are also included in this chapter. In Kingsthorpe, twenty-five wills (15.9 per cent) specified bequests to godchildren and in Castor fifteen wills (10.2 per cent)

specified bequests. Blakesley also had a lower percentage than Kingsthorpe, with eleven wills (12.9 per cent) stating bequests to godchildren, but this was still more than in Castor. Although mentioned within this chapter, it will be argued that godchildren through spiritual ties belonged within the kinship group, and have been analysed within the chapter on kinship.

Outside of godchildren, the group in Kingsthorpe to receive the most bequests was servants. Maids had the most bequests in seven wills, six to menservants, and three to all servants, a grand total of sixteen (10.2 per cent). In Castor, seven wills involve bequests to menservants, three to maids, one to a housekeeper, two to all servants and two to apprentices, a total of fifteen (10.2 per cent). Blakesley had the least bequests to servants, with seven bequests to maids, three bequests to menservants, one to servants in the son's house, and one to a shepherd, a grand total of twelve (14 per cent). Outside of bequests to godchildren, and members of the working household (servants), there are very few bequests to other members of the community in the three parishes.

In Kingsthorpe, table 3.1 shows the diverse range of bequests to members of the community outside of the groups outlined above. One will had a bequest to the minister, one to the master's children, two to the will writer, and two to relatives of the godchildren. Actual bequests to people specified as friends totalled five, one of which was also noted a neighbour (3.2 per cent). In Castor, there were two wills with bequests to the masters, one will had a bequest to the man that preached the

funeral sermon and one to tenants. Only one will specified a bequest to a friend (0.7 per cent).

Blakesley had two wills that were written with bequests to the will writer, one will with a bequest to the minister, one to the minister's wife, one to the trustees and one to the goddaughter's sisters. There was one unusual bequest to a member of the community, who would not be classed as kin, and this was to the girl betrothed to the son. Regarding friends, Blakesley had the highest number of wills for all three parishes, with five wills (5.8 per cent).

In all three parishes, overseers and supervisors were frequently noted in wills as people to receive bequests. In Kingsthorpe, overseers and supervisors were important to the testators. Overseers received a bequest in sixteen of the wills (10.2 per cent) and supervisors in thirteen of the wills (8.3 per cent). Supervisors and overseers were also of some importance to the testators of Castor. Supervisors received something in nine of the wills (6.1 per cent), and overseers in five (3.4 per cent). In Blakesley, supervisors received no mention at all, whereas overseers were listed in five wills (5.8 per cent). However, these bequests may have been given in recognition of the service they would be carrying out on behalf of the testator and not due to signs of affection, as would have been in the case of friends, godchildren and so on.

It should also be noted that not all the wills involved bequests to non-kin. In Blakesley, fifty-nine wills did not leave items to non-kin (68.6 per cent). In Castor,

seventy-seven wills had no bequests to non-kin (52 per cent) of the sample).

Kingsthorpe had seventy-four wills with no bequests to non-kin (47.1 per cent). Out of a total will sample of 391 wills, only 181 actual wills specified bequests to non-kin, a mere 46.3 per cent.

In Castor 94.9 percent of the will sample had one bequest or more to people outside of the kin group. Blakesley had the least with only 79.4 per cent of the wills with bequests outside of the kin. Kingsthorpe gives the impression of being more diversified in its bequests, with 105.6 per cent of the will sample having bequests outside the kin group. This high percentage indicated that the wills that had bequests to non-kin would tend to have more than one bequest to people outside the kin group. However, if one removes the unknown groupings of males, females and children, along with godchildren, then non-kin bequests account for 34 bequests in Castor (23 per cent of the 148 wills in the sample); Blakesley only twenty-eight non-kin bequests (32.6 per cent) and in Kingsthorpe only fifty-four bequests (34.4 per cent). It can be argued, looking at these results that bequests to non-kin members outside of the unknown groups and godchildren were low.

The nature of bequests

From the wills that specified bequests to non-kin, there were 710 actual bequests to non-kin. Primarily, it should be noted that those groups with few bequests received small tokens of affection. For example, Robert Cannell bequeathed six pence each to

the four children of his master.³ The tenants of John Fysher received 12d each as well as every cottage in the town receiving 8d each.⁴ John Smyth gave a range of small household items to the sister of his godson, including a cupboard, sheet, pewter platter, dish, saucer, candlestick, brass pot, lattyn, tablecloth, towel and a cow.⁵ The sisters of a testator's goddaughter received ten shillings each.⁶ William Foxley left fifty shillings to a shepherd, which when compared to the other bequests in the will was a small amount.⁷ Henry Tenbie in Castor left eight shillings to his housekeeper; however, this was stated more in the context of a debt owing.⁸ Mary Watts left twenty shillings to the minister and ten shillings to his wife.⁹ All these bequests involved small sums of money or small household items, indicating that the testator wished to show some form of recognition, and with the bulk of the inheritance concentrated into the hands of the nuclear family (as outlined earlier in chapter two), there would have been little left over from the estate to further bequeath. The fact that these people are recognised, even with small items, still illustrates that even though they were not a part of the kin network, they were still important in terms of affection to the testator.

³ NRO, 1st Series Book V, fol. 314 will of Robert Cannell, 31 January 1588, Kingsthorpe.

⁴ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 1, fol. 57a will of John Fysher, 5 September 1545, Castor.

⁵ NRO, 1st Series Book K fol. 47 will of John Smith, 12 September 1546, Kingsthorpe.

⁶ NRO, 1st Series Book AV fol. 27 will of Mary Watts, 20 April 1620, Blakesley.

⁷ NRO, 3rd Series, Book D, fol. 56 will of William Foxley, 1 January 1699, Blakesley.

⁸ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough Book 6, fol. 243 will of Henry Tenbie, 30 September 1608, Castor.

⁹ NRO 1st Series Book AV fol. 27 will of Mary Watts, 20 April 1620, Blakesley.

Servants were received a wide range of bequests in a number of wills. Generally, these all appear to be tokens of appreciation and affection, with some noting that bequests can go to all servants that remain with the testator at time of death. William Cotton of Castor gave two shillings and six pence to each of his servants.¹⁰ Francis Dove of Castor gave five shillings each to his servants, and his wearing apparel to be shared amongst them.¹¹ Anne Bett gave her servants a stick of malt each.¹² Nicholas Willinson gave his servants five shillings each and John Mottershed gave all his servants twelve pence each.¹³ Mary Watts even gave twelve pence each to all the servants in her son's house, as well as recognising her own servants.¹⁴

Out of the sixteen testators that bequeathed items to specific male servants there were seventeen actual bequests, and for the seventeen wills that specified items to maids, there were twenty bequests. Seventeen bequests to the maids involved money ranging from four pence to fifteen pounds (85 per cent of the total bequests). Nine of these bequests were under one shilling, the remainder stretched between twenty shillings and fifteen pounds. Bequests to maids of less than one shilling accounted for 52.9 per cent and 70.6 per cent were actually under forty shillings. Only five of

¹⁰ NRO Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 1, fol. I66 will of William Cotton, 10 November 1615, Castor.

¹¹ NRO, Index Peterborough Wills Volume 1, Book K, fol. 122, will of Francis Dove, 9 May 1660, Castor.

¹² NRO, 1st Series Book S, fol. 3, will of Anne Bett, 21 January 1566, Kingsthorpe.

¹³ NRO 1st Series Book R, fol. 72 will of Nicholas Willinson, 25 August 1559, Kingsthorpe, NRO, 1st Series Book Y fol. 128, will of John Mottershed, 14 April 1594, Kingsthorpe.

¹⁴ NRO 1st Series Book AV fol. 27 will of Mary Watts, 20 April 1620, Blakesley.

the bequests (29.4 per cent) were actually of substantial amounts above forty shillings. Other bequests to the maids included household items, clothes and animals. Five of the testators included such items (two included money and household items). Two of these five include one bequest of a cow and one of sheep.

For male servants there were only eight bequests of money (47.1 per cent), ranging also from four pence to fifteen pounds. Of these bequests, seven were under forty shillings, (four of these under one shilling) with the one bequest for fifteen pounds in the same will as that for the maid.¹⁵ Eight of the bequests involved small tokens of clothes, crops, household goods and animals. One bequest to a male servant was particularly generous. It involved the bequest of a house and land during his life (to then pass to the testator's son after the servant's decease).¹⁶

One testator had a bequest of money as an extra bequest to the trustees.¹⁷ This token of money was given as an extra sign of appreciation to the men for acting as trustees. Each trustee received five pounds, and with five trustees, this totalled twenty-five pounds. Scribes appeared in four wills as receiving small sums of money as a gesture of thanks for writing the will. These sums of money ranged from twelve pence, to the more substantial sum of forty shillings.¹⁸ Two female

¹⁵ NRO, 1st Series Book AV fol. 27, will of Mary Watts, 20 April 1620, Blakesley.

¹⁶ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 2 Book Z, fol. 3, will of Ruth Smith, 12 May 1615, Castor.

¹⁷ NRO, 3rd Series, Book D, fol. 56, will of William Foxley, 1 January 1669, Blakesley.

¹⁸ NRO, 1st Series Book OE, fol. 120 (bequest of 12d), will of Mary Cooper, July 1629, Blakesley; NRO, 2nd Series Book O, fol. 24 (bequest of 13d) will of Alexander Wood, 8 June 1617, Blakesley; NRO, 4th Series Book X, fol. 131

testators in Castor bequeathed sums of money to set up two people into apprenticeships. The first, from Joan Lamley was for forty shillings to set up an unidentified man in an apprenticeship.¹⁹ The second will was for fifty shillings and was from Dorothy Budworth setting up an unidentified woman in binding her to a trade, with the testator's son overseeing this.²⁰ The fact that these two testators were from Castor, may be because the parish was influenced more by the development of non-rural occupations, due to its proximity to Peterborough. Furthermore, the parish may have been developing in this direction due to a lack of available land, so it was more fruitful to apprentice the young adults to a trade rather than relying on them earning a living from the land. Blakesley with its high concentration on pastoral farming and Kingsthorpe with its concentration on agriculture (and its closed nature which regulated the inheritance of land), may explain why there was no evidence in these two parishes of testators binding young adults to a trade.

Overseers of wills accounted for twenty-six bequests in twenty-six wills. All of these, apart from one, were specified money values ranging from four pence to twenty shillings. Nine of these were under one shilling (34.6 per cent), thirteen were between one and ten shillings (50 per cent) and three were between eleven and

(bequest of ½ crown) will of Joan Orlibear, 23 April 1665, Kingsthorpe, and NRO 1st Series Book AE Part 2, fol. 95 (bequest of forty shillings) will of Alice Smith, 4 July 1638, Kingsthorpe.

¹⁹ NRO, Peterborough Wills Volume 2, Book I, fol. 140, will of Joan Lamley, 17 May 1617, Castor.

²⁰ NRO, 4th Series Book ii, fol. 35 will of Dorothy Budworth, 28 January 1670/1, Castor.

twenty shillings (11.5 per cent). The one remaining will gave the bequest to the overseers at the discretion of the executrix.²¹

Supervisors received twenty-two bequests out of the twenty-two wills. Twenty-one of these bequests involved money; one left half a seam of barley (4.6 per cent).²²

The twenty-one wills that involved money ranged from six pence to twenty shillings. Two of these wills were difficult to identify as to the actual amounts specified (9.1 per cent). Ten of these monetary bequests were under one shilling (45.5 per cent), eight were between one and ten shillings (36.4 per cent) and one was between eleven and twenty shillings (4.6 per cent).

Friends received nineteen bequests out of the eleven wills identified earlier. Twelve of these bequests involved money (63.2 per cent) ranging from one shilling to five pounds; most of these were small tokens of affection. Four bequests involved household items (21.1 per cent). Three wills contain quite substantial bequests.

Robert Beckett left the residue of his estate to his 'beloved friend' Alice Peedle.²³

However, he appears to have no direct heirs of his own and only mentions his mother, brothers and sisters. John Billingham left 'one moiety' of his personal estate to 'my neighbour and very good friend William Atkins'. The other half of the estate was to go to the testator's wife. In leaving this bequest to his friend, the testator

²¹ NRO, 1st Series Book P, fol. 271, will of John Typladys, 1552, Castor.

²² NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough Book 1 fol. 57 will of Jane Wills, 22 August 1545, Castor.

²³ NRO, 2nd Series Book E fol. 256 will of Robert Beckett, 30 January 1638, Kingsthorpe.

notes that this is to be used for the 'support and maintenance of my nephew William Darris being a four year old infant.' In effect, the testator was setting up his friend as a trustee and guardian of his neighbour, so this bequest is not really for the benefit of the friend. This argument is also supported by the fact that the testator states that if the nephew dies before he is twenty-one, then his share is to go back to the wife. Later on in the will, a further bequest of five shillings is given to the friend, which can be argued to be the true bequest to the friend.²⁴ Clement Darlow leaves his friends a share in a house and land.²⁵ This appears to be the will of a substantial man, as he leaves not only the house to his friends, but also a house to his son and another house to his wife (and then to another son). What is noticeable is that instead of the second son receiving a house in his own right, this goes to the testator's friends. This may be because the second son mentioned is obviously still young, however, it may be also due to the level of friendship between the testator and his friends. This argument is also supported by the further token of money given to them later in the will, as well as the appointment of them as protectors of the testator's interests in paying the debts if the second son fails to. Another friend was also appointed as supervisor. Thus, it can be suggested that for some testators friendship was important, with some friends receiving substantial bequests, instead of wider more distant kin. Furthermore, the importance of friendship is underlined by the appointment of some of these friends as trustees and guardians. Once again,

²⁴ NRO, 3rd Series Book V fol. 209 will of John Billingham, 11 April 1699, Kingsthorpe.

²⁵ NRO, 3rd Series Book L, Fol. 190, will of Clement Darlow, 5 March 1686, Kingsthorpe.

friends were more important in these cases to the testator than the wider kin network.

Two testators gave bequests to masters. One bequeathed a silver pot with a lid; however, the other bequeathed everything he had to his master.²⁶ This second will was nuncupative, and written after the death of the testator. Everything was left to his master because firstly the testator was of low status. He may have had debts to the master, as he does state in the will for the master to pay his outstanding debts. In addition, he appears young in age, for he mentions no other family apart from his mother. Death may have taken this testator by surprise, and with no immediate family responsibilities, and probably with debts incurred in trying to establish himself in life; he may have had no choice but to leave all to his master.

John Bett was the second testator that left a substantial testament to non-kin. He appears to identify no specific kin apart from his wife and leaves substantial bequests to a number of named people who cannot be directly stated as kin. In this will, he leaves all his houses and lands to a named male, who may possibly be a son-in-law or grandson. If this named male dies with no heirs, everything passes to the son of the testator's godson, who arguably could also be unidentified kin.²⁷

However, it should be noted that in this one will the testator left a wide range of

²⁶ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 1, Book I, fol. 66 will of William Cotton, 10 November 1615, Castor, NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 1, Book T fol. 89 will of Robert Cole, 27 January 1695/6, Castor.

²⁷ NRO, 1st Series Book I, fol. 337 will of John Bett, 15 February 1550, Kingsthorpe.

bequests, many of which went to the benefit of the community. Unidentified children, unknown females and unknown males account for the majority of the bequests for non-kin. Unknown children account for thirty-seven bequests, of which many involved more than one item resulting in forty-four individual bequeathed items. Twenty-six involved money ranging from under one shilling to forty pounds (70.3 per cent). The remaining 29.7 per cent of the bequests were split between household items, animals and crops.

Unknown females accounted for two hundred female bequests between the seventy-six wills. However, many of these bequests involved more than one item, and in fact 326 individual items were bequeathed, to 200 unknown females in seventy-six wills. In these bequests only sixty-nine are accounted for by money bequests (34.5 per cent). This is the lowest percentage in any of the groups regarding money bequests. The majority of bequests to unknown females concern actual items rather than money. The only other group to come close to this was male servants who only had 47.1 per cent of their bequests involving money, most between one and ten shillings. Testators preferred to bequeath a wide range of household items to these unknown women rather than money or other items. Two wills, however, did give the residue of the estate to two unknown women. John Henson of Blakesley in 1551, appears to have given the residue of his estate to a widow, who was possibly a servant, he does not mention any direct kin in the will. The will is split between godchildren and unknown people.²⁸ This could possibly have been because he was a vicar. Richard

²⁸ NRO, 1st Series Book P fol. 276, will of John Henson, 13 August 1551, Blakesley.

Smythe of Castor was the other testator, and it is worth noting that he was also a curate. He also appears to have no direct heirs and leaves the estate between a variety of unidentified people, and the residue between one unidentified male and one unidentified female.²⁹

Unknown males were the largest group of bequests to non-kin, with 286. Once again, many of these bequests contained more than one item resulting in 347 individual items. Only 103 bequests involved money (36 per cent) ranging from under one shilling to one hundred and thirty pounds. This is a low percentage similar to unknown females, with most of them between one and ten shillings. Household items accounted for only fifty-five bequests out of the 286 (19.2 per cent), animals accounted for ninety-one bequests (31.8 per cent) and crops twenty-seven bequests (9.4 per cent). Clothes, shoes and rings accounted for forty-six bequests (16.1 per cent). Thirteen bequests (4.6 per cent) involved land, cottages, houses and meadows to unknown males. Although a small percentage of the 286 bequests, were in comparison to the other groups of non-kin a substantial number of bequests involving property.

Regarding unknown males, there were also a number of individual bequests not found in any other non-kin group. One testator (0.4 per cent) bequeathed half of the estate to an unknown male after the decease of the wife; this could arguably have been a son-in-law, grandson or kin through marriage (with a different surname to the

²⁹ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 4, fol 238, will of Richard Smythe, 30 January 1574, Castor.

testator). Another testator specified an unknown male to keep custody of his daughter's money until they married. This guardian of the money may have been a brother-in-law (through marriage) to the testator or some other relative through marriage. It would most likely be an uncle to the daughters or the testator. One testator gave the twenty-one year lease of the forge to an unknown male. One testator placed his son's legacy into the hands of an unknown male until the son was twenty-one. Another passed items to the unknown male on behalf of the unknown male's dead father. This may have been the case of the testator having previously been set up as a guardian to a minor, but passing on items before the minor reached maturity due to the testator dying himself. All these wills, of which there exists only one example of each group accounted for 0.4 per cent of the bequests each. Of the remaining wills, eight bequests gave the residue of the estate to the unknown males. Richard Jackson gave two unknown males everything, there is no mention of a wife in this will, and the two unknown males are given everything in order to pay debts and bring up the testator's children.³⁰

From this breakdown, it can be seen how varied the bequests were to non-kin.

Women tended to be more personal in their bequests, detailing personal items rather than just money. This agrees with McIntosh's arguments that women made personal bequests more frequently than men, indicating they were more involved in the social networks of society.³¹ Some non-kin could be rewarded with quite substantial

³⁰ NRO, 1st Series Book W, fol 75, will of Richard Jackson, 29 September 1598, Kingsthorpe.

bequests. Those who were of less importance to the testator received token bequests. For example, servants, godchildren, relatives of godchildren, tenants, overseers, supervisors, trustees and scribes often received money bequests or small personal, household or farm items. Friends appear to have received small tokens of affection, although it must be noted that in a minority of cases (usually where there was no discernable family) they received quite substantial bequests. Unknown children, females and males are difficult to analyse, as often they could be kin, but just not identified as such within the wills. The bequests left to these groups are understandably muddled. Unknown children in the majority of cases were given money, as these children may have been nephews, nieces, grandchildren or other members of the kin group, so this is not a surprising result because these members of kin also tended to receive monetary bequests. Unknown females received many household items and unknown males received a combination of household items and animals or farming items. Unknown males also noticeably had the highest number of bequests of land or houses out of all the non-kin groups, evidence that they may have been unidentified kin. Thus, the patterns of the bequests to non-kin are arguably similar to those bequests to kin. Those people important to the testator received more substantial bequests than those that were less important. Those people that received substantial bequests are arguably unidentified members of the nuclear family, such as sons or daughters. Unidentified children, appear to receive the same range of bequests, as did grandchildren and nephews or nieces. Friends were more

³¹ M. K. McIntosh, 'The diversity of social capital in English communities 1300-1640 (with a glance at modern Nigeria)', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39, 3 (Winter, 1999), pp. 472-3.

important to some testators than wider kin and were rewarded with substantial bequests.

It is difficult to quantify if there were any differences in the range of non-kin recognised in the wills between the three parishes. All three parishes recognised an equal number of non-kin groups. Kingsthorpe testators appear to recognise the largest proportion of servants, overseers and supervisors; and Blakesley testators the least. Godchildren and their siblings are recognised in Kingsthorpe in the highest number of wills and in Castor in the least. Blakesley testators recognise the greatest number of friends, followed by testators in Kingsthorpe and then Castor.

Kingsthorpe testators recognise the largest proportion of unknown categories, with Blakesley wills recognising the least. Outside of these categories, Blakesley testators recognise the greatest range of non-kin, followed by Castor and then Kingsthorpe.

Thus, it can be tentatively suggested that Kingsthorpe testators recognise the greatest numbers of non-kin, followed by Castor and then Blakesley. Whether this was due to Kingsthorpe being a closed community, and Blakesley and (to an extent) Castor of an open nature, is difficult to establish. Regarding the range of items bequeathed to non-kin, the testators of all three parishes favour money. However, after this, preferences diverged, with Kingsthorpe testators next preferring to bequeath household items and then thirdly animals, Castor testators preferring to bequeath animals followed by household items and Blakesley testators giving equal proportions of both groups of items. These bequests may indicate the more rural nature of Castor, due to the larger number of animals bequeathed, especially when it is noted that Castor also has a higher proportion of bequests involving crops than

Kingsthorpe. Blakesley due to its pastoral nature would be expected to demonstrate a higher level of animal (and crop) giving, however the wills in this parish have the lowest proportion of bequests of this nature. The range of bequests given to non-kin do little to establish any concrete arguments concerning the pattern of gift giving to non-kin and if there are any real apparent differences in the focus of the testators of the three parishes.

The Life cycle and bequests

To see at what stage of life bequests to non-kin were given, and if there is a specific stage in life when non-kin were concentrated upon, the bequests to the various non-kin groups were totalled. Then the life cycle analysis was used placing each testator into A to E categories. The corresponding bequests to non-kin were linked to this A to E grouping. This is illustrated in tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

Table 3.2 illustrates that in Blakesley, those testators at stage C had the highest number of bequests to non-kin. This was followed in order by testators at stage E, B, and A. Nobody from stage D gave anything to the non-kin group in Blakesley. As demonstrated in chapter two, those in group C made the highest number of wills, followed by E, D, B, and lastly A. Despite the disappearance of group D, the bequests to non-kin closely follow the same pattern of the total number of wills made per group. Blakesley had 129 individual bequests to non-kin members, out of the actual twenty-seven wills that gave bequests to non-kin; an average of 4.78 bequests to non-kin per will.

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Those testators in life cycle stage C gave the highest attention to unknown males, then unknown females and children. Testators in category E had the highest number of bequests to unknown males and females. Category B testators also had the highest number to unknown males and unknown females. Testators in A had only four bequests, and gave two to friends. Unknown males and females figure highly, but if one removes these unknown quantities, it can be seen that testators in categories B and C gave the highest number of bequests to godchildren, and in category E, friends received the highest number of bequests.

Table 3.3 outlines the bequests to non-kin per life cycle stage in Castor. In this parish, the highest number of bequests to non-kin comes from category C also (as in Blakesley). After this point, the results between the two parishes then begin to differ. The second highest comes from testators in category A, then E, B and lastly D. Chapter two showed that those testators in Castor wrote the highest number of wills at stage C of the life cycle, followed by E, B, D and lastly A. Unlike Blakesley, Castor does not follow a similar pattern to the results of total number of wills per life cycle. Castor testators gave 296 bequests to non-kin from the identified seventy-one wills that gave bequests to non-kin, an average of 4.2 bequests per will. The majority of bequests in all five groups went to unidentified males and females. If one takes these groups out, it can be seen that in categories B and C, the highest number of bequests for non-kin from testators went to godchildren. Category A testators split bequests between godchildren and servants. Category D testators gave the highest number of bequests to unknown children and then supervisors and E's highest bequests went to servants.

Table 3.2 – Bequests to non-kin in Blakesley per stage in life cycle

Category	Non-Kin Bequeathed to	Total	%
A	Friend	2	1.6
	Unknown female	1	0.8
	Will writer	1	0.8
B	Unknown male	14	10.9
	Unknown female	7	5.4
	Overseers	2	1.6
	Maid	2	1.6
	Goddaughter	2	1.6
	Friend	1	0.8
	Unknown children	1	0.8
	Godchildren	1	0.8
C	Unknown male	17	13.2
	Unknown female	7	5.4
	Unknown children	7	5.4
	Maid	5	3.9
	Godson	4	3.1
	Overseers	3	2.3
	Manservant	3	2.3
	Godchildren	2	1.6
	Will writer	1	0.8
	Friend	1	0.8
	Shepherd	1	0.8
	Trustees	1	0.8
	Goddaughter	1	0.8
E	Unknown male	17	13.2
	Unknown female	11	8.5
	Friend	4	3.1
	Maid	2	1.6
	Goddaughter	2	1.6
	Manservant	1	0.8
	Servants in sons house	1	0.8
	Godson	1	0.8
	Goddaughter's sisters	1	0.8
	Minister	1	0.8
	Minister's wife	1	0.8

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley

Table 3.3 – Bequests to non-kin in Castor per stage in life cycle

Category	Non-Kin Bequeathed to	Total	%
A	Unknown female	32	10.8
	Unknown male	19	6.4
	Unknown children	8	2.7
	Master	2	0.7
	Godson	2	0.7
	Manservant/Maid	2	0.7
	Supervisor	1	0.3
	Apprentice	1	0.3
	Overseers	1	0.3
	All servants	1	0.3
	Trustees	1	0.3
	Goddaughter	1	0.3
B	Unknown male	18	6.1
	Unknown female	12	4.1
	Godchildren	3	1.0
	Overseers	1	0.3
	Unknown children	1	0.3
C	Unknown male	69	23.3
	Unknown female	26	8.8
	Unknown children	6	2.0
	Supervisor / Overseers	5	1.7
	Godson	4	1.4
	Housekeeper/Servants/Maid	3	1.0
	Godchildren	3	1.0
	Manservant	2	0.7
	Goddaughter	2	0.7
	Tenants	1	0.3
D	Unknown female	11	3.7
	Unknown children	6	2.0
	Supervisor	3	1.0
	Friend	2	0.7
	Unknown male	2	0.7
	Overseers	1	0.3
	Apprentice	1	0.3
E	Unknown male	27	9.1
	Unknown female	7	2.4
	Manservant	4	1.4
	Supervisor	2	0.7
	Person who preaches funeral sermon	1	0.3
	Maid	1	0.3
	Godchildren	1	0.3

Source: NRO Wills of Castor

Table 3.4 – Bequests to non-kin in Kingsthorpe per stage in life cycle

Category	Non-Kin Bequeathed to	Total	%
A	Unknown female	27	9.4
	Unknown male	20	7.0
	Unknown children	3	1.1
	Supervisor	2	0.7
	Maid	2	0.7
	Friend	1	0.4
	Godchildren / Godson	2	0.7
	Godson's sister	1	0.4
	Minister	1	0.4
B	Unknown male	15	5.2
	Unknown female	5	1.8
	Godson	4	1.4
	Supervisors/Overseers	4	1.4
	Unknown children	3	1.1
	Maid	1	0.4
	Godchildren	1	0.4
C	Unknown male	39	13.6
	Unknown female	20	7.0
	Overseers / Supervisors	17	6.0
	Godson	7	2.5
	Manservant/Maid/All Servants	7	2.5
	Friend	4	1.4
	Goddaughter	3	1.1
	Godchildren	2	0.7
	Will writer	1	0.4
	Master's children	1	0.4
	Good friend & neighbour	1	0.4
D	Unknown female	2	0.7
	Supervisor	2	0.7
	Unknown male	2	0.7
	Manservant	2	0.7
	Godchildren	2	0.7
E	Unknown female	32	11.2
	Unknown male	27	9.4
	Godchildren	6	2.1
	Manservant/All Servants/Maid	5	1.8
	Overseers/Supervisors	4	1.4
	Friend	3	1.1
	Unknown children	2	0.7
	Will writer	1	0.4
	Godson	1	0.4
	Godson's son	1	0.4

Source: NRO Wills of Kingsthorpe

In Kingsthorpe, table 3.4 illustrates that testators in category C were also the group with the highest number of bequests to non-kin. As in Blakesley, this was followed by group E, A, B, and then D. In the chapter two, the highest number of wills were written by those stage C, followed by E, A, B, and then D. It can be seen that the wills that gave bequests to non-kin followed the same order as the total wills categorised by life cycle. Kingsthorpe was the only parish to do this exactly. Blakesley had a similar pattern, and Castor's pattern did not match at all.

The total number of bequests to non-kin in Kingsthorpe was 286 and Kingsthorpe had 83 actual wills with bequests to non-kin, a ratio of 3.5 non-kin bequests per will. This ratio is the lowest out of the three parishes. The highest number of bequests by testators in categories A, B, C and E went to unknown males and females. Category D testators evenly distributed bequests between unknown females, unknown males, supervisors, servants and godchildren. If unknown males and females are removed, then the highest bequests to non-kin went to overseers by testators in category C and godchildren in E. Unknown children, followed by godchildren and supervisors were the highest bequests by testators in category A and godchildren received the most bequests by testators in category B. As in Blakesley and Castor, godchildren figure very highly in the bequests of all the groups.

In all three parishes, ignoring the unknown groups we can see what other non-kin received bequests per life stage. For those testators at the beginning of the life stage cycle of A, bequests tended to be focused on godchildren, servants, supervisors and friends. Testators in category B focused on godchildren, and C focused on

godchildren and overseers. Testators at stage D were very mixed in their approach and focused on non-kin with similar frequencies, although it could be argued that supervisors had a slight lead. Testators in category E were also mixed in approach focusing on friends, godchildren and servants. Godchildren appear frequently, influencing at least four of the five life cycle stages.

Overall, it could be suggested that the life cycle had very little effect on the bequests to non-kin. The same groups appear throughout all five of the life stages, but with different frequencies. Arguably, it would be expected that those in the earlier stages of life (A and B) would have the highest number of non-kin bequests, due to them having no immediate heirs themselves, as they had yet to produce children. This is not the case, with testators in category C (testators with children of their own) focusing heavily on non-kin. This may be because many of the unidentified males, females and children may have been kin. Category E comes second in two of the parishes, having a high number of bequests outside the kin group. Again, this is surprising, as this group incorporates those testators with children and grandchildren. Only Castor switches this round, with A coming second, which is slightly more understandable as this is the group of testators with no direct heirs at the beginning of their life cycle, and not even married. Another surprising fact is that category A testators had the least number of bequests to non-kin in Blakesley, for it would be expected that testators with no direct heirs to focus more heavily on people outside their kin group. Those testators in category B who had married but had no children, had a low number of bequests to non-kin. Within the three parishes, testators in category D (as with testators in category B), had a low number of

bequests to non-kin, they appear to focus bequests on kin. The third most frequent number of bequests to non-kin diverges in results between the three parishes, with Kingsthorpe having category A third, Castor category E and Blakesley category B. Fourth most frequent was B in Kingsthorpe, B in Castor and A in Blakesley. The lowest number of bequests in Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe, were to those non-kin from testators in category D. Kingsthorpe follows an identical pattern in the numbers of bequests to kin and non-kin, with categories C, E, A, B and then D in order bequeathing bequests to kin and non-kin. Blakesley and Castor do not have the same pattern of bequests per category to kin as to non-kin. Arguably, the fact that Kingsthorpe was the only parish to follow similar patterns was because it was a closed community. In comparison to the other two parishes that were open. The closer governing of the parish and lower mobility of the population would have lead to a smaller range of people in the community that could be recognised. The open communities of Blakesley and Castor would have had higher population mobility, with more interaction with non-kin, and a wider range of people that could be recognised.

Bequests to the Community

The wills can be examined to see if there is any evidence of bequests to community projects or groups. Table 3.5 lists the community projects evident in the wills, and the frequency with which to people gave to them. Out of 391 wills in the three parishes, there were 149 wills detailing some form of bequest for the benefit of the community (39 per cent). The poor figured highly in all three parishes, with 104

wills (26.6 per cent) bequeathing money, food, clothes or some other token to them. The bells of the local church were also a common bequest in wills, with money or some other token given to them so they could be rung, repaired or maintained. Bequests to the bells appeared in 41 wills (10.5 per cent). Traditionally, the Catholic Church had rung the church bells for the benefit of the soul of the testator, but the reformed church was uncomfortable with this practice. Cressy argues that the tolling of the bells 'was to show respect, to alert the community, to summon attendants to the bedside or graveside, to bring comfort to the living and the dying, and to assist the parting person by prompting neighbours to their prayers'.³² After the Reformation, the practice of bell ringing continued, but the link to it being beneficial for the dying person's soul was officially broken. In addition, the amount of rings and the length of time for the bell ringing to be taken were shortened. In 1571, Edmund Grindal approved bell ringing for the dying person, but did not approve the bells to be rung after death, except for one peal at the funeral.³³ Throughout England, there was much variation in local bell-ringing practices. Some parishes were more restrictive than others were. In the Northamptonshire wills the language changed from ordering the ringing of the bells to repairing or maintaining them. The emphasis of the testator may still have been for the benefit of the soul. It may also have been a focus for the testators to give money to the church.

³² D. Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death. Ritual, Religion, and the Lifecycle in Tudor and Stuart England (Oxford, 1997), p. 421.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 423.

Apart from these two main areas, only four other wills specify different community bequests. Richard Cox in Castor in 1603 specified twelve pence to repair the causeway to the church.³⁴ In this will, he also specified money to the poor and his servants. The other will of 1603 from Castor does not mention this causeway, and this bequest is unique to Richard Cox. John Bett and his wife Anne in two separate wills pledge money to the mending of Walbecke ridge.³⁵ With a sixteen-year gap between these two bequests, it is difficult to find a reason as to why these bequests were made. Arguably, this ridge was close to or on the land of the Bett family, and possibly these bequests were not for the benefit of the community, but more for the benefit of the family. Especially when it is noticeable that there were no other bequests within the other Kingsthorpe wills towards this ridge. The fourth unusual bequest can definitely be argued to have been for the benefit of the community. This bequest from 1669 involved the establishment of a school.³⁶ In his will, he bequeathed items to various kin, but did not appear to have any direct heirs of himself. The majority went to his sister, but after her death, it was to pass to trustees to be used to establish a grammar school for boys aged seven to fifteen. This legacy lasted many years, with Henry Dryden's account of Blakesley in 1910 referring to the school still existing.³⁷

³⁴ NRO, Testators Loose Wills C & D (Box), fol. 29 will of Richard Cox, 27 February 1603, Castor.

³⁵ NRO, 1st Series Book I, fol. 337 will of John Bett, 15 February 1550, Kingsthorpe, NRO, 1st Series Book S, fol. 3 will of Anne Bett, 21 January 1566, Kingsthorpe.

³⁶ NRO 3rd Series Book D, fol. 56, will of William Foxley, 1 January 1669, Blakesley.

³⁷ Dryden, The Parish of Blakesley.

Table 3.5 – Community projects specified in wills

Parish	Bequest	Number
Castor	Poor	45
Kingsthorpe	Poor	40
Kingsthorpe	Bells - repair/maintenance/ring	25
Blakesley	Poor	19
Castor	Bells - repair/maintenance/ring	12
Blakesley	Bells - repair/maintenance/ring	4
Kingsthorpe	Mending of Walbecke	2
Blakesley	Establish grammar school for boys aged 7-15	1
Castor	Repair of the causeway of Milton that leads to the church	1

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

To conclude, this study argues that the common themes of locality, mental cohesion and social interaction formed together under the banners of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship to form a community. Neighbours could become close friends, and rely on each other for support and help in times of need, as well as enjoying good times with one another. The close daily interaction between the neighbours would mean that neighbours often knew other families' business and problems. For a total will sample of 391 wills, 181 wills specified bequests to non-kin (46.3 per cent). The focus of the wills was on kin, but forty-six percent of testators still recognised the wider community.

The most frequent bequests apart from unknown groups and supervisors and overseers were to godchildren but these children could arguably be classed as kin. After these groups, friends and servants were overall the most important groups outside of the family to receive bequests. Money was the most common item bequeathed to non-kin, although women tended to detail specific items. In a

minority of cases, (usually where there was no discernable family) some non-kin received quite substantial bequests. Unknown children, females and males are difficult to analyse, as often they could be kin, but just not identified as such within the wills. The bequests left to these groups are understandably muddled, with money, household items, animals or farming items most commonly bequeathed. However, unknown males also had the highest number of bequests of land and houses, suggesting that they may have been unidentified kin.

Overall, it could be suggested that life cycle had very little effect on which non-kin were recognised. The same groups appear throughout all five of the life stages, but with different frequencies. Godchildren appear frequently throughout the non-kin bequests, influencing at least four of the five life cycle stages. For those testators at the beginning of the adult life stage cycle, bequests to non-kin tended to be focused on godchildren, servants, supervisors and friends. Testators who had just married focused on godchildren, and married testators with children focused on godchildren and overseers. Testators with married adult children were very mixed in approach, although it could be hesitantly argued that supervisors had a slight lead over other groups. Testators with grandchildren were also mixed in approach focusing on friends, godchildren and servants. Testators with direct heirs also focused some bequests outside of the kin group, possibly to more of an extent than testators with no direct family or heirs.

Only thirty-nine per cent of the wills (149) detailed a bequest for the benefit of the community. Out of this proportion, 26.6 per cent gave money, food, clothes or some

other token to the poor. 10.5 per cent gave bequests to the bells of the local church. There were only four different community bequests, involving the mending of a causeway, a ridge and the establishment of a school. Aside from the poor, testators were not interested in leaving legacies for the benefit of the community. Rather, their focus was on the maintenance of the nuclear family, concentrating bequests into their hands (as outlined in chapter two), and in recognising those wider kin and non-kin that were considered important enough to them to receive token bequests.

The analysis of the wills in the three Northamptonshire parishes illustrates that the recognition of people outside of the nuclear family, regardless of life cycle stage, was restricted in its range. Similar analyses in Terling and Whickham also discovered this. Macfarlane, Cressy and Howell also discovered the limited recognition of people within the wills of their own studies.³⁸ People outside of the kin group that were recognised in the Northamptonshire wills usually received small bequests. Furthermore, there was little difference in the items bequeathed to non-kin between the three parishes or the range of non-kin recognised. The society and economy of the three parishes and the type of community appears to have had little effect upon the will making behaviour of the testators concerning non-kin.

³⁸ Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, p. 149.; Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction', p. 63.; Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance, p. 255.

Chapter 4 – The roles of kin and non-kin in the wills

A number of roles needed to be fulfilled for the successful fulfilment of the legacies within a will. One of the most important was that of executor/executrix, this involved implementing the will, performing and ensuring the payment of all legacies and undertaking the wishes of the deceased.¹ In addition, an overseer or supervisor, or in some cases both, were appointed to assist. These people would ensure the executor/executrix performed the legacies within the will correctly and that legacies were paid in full. In some cases, they were also charged with helping and supporting the executor/executrix in times of difficulty. In the case of minors, guardians may have been appointed to safeguard their legacies. Trustees may also have been appointed in the case of some legacies. Aside from the roles nominated in the wills, further roles of godparents regarding the welfare of a minor or moneylenders regarding the payment of a legacy or debt could also have been mentioned.

Executors

Within the Northamptonshire wills, kin were overwhelmingly chosen for the role of executor. Non-kin only accounted for ten executors. Executors that did not specify a relationship accounted for twenty-three wills and twenty-six wills had no executors named at all. Kin accounted for 411 appointed executors (87.5 per cent). There were 470 executors for the 365 wills (some wills appointed more than one executor) that named executors. Three wills had four executors (one male will in Blakesley and

¹ Ralph Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750 (Oxford, 1998). p. 136.

two male wills in Kingsthorpe), one will had three executors (in Kingsthorpe) and sixty-eight wills had two executors (thirteen in Blakesley, twenty-six in Kingsthorpe and twenty-nine in Castor). The remainder had only one executor.

Table 4.1 illustrates that out of these 411 kin named as executors, 185 of them were wives (58.7 per cent) and 111 of them sons (27 per cent). This pattern was also found in King's Langley. Houlbrooke also discovered that wives were often chosen and many ran the businesses after the decease of the husband.² Within the Northamptonshire wills, daughters only account for thirty-one nominations (7.5 per cent of the kin specified in the wills). Brothers were then fourth highest with twenty-two appointments (5.4 per cent).

Whereas husbands deemed wives to be the most important person to place the responsibility in executing the will, women did not have this luxury as the wills of the women came from widows or spinsters/maidens. They relied mainly on their sons (twenty-one cases), and then daughters (eighteen cases). Twelve sons-in-law were also named as executors. The rest of the named kin were split quite evenly between kin through blood and kin through marriage. Not including the four most frequently appointed kin, the total for kin through blood accounted for twenty occasions and kin through marriage accounted for twenty-one (including the fiancé stated as executor in one will). In addition unidentified kinsmen, kinswomen and cousins, accounted for twenty-one.

² Mumby, Life and Death in Kings Langley p. xix; .Houlbrooke, The English Family, p. 210.

Table 4.1 –Kin and non-kin who acted as executors

Parish	% of Total	Blakesley Sex of Testator		Castor Sex of Testator		Kingsthorpe Sex Of Testator		Total
		F	M	F	M	F	M	
Executor								
Wife	45.0	0	40	0	70	0	75	185
Son	27.0	6	20	6	38	9	32	111
Daughter	7.5	3	3	8	5	7	5	31
Brother	5.4	1	2	1	7	3	8	22
Son in Law	4.4	2	0	5	4	5	2	18
Kinsman	3.4	1	2	4	4	2	1	14
Nephew	1.7	0	4	1	1	1	0	7
Sister	1.2	0	1	1	0	1	2	5
Cousin	1.0	0	0	1	0	3	0	4
Kinswoman	0.7	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Mother	0.7	0	0	0	1	0	2	3
Brother-in Law	0.5	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Grandson	0.5	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Niece	0.5	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Fiancé	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Uncle	0.2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total Kin	99.9	15	74	29	131	32	130	411
Non-Kin	17.0	0	3	0	1	2	4	10
None	25.4	0	1	0	5	1	8	15
Nuncupative-None	18.6	1	2	3	3	0	2	11
Not-Specified	39.0	2	4	1	4	5	7	23
Total Non-Kin	100%	0	3	0	1	2	4	10
Total Kin & Non-Kin		15	77	29	132	34	134	421

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

The remainder of the executors appear to be split quite evenly between kin by blood and kin by marriage. The most frequent appointment of wives, sons, daughters and brothers, tip the results of blood kin being chosen as executors quite substantially.

The role of executor was extremely important, so to ensure that the interests of the

family were protected, the executorial duties were concentrated into the hands of the nuclear family.

Non-kin acted very infrequently in this role. Table 4.1 illustrates that in Castor, there were 161 executors appointed for 132 wills (sixteen wills out of the 148 total wills did not specify an executor). From these, only one can be linked to non-kin, with one testator that appointed his master as executor, and gave him all his goods.³ Blakesley had ninety-two executors nominated in seventy-six wills that appointed executors (ten wills did not). Out of these ninety-two, only three were non-kin appointed in two wills. John Henson appointed a female servant as the executor and she received the residue of the estate. This may have been because he was a vicar, and as such appears to have had no direct family, although he does give bequests to godchildren.⁴ Thomas Barnes appointed two male trustees to act as his executors. They also received the residue of the estate, and as trustees, they were to pay all the legacies within the will.⁵ Kingsthorpe had 168 executors appointed in 134 wills (twenty-three wills out of the 157 did not appoint an executor). Out of these only six executors were non-kin. Ann Timms appointed the overseers of the poor as her executors, and she also asked them to arrange the burial of her body, to sell her house and pay her debts (along with four unspecified males as trustees to assist the

³ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills, Volume 1, Book T, fol. 89, will of Robert Cole, Castor, 27 January 1695/6.

⁴ NRO, 1st Series, Book P, fol. 276, will of John Henson, Blakesley, 13 August 1551.

⁵ NRO, 3rd Series, Book A, fol. 89, will of Thomas Barnes, Blakesley, 24 November 1645.

sale and payment of debts).⁶ Richard Jackson appointed the trustees of his mill and children to act as his executors. Two non-kin males were appointed to receive the money and profit from the mill and use it to pay the legacies and bring up the children.⁷ John Paybody appointed the curate as his executor. This will was quite religious in its overtone, with a number of bequests to the church and vicar, and requests for masses and prayers.⁸ Dorothy Jenoway appointed her neighbour as second executor with a kinswoman as the first executor.⁹ This neighbour does not appear to have received any bequests. Thomas Ludlow appointed an unknown male and a female servant as executors. Within this will, there appears to be no personal bequests to family, merely bequests to the church, the poor and the bell ringers. There is one bequest of money to the same female servant named as executor on the will, but this appears to be a debt owed rather than an inheritance legacy.¹⁰

The Time Taken to Prove wills

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the range of time that existed between the date of writing the wills and the date of proving them at court. As can be seen the majority of the wills were proved before six months. Figure 4.1 illustrates that 114 wills from

⁶ NRO, Individual Catalogued will, 189p/287, will of Ann Timms, Kingsthorpe, 25 February 1691.

⁷ NRO, 1st Series, Book W, fol. 75, will of Richard Jackson, Kingsthorpe, 29 September 1598.

⁸ NRO, 1st Series, Book I, fol. 133, will of John Paybody, Kingsthorpe, 16 July 1546.

⁹ NRO, 3rd Series, Book S, fol. 218, will of Dorothy Jenoway, Kingsthorpe, 3 March 1693/4.

¹⁰ NRO, 2nd Series, Book N, fol. 40, will of Thomas Ludlow, Kingsthorpe, 1 January 1622.

male testators were proved between one and six months (41.2 per cent). Seventeen wills were proved between one and ten days (6.1 per cent), and twenty-four wills between eleven and twenty days (8.7 per cent). Twenty-one wills were proved between twenty-one and thirty days (7.6 per cent), twenty-four wills between thirty-one and fifty-four days (8.7 per cent) and eighty-six wills (31.1 per cent) between one and fifty-four days. Thirty-nine (14.1 per cent) were proved between seven to twelve months. Nine wills (3.3 per cent) were proved between thirteen and eighteen months. Twelve wills (4.3 per cent) accounted for nineteen to thirty-six months and seventeen ranged between three years ten months and fourteen years (6.1 per cent).

Figure 4.2 shows that thirty-two female wills were proved between one and six months. When one takes into account that ten wills were difficult to account for due to lack of dates, this gives a percentage of 48.5 per cent proved between one and six months of the sixty-six total female wills. Figure 4.2 also illustrates the wide range of prove time for female wills ranging from three days to twenty-six years and seven months, although it must be noted that the female testator on this occasion did note her good health, and that she just had the desire to settle her estate.¹¹ Fourteen wills (21.2 per cent) had a prove time between three to thirty-eight days. Thirteen wills (19.7 per cent) ranged between seven and thirty-five months. Six wills were proved between four years and fourteen years seven months (9.1 per cent).

¹¹ NRO 4th Series Book vi, fol. 101, will of Dame Margaret Lane, Kingsthorpe, 6 December 1662.

Figure 4.1: Length of time between date will was written and prove date for male wills in Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe.

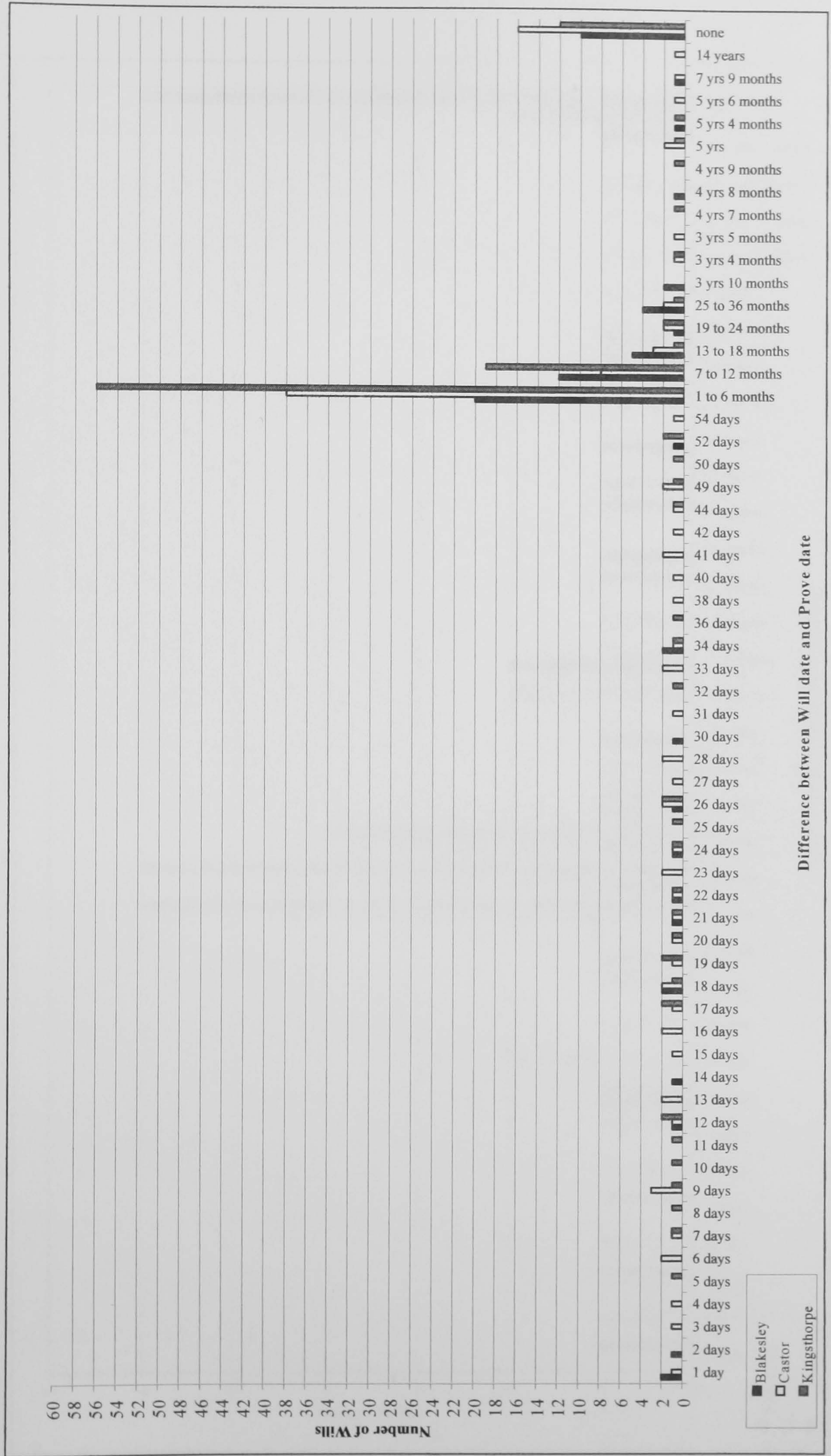
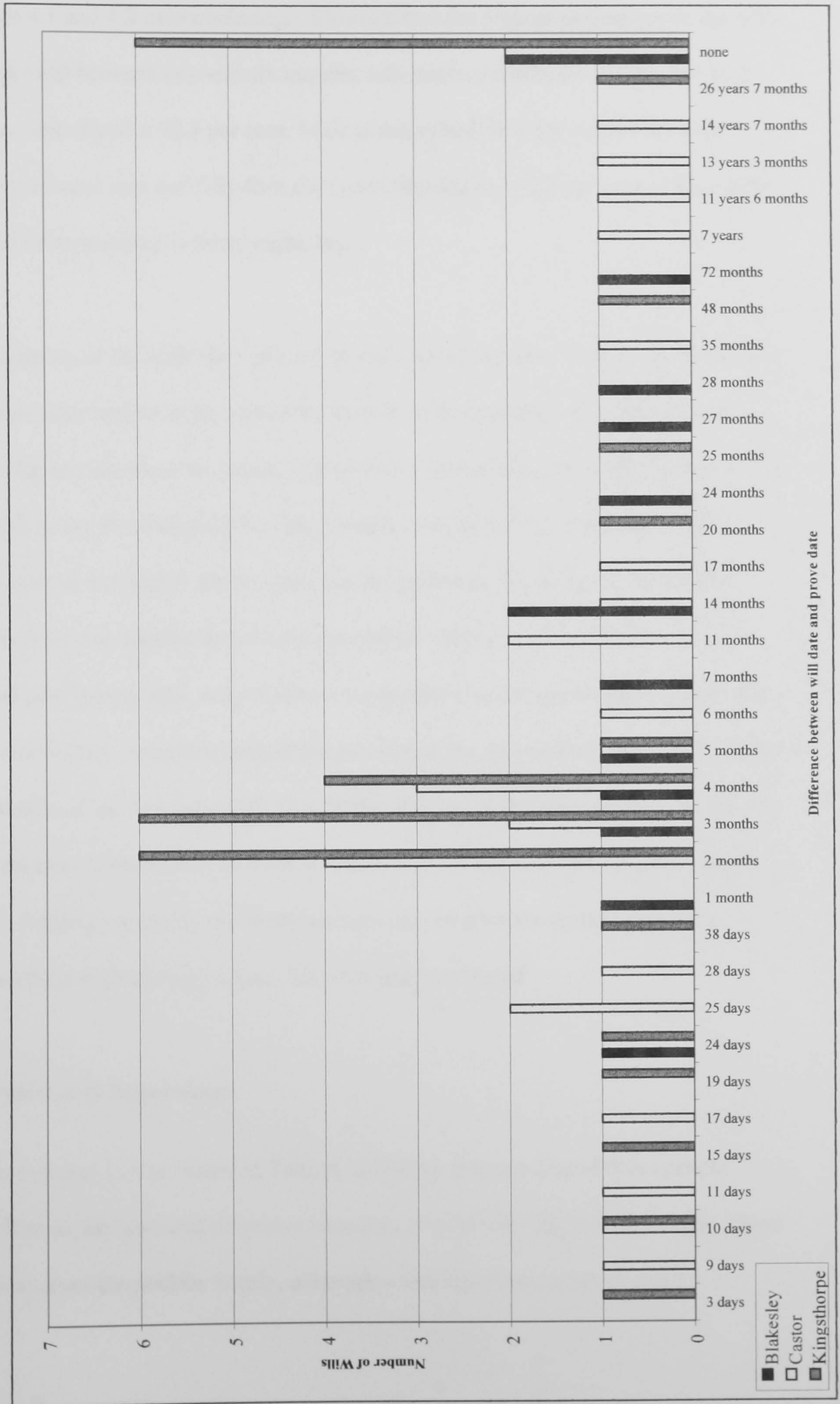


Figure 4.2: Length of time between date will was written and prove date for female wills in Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe.



Difference between will date and prove date

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 overwhelmingly illustrate that the highest percentage of the wills were proved between one and six months, with male testators accounting for 41.2 per cent and females 48.5 per cent. Male testators had 31.1 per cent of the wills proved between one and fifty-four days, and females had 21.2 per cent of their wills proved between three to thirty-eight days.

The majority of the wills were proved in less than six months, with 72.2 per cent of the male wills and 69.7 per cent of the female wills accounted for within this time. These figures illustrate the speedy and effective execution of the wills; however, it is difficult to say if the intentions of the testator were adhered to. Due to the wills being proved so quickly the executor and the inheritors must have accepted the legacies, for any dispute would have delayed the effective execution. Those wills proved after a long time, may be due to the testator not dying immediately after the will was written. Approximately thirty per cent of the will makers did not die within six months of making their will. This further illustrates that the making of a will for the majority of testators in all three parishes was left until the last moment before death. Although arguably the thirty per cent proved after six months may have written their wills during sickness but then later recovered.

Overseers and Supervisors

Wrightson and Levine found in Terling, that forty-five per cent of those people named as supervisors and overseers were kin, even if they did not live locally. These kin were from the nuclear family, although wider kin were chosen in some

instances.¹³ Houlbrooke found that those chosen as overseers were mainly neighbours and friends, and in some cases clergy.¹⁴

In the wills from the three Northamptonshire parishes, very few chose members of the family into a supervisory or overseer role. What is first noticeable from table 4.2 is the large number of wills from the three parishes that did not have supervisors or overseers noted. Although it may have been the case that testators did not appoint them, it is highly likely that as the sample under analysis is of copied wills, these names may have been missed off some of the copied entries. Two hundred and thirty seven of the 391 wills in the sample (60.61 percent) did not specify supervisors or overseers. This breaks down as fifty-nine out of the eighty-six wills in Blakesley (68.6 per cent), ninety-seven out of the 148 Castor wills (65.5 per cent) and eighty-one out of the 157 Kingsthorpe wills (51.6 per cent).

From those 154 wills that did specify the names of the people for whom they wanted to act as supervisors or overseers, these people were mainly non-kin. In the three parishes, only forty-nine wills specify kin within the role. Twenty-eight involved only kin and twenty-one were mixed with non-kin. This is in contrast to 126 wills that either appointed non-kin on their own (105) or mixed with kin (twenty-one). If one takes these forty-nine wills as a percentage of those wills that specified supervisors or overseers, it can be seen that kin only accounted for 31.8 per cent of the 154 wills that specified people in these roles.

¹³ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 101.

¹⁴ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 137.

Table 4.2 – Kin/Non-kin breakdown of supervisors/overseers in the wills

Parish	Relationship of supervisors/overseers to testators	Total
Blakesley	No supervisors/overseers	59
	Non-kin	20
	Kin	4
	Mix of kin/non-kin	3
Blakesley Total		86
Castor	No supervisors/overseers	97
	Non-kin	35
	Mix of kin/non-kin	8
	Kin	8
Castor Total		148
Kingsthorpe	No supervisors/overseers	81
	Non-kin	50
	Kin	16
	Mix of Kin/Non-kin	10
Kingsthorpe Total		157
Total		391

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Blakesley had seven wills that specified kin as overseers or supervisors, four of which specified kin only. If one takes away the wills with no supervisors or overseers, this leaves only a proportion of twenty-seven wills that names supervisors or overseers, and only 25.9 per cent of the wills covered kin. Three wills incorporated a mixture of kin and non-kin (11.1 per cent). Castor had sixteen wills that specified kin as supervisors or overseers, which when taken as a proportion of those wills that named supervisors or overseers was 31.4 per cent. The spread of kin was equal between wills that only specified kin in these roles and those wills that appointed kin and non-kin, with eight wills each.

Kingsthorpe showed the greatest diversity of people named as supervisors and overseers. Twenty-six wills named members of the kin group, which when taken as

a proportion of those wills that named overseers and supervisors, resulted in 34.2 per cent of the seventy six named wills. Of these twenty-six wills, sixteen specified kin only in these roles and ten wills mixed the roles between non-kin and kin. From the three parishes, it can be seen that Kingsthorpe appointed the highest percentage of kin in the role of supervisor or overseer, with Castor having the second highest percentage and Blakesley third. However even in Kingsthorpe, these only account for 34.2 per cent, and thus kin were not favoured in these roles, a lower percentage than Terling with 45 per cent.¹⁵ Those kin appointed were usually not direct descendents. It is also immediately noticeable that they were all male. The norm appears to have been to appoint male kin, but in not specifying the direct kin link, it is difficult to see if they were direct or distant kin.

In Blakesley out of the seven wills that specified kin, six identified them as kinsmen, but not their specific relationship. The one will that did specify the relationship appointed two males to share the role (the testator's brother-in-law and son-in-law). This testator did not appoint direct blood kin, but rather kin through marriage. The seven Blakesley testators also favoured appointing more than one person to fulfil this role, with three wills appointing three people (42.9 per cent), three appointing two people (42.9 per cent) and only one will appointing one kinsman (14.3 per cent). The percentage of wills appointing solely kin was only slightly higher than kin combined with non-kin. Four wills solely appointed kin (57.1 per cent) as compared to three wills combining kin with non-kin (42.9 per cent).

¹⁵ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

In Castor out of the sixteen wills that specified kin, only ten appointments were identified as kinsmen and nine were specific kin relationships. Three wills identified kin combined with other males simply identified as kinsmen. These three wills were two wills appointing a brother and a kinsman in each will to act, whereas one will appointed a combination of his father, two kinsmen and one unknown male in the role. Seven wills appointed blood kin, six of them brothers and one father. Four wills appointed kin by marriage, three wills with brothers-in-law and one will with a son-in-law. As in Blakesley, the sixteen Castor testators also favoured appointing more than one person to fulfil this role, with one will appointing five people (6.3 per cent), ten appointing two people (62.5 per cent), two wills appointing three people (12.5 per cent), and three wills appointing one kinsman (18.8 per cent). The percentage of wills appointing solely kin rather than kin combined with non-kin was the same. In both cases, there were eight wills (50 per cent).

In Kingsthorpe out of the twenty-six wills that specified kin, seven only identified them as kinsmen. Within those wills that specified the kin relationship, thirteen involve direct blood relations. Out of these wills, one combined an uncle and a brother and another will combined a son and a brother along with two unknown males. From the wills that specified kin by marriage, three wills involved brothers-in-law, two involved fathers-in-law and one a son-in-law. Out of those wills that specified kin relationships, blood kin were appointed more often than kin through marriage, and of these, the highest numbers were brothers. Arguably, blood kin were preferred over affinal kin, as the testator placed greater trust in them due to their kinship link through blood. The Kingsthorpe testators also favoured appointing more

than one person to fulfil this role, with two wills appointing four people, four wills appointing three people, eleven wills appointing two people and nine wills appointing one kinsman. The percentage of wills appointing solely kin was higher than kin combined with non-kin. Sixteen wills solely appointed kin (61.5 per cent) as compared to ten wills combining kin with non-kin (38.5 per cent).

Regarding non-kin, it is difficult to ascertain whether they were friends, neighbours etc. because often they were only identified by name. Non-kin were appointed as sole supervisors in 105 wills and jointly in twenty-one wills with kin (32.2 percent). Only forty-nine wills appointed solely kin (12.5 percent). Nearly two-thirds of the wills (60.6 percent) did not consider the appointment of wills or supervisors necessary, so it could be argued that the norm was not to appoint these people. However, if supervisors were appointed, then testators favoured non-kin.

The Numbers of Supervisors and Overseers appointed

After identifying the fact that non-kin tended to act in the roles of supervisor and overseer, it would be interesting to see how many people testators felt were necessary to appoint in this role. Blakesley and Castor testators favoured the appointment of supervisors, whereas in Kingsthorpe they tended to appoint overseers. In Blakesley, twenty-six testators appointed supervisors and only one testator appointed overseers. Sixteen of them appointed two supervisors (59.3 per cent), with only six appointing three supervisors (22.2 per cent) and four appointing

one supervisor (14.8 per cent). Only one male testator appointed five (3.7 per cent). The one testator that appointed overseers, detailed three people.

In Blakesley, twenty-three male testators appointed supervisors or overseers (31.9 per cent) and five females out of the fourteen total female testators appointed supervisors (35.7 per cent). In Castor forty-four testators appointed overseers or supervisors (37 per cent). Eight female testators appointed overseers or supervisors (27.6 per cent). Kingsthorpe had seventy-eight wills that appointed overseers or supervisors. Among the male testators in Kingsthorpe, there were sixty-two appointing overseers and supervisors (50 per cent). Female testators had sixteen appointing supervisors and overseers (48.5 per cent). Kingsthorpe had the highest percentage of its will sample appointing overseers and supervisors (49.7 per cent) in the wills of both sexes. Castor had the second highest total with fifty-two testators appointing overseers and supervisors (35.1 per cent). Blakesley was the third highest with twenty-eight testators appointing these groups (32.6 per cent). There was no real difference in the numbers of supervisors or overseers appointed by the two genders in the three parishes, males and females appointed the most in Kingsthorpe, followed by Castor and then Blakesley. Arguably, the closed community of Kingsthorpe led to a closer interaction with members of the community, and in this parish, the appointment of non-kin in the role of a supervisor or overseer was more likely. The high mobility of the population in the open communities of Blakesley and Castor, would have led to less communal interaction and these parishes are the least likely to appoint supervisors or overseers, and of those testators that did appoint them the least number.

Witnesses

Arguably, those surrounding the testator at the time of death were deemed the most important to the testator, and those that would be most likely to benefit. Those people attendant at the bedside would have signed the will as witnesses to its contents being the true intentions of the testator. As has been seen in earlier chapters, those receiving most bequests were kin, and it would thus be expected that as these people were most important to the testator, then a high percentage of the witnesses would also be kin. However, it is immediately evident from table 4.3 that the witnesses follow the same pattern as the supervisors and overseers. Disregarding the twenty wills that had no witnesses it can be seen that the large majority of the wills that named witnesses took them from outside their own kin group.

Only six wills in Blakesley had members of the kin group acting as witnesses. Of these, only one will had kin solely as the witnesses (1.2 per cent). Seventy-three out of the seventy-nine wills that named witnesses had non-kin solely (92.4 per cent) and five had a mixture of kin and non-kin (6.3 per cent). One (1.2 per cent) had the vicar acting as a witness. Castor had eighteen wills (12.7 per cent of the total wills with witnesses) with witnesses that could be identified as kin signing alongside non-kin. There were no wills at all that had kin solely acting as witnesses. Non-kin appeared in 124 of the 142 wills that named witnesses in Castor (87.3 per cent). Kingsthorpe had eighteen wills that named kin as witnesses, out of the 151 wills that had witnesses named (11.9 per cent). Out of these eighteen wills, only one will had kin solely acting as witnesses (0.7 per cent), seventeen of the wills had kin and non-

kin acting as witnesses (11.2 per cent). Non-kin appeared as witnesses in 132 wills of the 150 wills with witnesses in Kingsthorpe (88 per cent). Clerks and curates accounted for twenty-six wills (17.3 per cent). This left 108 wills in Kingsthorpe that had people outside of the kin group acting as witnesses (72 per cent).

Table 4.3 – Breakdown per parish illustrating whether witnesses are related to the testator

Parish	Categories of Witnesses	Total	% of total will sample in parish
Blakesley	Non-kin	73	84.9
	No witnesses	7	8.1
	Mix of Kin/Non-Kin	5	5.8
	Kin	1	1.2
Blakesley Total		86	100
Castor	Non-kin	124	83.8
	Mix of Kin/Non-Kin	18	12.2
	No witnesses	6	4.1
Castor Total		148	100.1
Kingsthorpe	Non-kin	132	84.1
	Mix of Kin/Non-Kin	17	10.8
	No witnesses	7	4.5
	Kin	1	0.6
Kingsthorpe Total		157	100

Source: NRO, Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Consequently, it can be seen that in the 391 wills, 329 were witnessed by non-kin (84.1 per cent), with kin only appearing solely in two wills (0.5 per cent). Kin mixed with non-kin accounted for forty wills (10.2 per cent). Twenty wills had no witnesses at all (5.1 per cent). In Terling, only five percent of the witnesses to the wills were kin.¹⁶ The Northamptonshire results follow the pattern of Terling, with the majority of the wills witnessed by non-kin, most likely in the shape of friends

¹⁶ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p. 100.

and neighbours. Blakesley had the highest percentage of wills with witnesses from outside of the kin group followed by Kingsthorpe and then Castor. Arguably, as beneficiaries in the will, the nuclear family was not legally allowed to witness. Thus, those not benefiting could act as signatories. However, with wider kin most likely being of some distance away, the dying relied on friends and neighbours from within the local community, especially as death could act with great immediacy, and there would be no time to wait for wider kin to attend the deathbed and sign the will. Those kin that did act as witnesses did not receive bequests from the wills.

Furthermore, these kin may have lived close to the testator, and may indicate a preference for kin over non-kin when geographical distance was not an issue. This reliance on friends and neighbours illustrates the strong relationships to be found within communities. In fact, relations between members of the community may have been closer than relationships between wider kin separated by geography.

The norm was for men to act in this role, with thirty-seven of the wills naming kinsmen (88.1 per cent). However, unlike the appointment of supervisors and overseers, some women acted as witnesses. This was probably due to their gender, as women were often attendant to the deathbed caring for the sick. Furthermore, as they were not undertaking any specific role involving the fulfilment of legacies when acting as witnesses, their restricted legal status as women was not brought into question. Kinswomen were named in six of the wills as witnesses (14.3 per cent).

Testators also preferred to have more witnesses than less (as was the case with supervisors and overseers). Blakesley had one will with four witnesses, three wills

with three witnesses, one will with two witnesses and only one will with one witness. Castor had one will with eight witnesses, one will with six witnesses, two wills with four witnesses, nine wills with three witnesses, and five wills with two witnesses. Kingsthorpe had one will with five witnesses, six wills with four witnesses, eight wills with three witnesses and three wills with two witnesses. The common thread between all three parishes appears to be that three witnesses was the usual number noted.

Witnesses follow the same pattern as supervisors and overseers, with testators preferring to choose them primarily from outside of the family. Blakesley had the highest percentage of wills with witnesses from outside of the kin group followed by Kingsthorpe and then Castor. Regarding supervisors and overseers, Blakesley once again has the highest number of wills choosing these people from outside of the kin group. However, Castor and Kingsthorpe switch places in this section, although their results are so close, the difference is negligible.

The role of the supervisors and overseers of wills was difficult; they had to ensure justice was done to the clauses of the will and that all legacies were paid fairly and promptly. They had to assist the nominated executor(s) in fulfilling the terms of the will. Testators may have chosen these people from outside of the kin group because they were not receiving any legacy in the will and it would be easier for them to act in the best interest. Secondly, these people may have been friends or colleagues of the testator, and may have had a close relationship. This friendship would be utilised from the grave, ensuring these people protected the interests of the testator and the

family. As James argued in his study of Durham, neighbours were relied upon for support, and a small number would be chosen to be supervisors.¹⁷ Cressy notes that kin, heirs and neighbours would attend the dying testator.¹⁸ Wrightson and Levine found in their study of Terling, that there were only loose networks of kin in the village and the immediacy of death resulted in neighbours supporting the dying testator rather than kin.¹⁹

As with this study of three parishes in Northamptonshire, Wrightson and Levine also found kin recognition very low when identifying witnesses of the wills. They found that 95 per cent of the witnesses were neighbours or friends, with a small number of scribes.²⁰ They also discovered that testators chose witnesses from within their same occupational networks.²¹ Riley, in his examination of four communities in Yorkshire also found low kinship recognition in the witness lists and a heavy use of neighbours and friends.²² Coster discovered that only 9.3 per cent of witnesses in the Yorkshire wills were kin.²³

Coldicutt also discovered that neighbours frequently acted as witnesses, and argued that it is worth analysing these names to see how often these neighbours appeared.²⁴

¹⁷ M. James, Family, Lineage and Civil Society, a Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region 1500-1640 (London, 1974), p. 22.

¹⁸ Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, p. 390.

¹⁹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 100.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 101.

²² M. D. Riley, 'Families and their Property in Early Modern England, a Study of Four Communities in the Yorkshire Ouse 1660-1760' (University of York, Oct 1990), p. 146.

²³ Coster, 'Kinship and inheritance in early modern England', p. 7.

²⁴ Coldicutt, 'A Long Sutton Miscellany', p. 14.

This as well as being a method to gauge literacy levels can also be used to determine the frequency with which people appeared as witnesses, supervisors or overseers. Riley in his study of Yorkshire wills found that surnames do repeat frequently, indicating a community of people who would often act as witnesses or supervisors within the village.²⁵

The wills were analysed to see if names appeared repeatedly within the role of supervisor, overseer or witness. Table 4.4 details the frequency with which names appear in the wills in these roles. These names could appear once either in numerous individual wills or more than once in different roles within a smaller number of wills. In counting the individual names, it was found that Castor had the highest number of individuals in these roles with 373 people in forty-eight wills.

Kingsthorpe had 316 individuals acting in the roles for 157 wills and Blakesley had 202 people acting in the roles for eighty-six wills. It can be seen from table 4.4 that 710 people only ever appeared once in these roles (79.7 per cent). This leaves only 20.3 per cent of the people appearing twice or more. Ninety appeared twice in the wills (10.1 per cent) and thirty-nine appeared three times (4.4 per cent). All three parishes followed the same pattern of having those who appear once as the highest category, followed by those who appeared twice and then three times. After this, the pattern between the three parishes differed.

²⁵ Riley, 'Families and their Property', p. 146.

Table 4.4 – Frequency of names appearing as witnesses/supervisors or overseers within the wills of the three parishes

Parish	Frequency of Names Appearing															Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	11	13	14	17	19	20	
Castor	303	44	17	4	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	373
Kingsthorpe	243	26	12	7	10	5	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	316
Blakesley	164	20	10	5	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	202
Total	710	90	39	16	12	8	4	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	891

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

The highest number of named appearances for an individual in Blakesley was six, whereas in Castor three individuals appear seven, eight and nine times within the wills. Kingsthorpe has the greatest extremes, with three individuals appearing seven times, two appearing eight, two appearing nine, and six individuals appearing between eleven and twenty times.

As was noted earlier, the clergy appear quite regularly in various roles within the wills. Clergy appeared in fifty-three of the 391 wills (13.6 per cent) as supervisors, overseers or witnesses. As noted later in chapter six, clergy could have been present as will-writers and thus named in these roles. Richard Pulcher (curate) appeared twenty times, fourteen as witness, five as supervisor and one as overseer. Izaker Brooke appeared nineteen times, thirteen as witness, four as overseer and two as supervisor. Simon Cooke appeared seventeen times, eleven as witness, five as overseer and one as supervisor. William Garret appeared fourteen times, thirteen as witness and once as supervisor. Thomas Wallis appeared thirteen times, seven as witness, five as overseer and once as supervisor. William Root appeared eleven

times, ten as witness and one as supervisor. Although Root and Pulcher are noted on the wills as curates, none of the others are, but it may be a strong possibility.

William Garret is noted in the will of Joan Orlibear as being the will scribe, but none of the others are given recognition of this status.²⁶

For Castor the highest number of appearances for any person in the wills was nine, and this was by Thomas Booker, the Curate, in the role of a witness. Robert Mylner appeared eight times, six as a witness and twice as an overseer. Edward Gardner appeared seven times, six as a witness and once as a supervisor. Blakesley did not have as high a number of witnesses appearing many times. William Chaulke appeared the most times in six wills as a witness. However, due to the high infrequency of other members of the community appearing, it could be argued that those who appear more than once had important roles to play, possibly acting as scribes. The evidence agrees with the results in Terling. Because of the immediacy of death and loose kinship networks neighbours were often called upon.²⁷

The other roles of neighbours and friends

Wrightson and Levine also draw attention to references to debt within the wills.

They argue that items owed by and to testators within the wills are illustrations of people within the community and neighbourhood interacting with one another.

Table 4.5 illustrates the fact that there were only twenty-eight wills that detailed

²⁶ NRO 4th Series X131, will of Joan Orlibear, Kingsthorpe, dated 5 July 1665.

²⁷ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

some form of debt owing to or owed by the testators. Blakesley had no male testators at all detailing debts, and this was the same with female wills in Kingsthorpe. Castor had the greatest number of wills detailing debts, with a total of eighteen (64.3 per cent). Kingsthorpe had seven wills (25 per cent) and Blakesley three wills (10.7 per cent). Out of the twenty-eight wills, seventeen (60.7 per cent) detailed items of money owed by the testator and eleven (39.3 per cent) detailed items of money owed to the testator. Of the seventeen wills, eleven of them were from Castor (64.7 per cent), five from Kingsthorpe (29.4 per cent) and one from Blakesley (5.9 per cent). Out of the eleven wills, seven were from Castor (63.6 per cent), two from Kingsthorpe (18.2 per cent) and two from Blakesley (18.2 per cent).

In both cases there were more wills listing non-kin than kin, with four kin wills out of eleven (36.4 per cent) as compared to six non kin wills (54.5 per cent) owing money to the testator and only one will with a mix of kin and non-kin (9.1 per cent). Four wills out of seventeen had the testator owing money to kin (23.5 per cent) as compared to thirteen wills owing money to non-kin (76.5 per cent). The evidence tentatively suggests the likelihood of money and loans passing between non-kin members more often than kin. Out of the twenty-eight wills that detailed debts, nineteen wills involved non-kin (67.9 per cent), eight involved kin (28.6 per cent) and one of the wills involved kin and non-kin (3.6 per cent). These percentages are close to the discoveries made in Terling, where debt references involved 17 per cent kin, 67 per cent neighbours and 16 per cent with unrelated outsiders.²⁸

²⁸ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p. 100.

Table 4.5 – Details of wills that specify debts owing to or owed by the testator to kin or non kin members of the community

		Number of Wills detailing debts owed to testator by kin/non kin				
Parish	Sex	Kin	Kin/non kin	Non kin	Total	%Of 28 wills
Blakesley	Female	2	0	0	2	7.1
Castor	Female	1	0	0	1	3.6
	Male	0	1	5	6	21.4
Kingsthorpe	Male	1	0	1	2	7.1
Total Wills		4	1	6	11	39.2
		Number of wills detailing debts owed by testator to kin/non kin				
Parish	Sex	Kin	Kin/non kin	Non kin	Total	%Of 28 wills
Blakesley	Female	0	0	1	1	3.6
Castor	Female	1	0	0	1	3.6
	Male	1	0	9	10	35.7
Kingsthorpe	Male	2	0	3	5	17.9
Total Wills		4	0	13	17	60.8

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Loans between kin appeared to be of a higher amount of money than those concerning non-kin. Loans owing to the testator by non-kin ranged from nine pence to five pounds, whereas those between kin ranged from five pounds to fifty pounds. One unusual loan was of a debt owed to the testator of five hundred pounds by two men. This large loan amount indicates these men may have been unidentified kin. However, the testator was a gentleman and this loan although initially appearing substantial, was not as substantial as it initially seems as it came from a wealthy man. Loans owed by the testator to non-kin ranged from ten pence to forty pounds. However, apart from one loan of forty pounds, and one for ten pounds, all the rest were less than five pounds. Kin loans owed by the testator ranged from five pounds to one hundred pounds. Arguably, testators loaned higher sums of money from kin

than non-kin. Ten of the seventeen wills involving non-kin involved loans less than forty shillings (58.8 per cent). Five were between three and ten pounds (29.4 per cent) and one was for forty pounds (5.9 per cent). Three unspecified amounts of money were difficult to quantify and are not included in the above summary. Kin had no loans less than forty shillings. There were three loans out of the eight to kin of between five and ten pounds (37.5 per cent). Thus, in cases of loans borrowed by the testator, the role of kin was important, as testators loaned higher sums of money from kin than non-kin. Although loans between kin were less frequent than between non-kin, the higher amounts of money involved indicate the importance of kin in the money lending relationships.

Three loans were between thirty and one hundred pounds (37.5 per cent) and two had unspecified amounts. Added to this is the unusual will with a sum owed by non-kin of five hundred pounds and fifty pounds by kin. Despite this unusual clause, it can be argued that the debts between non-kin were usually of small amounts of money, with 58.8 per cent of the debts below forty shillings. Eight of these were under twenty shillings (47.1 per cent), which is higher than Terling's result of 38 per cent.²⁹ Only one loan was over twenty pounds (5.9 per cent). Terling had 16 per cent of loans over twenty pounds. The three Northamptonshire parishes have loan amounts to non-kin that fall within a smaller range than Terling, with a higher number concerning smaller amounts.

²⁹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

A hesitant suggestion can be made that females appeared to lend money more frequently than borrow it (especially if they were widows), with males taking the opposite action. This is especially the case, when it is noted that three of the female wills specified themselves as widows (Anne Warwick, Aswell Kendall, and Alice Atterbury).³⁰ Widows often became involved in local networks of money lending. Women appeared to loan money more than males. Males appear to run up debts rather than loaning money. Loans between kin were not restricted in the range of kin recognised and kin however distant by blood or marriage could call upon one another for loans. The people that owed money to the testator were close kin, ranging from a mother, one brother and two nephews. In comparison, the debts owed by the testators were to a wider group of kin, ranging from a sister, a wife's sister, an unidentified kinsman and a daughter. The amount owing to the daughter was the highest amount. Arguably, women became involved in money lending, because as widows they had accumulated sums of money that could be freely disposed, and was used by them to accrue money (through interest). Women do however appear to have maintained credit relations with more women than men, arguably wanting to support female kin due to their common gender. Although loans owed by the female testators were from wider kin in some instances, arguably in both loans owed and borrowed these were concentrated between the nuclear family of procreation, and nuclear family of orientation.

³⁰ NRO, 1st Series Book S, fol. 28, will of Anne Warwick, Blakesley, dated 20 November 1567, NRO 3rd Series, Book A, fol. 160, Will of Aswell Kendall, dated 20 November 1650, NRO 3rd Series, Book L fol 269/270, Will of Alice Atterbury, Castor, dated 9 May 1691.

The role of servants

Thirty wills left a bequest to a servant or group of servants, with male servants rewarded most frequently. Within these thirty wills, there were thirty-eight bequests ranging from crops, animals and clothes to quite substantial amounts of money.

There was one bequest to a shepherd, and in another separate will, one bequest to a housekeeper, however this was phrased as money owing to the housekeeper, rather than a legacy. Five wills bequeathed items to all their servants. Generally, this appears to have been a small amount of money as a token of affection, ranging from twelve pence to five shillings. Maids received the second highest number of bequests within the wills, ranging from small household items and clothes to money between twelve pence and fifteen pounds. Three wills gave substantial sums of money, indicating a great affection and ties similar to that of close kin (living with the testator).

Male servants were rewarded with the greatest number of bequests in the wills of male testators; however, the monetary value was not as high as in the wills of the female testators. The largest gift of money to a male servant was fifteen pounds (in the same will as the fifteen pounds for the maid).³¹ Instead, male servants appear to have been rewarded most frequently with animals and crops from the farm.

Maidservants only accounted for two bequests involving animals. One bequest of a house and land to a male servant does appear to be quite substantial. However, this was only to be provided throughout the life of the servant, for on his death the house

went to the son of the testator. The children of the testator were not penalised as they also received land or parts of land as inheritances.³²

With only thirty wills detailing items to servants, it could be argued that servants were not deemed important enough to receive bequests within the majority of testators, with 92.3 per cent of the wills not listing any bequests to servants. This low percentage of bequests to servants may have been due to a large number of households not having servants. However, it was most likely due to servants not being deemed important enough or held in great affection with the testators to receive items.

Guardians and trustees

More evidence of the existence of the bonds of community can be seen through the appointment of guardians and trustees to legacies. Fifty-two wills from the three parishes appointed a guardian or trustee for either a person or their legacy. Within these fifty-two wills, thirty involved the appointment of a member of kin, whereas the remainder appointed a non-kin member or some unidentifiable person. Seven of these wills were from females, and overwhelmingly twenty-one were from men appointing their wives as guardian to their children. Regarding the male testators that appointed guardians, 46.7 per cent of them appointed their wife. In nearly 50

³¹ NRO, 1st Series, Book AV, fol 27, will of Mary Watts, Blakesley, dated 20 April 1620.

³² NRO, Index Peterborough Wills, Volume 2, Book Z, fol 3, will of Ruth Smith, Castor, dated 12 May 1615.

per cent of the wills of the male testators, the children were of a minor age and their welfare was of primary concern. Alternatively, these men felt that the women's position was so tenuous that this appointment as the guardian of her own children was necessary to protect the children within the family unit.

If one looks closely at these twenty-one male testators that appointed wives, it can be seen that ten of them specifically mentioned the guardianship and education of the testator's children.³³ The remaining eleven placed the legacies due to the children in the hands of the wife, until they were of sufficient age to receive them. Six of these eleven wills specifically mentioned using the legacies to raise the children, and then the children to receive them at an appointed age.³⁴ There appears

³³ Family Records Centre, PCC, fol. 102, Microfilm Box 415 will of Charles Titley, Castor, 20 May 1693; NRO, 4th Series Book X, fol. 10, will of Valentine Miles, Castor, 13 August 1671; NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills, Volume 2, Book N, fol. 108 will of James Manton, Castor, 2 May 1644; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 14, fol. 128 will of Nicholas Bacon, Castor, 24 June 1646; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 13, fol. 188 will of Vincent Ffrimore, Castor, 20 January 1638; NRO, 1st Series, Book I, fol. 337 will of John Bett, Kingsthorpe, 15 February 1550; NRO, 1st Series, Book P, fol. 70 will of Thomas Brooke, Kingsthorpe, 2 December 1560; NRO, 1st Series, Book S, fol. 82 will of John Watts, Kingsthorpe, 7 March 1569; NRO, 1st Series, Book V, fol. 11 will of Thomas Jeffes, Kingsthorpe, 25 November 1579 and NRO, 1st Series, Book V, fol. 39 will of William Webbe, Kingsthorpe, 27 August 1580.

³⁴ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 1, fol. 78, will of Roger Tonge, Castor, 30 August 1546; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 11, fol. 174 will of Eusebie Catesby, Castor, 11 October 1629; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 8, fol. 327 will of Richard Wildebore, Castor, 27 October 1613; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 2, fol. 117 will of Thomas Whitmore, Castor, 1 November 1557; NRO, Consistory Court Of Peterborough, Book 1, fol. 174 will of Roger Stables, Castor, 14 November 1553, with the six specific wills being that of NRO, 4th Series, Book VIII, fol. 268 will of Thomas Palmer, Castor, 1 September 1666, NRO, 1 Series, Book R, fol. 17 will of James Whitton, Blakesley, 26 August 1559; NRO, 1st Series, Book S, fol. 27 will of Richard Glenn, Kingsthorpe, 23 September 1567; NRO, 1st Series, Book P, fol. 69 will of Thomas Wryght, Kingsthorpe, 2 October 1569; NRO, 1st Series, Book Y, fol.

to be no specific occupation within these twenty-one wills that appointed these wives. One gentleman, five yeomen, four husbandmen, two labourers, one woolwinder, one carpenter and seven unspecified testators wrote the twenty-one wills.

Three brothers were appointed as guardians and trustees by three separate testators (10 per cent of the total thirty wills). Two of these testators stated that the brother appointed was to use the legacies to raise the children, and on their maturity to then pass on the legacy.³⁵ The remaining testator did not mention using the legacies, but appointed the brother to raise the children and then pay the legacies they were due at maturity.³⁶ The two remaining male testators from the total of thirty that appointed guardians or trustees were both from Kingsthorpe. Richard Skynner in 1560, appointed his brother and sister to act as joint guardians to a younger sister. They were to raise her, and at the age of sixteen to pay her a legacy. All this was to be done at the oversight of the supervisors, who were two unidentified males. The guardians were also the executors of the will, and the testator appears to have had no direct heirs from him.³⁷ The second testator was that of a vicar, Edward Regnolds,

60 will of John Pretty, Kingsthorpe, 13 May 1592,; and NRO, 2nd Series, Book S, fol. 66 will of John Cooke, Kingsthorpe, 16 May 1614.

³⁵ NRO, Index Peterborough Wills, Volume 1, Book R, fol. 51 will of Roger Castine, Castor, 25 July 1670, and NRO, 1st Series, Book P, fol. 37 will of William Brooke, Kingsthorpe, 8 November 1564.

³⁶ NRO, 1st Series, Book R, fol. 72, will of Nicholas Willinson, Kingsthorpe, 25 August 1559.

³⁷ NRO, 1st Series, Book R, fol. 126, will of Richard Skynner, Kingsthorpe, 5 May 1560.

also from Kingsthorpe.³⁸ In this, he has direct heirs, and an added complication was that this will was nuncupative (written after the testator had died from verbal statements made on the deathbed), suggesting that the testator had not had sufficient time to settle the estate and this was the reason for the appointment of trustees over the land. This testator appointed his son, three sons-in-law and an unknown male (possibly another vicar) as the trustees to his lands. They were to sell the lands, and use the money to pay all debts. None of the lands within the will were bequeathed to any heirs. The only items bequeathed are books and household items to the wife, to dispose of as she thinks fit between his children. Thus, this second will does not involve the appointment of a guardian over a person or legacy. This is the only will out of the thirty, which is of this kind. The remaining twenty-nine all involve legacies or people. These twenty-nine testators that appointed guardians indicated that the welfare of the nuclear family was the prime motivation. In all of these cases, young children were involved, and to ensure the successful passing of legacies to these minors and the survival of the nuclear unit and estate, the interests of the family were protected through the guardian. To ensure the welfare of the testator's nuclear family, the widow was placed in a large number of these wills as the guardian over the children.

Four of the thirty wills that appointed kin as guardians or trustees were from women. Two of these testators appointed a son as guardian. Phyllis Pitham from Blakesley, widow, appointed her son as guardian over her two youngest children until they

³⁸ Family Records Centre, PCC [24] 30 Microfilm Box 449, will of Edward Regnolds, Kingsthorpe, 27 June 1698.

were fifteen.³⁹ Dorothy Burdworth of Castor also appointed her son as a guardian or trustee, but for a different purpose to Phyllis Pitham, she appointed her son as guardian to a legacy of fifty shillings to appoint an unidentified woman to a trade.⁴⁰ Margerie Sheppherd from Kingsthorpe, appointed her daughter to act as trustee or guardian, she was to have the use of the land, until the testator's son was twenty-one, and then this land was to pass to him. This testator was effectively protecting the land and the legacy through the daughter until the male heir was old enough.⁴¹ Widows wrote all three of these wills, because with no husbands, they turned to direct heirs of their own from the nuclear family. Furthermore, they may have been fulfilling their husbands' legacies through their own wills, especially in the case of the will concerning the inheritance of land. This land may already have been pre-bequeathed by the father to his young son through the widow, and with the widow now dying herself; she was now protecting the legacy through the daughter. It is unusual to find land passed within the wills of the females; usually the female wills only involve small tokens of affection and personal items.

The fourth female testator has not identified herself as widow, but she mentions a son and no husband. The possibility is that she is a widow, although one must also accept the fact that this woman may have been unmarried with an illegitimate child. In this will from Castor, Margaret Warren appoints her father as guardian to her son.

³⁹ NRO, 3rd Series, Book T, fol. 284, will of Phyllis Pitham, Blakesley, 24 May 1697.

⁴⁰ NRO, 4th Series, Book II, fol. 35, will of Dorothy Burdworth, Castor, 28 January 1670-1.

⁴¹ NRO, 1st Series, Book V, fol. 117, will of Margerie Sheppherd, Kingsthorpe, 6 February 1583.

Looking at the Castor parish register there are two Margarets in 1626 that married into the Warren family, plus the baptism of a son William Warren in 1627. Richard Warren is buried in 1629, and he may have been married to one of the Margarets. Furthermore, a Margaret Warren, a widow is buried on 14 December 1633, four days after the date of the will. The likelihood of this female being a widow is strong and she left her orphaned son to the protection of her father-in-law and not her own blood family.⁴²

Twenty-two testators appointed non-kin as a trustee or guardian over legacies or people. Nine of these were from males in Castor, six males in Kingsthorpe and four males in Castor. There were only three females, one from Castor and two from Kingsthorpe. Five of these testators were directly involved in appointing a guardian to money or goods. These people were given the bequest destined for a minor until they were of an old enough age to receive the money. Lewys Hurlocke (widow) in 1547 appointed Simon Child and John Hurlocke to be guardians of her three daughter's legacies until they married.⁴³ John Warwick from Blakesley placed the monetary legacies into the hands of William Foxley until the children they were destined for achieved the ages of eighteen.⁴⁴ Dorothy Jenoway appointed the neighbour as trustee for the items given to a kinswoman, keeping the goods until she

⁴² NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills, Volume 2, Book E, fol. 179 will of Margaret Warren, Castor, 10 December 1633.

⁴³ NRO, 1st Series Book I, fol. 286, will of Lewys Hurlocke, Kingsthorpe, 16 August 1547.

⁴⁴ NRO, 2nd Series Book G, fol. 195, will of John Warwick, Blakesley, 15 October 1636.

came to maturity.⁴⁵ The remaining two wills were from Castor, and were from John Walton in 1658 appointing Anthony Bellamy as guardian to his grandchildren's legacies and Christopher Wilson in 1623 appointing John Brookes as guardian of his grandson's legacy.⁴⁶

Twelve testators outlined a legacy to provide for the upbringing of a minor, and this legacy was placed in the hands of the guardian to either pay for someone else to bring up the child or for them to do it themselves. Adrian Groome in Castor appointed a guardian to oversee his son's studies at Cambridge University.⁴⁷ John Johnson also of Castor appointed a guardian over his daughter to look after her, as she was the sole direct heir.⁴⁸ Robert Watkin in Castor appointed guardians to use the residue of the estate towards the maintenance of the children.⁴⁹ Two testators in Castor involved the guardian paying money to the testator's widow to bring up the child of the testator.⁵⁰ Another testator in Castor, arranged for the wife to pay money to the guardians for the use of the testator's daughters until they were

⁴⁵ NRO, 3rd Series, Book S, fol. 218, will of Dorothy Jenoway, Kingsthorpe, 3 March 1693/4.

⁴⁶ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills, Volume 2 Book K, fol. 143, will of John Walton, Castor, 23 May 1658; NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills, Volume 2, Book D, fol. 6, will of Christopher Wilson, Castor, 1 January 1623.

⁴⁷ NRO, Consistory Court Of Peterborough, Book 3, fol. 74, will of Adrian Groome, Castor, 21 December 1562.

⁴⁸ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 1, Book H, fol. 179, will of John Johnson, Castor, 17 May 1614.

⁴⁹ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 2, Book Q, fol. 179, will of Robert Watkin, Castor, 13 July 1681.

⁵⁰ NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 2, Book H, fol. 148, will of John Wortleye, Castor, 12 April 1615, and NRO, Index to Peterborough Wills Volume 1, Book K, fol. 269, will of Francis Bird, Castor, 23 October 1659.

eighteen.⁵¹ Ann Nubon appointed a guardian over her son for as long as he lived.⁵² Kingsthorpe had five wills that involved guardians being appointed within this kind of role. Richard Jackson, Henry Weston, Robert Morris, and John Billingham all appointed guardians to bring up the children.⁵³ Richard Pytmer appointed a guardian over his son, merely to ensure that the son stayed with the mother, and she provides for him for ten years.⁵⁴ Blakesley had no wills that appointed guardians over children's legacies, but had two wills that appointed a guardian for the children, if the widow remarried again. John Hole appointed guardians to his son's legacy until he is twenty if the widow remarried.⁵⁵ Simon Smith from Kingsthorpe appointed a guardian for the son, in case the son did not trust his stepfather to pay the legacy. (The new husband of the widow was to pay the legacy if she remarried).⁵⁶ These testators were effectively protecting the interests of their nuclear family, without restricting the widow after his death. Rather than restricting the possible remarriage of the widow, the testator ensured the legacies to the children were protected and could not be harmed by the widow remarrying. The three testators in Blakesley that involved the appointment of guardians, all had

⁵¹ NRO, 4th Series Book X, fol. 10, will of Valentine Miles, Castor, 13 August 1671.

⁵² NRO, Consistory Court Of Peterborough, Book 12, fol. 254, will of Ann Nubon, Castor, 9 January 1636.

⁵³ NRO, 1st Series, Book W, fol. 75, will of Richard Jackson, Kingsthorpe, 29 September 1598; NRO, 2nd Series, Book S, fol. 46, will of Henry Weston, Kingsthorpe, 29 April 1611; NRO, 3rd Series, Book M, fol. 6 will of Robert Morris, Kingsthorpe, 21 January 1690; and NRO, 3rd Series, Book V, fol. 209, will of John Billingham, Kingsthorpe, 11 April 1699.

⁵⁴ NRO, 1st Series, Book M, fol. 15, will of Richard Pytmer, Kingsthorpe, 6 November 1547.

⁵⁵ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 4, fol. 160, will of John Hole, Castor, 5 January 1593.

⁵⁶ NRO, 1st Series, Book T, fol. 244, will of Simon Smith, Kingsthorpe, 19 February 1578.

different reasons for the appointment of them. None of them appointed guardians for the children's welfare. Richard Wayte appointed two guardians to ensure all the legacies and debts were paid after the decease of the testator's wife.⁵⁷ William Gibbons appointed two of his friends as guardians to sell the estate and divide the profits between the testator's wife and family.⁵⁸ William Foxley set up a grammar school, and he appointed five guardians to ensure that it was set up and run effectively.⁵⁹

It can be seen that for those testators that appointed non-kin as guardians, the majority of these appointed guardians to ensure the welfare of the children. Nineteen of the twenty-two involved the care of minors or their legacies through guardians in Kingsthorpe and Castor, with three (all from Blakesley) appointed guardians for quite diverse reasons. All twenty-two wills involved the appointment of male guardians. Four involved possible kinsmen (as they had the same surname of the testator). Three of these were kinsmen combined with non-kin and one was of two kinsmen together. Two of the testators appointed curates as the guardians, one named a male neighbour, and two appointed male friends.

Out of the fifty-two testators that nominated guardians, thirty involved kin (57.7 per cent) and twenty-two involved non-kin (42.3 per cent). Within the role of

⁵⁷ NRO, 4th Series, Book IX, fol. 143, will of Richard Wayte, Blakesley, 29 October 1658.

⁵⁸ NRO, 3rd Series, Book T, fol. 58, will of William Gibbons, Blakesley, 3 April 1699.

⁵⁹ NRO, 3rd Series Book D, fol. 56, will of William Foxley, Blakesley, 1 January 1699.

guardianship of the children, of those testators that appointed guardians, the norm was to favour kin. However if one removes the wives (who would have looked after the minor children as normal, even if they were not nominated on the wills), then non-kin would have been the norm, as there were twenty-one testators with non-kin appointed compared to eight testators that nominated kin apart from the wife.

Godparents

Another role that could be performed within the community was that of godparent. These people would be appointed at the baptism of a newborn child, and would be expected to be 'responsible for the religious instruction and general social welfare of their godchildren and frequently provided the name for the child. The variety of persons nominated as godparents expressed the flexibility of this fictive kinship bond. Godparents might be close relatives, friends or neighbours of the biological parents.'⁶⁰ As can be seen from the number of bequests to godchildren, the role of godparents was active in the three Northamptonshire parishes. Gottlieb argued that godparents were often friends or work associates, and this increased their personal networks of kinship, for these godparents were considered special relationships.⁶¹

As can be seen from table 4.6 fifty-four testators gave bequests to godchildren, which equates to 13.8 per cent of the will sample. Of these fifty-four, the highest number came from Kingsthorpe, with twenty-seven. These twenty-seven testators

⁶⁰ Beaver, 'Sown in dishonour', p. 412.

⁶¹ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 191.

accounted for 17.2 per cent of the 157 testators from Kingsthorpe, twenty-four male and three female. In Castor, fifteen testators gave bequests to godchildren, a percentage of 10.1 per cent of the total Castor will sample. Twelve of these were males and three females. Blakesley had the lowest number of bequests to godchildren, with only twelve. These twelve bequests account for 14 per cent of the will sample. Out of these twelve bequests, eight of them were from male testators and four female testators.

Table 4.6 – Bequests to Godchildren in the Wills of the Northamptonshire Parishes

Parish	Sex of testator	Range of godchildren bequeathed to	Total Bequests
Blakesley	Male	Godchildren	3
		Godson	3
		Goddaughter	2
Castor	Male	Godchildren	5
		Godson	5
		Goddaughter	2
Kingsthorpe	Male	Godchildren	9
		Godson	10
		Goddaughter	3
		Godson's sister	1
		Godson's son	1
Blakesley	Female	Godson	1
		Goddaughter	2
		Goddaughters sisters	1
Castor	Female	Godchildren	1
		Godson	1
		Goddaughter	1
Kingsthorpe	Female	Godchildren	3
Total Wills			54

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

When taken as a percentage of the total number of wills per parish, it can be seen that Kingsthorpe had the highest proportion with items bequeathed to godchildren. This is followed by Blakesley and then Castor. However, when these results are presented by gender, the results give a slightly different impression. Female testators in Blakesley had the highest percentage bequeathing items to godchildren, followed by males in Kingsthorpe and then males in Blakesley. Castor had the fourth and fifth highest percentages of items bequeathed to godchildren, and females in Kingsthorpe had the lowest percentage in all three parishes. It can be seen in the three parishes in Northamptonshire that the percentage detailing bequests to godchildren is quite low. Females in Blakesley are the only group to have over a quarter of the wills detailing bequests to godchildren. The results for all three parishes fall in line with Beaver's results in his study of Gloucestershire, where he found only 16 per cent of the will sample gave bequests to godchildren.⁶²

Table 4.7 shows the number of testators per life cycle stage that gave bequests to godchildren. From this table it can be seen that the largest number of bequests to godchildren came from testators at stage C of their life cycle. Twenty-five of the testators out of the fifty-four gave bequests to godchildren at this stage (46.3 per cent). This stage of life is where testators are married and have begun to have families of their own, so it seems odd to be diverting bequests away from their own children to godchildren. However, it could be argued that these godchildren were

⁶² Beaver, 'Sown in dishonour', p. 412.

considered members of the testators own immediate kin group, and treated as surrogate children.

Table 4.7 – Bequests to Godchildren by life cycle stage of the testator for Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Life cycle stage	Range of godchildren bequeathed to	Kingsthorpe Number of Bequests	Blakesley Number of Bequests	Castor Number of Bequests	Total Bequests
A	Godchildren	1	0	0	1
	Godson	1	0	1	2
	Godson's sister	1	0	0	1
	Goddaughter	0	0	1	1
B	Godson	4	0	0	4
	Godchildren	1	1	2	4
	Goddaughter	0	1	0	1
C	Godson	4	3	5	12
	Goddaughter	3	1	2	6
	Godchildren	2	2	3	7
D	Godchildren	2	0	0	2
E	Godchildren	6	0	1	7
	Godson	1	1	0	2
	Godson's son	1	0	0	1
	Goddaughters sisters	0	1	0	1
	Goddaughter	0	2	0	2
Total Wills		27	12	15	54

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

The next group to give the second highest number of bequests to godchildren were those testators at stage E, the last stage of the life cycle. It is at this stage the testators had grandchildren, and now once again the testator was focusing on young children. At this stage, thirteen testators gave bequests to godchildren (24.1 per cent). Stage B has the third highest number of bequests with nine (16 per cent), stage

A is fourth with five bequests (9.3 per cent) and stage D is last with only two bequests (3.7 per cent). These results are slightly different to the analysis by Coster who found that married men with no children who had the highest number of bequests to godchildren in Yorkshire wills.⁶³

To conclude, out of the 154 testators that appointed supervisors or overseers' non-kin were favoured, with only 31.8 per cent appointing kin. Witnesses also were in the majority non-kin. However, kin were overwhelmingly appointed as executors, accounting for 87.5 per cent, with over half of them wives and sons over a quarter. Daughters accounted for the third most frequent choice with 7.5 per cent. Widows appeared to have relied mainly on their sons, and then daughters.

These results follow the same pattern as those of Maddern's study of wills in Norfolk; she found that wives and sons were preferred, followed by daughters.⁶⁴ Mumby also discovered in the wills of Kings Langley that wives were appointed executrices in twice as many wills as sons.⁶⁵ Moyse in her study of Helpston in Northamptonshire also found that close kin acted as executors, with a large number of them being wives.⁶⁶ Whereas Wrightson and Levine argued that in Terling kin were favoured in the role of executor and to some extent overseers and supervisors; in the three Northamptonshire parishes, kin were only favoured in the role of executor. This goes on to disagree with Gottlieb's conclusion that 'we cannot escape

⁶³ Coster, 'Community, piety, and family', p. 529.

⁶⁴ Maddern, 'Friends of the dead', p. 169.

⁶⁵ Mumby, *Life and Death in Kings Langley*, p. xiv.

⁶⁶ Moyse, 'Helpston', p. 336.

the impression that a lot of people preferred to rely on kinsfolk when they could'.⁶⁷

Indeed, the role of supervisor, overseer or witness in the Northamptonshire wills was more likely to be fulfilled by non-kin. It can be agreed, in line with Houlbrooke's arguments that close kin were concentrated upon in the role of executor, whereas the role of overseer fell into the hands of neighbours or friends.⁶⁸

Wrightson and Levine in their analysis of Terling and Whickham found that whereas kin appeared to have been preferred in the roles of executors and to some extent supervisors and overseers, the witnesses of the wills were in the majority neighbours.⁶⁹ They found only five per cent of the signatures that could be identified as kin. The reason for this was due to the immediacy of death and the loose network of kin, which resulted in testators choosing neighbours.⁷⁰ Terling had 95 per cent witnesses from non-kin; the three Northamptonshire parishes resulted in 91.1 per cent of witnesses outside of the kin group. Gottlieb also found that groups of neighbours acted as witnesses and executors in wills rather than distant kin. Where close kin could not perform these roles, neighbours did. However, she does note that wherever possible kin were used, and would only call on non-kin when they had no choice, which does not appear to be the case in Northamptonshire.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 192.

⁶⁸ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, pp. 136-137.

⁶⁹ Levine and Wrightson, Whickham, p. 286.

⁷⁰ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

⁷¹ Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World, p. 192.

Fifty-two testators appointed guardians or trustees to children or legacies, thirty of which involved the appointment of a member of kin, whereas the remainder appointed a non-kin member or some unidentifiable person within this context. From these thirty, it can be seen that twenty-one of them (70 per cent) appointed the wife within this role. The appointment of kin as guardians followed similar patterns as Terling.⁷² The role of godparent within the community is difficult to assess due to the low number of bequests to godchildren. Bequests to godchildren appear to have been most frequent from those testators with their own children or grandchildren. Only twenty-six testators mentioned anything regarding specific debts owed to or by the testator. The items of money were substantially smaller to non-kin than they were to kin. Loans between kin were not restricted in the range of kin recognised and kin however distant by blood or marriage could call upon one another for loans. In Terling, seventeen percent of the debts were between kin, indicating that over eighty per cent were between non-kin.⁷³ In the Northamptonshire parishes, 28.6 per cent were between kin, but this percentage is still low enough to illustrate that nearly three-quarters of the debt and credit loans made in the community were between non-kin members. Spufford's analysis of wills in Cambridgeshire also shows widespread networks of money lending in the villages. Although she does not specify as to whether these networks were between kin or non-kin, the evidence she presents is clear in itself that these networks were wide enough to indicate the presence of more non-kin lending than kin specific lending.⁷⁴

⁷² Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p. 193.

⁷³ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p. 100.

⁷⁴ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp. 212-213.

The fact that non-kin were more relied upon for money lending and in the roles of supervisor, overseer, witness, and to some extent as guardians or trustees, shows how shallow the kinship levels were in the three parishes, and agrees with Wrightson and Levine's findings in Terling. Even where kin were preferred within the role of executor, this was mainly restricted to the nuclear family. With such a low level of kin connection within the three parishes, community relations were based on high levels of non-kin interaction, built on interpersonal relationships between neighbours, friends, guilds, and members of the same levels of society, rather than blood ties or ties of marriage. The low number of marriage connections between families (illustrated in chapter one) also illustrates the narrowness of kin relations within the Northamptonshire parishes, and supports the finding that non-kin were heavily relied upon. A large number were for only one connection with another family (38.9 per cent), and most people did not have any marriage connections at all (40.9 per cent). This result of 38.9 per cent is close to Terling's result of 39.3 per cent. This shows how shallow the kinship levels were in the three parishes, and agrees with Wrightson and Levine's findings in Terling. However, when compared to Whickham's kinship links of 13.6 per cent between householders, Terling and the Northamptonshire parishes appear to have more significant kinship networks.⁷⁵

Within the context of the community and neighbourhood, non-kin can be seen to have played important roles as supervisors, overseers and witnesses to the wills of

⁷⁵ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p. 191.

the three parishes in Northamptonshire. These non-kin members of the community also played important roles within the day-to-day financial affairs of the community. The fact that distant kin were not brought into the roles that non-kin performed illustrates that non-kin within the immediate vicinity were preferred rather than distant kin who could be also of some travelling distance away. Thus, Wrightson and Levine argued that ‘kinship ties beyond those of the nuclear family were of limited significance in the social structure of village communities’; and it is also possible to also place this observation within the three Northamptonshire parishes under study.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 145.

Chapter 5 – Gender - The role of women within inheritance

In recent years, studies of women as a gender in their own right have been increasing in frequency.¹ Nineteenth-century historians began the investigations into the history of women, through studies of women in high social standing, for example queens and princesses. The 1890s saw the beginnings of a new school of examination into economic and social history in which women were a major player. Women of lower social hierarchies began to be examined, but the major focus was on the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Alice Clark, stimulated by these developments, began to investigate the period prior to 1780 and published her study of the Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century in 1919. Since Clark, historians have examined wide-ranging aspects of the lives of ordinary women.²

Laurence notes how women have been ‘hidden from history’ due to a lack of interest by historians in examining them separate from men.³ She further argues that social history has given the greatest impetus to the study of women. Investigations by social anthropologists and ethnographers have stimulated further investigation. However, although women have been investigated in local, agrarian, urban, ecclesiastical, literary and educational history, work by economic and historical demographers does little to further the study of women in their own right.⁴

¹ M. Prior (ed.), Women in English Society 1500-1800 (London, 1985, Reprint 1996), p. xv.

² J. Thirsk (Foreword) in M. Prior (ed.), Women in English Society, pp. 2-13.

³ A. Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, a Social History (London, 1994), p. 3.

⁴ Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, pp. 6-7.

The debate on the role of gender has done much to influence the study of women. Social, economic and legal restrictions affected women, for example, women had different legal rights, and a different role in society and the economy.⁵ Privileges gained with social standing also affected the role that women played in England, for example, giving them greater access to education. However, this access was still limited and did not offer the same access as men. Furthermore, social status was accorded to women through their husbands; it was not something they could attain in their own right.⁶ Gender is the overriding factor that affects the daily lives of women in society. Fletcher argues that women accepted the role forced upon them by society, whereas Zemon Davis argues that they often would become equals and in some cases superior to husbands.⁷ Erickson further notes that the literature concerning the role of women in society and their subjugation in no way reflected the true situation.⁸

This chapter will examine whether there were any marked differences between the inheritance, kinship and community patterns to be found between the wills of men and women. This will be done by examining those wills with female testators and the bequests they gave, along with an examination of the bequests women received from male testators and the roles that they were accorded in the fulfilment of the legacies. The first problem to overcome is the low numbers of wills that were written by females. Erickson stated that only twelve to seventeen per cent of will samples were

⁵ Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, p. 14.

⁶ Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, pp. 15-16.

⁷ A. Fletcher, Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800 (Bath, 1995), p. 407; N. Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (London, 1975), p. 145.

written by women in the sixteenth century, rising in the seventeenth century to between twenty and twenty-five percent.⁹ Eales discovered 20 per cent from women and Cross in Leeds and Hull found 18.5 per cent were from females.¹⁰ When women married, they lost all rights to their goods; this passed to their husbands and before marriage, everything they owned belonged to their fathers. A woman could only bequeath items she had secured as her own in a marriage contract. Under an act in 1540, a husband could make long leases over his wife's estate of up to twenty-one years.¹¹ Unless women were widows, unmarried or had permission from their husbands, they had no legal ability to write wills as lawyers argued that as a wife did not legally own anything. Despite this inferior legal status, Laurence found a fifth of the wills in Leeds and Hull were from women and Vann in wills from Banbury found that in 1650-1724 almost a quarter were from women, while by the late eighteenth century this proportion had increased to a third.¹² Arguably, this increase was because the wills of women were more common in towns, where the mortality rate was higher. Alternatively, this increase may also be due to the proportion of women writing wills increasing throughout the period.

⁸ A. Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, (London, 1995), p. 236.

⁹ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 204.

¹⁰ J. Eales, Women in Early Modern England 1500-1700 (London, 1998), p. 20; C. Cross, 'Northern women in the early modern period: the female testators of Hull and Leeds 1520-1650', The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal Vol 59 (1987), p. 83.

¹¹ Stone Lawrence, 'The rise of the nuclear family in Early Modern England: The Patriarchal Stage' in Rosenberg Charles E (ed.), The Family in History (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 49-50.

¹² Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, p. 234, and Vann R. T., 'Wills and the Family in an English town Banbury 1550-1800' Journal of Family History, 4 (1979), p. 366.

It has been argued that the use of marriage settlements and trusts were set up in wealthy families to protect the welfare of the wives upon widowhood. However, these agreements could also easily undermine the rights of widows to what they rightfully and legally should inherit.¹³ From the sixteenth century, feoffees could also be used to restrict widows' rights. The feoffee set up by a husband, could effectively disinherit the wife of everything, including items agreed upon in her marriage contract. These items could then be passed to others through the husband's will. Husbands who persuaded their wives to forgo some of their inheritance could modify strict settlements set up at marriage.¹⁴ Stone further argued that the decline of the role of kinship in society also left women exposed in the inheritance stakes. As kinship declined, women lost the protection of their families and the support they would have received in making a claim upon their husband's estate. Stone also argues that the eradication of Catholicism and its replacement with Protestantism, also left women exposed. First, the destruction of the religious icon of the Virgin Mary, as a female representative of devotion, and the disappearance of supportive 'unmarried' priests ensured the further subordination of women. Secondly, the new Protestant religion insisted upon and preached the necessity of love within marriage and the need for women to subordinate their wishes to their desires of their husbands.¹⁵ This further undermined the rights and role of women within society and left them open to further exploitation and manipulation by their husbands.

¹³ Mendelson Sara and Crawford Patricia, Women in Early Modern England (Oxford, 1998). p. 41.

¹⁴ Mendelson and Crawford. Women in Early Modern England. p. 177.

¹⁵ Stone, 'The rise of the nuclear family', p. 52.

Generally, it is difficult to assess the social status of the women who write wills because few women noted their occupations.¹⁶ Women were defined in their wills by their relationship to a man (i.e. wife, widow or spinster). In addition, women did not tend to have an occupation, as for the most part of their lives, especially once married they contributed through running the house, rearing children and helping the husband with his business or land.¹⁷ Some of the wills do not give an indication of marital status, so one must assume through an analysis of bequests, that those wills containing bequests to children were married, but likely due to the legal restrictions on married women, to be widows (especially if no husband is mentioned). Those with no bequests to children or grandchildren were defined as spinsters.

Johnston has found that women were freer in their bequests, less restricted by obligation and custom. Younger children and unmarried daughters tended to be favoured. Many times, they appeared to be balancing out the legacies of their husbands' wills.¹⁸ Marcombe also agrees with this, and Helt argues that women bestowed legacies based upon pure emotion, that legacies were unequal in size and given to a wide range of children, friends, neighbours and people who they decided were to be rewarded.¹⁹

¹⁶ Wrightson Keith and Levine David, Poverty, Piety in an English Village Terling, 1525-1700 (Oxford, 1995; Reprinted 1999), pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Laurence, Women in England 1500-1760, p. 19.

¹⁸ Johnstone J. A., 'Family, Kin and Community in Eight Lincolnshire Parishes 1567-1800', Rural History 6 (2) (1995), p. 184.

¹⁹ Marcombe David, English Small Town Life, Retford 1520-1642 (Nottingham, 1993), p. 154; Helt J. S. W., Women, Memory and Will-making in Bruce Gordon & Peter Marshall (eds.), The Place of the Dead. Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, (Cambridge, 2000)., pp. 197-8.

It could be argued that despite the legal constraints on women, once they had gained the opportunity to bequeath items they had secured through their marriage contracts or had gained through the husband's (or other's) bequests to them, they were quite unrestricted to whom they bequeathed items to. As Amussen notes,

the behaviour of women in writing their wills opens a small crack in the patriarchal facade of early modern England. Women did not just accept the valuation of them offered by the writers of sermons and advice manuals, but shaped their wills according to their experience and perceptions of need. From their experience, they knew of the abilities and competence of other women – recognised by men in their wives but not their daughters.²⁰

In wills with more than one child, thirty per cent of women gave to daughters (in comparison to 6.7 per cent of men). Seemingly, women showed favouritism within their wills towards selected children, but not necessarily all the time to daughters. This was more so than men, property division in female wills was less equally proportioned than that of male wills.²¹ The range of people bequeathed to in the wills, may have been an attempt by women to balance out previous inheritances assigned in the will of their deceased husband. Furthermore, as land was rarely involved women could bestow gifts as tokens of affection, rather than setting out substantial bequests involving the land and estate as men had to. Men appeared to be more constrained by the need to ensure the survival of the estate and the family, whereas women did not need to nor had the opportunity to do so. These observations will be examined in wills of the female testators to see what items women bequeathed and the range of people they bequeathed to.

²⁰ Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, p. 93.

²¹ Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, p. 92. Amussen also argues that women left a substantial proportion of land to their daughters, in comparison to males. (34.6 per cent of women left bequests to daughters in comparison to 13.7 per cent of men.

The role of women as executrices can also be examined. As found in the earlier chapters husbands appointed wives in this role more often than sons.²² The choosing of wives indicated that these women were actively involved in their husband's businesses and were best equipped to deal with matters of inheritance. Furthermore, they probably (unless objected to by the guilds) took over the running of the businesses or estates until the true inheritor came of age. Houlbrooke also discovered in his studies that wives were the most common choice of executor and guardian, and often took over the running of the business, although in some areas of the country they were only allowed to do this on a temporary basis.²³ An examination can also be made regarding who women chose as their own executors and executrices. Amussen found that more females chose daughters in this role, nearly a third of female wills chose a woman of any kind.²⁴

The wills of female testators

Table 5.1 outlines the number of wills that were written by females from the three Northamptonshire parishes. In Blakesley, widows make up the largest percentage of the female testators, with twelve out of the fourteen wills (85.7 per cent). There were only two unmarried females. With only fourteen female testators, out of eighty-six testators for the parish, females only make up 16.3 per cent of this parish. These

²² Mumby, Life and Death in Kings Langley, p. xix.

²³ Houlbrooke, The English Family 1450-1700, p. 210.

²⁴ Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society, p. 92.

fourteen testators have wills in fourteen individual years, with the majority of them from 1620 onwards. Although the first testator in Blakesley, within the period under study was from 1545, the first female testator in the sample in Blakesley was not evident until 1567.²⁵

Table 5.1 – Marital status of women testators in Blakesley, Kingsthorpe and Castor

Occupation	Blakesley		Castor		Kingsthorpe	
	Total	% Of total Parish wills	Total	%Of total Parish wills	Total	% Of total Parish wills
Widow	12	13.9	18	12.2	27	17.2
Spinster	1	1.2	2	1.3	4	2.5
Not specified	0	0.0	9	6.1	2	1.3
Maiden	1	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	14	16.3	29	19.6	33	21.0

Source: NRO Female Wills of Blakesley, Kingsthorpe, and Castor

In Castor, twenty-nine females wrote wills, with eighteen widows (62.1 per cent) and two spinsters. Nine of the female testators did not specify their marital status and the range of people bequeathed to make it difficult to place them within a marital category. Females in Castor had a slightly higher percentage of the total will sample than in Blakesley (19.6 per cent). In Castor, the first female testator was from 1543 and this was the first in the total sample, with the first male testator in Castor in 1544.²⁶ The twenty-nine female testators appeared in twenty-eight individual years, with two of these appearing in 1638. The largest number of the

²⁵ NRO, 1st Series I47, will of Thomas Gybbys, Blakesley, 26 September 1545, NRO, 1st series, S28, will of Anne Warwick, Blakesley, 25 November 1567.

²⁶ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 1, fol. 197, will of Edythe Dalande, Castor, 12 July 1543; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 1, fol. 23, Castor, will of Robert Curteys the elder, 20 May 1544.

female testators was to be found in the period 1614-1647, with thirteen out of the twenty-nine writing wills in these years.

The parish of Kingsthorpe had the largest number of wills written by females with 21 per cent of the total 157 wills, just as it had the largest will sample. Again, in this parish, widows had the greatest number of wills; this time accounting for twenty-seven out of the thirty-three wills (81.8 per cent). Two women did not specify their marital status and spinsters accounted for four wills. The first female testator in Kingsthorpe was in 1546, although the first testator within the period under study in Kingsthorpe was from 1545.²⁷ The thirty-three female testators appeared in only twenty-six individual years, with four in 1546, two in 1547, two in 1597 and three in 1693. The largest number of female testators in Kingsthorpe were to be found in the period 1546-1598 with fifteen of the will sample written in these years.

Out of all three parishes, there were seventy-six female testators (19.4 per cent of the total testators). This falls comfortably between the findings of Cross, Eales and Vann. In Northamptonshire, fifty-seven of the female testators were widows (75 per cent) and eight spinsters/maidens (10.5 per cent). Eales discovered 20 per cent were from single women, with 80 per cent from widows, she also had a small number that were unusually from wives (less than 1 per cent).²⁸ Cross discovered in Leeds and Hull that approximately one in eight (12.5 per cent) were unmarried testators, six of

²⁷ NRO, 1st Series K43, Kingsthorpe, will of Maryon Childs, 3 July 1546, NRO, 1st Series K5, Kingsthorpe, will of Thomas Cazette, 26 April, 1545.

²⁸ Eales, Women in Early Modern England, p. 20.

the female wills were from married women (1.5 per cent) and the remainder were widows (86 per cent).²⁹ Although the Northamptonshire results are lower than the percentages that Eales and Cross discovered, this may be because females of unspecified marital status wrote eleven of the wills. However, these results still follow the same pattern as Eales. Erickson, in line with Eales, also argues that in the early modern period there was a small percentage (under eight per cent) of the will sample that were made by wives.³⁰ Prior also notes in her study that wives accounted for a growing proportion of the female testators throughout the period.³¹ However, in the Northamptonshire parishes there were no identifiable married women who made wills.

Bequests to kin outlined in the female wills

Table 5.2 details the kin recognised by female testators of the three parishes. As can be seen there was 330 separate bequests by the testators to kin. There were thirty-eight categories of kin recognised, and of these, sons were recognised with the highest frequency, with seventy-four bequests. Daughters received fifty-eight bequests; granddaughters had thirty-eight and grandsons twenty-six. If the grandchildren categories are combined (excluding the granddaughter-in-law) this comes to seventy-three, only one less than sons.

²⁹Cross, 'Northern women in the early modern period', pp. 83-86.

³⁰Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 140.

³¹M. Prior, 'Wives and wills 1558-1700', in J. Chartres and D. Hey, *English Rural Society 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 206-9.

Table 5.2 – Total number of bequests to kin in the female wills

Kin Member	Number of Bequests				%
	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Blakesley	Total	
Son	33	24	17	74	22.4
Daughter	26	22	10	58	17.6
Granddaughter	16	15	7	38	11.5
Grandson	11	10	5	26	7.9
Brother	5	11	1	17	5.2
Sister	6	4	2	12	3.6
Son in law and Wife	4	2	4	10	3.0
Niece	3	7	0	10	3.0
Grandchildren	7	2	0	9	2.7
Nephew	4	5	0	9	2.7
Male Cousin	3	4	1	8	2.4
Kinsman	0	3	4	7	2.1
Kinswoman	3	1	2	6	1.8
Female Cousin	2	2	1	5	1.5
Sister-in law	2	2	0	4	1.2
Godchildren	1	3	0	4	1.2
Daughter and Son In Law	0	2	2	4	1.2
Daughter in Law	3	0	0	3	0.9
Son's Wife	1	0	2	3	0.9
Nephews and Nieces	2	0	0	2	0.6
Aunt	1	0	1	2	0.6
Goddaughter	0	0	2	2	0.6
Brother in law	0	0	2	2	0.6
Mother	0	0	2	2	0.6
Male Cousin's Daughter	1	1	0	2	0.6
Granddaughter in law	1	0	0	1	0.3
Male Cousin and Wife	1	0	0	1	0.3
Goddaughter	1	0	0	1	0.3
Children	1	0	0	1	0.3
Uncle	1	0	0	1	0.3
Godson	0	0	1	1	0.3
Goddaughter's Sister	0	0	1	1	0.3
Brother in law and wife	0	0	1	1	0.3
Sons and Daughters (Group)	0	0	1	1	0.3
Male Cousin's Wife	0	1	0	1	0.3
Children of Nephew/Niece	0	1	0	1	0.3
Total	139	122	69	330	100

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

The kin that were beneficiaries are illustrated in figures 5.1 and 5.2, which also show the differences between the three parishes in the range of kin recognised by females and males. Figure 5.1 and 5.2 is also demonstrated in percentages, to show what proportion of the testators in that parish gave items to that particular kin. What is noticeable was the high percentage of bequests in all three parishes from the female testators to sons. In Blakesley and Castor, nearly 25 per cent of the bequests were concentrated into the hands of sons, while in Kingsthorpe it was nearly 20 per cent. Blakesley had the highest percentage of females that bequeathed items to sons. Figure 5.1 also illustrates that daughters accounted for nearly 19 per cent of the beneficiaries in the female wills in Castor and Kingsthorpe, whereas in Blakesley it settles at just below 15 per cent. Females in Blakesley strongly favoured sons, Castor only slightly favoured sons and in Kingsthorpe, there was little favouritism between the siblings. This may be due to the economic and social differences between Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe. With Blakesley being of a more pastoral and rural in nature than the other two parishes, males were favoured in the wills to ensure the survival of the family and the estate. Granddaughters were above the ten per cent mark and grandsons just under. Bequests to the rest of the kin were all under five per cent, apart from brothers in Kingsthorpe (who are nearing ten per cent), and kinsmen and son-in-laws with their wives who neared the six per cent mark. Bequests to grandchildren in Castor were just over five per cent.

Figure 5.1 and table 5.2 also illustrate the range of kin that are given bequests in some parishes, but not the others. This shows how different kin were important to testators in different parishes. Kingsthorpe had the lowest number of kin that were

only recognised in this parish, with a total of two. The children of a nephew or niece and a male cousin's wife were favoured with bequests specific to this parish. It can also be seen that a greater range of kin was recognised by male testators. However, despite this, the nuclear family was concentrated upon by the male testators than the female testators. Female testators recognised a smaller range of kin, but spread the bequests wider than the nuclear family in comparison to the male testators.

Blakesley had six kin categories that received items solely from the female testators. These were godsons, the sister of a goddaughter, brothers-in-law, a brother-in-law's wife, a collective group of sons and daughters and finally mothers. One of the testators that gave bequests to the mother unsurprisingly was from a maiden.³²

Castor also had six kin groups that received bequests only in this parish. These included daughters-in-law, granddaughters-in-law, uncles, a male cousin and his wife, a group of children and a group of nephews and nieces. As was the case discovered in chapter two with male testators, the bequests in all three parishes in the wills of females were also concentrated into the hands of the nuclear family. After the immediate family of sons and daughters, bequests were then handed to grandchildren followed by the testators own brothers and sisters. It is only after this point that the bequests diversify, going to sons-in-law and nephews and nieces. The range of bequests outside the nuclear family recognised a wider range of female kin than male, with more groups bequeathed to involving females as compared to males. Helt found that 'women's wills most often identified members of the nuclear family

³² NRO, 1st series, Book OE, fol. 120, Blakesley. will of Mary Cooper. July 1629.

or, in lieu of them, members of an extended circle of kin to be the recipients of remembrances'.³³ Erickson also discovered that, women recognised a wider range of kin than men.³⁴ However, the Terling analysis showed that women did not differ from the men in kin recognition.³⁵ The results from the three parishes are closer to Helt's and Erickson's conclusions, than those reached by Levine and Wrightson.

The small range of kin recognised in Kingsthorpe in comparison to the other two parishes, and the negligible difference between the number of bequests to sons and daughters, may be supporting evidence concerning Kingsthorpe being of a closed community. The highly structured nature of a closed community with its rigorous social structures and high maintenance of social and economic order would have ensured that the community followed a strict settlement pattern regarding inheritance and the passing of estates and land through families. Land was highly concentrated into the hands of a few, and the people closely governed by the parish hierarchies. Women would have been in no position to challenge this order and could have done little to address any balances from their husbands wills.

³³ Helt, 'Women, memory and will-making', p. 198.

³⁴ Erickson, Women and Property p. 212.

³⁵ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 93.

Figure 5.1: Percentages of Kin bequeathed to in the female wills per parish

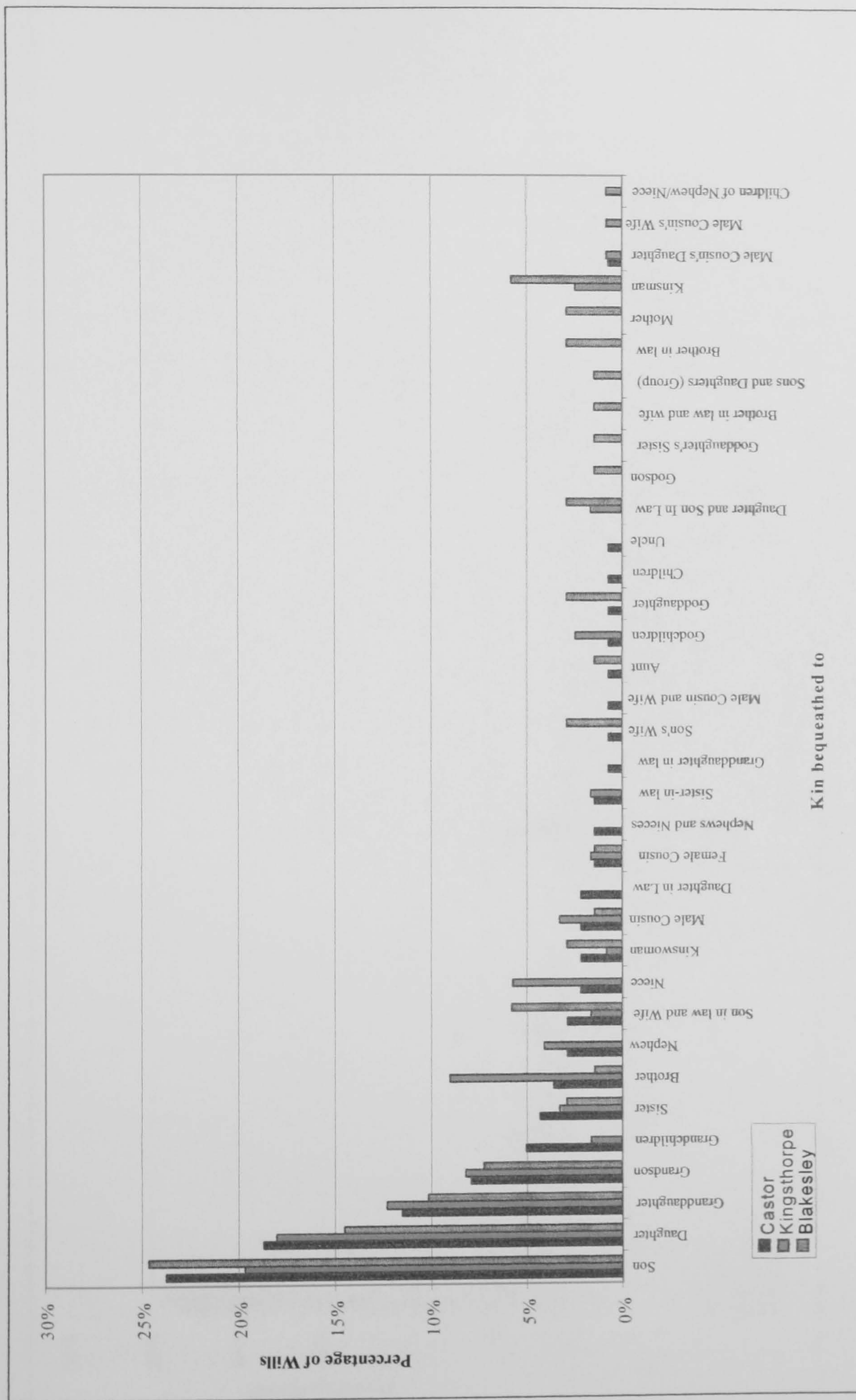
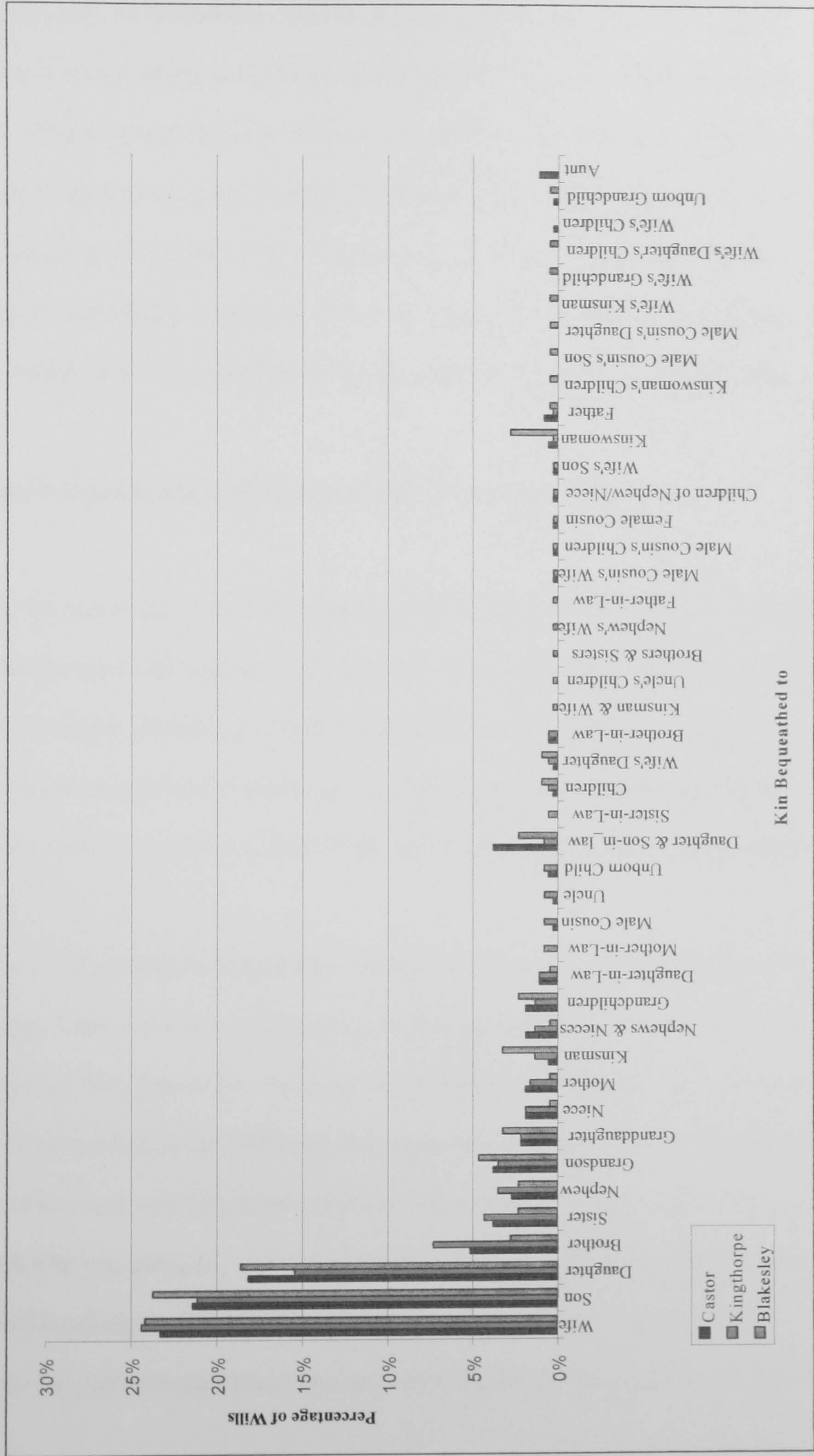


Figure 5.2: Percentages of Kin bequeathed to in the male wills per parish



Consequently, no favouritism could be shown, as it is highly unlikely this would have achieved anything as the father already strictly settled the inheritance of the estate. Blakesley and Castor in comparison with their more open community would have been freer to recognise a wider range of kin. The loose local governing of the community by the higher social hierarchies combined with the more highly mobile nature of the population would have led to a loosening of control over inheritance and a wider range of people that the testator interacted with and would recognise.

Bequests in the female wills to individuals who were not kin

Table 5.3 details the number of bequests by female testators that recognised non-kin. As was the case with male testators, there were fewer bequests to non-kin compared to kin. Unknown females and males top the table with the highest number of bequests. In comparison to chapter three, it can be seen how narrow the range of non-kin were that were recognised by the female testators in comparison to males.

Outside of the unknown categories, bequests are concentrated into the hands of servants. Twelve bequests were given to servants and apprentices. Friends received bequests in five of the wills, evenly spread throughout the three parishes. The people who were involved in the will were then focused upon with the supervisors and the will writers each receiving three bequests. Two ministers, one minister's wife and a person who was going to preach the funeral sermon (most likely the minister) were then acknowledged within the wills. Aside from the unknown groups, female testators appear to bequeath to only non-kin that they felt a sense of duty too. There

appeared to be no overwhelming recognition of friends and people within the daily community outside of the immediate kin group identified.

Table 5.3 – Bequests that recognised non-kin in the three parishes of Northamptonshire

Non-Kin /	Number of Bequests				%
	Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	
Unknown Female	10	32	53	95	47.3
Unknown Males	11	27	34	72	35.8
Unknown Children	0	2	5	7	3.5
Friend	1	2	2	5	2.5
Manservant	1	3	0	4	2.0
Maid	2	1	1	4	2.0
Supervisor	0	1	2	3	1.5
Will Writer	1	0	2	3	1.5
Apprentice	0	2	0	2	1.0
Minister	1	0	1	2	1.0
Person who preaches funeral sermon	0	1	0	1	0.5
Ministers Wife	1	0	0	1	0.5
Servants in Sons House	1	0	0	1	0.5
All Servants	0	0	1	1	0.5
Total	29	71	101	201	100.1

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Kingsthorpe recognises the greatest number of non-kin in comparison to the other two parishes. All three parishes recognise nine non-kin categories, although these categories differ. Kingsthorpe has the least difference between the number of bequests to kin and non-kin. There were 223 bequests to kin and non-kin by the female testators, of which 45.3 per cent were to non-kin. In Castor, out of 210 bequests only 33.8 per cent were to non-kin. In Blakesley, out of 98 bequests only 29.6 per cent were to non-kin. Arguably, the fact that Kingsthorpe was a closed society, rather than open like Blakesley or Castor affected the numbers of non-kin

recognised. The closed society nature of Kingsthorpe resulted in little population movement and closer interaction with neighbours and other members of the community, whereas in the open societies the fluidity of population movement resulted in few close relations with other members of the community. Consequently, in the open societies, relations between non-kin were not as closely maintained or nurtured.

Charitable bequests in the wills of the female testators

Helt found that in Essex, even though there were five times less wills written by females than males, they gave nearly a third of charitable bequests.³⁶ In comparison, charitable bequests do not appear to have figured in importance in the wills from the female testators from the three Northamptonshire parishes. Outside of the usual bequests to the church and the poor there appeared to be only one community bequest, already outlined earlier in chapter three, involving the mending of Walbeck Ridge in Kingsthorpe.³⁷ There were sixteen bequests to the poor, but these may have been replacement bequests, for the traditional money for the soul bequests that had been replaced in the Reformation. Within these three parishes, charitable and community bequests were not considered important to the female will writers. Erickson found that although women gave more charitable bequests than males, these charitable bequests (along with male wills) were decreasing in the seventeenth century in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Sussex.³⁸ Cross found similar results in her

³⁶ Helt, 'Women, memory and will-making', p. 201.

³⁷ NRO, 1st Series Book S, fol.. 3, will of Anne Bett, Kingsthorpe, 21 January 1566.

³⁸ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 211.

study of female wills in Hull and Leeds, in that the reign of Elizabeth I saw a sharp reduction in charitable bequests, with only the more wealthy leaving small sums of money.³⁹ Erickson's argument that more women than men bequeathed charitable items is not supported from the evidence of the wills from the three Northamptonshire parishes. In these parishes, there are more charitable bequests in the wills of male testators than in the wills of the female testators, but this may be due to the very low number of wills written by females in comparison to males.

Women and the inheritance of land

It has been suggested that in the wills of fathers, daughters received personal property equivalent to the value of real property given to sons.⁴⁰ In all three parishes, daughters were not ignored, receiving a good proportion of the bequests. Male testators concentrated bequests of land and houses into the hands of sons, although some daughters did receive a share. Erickson argued that only five per cent of male testators in Lincolnshire and Sussex who had daughters bequeathed land to them when they also had sons. In Yorkshire, daughters received land more frequently even if there were sons, with 26 per cent of males giving land to daughters as well as sons.⁴¹ In the case of the Northamptonshire female testators, sons and daughters received equal bequests of land indicating less of a gender bias by the female testators in comparison to the males. In Blakesley, the one female

³⁹ Cross, 'Northern women in the early modern period', p. 92.

⁴⁰ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 119

⁴¹ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 61.

testator to bequeath land gave it to the son. Nevertheless, these bequests of land and houses are so small as to be negligible.

Daughters in all three parishes were mainly given household items, clothes, and crops. Wives of the male testators were bequeathed mainly the residue of the estate, and although the bequests of land and houses to wives were generally the highest in all three parishes, this is arguably higher than sons due to the higher number of male testators. Both male and female testators favoured sons to receive the land and house, and if one looks at the male testators in the majority of cases wives were only given a life interest, the land or house was then to pass to the son. It can be agreed in line with Erickson that daughters did receive a comparable amount of bequests, although this was more focused on personal items, with the sons receiving the land and houses.

Concerning provision for widows, Whittle found in Norfolk that land was bequeathed in 57 per cent of wills to widows.⁴² Spufford discovered that in Chippenham the widow received a life interest in the house and land. In Willingham, the widow only received the land and house until the son came of age, then the widow was allocated a specific room in the house. If the heir was already of age, then the widow was given a specific room in the household. In some cases in Willingham, the widow was given a specific house. In Orwell, the widow received

⁴² J. Whittle, 'Inheritance, marriage, widowhood and remarriage: A comparative perspective on women and landholding in northeast Norfolk 1440-1850', Continuity and Change, 13 (1) (1998), p. 53.

a room and land in the house of the inheriting son. In Orwell, if the widow remarried she usually lost her inheritance and rights.⁴³ This common practice she also notes shows strong evidence of multi-generational houses. In Terling, widows also received a life interest in land or housing.⁴⁴ Houlbrooke also argued for the common existence of widows receiving a life interest in land.⁴⁵ Whittle found in Norfolk that women held land for substantially less time than men, and those women that did hold land for a long period were smaller in number than men. She does argue though that some men died leaving no widow, and some widows received no land at all.⁴⁶ Those widows that did receive the land (either as a life share or until the heir had matured) did not hold the land for long periods. Furthermore, Whittle argued that those women receiving land decreased from the fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, whereas bequests of land to sons increased in proportion. This is also due to an increasing shortage of land, with its linked increasing price.⁴⁷ Although she does note that this may not be the case in all parishes, and there may have been widespread regional differences. Life interest in land was a common feature in the wills from all three Northamptonshire parishes, with a large proportion of the male testators specifying a life interest in the estate, sometimes limited to the maturity of the inheriting child.

⁴³ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 162-3, p.116 and p. 113.

⁴⁴ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680, p. 102.

⁴⁵ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 138.

⁴⁶ Whittle, 'Inheritance, marriage, widowhood and remarriage', p. 60.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 53.

Bequests by female testators as defined by life cycle stage

Tables 5.4 to 5.6 detail the range of kin recognised per life cycle stage. Table 5.4 outlines the kin recognised by those female testators at stage A and B of the female life cycle. As can be seen from this table, few women were at this stage of the life cycle. There was a wider range of kin recognised at Stage A than stage B, despite stage B being the marriage of the female into another family. The focus of kin changed between these two stages, with stage A focusing on brothers and sisters and immediate kin. Stage B focuses on the new family of in-laws.

Table 5.5 details the range of kin recognised by the female testators at stages C and D of their life cycle. From this table it can be seen that the females recognised a wider range of kin than at stages A and B of the life cycle. Stage C recognised more kin than at stage D, which is surprising due to the new families, brought into the kin group through the marriages of the testators own children. As might be expected, sons and daughters are the kin that are most frequently recognised at stages C and D. Even at stage C, brothers and sisters are still of importance to the female testators, along with nieces and nephews. Stage C also now restricts the recognition of the in-laws into which the testator has now married (or that a testator's siblings have married). Stage D had the smallest kin recognition range from all five of the life stages. This indicates that wills were the least likely to be made at this stage. In-laws once again make an appearance, but this time it is the wives or husbands of the testator's own children. Outside of the immediate group of children and the spouses

of these groups, there are only two bequests, both to females. Stage D had the lowest number of bequests out of all the different life stages.

Table 5.4 – Kin recognised per life cycle stage (A and B) in the female wills of the three Northamptonshire Parishes

Category	Kin/	Number Recognised				%
		Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	
A	Sister	1	1	2	4	21.1
	Brother	1	1	2	4	21.1
	Kinswoman	0	1	1	2	10.5
	Male cousin	1	0	1	2	10.5
	Nephew	0	0	1	1	5.2
	Kinsman	0	0	1	1	5.2
	Mother	1	0	0	1	5.2
	Kinsman's children	0	0	1	1	5.2
	Aunt	1	0	0	1	5.2
	Female cousin	0	0	1	1	5.2
	God daughter	0	1	0	1	5.2
	Total A Category		5	4	10	19
B	Sister	0	1	0	1	11.1
	Brother	0	1	0	1	11.1
	Sister -in -law	0	1	0	1	11.1
	Brother in law	1	0	0	1	11.1
	Brother in law & wife	1	0	0	1	11.1
	Kinsman	1	0	0	1	11.1
	Kinswoman	1	0	0	1	11.1
	Male cousin's daughter	0	1	0	1	11.1
	Male cousin	0	1	0	1	11.1
Total B Category		4	5	0	9	99.9

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Table 5.6 details the range of kin bequeathed to by those testators at stage E of the life cycle. It can be seen (as was the case with male testators in chapter two) that this stage had the widest range of kin bequeathed to. One difference to notice was that the female testators at this stage had the highest number of bequests. In addition, the greatest numbers of wills were written, as compared to male testators who wrote the

greatest number at stage C. Stage E had the highest number of bequests placed in the hands of grandchildren, with sons and daughters following behind. Although the tables in chapter two were based on both sexes, it can still be argued that males focused more on inheritance when they had young unmarried children, and females focused on grandchildren.

Table 5.5 – Kin recognised by life cycle stage (C to D) in the female wills of the three Northamptonshire Parishes.

Category	Kin /	Number Recognised				%
		Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	
C	Son	3	2	8	13	23.2
	Daughter	2	0	9	11	19.6
	Niece	0	3	3	6	10.7
	Nephew	0	2	3	5	8.9
	Brother	0	3	2	5	8.9
	Sister	0	3	1	4	7.1
	Sister-in-law	0	1	2	3	5.4
	Nephews and Nieces	0	2	0	2	3.6
	Godchildren	0	1	1	2	3.6
	Children	0	1	0	1	1.8
	Kinswoman	0	1	0	1	1.8
	Male cousin	0	1	0	1	1.8
	Uncle	0	1	0	1	1.8
	God son	0	1	0	1	1.8
	Total C Category	5	22	29	56	100
D	Daughter	2	4	0	6	33.3
	Son	1	3	0	4	22.2
	Daughter-in-law	1	2	0	3	16.7
	Daughter & son-in-law	0	0	1	1	5.6
	Aunt	0	1	0	1	5.6
	Son-in-law & wife	1	0	0	1	5.6
	Son's wife	0	1	0	1	5.6
	Female cousin	0	1	0	1	5.6
	Total D Category	5	12	1	18	100.2

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Table 5.6 – Kin recognised per life cycle stage (E) in the female wills of the three Northamptonshire Parishes

Category	Kin /	Number Recognised				%
		Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	
E	Grandson	8	18	18	44	29.1
	Granddaughter	5	10	11	26	17.2
	Daughter	3	12	6	21	13.9
	Son	5	10	5	20	13.2
	Son-in-law and wife	3	2	2	7	4.6
	Grandchildren	0	5	2	7	4.6
	Brother	0	0	3	3	2.0
	Daughter and Son-in-law	1	0	1	2	1.3
	Niece	0	0	2	2	1.3
	Male cousin	0	0	2	2	1.3
	Godchildren	0	0	2	2	1.3
	God daughter	2	0	0	2	1.3
	Children of nephew/niece	0	0	1	1	0.7
	Granddaughter-in-law	0	1	0	1	0.7
	Kinsman	0	0	1	1	0.7
	Kinswoman	0	1	0	1	0.7
	Cousin & wife	0	1	0	1	0.7
	Male cousins son	0	0	1	1	0.7
	Male cousin's daughter	0	0	1	1	0.7
	Sons and daughters group	1	0	0	1	0.7
	Female cousin	1	0	0	1	0.7
	Daughter-in-law	0	1	0	1	0.7
	God son	1	0	0	1	0.7
Son's wife	1	0	0	1	0.7	
God daughters sisters	1	0	0	1	0.7	
	Total E Category	32	61	58	151	100.2

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Arguably, this was due to the legal restrictions upon married women making wills, and it is only at the widow stage that the bulk of bequests are found. With legal

restrictions on females making wills lifted when wives became widows, then understandably widows will focus on the younger generation of grandchildren, as the testator's own children have established themselves through marriage and possibly also through the settlement of the estate through the deceased father. At all five stages of the life cycle, women recognised a smaller range of kin than the male wills identified in chapter two.

The roles fulfilled within the female wills

Erickson found that, in the south of England, three-quarters of females chose sons, sons-in-law or brothers as executors, with up to a third choosing daughters or other female kin. In the north, all the children shared the role equally. Males never named a daughter as executrix, if a son was available. Single women would name brothers and sisters equally.⁴⁸

. Sixty-one out of the seventy-six female testators have one executor, while the remaining fifteen had two. Only one female in Kingsthorpe did not appoint an executor. Table 5.7 details the breakdown of those people females chose as executors. Sons acted in twenty-one of these positions, daughters were then second choice, acting in eighteen of the positions and son-in-laws acted third in this role. The female testators of the three Northamptonshire parishes fall within the patterns of the north and south outlined by Erickson. Although, not overwhelmingly

⁴⁸ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 220.

choosing sons over daughters (only three more testators chose sons rather than daughters), neither did they follow the pattern in the north of choosing their children equally. Sons, sons-in-law and brothers were chosen by thirty-eight testators out of the seventy-six (50 per cent). Twenty-one testators appointed females (27 per cent) and forty-nine testators appointed male kin (64 per cent). These results are slightly closer to the results of the south, although not substantially so.

Table 5.7 – Details of those acting as executors in the female wills of the three Northamptonshire Parishes

Executor /	Number of times appointed as executor				%
	Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	
Son	6	6	9	21	23.1
Daughter	3	8	7	18	19.8
Son-in-law	2	5	5	12	13.2
Not Specified	2	1	5	8	8.8
Kinsman	1	4	2	7	7.7
Brother	1	1	3	5	5.5
Nuncupative – None	1	3	0	4	4.4
Cousin	0	1	3	4	4.4
Kinswoman	1	1	1	3	3.3
Nephew	0	1	1	2	2.2
Sister	0	1	1	2	2.2
Brother-in-law	1	0	0	1	1.1
None	0	0	1	1	1.1
Neighbour	0	0	1	1	1.1
Trustees + Overseers for the Poor	0	0	1	1	1.1
Uncle	0	1	0	1	1.1
Total	18	33	40	91	100.1

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Overwhelmingly, it can be seen that the children of the female testators were the preferred choice of executor. Non-kin only accounted for two testator choices, with one neighbour and the trustees for the poor appointed by two female testators.

Outside of the nuclear kin of son, daughter and son-in-law, the choice of executor became quite widespread. Unspecified kinsmen accounted for seven appointments, with brothers accounting for five and cousins four. Women appear to have preferred men in the role of executor chose forty-nine males in comparison to twenty-three females.

The top three executors for male testators were wives, sons and daughters. Brothers, sons-in-law and kinsmen follow this. For female testators the top three were sons, daughters and son-in-laws, with kinsmen and brothers following this. Female testators follow the same pattern as male testators, with the exception, that male testators had the opportunity to appoint wives, whereas females cannot appoint husbands.

Supervisors, Overseers and Witnesses

Within the seventy-six female testators, eighteen of them appointed supervisors (23.7 per cent) and eleven appointed overseers (14.5 per cent). No female testators appointed both a supervisor and an overseer. All the supervisors and overseers appointed by the female testators were male. This was likely due to the higher legal standing males enjoyed.

Regarding witnesses, there were 192 names in the wills of the female testators (three wills had no witnesses). The most common number of witnesses per will was three with thirty-eight wills having this number (52.1 per cent), and twenty-two wills had

two witnesses (30.1 per cent). Out of these 192 signatures, only twenty-six were females (13.5 per cent), with only one woman appearing more than once. Elisabeth Chaulke appeared in three wills of female testators in Blakesley alongside her husband Matthew Chaulke.⁴⁹ The Chaulke family appears to have been quite active in the appearance as witnesses in the wills of Blakesley. Matthew Chaulke appeared in one further will of a male testator without Elisabeth, and William Chaulke (possibly the son as he appeared in later wills) is found as witness for five testators (one of which was alongside Matthew). As was the case with supervisors and overseers and to an extent with executors, males were preferred in these roles by female testators. However, as was the case in with male testators with the role of witness, non-kin filled the roles of supervisors or overseer, and kin filled the role of executor. Thus, female testators followed the same patterns as male testators nominating the same range of kin or non-kin depending on the role.

The role of guardian

Only seven female testators appointed guardians, with one from Blakesley, three from Castor and three from Kingsthorpe. All seven appointed a guardian to oversee the welfare of younger children, and five of them concentrated this role into the hands of kin. Two testators appointed a son, one a daughter, one a father and the fifth testator a member of male kin. Phyllis Pitham in Blakesley appointed one of

⁴⁹ NRO 3rd series Book S fol. 165 will of Anne Newman, Blakesley, 4 November 1689; NRO 3rd series Book W, fol. 101 will of Mary Newman, Blakesley, 22 April 1696; NRO 3rd series Book W, fol. 259 will of Jane Thomson, Blakesley, 12 January 1698.

her sons to look after the two youngest children until they were fifteen years of age.⁵⁰ Dorothy Burdworth of Castor also appointed her son to oversee the appointment of binding an unidentified female to a trade, and to ensure the money appointed for this was used effectively.⁵¹ Margerie Shepherd of Kingsthorpe appointed her daughter in the role of guardian over her younger brother. She was to look after him and his land until he was 21 then he was to receive his inheritance (and the daughter would lose the land).⁵² Margaret Warren of Castor chose her father to act as guardian to her young son.⁵³ The fact that she chose her father highlights her young age at death, but also the fact her husband had died at an early age too. Due to the high mortality rates of the period, this was a risky choice because this man may have died before her son had reached maturity. The choice of the father perhaps indicates the desire of testators to choose kin to perform this role where possible, despite the age limitation. Although wider kin may not have been available, the fact that she also chose her father over younger members of the wider kin circle, also indicates a desire by the testators to concentrate the role of guardian within the close kinship circle. The fifth testator that chose a member of kin was Lewys Hurlocke from Kingsthorpe.⁵⁴ However, this member of kin is only identifiable through having the same surname and could be a member of the wider

⁵⁰ NRO, 3rd series Book T284, will of Phyllis Pitham, Blakesley, 24 May 1697.

⁵¹ NRO, 4th series Book ii, fol. 35, will of Dorothy Burdworth, Castor, 28 January 1670-1.

⁵² NRO, 1st series Book V, fol. 117, will of Margerie Shepherd, Kingsthorpe, 6 February 1583.

⁵³ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough Book 12, fol. 6, will of Margaret Warren, Castor, 10 December 1633.

⁵⁴ NRO, 1st series Book I286, will of Lewys Hurlocke, Kingsthorpe, 16 August 1547.

kin group. She further appointed another male to share this role that is arguably not a member of kin. These two males are appointed together to have custody of the testator's three daughter's legacies, until they came of age. This testator splits the role between a kin member and a non-kin member. The remaining two female testators out of the seven that appoint guardians do not appoint kin. Ann Nubon in Castor appointed an unidentified male as guardian and overseer to her son for as long as he lived.⁵⁵ Finally, Dorothy Jenoway of Kingsthorpe, the only female who identified herself as spinster (the rest of the seven female wills were widows), appointed her neighbour as guardian to the goods that the kinswoman who had inherited the estate was to receive when she came of age.⁵⁶ The kinswoman is unidentifiable as to whether she is close kin (e.g. a sister) or from the wider kin circle. This testator was the only testator to choose a guardian from within the community, and this may have been because she was a spinster, with no close kin to choose from. It can be suggested that female testators when choosing a guardian preferred to choose kin and these were often members of the nuclear family. This follows the same pattern as the appointment of executors by female testators, and the appointment of guardians by male testators. The appointment in Kingsthorpe of non-kin as a guardian follows the pattern of a higher proportion of non-kin recognised by female testators in the three parishes. This appointment of non-kin may be indicative of the closed society apparent in Kingsthorpe and the closer relations with friends, neighbours and non-kin. However, the fact that testators in all

⁵⁵ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 12, fol. 254, will of Ann Nubon, Castor, 9 January 1636.

⁵⁶ NRO, 3rd series Book S218, will of Dorothy Jenoway, Kingsthorpe, 3 March 1693/4.

three parishes preferred to choose kin to perform this role makes it more likely that kin were the preferred choice in all three parishes.

The role of women in wills of male testators

As stated earlier, wives played the main role as executrices of the wills of male testators in the wills from the three parishes under study, 185 of the 315 executors appointed by the male testators (58.7 per cent). This percentage increases if one only accounts for the forty male testators that appeared to have no wife or children accounted for. The non-mentioning of children or wives by male testators indicates they may have not been married. If one deducts these forty wills for the total 315 male wills, then the percentage of wives who acted as executrices increases to 67.3 per cent. Erickson found that married men named their wives sole or joint executrix in 63 to 89 per cent of wills.⁵⁷

If one accounts for the male testators with no immediate family, the results for Northamptonshire fall within the range found by Erickson, and are substantial enough to indicate the popularity of wives within this role. Houlbrooke also argued that wives were the most likely to be named executors or guardians in married men's wills, and they also often took over the running of the family business.⁵⁸ He also noted that those married men with young children were more likely than those men with adult children to appoint wives as executrices.⁵⁹ When one examines the

⁵⁷ Erickson, Women and Property, p. 157.

⁵⁸ Houlbrooke, The English Family 1450-1700, p. 210

⁵⁹ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 137.

Northamptonshire wills; it can be seen that in the majority of cases those wives appointed as executrices had young children. Wives were also appointed as guardians to minor children and as holders of children's portions. Of the fifty-two testators that appointed guardians, wives accounted for twenty-one. Often these wives had no restrictions laid upon them, but in some cases, wives were asked not to remarry, and if they did, they would lose their original inheritance.

As can be seen from table 5.8, only a small percentage of male testators actually specified a restriction on wives remarrying. Castor had the lowest percentage with only 6.7 per cent restricting the wife, Blakesley had 6.9 per cent and Kingsthorpe had the most with 7.3 per cent. Kingsthorpe also had the greatest actual testators with a total of nine, Castor had eight and Blakesley only five. Were restrictions influenced by the wealth and occupation of the male testator? Yeomen testators had the highest number of wills that restricted the wife in all three parishes, although it must be stressed that this is still a low number in comparison to the total number of testators. Husbandmen from all three parishes also restricted wives. Carpenters and the testators with no specified occupation restricted wives in Castor. Labourers and the testators with no specified occupation restricted wives in Kingsthorpe. One Blakesley gent restricted his wife from remarrying. Regarding occupations, it could be suggested that the wealthier the testator the more likely the wife had restrictions placed upon her. However, this is a very weak hypothesis, as the numbers of testators that are involved in this total are too small to give concrete evidence. However, it can be argued that the passing on of inheritances to children if the wife

remarried was not a major concern of the dying husband. Perhaps this was due to the outlining of specific bequests by male testators to children and bequests outside of the wills. Consequently, because the mother was not usually used as a medium to pass items through, then it was felt that there was no need to restrict the re-marriage of the wife if she chose to. Arguably, this also meant that large bequests were not given to wives, and if one goes back to the items bequeathed to kin in chapter two it can be seen that very few items of land stayed with the wives, and in fact, they only mainly had a life interest.

Table 5.8 – Details of those male wills that specify restrictions on wives remarrying

Parish	Occupation	Restriction on wife remarrying	
		Total	% of male testators in parish
Blakesley	Yeoman	3	4.2
	Gent	1	1.4
	Husbandman	1	1.4
Castor	Not specified	3	2.5
	Yeoman	3	2.5
	Carpenter	1	0.8
	Husbandman	1	0.8
Kingsthorpe	Not specified	3	2.4
	Yeoman	3	2.4
	Husbandman	2	1.6
	Labourer	1	0.8
Total		22	7.0

Source: NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Out of the twenty-two testators, four specified the widow would only receive money and lose the land if she re-married (18.2 per cent). One widow received household goods instead (4.5 per cent) and three testators stated that the widow would only receive her rightful third (13.6 per cent). Four testators stated that she would lose the

legacy and did not specify anything in its place (18.2 per cent) and three stated the wife had to put in sufficient sureties to protect the legacies of the children (13.6 per cent). Three testators stated sums of money that the widow had to pay if she remarried (13.6 per cent). Two testators stated that if the wife did not put in sufficient sureties, then the overseer or supervisor could take the land from her and dispose of as they think fit (9.1 per cent). Lastly, two testators stated that if the wife remarried the land would go straight to the daughter or son (9.1 per cent). Those male testators that did specify a restriction on the wives remarrying used a variety of methods to stop or deter the wives from this act. However, those husbands that were concerned about this were only a small minority. This was also seen to be the case in the Terling study, where Wrightson and Levine found that few testators displayed concerns by males of their widows remarrying, and there are few examples of restrictions upon remarriage.⁶⁰ Spufford found in Cambridgeshire, that the maintenance of a widow usually stopped if she remarried. However, Spufford does not indicate how frequent these restrictions were within the wills, but notes that remarriages did take place.⁶¹ Houlbrooke also argued that most husbands laid no conditions upon widows who remarried, and as such did not mention this possibility at all; the prime focus of the male testators was provision for their children.⁶²

Table 5.9 details the male testators that specified the bequests of their children to pass through the mother. Castor had the highest number of males that concentrated

⁶⁰ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 97.

⁶¹ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 113.

⁶² Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 139.

bequests through the mother, with twenty-two (18.5 per cent). Blakesley and Kingsthorpe in comparison to Castor had a very small number with nine (12.5 per cent) and two (1.6 per cent).

Table 5.9 – Wills of male testators that placed children’s inheritance through the mother.

Parish	Occupation	Wife to receive portion then to go to children	
		Total wills	% of male testators in parish
Blakesley	Not specified	5	6.9
	Yeoman	2	2.8
	Gent	1	1.4
	Husbandman	1	1.4
Castor	Not specified	7	5.9
	Yeoman	4	3.4
	Husbandman	3	2.5
	Carpenter	3	2.5
	Tailor	2	1.7
	Gent	1	0.8
	Mason	1	0.8
	Woolwinder	1	0.8
Kingsthorpe	Husbandman	1	0.8
	Yeoman	1	0.8
Total		33	26.6

Source – NRO Wills of Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe

Of these testators, those males that did not specify an occupation topped the table in both Castor and Blakesley. However, as was the case of those testators that placed a restriction on wives re-marrying, yeomen were close to the top of the table.

Husbandmen also focused bequests through the mother, with three in Castor, and one each in Kingsthorpe and Blakesley. Castor had the widest range of occupations that gave bequests to children through the mothers, ranging from three carpenters, two tailors, one woolwinder, one mason and one gentleman. Blakesley also had one

gentleman that gave the children's portion through the wife. Thirty-three male testators (26.6 per cent) left the mother in charge of the children's legacies, a very small percentage indeed, with testators at stage C of the life cycle writing twenty-six of these wills. So despite the fact that chapter two discovered that those males with young children were the most likely to leave wills, most men did not deem it necessary to place the legacies of the children under the care and supervision of the mother.

Jointure agreements

Jointure agreements were used within marriages to protect the rights of the mothers and children regarding land and property. These jointure agreements appeared in the medieval period and were set up between husband and wife to have a joint share of the land. The surviving partner would receive income from this land. This arrangement effectively protected the widow from disinheritance.⁶³ Within the wills of the 315 male testators, only three mentioned the use of a jointure, these were Thomas Warwick in Blakesley in 1621, Thomas Lea (husbandman) in 1567 and William Bunch (carpenter) in 1685 of Castor.⁶⁴ Thomas Warwick is unusual in that he specifically mentions a lack of jointure on the lands, and the wife only receiving money. William Bunch states that the wife has a jointure on the land, however if she

⁶³ Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 25.

⁶⁴ NRO, 1st series, book AV, fol. 83, will of Thomas Warwick, Blakesley, 30 Dec 1621; NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 3, fol. 167, will of Thomas Lea, Castor, 22 April 1567; NRO, 3rd series, Book M, fol. 190, will of William Bunch, Castor, 4 April 1685.

marries, she loses the land and it is to pass to the daughter and her husband. Thomas Lea also mentions the existence of a jointure, and this secures his widow an inheritance of twenty-one shillings and eight pence a year. There is no mention of forfeiture if she remarries. Arguably, the infrequency of jointures indicates that these may not have been used; however, this non-mention of them may be due to the fact that the legacies to children and wives were specific within the wills or that arrangements regarding the land may have already been made. The specific detailing of items in wills may also hide the fact an existing jointure is in place and is being adhered to. Perhaps Thomas Warwick's specific mention of there being no jointure is evidence of the common existence of them, although arguably this is a weak point. Rather it is more likely that within Northamptonshire, because jointures are mentioned in only three wills, they were not commonly used.

To conclude it can be seen that female testators wrote few wills and of this small number, widows wrote the majority. The patriarchal society of the early modern period restricted the legal rights of women (married or unmarried) to make wills. Although other studies throughout the country have identified some wills written by married women, no married women were found amongst the female testators in Northamptonshire. Both male and female testators left the writing of their wills close to death, with only one female being exceptionally prepared and writing it twenty-six years before death (arguably when she had just been widowed).

Of those wills written by women, bequests were of an intimate and personal nature, and were concentrated in the hands of their surviving children. Whether these

bequests were individual to the woman or an adherence to the legacies outlined by the deceased husband it is difficult to ascertain, due to the lack of paired married couples wills. Bequests were concentrated into the hands of the nuclear family, although females do show a slight leaning towards other female kin in comparison to males. Regarding non-kin, friends and servants fare well. Whereas male testators concerned themselves with land and houses, females concerned themselves with money and household effects. Sons were the preferred choice as executor of female testators; daughters were second choice, and sons-in-law acted third. Wives were the preferred choice of executrix in the wills of the male testators. All of the testators appointed male supervisors and overseers, arguably due to the higher legal standing males had in society. Regarding witnesses, males were preferred in these roles as well in the wills of female testators, and women only appeared in 4.7 per cent of the wills of the male testators as witnesses.

Charitable bequests do not appear to have figured in importance within the wills of female testators. Apart from the bequests of money to the poor and the church there appeared to be only one community bequest. Women were little involved in the three Northamptonshire parishes in networks of debt and credit. However, of those testators that do specify debts, it can be tentatively suggested that those females that borrowed money, sought it from the local community, whereas those females that lent money lent it mainly to kin.

Kingsthorpe male testators gave twice as many bequests of land or houses to sons in comparison to daughters. Sons also in the wills of male testators received more

bequests of animals and farm tools. Daughters received more bequests of household items and only slightly less bequests of money. In Kingsthorpe, wives received a substantial number of bequests of the land or house and the residue of the estate, in fact more than their sons do. In the wills of female testators, sons received more bequests than daughters. Sons and daughters received equal bequests of land and houses, and arguably, female testators were trying to address the disparity within the wills of male testators. Castor female testators gave sons more bequests than females, but in Kingsthorpe, equal bequests were given to sons and daughters. Daughters received more bequests of crops, clothes and household items, whereas sons received more bequests of animals, furniture, money and the residue of the estate. In Blakesley, there was little difference between bequests to sons and daughters. Concerning provision for widows, life interest in land was a common feature in all three Northamptonshire parishes, sometimes limited to the maturity of the inheriting child. Wives were often appointed guardians to minor children and holders of children's portions. Most wives had no restrictions laid upon them, but in some cases, a small percentage of the male testators specified a restriction on wives remarrying. Wives were asked not to remarry, and if they did, they could lose their original inheritance. Furthermore, the infrequency of jointures in the wills indicates that these were not used in the three Northamptonshire parishes, and that there was little provision for widows pre-inheritance.

The evidence in the wills of the female testators indicates there were few differences between the range of non-kin and kin recognised between the three parishes. The female testators undertook different strategies but they still recognised their nuclear

families first. There was little difference to be seen in the proportions of the range of kin and non-kin recognised between male and female testators, except for the fact that older women (usually in a state of widowhood) wrote most of the wills, which resulted in a larger proportion of grandchildren being recognised. Overall, female testators appointed the same range of people and concentrated the bequests into the hands into the same range of kin and non-kin as male testators.

Supporting evidence that Kingsthorpe was a closed community includes the smaller range of kin recognised in comparison to the other two parishes, and the negligible difference between the number of bequests to sons and daughters. The rigorous social structure of a closed community would have resulted in strict settlement patterns passing estates and land through families. The land was controlled by a few families, with little land turnover and the community closely governed by the parish hierarchies. Women would have been unable to challenge this order and could have done little to address any imbalances from their husbands' wills. Consequently, favouritism was not shown by female testators to other females. Blakesley and Castor with their open communities arguably would have been freer to recognise a wider range of kin. The looser local governing of the community combined with the more mobile nature of the population would have led to a looser control over inheritance and a wider range of people that the testator would recognise. The fact that Kingsthorpe was of a closed society, also affected the numbers of non-kin recognised by female testators. The closed nature of Kingsthorpe resulted in little population movement, with ties developing between female members of the community and closer interaction with neighbours. In the open societies, the fluidity

of population movement resulted in fewer close relations with other females. Consequently, in the open societies, relations between non-kin were not as closely maintained or nurtured.

Female testators did not widen the kin group to recognise more females; however, the bequests they left were of a more personal nature. Those females that could make wills were not subjected to the pressures of the patriarchal society; they gave whatever items they chose and were not restricted in whom they recognised. As was the case with Helt's analysis, male testators in Northamptonshire followed the lineal transfer of property, whereas female testators illustrated a strong bond linking women together, where women were the preferred recipients in female wills.⁶⁵

Overall wives appear to have been well recognised within the wills of their husbands. Females in general (daughters, nieces, granddaughters etc.) also received a good proportion of bequests from male and female testators. Although females had no legal standing and few could make wills, those that did attempted to readdress any gender imbalance to ensure the welfare of the female population. The role of gender within inheritance was a strong factor, affecting the treatment of a person dependent on their sex. Despite women historically being regarded as the weaker gender, they did not give the appearance of this within their own wills nor in the bequests that they received from male testators.

⁶⁵ Helt, 'Women, memory and will-making', p. 199.

Chapter 6 – Religion

The study of popular religion has been a considerable area of historical interest and methodological debate in recent years. It has been often argued that, 'religion as officially prescribed is invariably different from religion as practised.'¹ Official church records, religious acts and laws, prayer books and pamphlets outlined the religious stance of the official church in England; however, these sources are of limited utility for understanding the popular religious practices actually undertaken by the people. The official church was a dominating force both nationally and locally, with a complex network of parish churches, linked together with a church court system, which monitored the moral and spiritual activities of the people. The church dominated the daily lives of all people (regardless of their social status), as well as being present at the rituals associated with the important events in life, birth (baptism), marriage and death (administering the last rites and undertaking the burial ceremony).

Thus if the church held such a strong social control over people, is it possible to examine whether people concurred with the beliefs of the church or undertook different practices? As Ingram points out, one method could be to examine the official church court records to see how often people were prosecuted for failing to adhere to the official religion. This would give an indication of the level of religious belief, as well as the proportion of people that did not follow the teachings and practices of the official church. However, he also notes that this approach has its dangers, as it exaggerates the

¹ M. Ingram, 'From Reformation to Toleration: Popular religious cultures in England 1540-1690', in T. Harries (Ed.), Popular Culture in England c.1500-1850, (Basingstoke, 1995), p.96.

strength of opposition, rather than focusing on the people who actually adhered.²

Religious pamphlets can also be examined, to see what the popular literature was preaching to the people; but this only illustrates the official theory and gives no illumination into the actual beliefs of the people. Even if people gained exposure to the literature, it does not necessarily mean that they believed in its religious views.

Thus, a source needs to be found that expresses the religious views of the common people. One available source that could be used is the religious statement, called the preamble, found at the beginning of wills. This statement concerned the bequest of the soul and body to God, and the wording of this statement can be assessed to see the religious convictions of the testator. As Marsh summarises,

historians understandably desperate for direct and statistically presentable evidence on popular religion have often turned to wills. These exist in large numbers for the sixteenth century (especially towards its close), and the vast majority open with a preamble in which the testator bequeaths his or her soul to God.³

It is also interesting to note that,

even contemporaries employed the preambles of wills as evidence of men's religious beliefs: in 1532, the corpse of a Gloucestershire man was disinterred and burned as a heretic by order of convocation because in his will he denied the mediation of the saints.⁴

The reliability of examining will preambles has been much debated amongst historians as to whether the benefits of such studies outweigh the problems. The examination of wills for evidence of religious belief is a precarious subject. As Richardson writes,

² Ibid, p.96.

³ C. Marsh, Popular Religion in Sixteenth Century England, (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 128-129.

⁴ R. O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation (London, 1986), p. 155.

wills can provide evidence of religious opinion but they are a difficult source to handle and their value consists as much in the way they indicate general trends as in providing conclusive evidence in themselves of the religion of the individual.⁵

Despite the fact that the beliefs expressed in wills are arguably weak evidence of actual belief, they are still used by historians to indicate the pattern of personal religious beliefs. This has led to several regions of the country being examined using this method, because despite 'reservations on the reliability of the evidence, in the absence of personal correspondence, wills remain the only reasonably comprehensive source from which to gauge religious trends.'⁶

As outlined in the introduction, Dickens is recognised as the originator of this method and it is against his work that further analyses have been set.⁷ These studies have analysed the religious feelings of the common people. Various studies have classified wills into a number of categories, dependent on the emphasis of the preamble and the words chosen in the bequest of the soul to God. Some studies have resulted in more complicated classification than others have. It has been argued that the Reformation

⁵ R.C. Richardson, 'Wills and Willmakers in the 16th and 17th centuries: some Lancashire evidence', Local Population Studies, 9 (1972), p. 41.

⁶ C. Cross, 'The development of Protestantism in Leeds and Hull 1520-1640, The evidence from Wills', Northern History XVIII (1982), p. 230; C. Cross, 'Wills as evidence of popular piety in the Reformation period: Leeds and Hull' in D. Loades (ed.), The End of Strife (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 44 and R. C. Richardson, 'Wills and Willmakers', p. 41.

⁷ Dickens 'Early Protestantism and the Church in Northamptonshire', Northamptonshire Past and Present 7 Number 1 (1983-4), p. 37 and see footnote 87 in the Introduction.

encouraged wider expression and use of words in the preamble that was not seen in the medieval period.⁸

Analysing wills for religious beliefs

As noted in the introduction, a number of issues need to be borne in mind when analysing wills. Motives for writing a will were generally not religious. The settlement of an estate was the prime motive and this could be easily done without reference to religion.⁹ If religion was not the prime motive for making a will, it is difficult to lay any emphasis upon the religious significance of the preamble. It could be argued that the preamble was merely a structured statement of words, to which the testator paid little attention to while constructing the more personal important elements of the will.

The second issue to note is that wills were only made by a small percentage of the population, although this proportion was steadily increasing throughout the period.¹⁰

This will skew any results, as the whole population is not represented. Dickens also notes the problem of the wills representing the whole of society, arguing that wills came from elderly males, from the middling sections in society. However, he does not see this as a major issue, arguing that due to the social standing of these males, they

⁸ C. Marsh, 'In the name of God? Will making and faith in early modern England', in G. H. Martin and P. Spufford (eds.), The Records of the Nation (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 215-6.

⁹ Ibid, p. 226.

¹⁰ Cross, 'The development of Protestantism in Leeds and Hull', p. 230.

would be of independent mind, with their own opinions, and would reflect to an extent the nature of religious opinion of the whole of the local society.¹¹

A third issue concerns the passage of time. The period under study in this thesis spans over 150 years, and during this time, the emphasis of the church would have fluctuated and changed position many times. Furthermore, social and economic changes will also have had their effect on the official religious stance of the church as well as the outward appearance of religious beliefs held by the people. First, the impact of the Reformation, and the different religious viewpoints of the reigning monarchs during these times, will have had an impact. Then the Civil Wars, the Interregnum and the Restoration period will have also affected the official church and its teachings. These events will have been socially and economically disturbing to many communities, as well as affecting the position of the church, and smaller radical religious groupings began to develop and gain strength within the local populations. Thus, the categorisation of religious beliefs will also fluctuate and it is difficult to apply any static categorisation over the period under study. As the social and economic changes of the period made their impact, the popular religious culture in local communities will also have evolved and changed as the period progressed. Whereas one form of categorisation of religious viewpoint may be relevant at the beginning of the period under study, it may not be as relevant at the end of the period. However, some form of analysis needs to be used in order to assess the

¹¹ A. G. Dickens, 'The early expansion of Protestantism in England 1520-1558' in P. Marshall (ed.) The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640 (London, 1997), p. 105.

religious views of the people, and thus a form of categorisation needs to be applied, as long as it is recognised that religious views were not static and did fluctuate as the period progressed.

A fourth issue concerns the level of scribal influence. It has been argued that as testators tended to dictate or write their wills on their deathbed, usually in a state of sickness, the testator could be subject to the religious preferences of the will-writer. Consequently, the preamble may not reflect the mind of the testator but the religious viewpoint of the scribe. Spufford emphasises in her study of Cambridgeshire, the influence of scribes over the form and content of wills. Marsh does not agree with this argument and argues that a dying person would not have been coerced; rather through sickness, they were more likely to be obstinate in their beliefs and desires.¹² O'Day, who agrees with Spufford on scribal influence, asserts that some wills did exist with individual preambles, and these were likely to demonstrate actual testator beliefs.¹³ However, since Capp's discovery of the popular 'Fly' almanac, which listed the will preamble formulas that Spufford had identified as individual testator beliefs, she has sought to support her original findings. She stressed that due to the large number of formula books from the 1660s, any individual preamble should be checked against those in 'Fly'. If it is not in this formula book then it can be deemed original.¹⁴

¹² Marsh, 'In the name of God', p. 231.

¹³ O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation, p. 106.

¹⁴ B. Capp, 'Will formularies, notes and queries', Local Population Studies 14 (1975), p. 49; and M. Spufford, 'Peasant Inheritance Customs and Land Distribution in Cambridgeshire from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries' in J. Goody, J. Thirsk and E. P. Thompson, (eds.), Family and Inheritance, Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800 (Cambridge, 1975), p. 36.

Marsh also argues that even if the same scribe used an expressive formula more than once, this still reflected the opinion of the testator, as a scribe would be unlikely to force an unwanted preamble upon a testator. Marsh has also suggested that a short preamble did not necessarily indicate a testator with no religious opinion, rather the shortage of time might have not allowed the time to write a long expressive preamble.¹⁵

The fifth issue centres on the actual preambles themselves, as the preamble may have been a set formula used by the will writer every time they wrote a will. Alsop noted that wills tended to be written by a small number of people within a parish, and these writers may have written the same wording for every will.¹⁶ Spufford agrees with this by arguing that, unless a dying man had strong religious beliefs, the preamble would most likely have reflected the belief of the scribe.¹⁷ Alsop also believes in the evidence that formularies were used and that books containing formulas were available by the mid seventeenth century, but professional scribes would have had access to formula books as early as the Tudor period.¹⁸ Spufford argues that the only way to tell if a preamble is the actual religious belief of the testator is to find two wills written in the same hand and examine them to see if the same words and clauses were written for two different people. To be more conclusive in this method a high number of wills written by the same hand would be more persuasive.

¹⁵ Marsh, 'In the name of God', pp. 239-48.

¹⁶ J. D. Alsop, 'Religious preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 Number 1 (January 1989), pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ M. Spufford, 'The scribes of villagers wills in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their influence', *Local Population Studies*, 7 (1971), p. 29.

¹⁸ Alsop, 'Religious preambles', p. 20.

However, Marsh disagrees and argues that even though formula books may have existed they still did not 'diminish the significance of will preambles as statements of faith.'¹⁹ A testator would have attempted to choose a scribe with the same religious views. Therefore, even if the preamble was formulaic at least it mirrored the religious viewpoint of the testator. Alsop disagrees with this, arguing that if the religious preamble had been more at the core focus of the will this may have been the case. However, as the issue at the centre of wills was the bequeathing of property, then the religious affinity of the will writer was not crucial.²⁰

A sixth issue concerns the religious emphasis of the language used in the preambles. What could appear to be a Protestant preamble may have a Catholic religious bequest in the text of the will, as Alsop found in his studies of preambles.²¹ This mixture of religious overtones makes it difficult to assess the true religious nature of the testator. This is also the case when the preamble mixes in the traditional with the non-traditional (i.e. Catholic with Protestant) or when a testator has a non-committal or neutral preamble giving no indication of belief. This makes it difficult to analyse the wills for the religious beliefs of the testator.

Conservative preambles may have been written to hide the real religious convictions of the testator, especially during the reigns of the Tudor monarchs (except the more later settled years of Elizabeth), when the religious direction of the country was disjointed and uncertain. Testators would want their wills proved and not thrown out of court for

¹⁹ Marsh, 'In the name of God', p. 244.

²⁰ Alsop, 'Religious preambles', p. 23.

radical religious beliefs. As Marsh notes, earlier studies of Lollard wills show over half had conventional preambles, so even radical people played it safe.²² This may have led to a number of wills with neutral or short preambles, in which little can be gauged. Wills with neutral preambles may have included bequests later in the body of the will of a Catholic or Protestant flavour. These bequests would give an indication of the religious preferences of the testator. There are also instances that some preambles were not even written in full, with preambles shortened with the word 'etcetera'.²³ All these issues may lead the historian to conclude that 'far from revealing the religious beliefs of the average testator, wills and their preambles hide them from the historian's gaze.'²⁴

As Houlbrooke, Zell, Marsh and Scarisbrick argue, despite all the problems with analysing preambles, they are still valuable evidence, and should be combined with religious bequests in the wills to strengthen their value.²⁵ Alsop is cautious about the use of the preambles combined with the religious bequests as evidence of religious belief, arguing that the preamble combined with religious bequests could lead to a confusing picture of religious belief.²⁶ Rather he argues that one should discard the religious preamble and merely examine the body of the text instead.

²¹ Ibid, p. 23.

²² Marsh, 'In the name of God', p. 238.

²³ Alsop, 'Religious preambles', pp. 24-5.

²⁴ O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation, p. 157.

²⁵ R. Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750 (Oxford, 1998), p. 121; M. L. Zell, 'The use of religious preambles as a measure of religious belief in the sixteenth century', Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 122, (1977), p. 249; Marsh, 'In the name of God?' p. 238, and J. J. Scarisbrick, The Reformation and the English People (Oxford, 1984), pp. 10-1.

²⁶ Alsop, 'Religious preambles', p. 26.

However, this viewpoint is a small objection in a sea of positive views concerning the benefit of examining the body of the will text for religious beliefs.

A seventh issue relates to the comparison of results within different preamble studies. Different historians have used different techniques in examining the religious opinions of the people of the period. These diverse categorisations may lead to problems in comparison between different regions of the country and in collating national trends. Spufford in her analysis of the surviving wills for Cambridgeshire for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, discovered three categories, Catholic, neutral and Protestant.²⁷ Clark found four categories of will preambles in his study of Kent. These being conservative, reformist, radical and indeterminate wills with no preambles.²⁸ Zell, in his study of Kent for 1535-65, found four categories: traditional, non-traditional, Protestant and mixed, reflecting conflicting ideologies.²⁹ Attreed in her study of northern England 1525-88 found three categories, these being traditional, non-committal, and non-traditional/Protestant.³⁰ Mayhew in his study of East Sussex 1530-1559 took the analysis even further, finding six categories in total, the main four being traditional, reformist, Protestant and neutral. He also identified two further categories of mixed traditional/reformist and mixed Protestant/traditional, these last two categories combining elements from the first four.³¹ Litzenberger, one of the more recent proponents of the analysis of will

²⁷ Spufford, 'The scribes of villagers wills', p. 29.

²⁸ P. Clark, English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution. Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500-1640 (Hassocks, 1977).

²⁹ Zell, 'The use of religious preambles', p. 246.

³⁰ L. Attreed, 'Preparation for Death in Sixteenth Century Northern England', Sixteenth Century Journal, 13 (1982). p. 41.

³¹ Mayhew, 'The progress of the Reformation'

preambles, in her study of Gloucestershire for 1540-80, identified three main categories of traditional, neutral and Protestant. However within these three categories, she identified a further five categories each within the catholic and protestant groups and a further seven categories within the neutral group.³² Even though she identified these further sub-categories, it is still interesting to note that she identified three main categories, these being the same as Spufford. These different categorisations of will preambles and bequests make it difficult to compare between regions.³³

Available Sources for analysing religious beliefs

It would be useful to this study to examine other sources to present a more rounded picture of the religious beliefs held by the people in the three parishes. Official church records, religious acts, laws, and prayer books outlined the official outlook of the Church of England; however, these sources are useless for understanding the popular religious practices undertaken by the people. Religious pamphlets can also be examined, to see what the popular religious literature was preaching to the people; however, this does not allow an examination of whether the people actually believed in it. Even if people gained exposure to the literature, it did not necessarily mean that they believed in its religious views. Church court records would show cases of non-attendance, prosecution for not adhering to church policy, as well as other cases concerning prosecution for moral or spiritual corruption. These records could be

³² C. Litzenger, 'Local Responses to Changes in Religious Policy based on Evidence from Gloucestershire Wills (1540-1580)', Continuity and Change, 8 (1993), p. 420.

³³ O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation, pp. 157-8.

examined for evidence of non-adherence to the established church. However, for the three parishes under investigation, these records are scarce. Church attendance figures were sometimes recorded in parish registers, and these would be useful to assess how closely people followed the parish church and attended services regularly. Some parish clerics also noted comments in registers concerning particular people, religious occasions or particular cases that were due to go under the church court system. For the three parishes under study, none of this extra useful information was present, merely the straight recording of baptism, marriage and death figures.

As a result, due to the lack of other useful sources, this study will rely solely on the views expressed within the religious preambles in the wills and the evidence of religious bequests. Although there are problems with studying these preambles (as outlined earlier), they will give a general overview of the religious convictions of the common people, even if they do not give a detailed picture.

Religious beliefs in other regions

Evans found that in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire in the late 1530s, the preambles indicated a decline in the traditional religion and the beginning of Protestant preambles.³⁴ Spufford also discovered this shift in the focus of preamble. She agrees with Dickens that traditional beliefs declined in the 1540s continuing into the 1550s.³⁵ Attreed however, notes that high numbers of wills in northern England

³⁴ N. R. Evans, 'Testators, literacy, education and religious belief', Local Population Studies, 25 (1980), p. 49.

³⁵ Spufford, 'The scribes of villagers wills', p. 29.

remained traditional into Elizabeth's reign, although the main part of the will contained few Catholic traditional bequests towards the end of Henry's reign.³⁶ This strengthens the argument that the preamble did not change and was formulaic and that the bequests may indicate the possible religious persuasions of testators. O'Day notes that by the late 1530s the traditional preamble was being replaced by a more non-committal preamble and by some preambles indicating strong Protestant ideas. In East Sussex, there was no swing back to the traditional formulas in the reign of Mary I, but under Elizabeth I, nineteen per cent of the wills in East Sussex still had traditional preambles, but five times as many wills were neutral rather than Protestant in flavour.³⁷ Houlbrooke argues that wills show little evidence of dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church before the beginning of the Reformation. He cites the wills in Norwich of which three-quarters had traditional religious bequests in the period 1490-1517, and this was almost as high during 1518-1532.³⁸ Sheils indicates that in the 282 wills proved 1549-1553 in the Archdeaconry of Northampton, over half were broadly Catholic, nearly a third of them mentioned only God, and a sixth of them were Protestant in tone.³⁹

In the village of Clayworth in Northamptonshire in 1676, the Compton census revealed that nearly eighty-five per cent of the people attended the church service in the Easter

³⁶ Attreed, 'Preparation for death', p. 41.

³⁷ O'Day, The Debate on the English Reformation, p. 158.

³⁸ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, pp. 115-6.

³⁹ W. Sheils, The Puritans in the Diocese of Peterborough 1558-1610 (Northampton, 1979), pp. 15-7.

of that year. It was also noted that there were no religious dissenters.⁴⁰ In 1676, the religious mood of this village in Northamptonshire appears stable, with the people displaying conformity to the established religion of England after the impact of the changes brought about during the Reformation. The 1676 Compton Census calculated that Northamptonshire had 83,970 Conformists, 1,972 Nonconformists and 102 Roman Catholics (the smallest number of Catholics for any county in England), and the religion of Northamptonshire appeared settled.⁴¹ In Blakesley, there were 400 conformists and two nonconformists, in Kingsthorpe 570 conformists and six nonconformists and in Castor (including Sutton and Upton) 478 conformists and two nonconformists.⁴² For all three parishes, according to the Compton census, the population subscribed to the established religion, with no leanings towards Catholicism, and a tiny minority that were Protestant nonconformist. These three parishes do not appear to have been hotbeds of nonconformity or popish recusancy and the curates appear to have been a steady influence upon the people. Nevertheless, do the surviving wills give any indication of this result? Sheils argues that following the Elizabethan Church settlement of 1559, parish clergy were conservative uncertain as to the religious direction of the country following the religious changes in the previous decades.⁴³ The turnover of curates was low, indicating that they were not removed as a threat to the established church. This also indicates that the curates adhered to the

⁴⁰ P. Laslett and J. Harrison, 'Clayworth and Cogenhoe', in H.E. Bell and R.L. Ollard (eds.), Historical Essays 1600-1750, Presented to David Ogg (Edinburgh, 1963), p. 162.

⁴¹ W. Page (ed.), Victoria County History of Northamptonshire (London, 1913), p. 62.

⁴² A. Whiteman (ed.), The Compton Census of 1676, a Critical Edition, (Oxford, 1986), pp. 385-8.

⁴³ Sheils, The Puritans in the Diocese of Peterborough, p. 21.

practices of the current church and did not outwardly display religious opinion different to that of the state. Furthermore, the low turnover of curates led to religious stability within the parishes.

There have been a number of schools of argument concerning the Reformation. Dickens in his study of The English Reformation in 1964 argued that the people of England were dissatisfied with the traditional religion and encouraged the changes of the Reformation. In this view, the Reformation evolved due to religious conversions amongst the people that steadily grew and swept through England, separate from the official legislation.⁴⁴ Cross observes that there was a complete dissatisfaction with the medieval church, and a desire by the lay people to remove abuses and corruption, and become more actively involved.⁴⁵ In the mid 1970s, the revisionist approach to the study of religion in the early modern period began. Elton argued that the change to Protestantism was due to coercion by the crown and authorities, and not due to major popular conversions.⁴⁶ Duffy, Haigh and Scarisbrick argued that the traditional religion was in good condition amongst the people of England, and many resisted the changes of the Reformation.⁴⁷ Scarisbrick and Haigh further argued that change was slow and nothing was really established until Elizabeth,

⁴⁴ A. G. Dickens, The English Reformation Second Edition (London, 1989), p.382.

⁴⁵ C. Cross, Church and People England 1450-1660 Second Edition (Oxford, 1999), p. 1.

⁴⁶ G. R. Elton, England Under the Tudors Third Edition (London, 1991), p. 110.

⁴⁷ C. Haigh, Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire (Cambridge, 1975), p. 62 and p.117, Scarisbrick, The Reformation and the English People, p.1 and p.12, E. Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England c1400-c1580 (London, 1992), p. 4.

however Dickens maintained that Protestantism appeared early in England, and enthusiasm for the new religion ensured that it spread rapidly throughout the nation.⁴⁸

Although the preambles cannot be relied upon solely to indicate the personal religious preferences of the testator, they can still indicate as a group the general swing in religious temperament of the country. In the rapidly changing religious mood of the country throughout the early modern period, 'since most people are themselves genuinely uncertain about their religious faith, it is difficult at any time to discover people's attitude to religion'.⁴⁹ Only an educated guess can be made through an analysis of the preambles in conjunction with any religious bequests what the religious viewpoints of the three parishes were.

To check whether a will conforms to a formula, an examination of wills within one locality, rather than over a wide area restricted by time should be undertaken. Comparisons can be made of the words used and whether these reoccurred regularly. Even if a formula was used in the preamble of a will, this could still reflect the feelings of the testator. Just because a preamble has been used in a number of wills does not mean that it does not reflect the personal feelings of the testators in a number of wills. Furthermore, an examination of the witnesses of wills at the end of the will, helps to establish whether a re-occurring preamble was being used as a

⁴⁸ Scarisbrick, The Reformation and the English People, p. 162, Haigh, Reformation and Resistance, Dickens, The English Reformation, pp. 325-334.

⁴⁹ B. Coward, The Stuart Age, England 1603-1714 (London, 1994), p. 78.

formula by the same will writer or whether it was a common form of expression within the local area.

The evidence of religious belief

One of the more detailed and comprehensive studies that takes into consideration the wording of the soul preambles along with the religious bequests was the study undertaken by Mayhew for East Sussex 1530-59.⁵⁰ Using the broad groups of traditional, Protestant and neutral as had been used in other regional analyses, he also identified three more categories, reformist, mixed traditional/reformist and mixed Protestant/traditional. These mixed categories combined elements of both the individual groupings. Mayhew combined the religious wording of the preambles with the religious bequests found later in the wording of the wills, and categorised them according to this combination. Mayhew recognised the limitation of just using the preambles as indicators of religious belief, and used religious bequests and the language of the will as indicators of religious temperament.⁵¹

The traditional category includes preambles that dedicate the soul to Almighty God and the Virgin Mary, and/or the saints. This can be combined with requests for praying for the soul of the testator. Also within this category are neutral preambles that only bequeath their soul to God, but combine this with distinctively Catholic bequests of obits, masses, chantries and so on. The reformist category contains

⁵⁰ Mayhew, 'The progress of the Reformation in East Sussex'.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 40.

preambles that do not mention Mary, the saints and Holy Company of heaven. They tend to refer to Almighty God as maker, saviour, or redeemer, but do not go as far as stating hope in resurrection, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The Protestant categorisation includes all those wills with a strong Protestant feel, which show a strong belief in salvation through Christ. This category also includes wills with a neutral preamble but with Protestant bequests of bibles, money to preach funeral sermons or religious books. The neutral category consists of wills whose souls are dedicated only to Almighty God, or have no preambles at all. The mixed categories of traditional/reformist and traditional/Protestant are categories that have mixtures of the main features of the individual groups. This is usually a reformist or Protestant preamble with a traditional bequest or traditional preamble with reformist/Protestant bequests, although Mayhew did find evidence of preambles with mixed influences. These last two categories were found in the smallest percentage of wills and Mayhew found they appeared in times of religious change.⁵²

In the analysis of the three Northamptonshire parishes, Mayhew's categorisation has been used as the basis. However, it should be noted that these categorisations are static within a moving period. For example, by the second half of Elizabeth I's reign, any reference to the saints or the Virgin Mary will be unusual, due to the establishment of the Church of England. Thus, by this time, only the stress of the wording of the preamble can be analysed to see how strongly Protestant that it appears to be. The church within England, due to the Reformation and the influence

⁵² Ibid, p. 41.

of the European Protestants was constantly evolving and thus affecting the local people within the communities. This form of analysis is limited in that it can only give an overall impression of the mood of religious sentiment, and cannot give any concrete evidence. Because of the limited reliability of this categorisation method, individual preambles will also be examined, looking for unusual wording and originality. Combined with this will be an analysis of scribes, to see what preambles they wrote and whether any common patterns existed. This examination of individual preambles and possible scribes will help to see how the preamble evolved and changed during the period under study.

As with Mayhew's study, within these six categories a wide variation in the use of wording in the preambles was discovered. Many of the preambles are similar, but with slight variations in the words and stresses used. Mayhew argues that although there were a few preamble formulas evident in the period, a wide range of preambles existed because most parish priests composed their own preambles at the specific time of writing.⁵³ Although other historians would argue over whether the formularies were composed in this way, it does seem likely that with the high degree of variation within the wording of the will preambles, that even if a few basic formularies were known, these evolved and mutated over time, with each scribe writing them differently.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 41-2.

Following Litzenberger's presentation of her analysis of the religious content of wills by reigning monarch, table 6.1 illustrates the results for all three parishes regardless of gender. The year groupings follow the reigns per monarch, except for the fact that I have allowed the cross over year to be at the end of the previous monarch's reign, this is to allow for those months of confusion as a new monarch takes over and establishes a new authority. This is especially so during the reigns of the Tudor dynasty. Table 6.1 illustrates that in line with Houlbrooke's argument, there is little sign of discontent in the preambles of Henry VIII's reign with all except one will falling in the traditional category. This slowly changed until the reign of Elizabeth when the proportion of reformist and Protestant preambles increased especially in the second portion of her reign.

Table 6.1 wills also shows that the highest number of wills were those with Protestant preambles. This indicates that throughout the three parishes, the religious mood was moving away from traditional preferences, with Protestantism making an impact upon the people. Protestant preambles were written by 160 testators, with the earliest appearing in the reign of Edward VI. Ninety-nine testators preferred to show no religious preference in their wills, preferring to hide their religious conviction, with a neutral clause committing their soul to God alone or having no preamble at all. Reformist testators are third highest, with sixty-two showing Protestant leanings, but not going as far as stating a desire for salvation or resurrection in the eternal life. Traditional testators were fourth with forty-three, and the mixed categories of traditional/reformist and protestant/traditional were fifth and sixth with fifteen and twelve respectively.

Table 6.1 – Will religious leaning by religious category per royal/commonwealth reign

Monarch	Period	Trad itional	Trad/Re formist	Neutral	Reform ist	Prot/ Trad	Prot estant	Total
Henry VIII	1543-1547	22		1		1		24
Edward VI	1548-1553	11	1	2	2	1	1	18
Mary I	1554-1558	7	2	5		1		15
Elizabeth I (a)	1559-1580	3	9	13	7	3	4	39
Elizabeth I (b)	1581-1603		2	14	12	3	10	41
James I	1604-1625			23	18	2	17	60
Charles I	1626-1649		1	13	11	1	32	58
Commonwealth	1650-1653			3			1	4
Cromwell x 2	1654-1659			1	1		4	6
Charles II	1660-1685			12	9		40	61
James II	1686-1688			1	1		10	12
William & Mary	1689-1694			2			19	21
William III	1695-1702			9	1		19	29
Anne	1703+						3	3
	Total Wills	43	15	99	62	12	160	391

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Protestant testators account for 40.9 per cent of the will sample, indicating that once the pattern of the established religion had been confirmed by the second half of Elizabeth's reign, there was little resistance or move towards the traditional faith. The first Protestant will appears during the reign of Edward VI, and then there are no more apparent until the reign of Elizabeth I. Unsurprisingly, there are no wills

with Protestant preambles during the reign of the Catholic Mary I, but these wills begin to reappear during the reign of the Protestant Elizabeth I. During the second half of the reign of Elizabeth I and the reign of James I, wills with reformist preambles and Protestant preambles are evenly matched in quantity, and it is not until the reign of Charles I, that Protestant wills outstrip the reformist wills in quantity. From the reign of Charles I onwards, wills with Protestant preambles are consistently the highest in number in comparison to the other categories. Only during the Commonwealth period is this not the case and this was arguably because of the low sample of wills available from this period (only four in total). The first Protestant testator appeared in 1553 and then no more appeared until the reign of Elizabeth. Symond Askew bequeathed his 'soul unto Almighty God trusting to be saved only by the blood and death of his son Jesus Christ and not be the merits or desyringe all the holy company in heaven to be intercessors for me.'⁵⁴ For this will to appear so close to the end of Edward's reign and to not be proved until the beginning of Mary's reign, the conviction of the testator must have been very strong indeed.

Wills with neutral preambles or that had no preamble at all account for the second highest in number in the analysis, with ninety-nine (25.3 per cent). Wills with neutral preambles are found in every reign, peaking in number during the reigns of Elizabeth I, Charles I, James I and Charles II. Arguably, these peaks are due to the larger number of wills available to analyse in these reigns, as in all cases in

⁵⁴ NRO 1st series M113, will of Symond Askew, 26 Feb 1553, Castor.

comparison to other categories they account for less than thirty-four per cent, apart from in the reign of James I, where they are the category with the highest number. However, even in the reign of James I, neutral wills only account for 38.3 per cent, with reformist wills coming a close second with thirty per cent.

Reformist testators are the third highest and account for 15.9 per cent of the sample.

The first will with a reformist preamble appeared in Castor in 1552⁵⁵ The other reformist will in the reign of Edward VI, was that of John Fermer in Blakesley in 1553.⁵⁶ This will was written towards the end of Edward VI's reign and proved at the beginning of Mary I's reign. Reformist testators peaked in the reign of James I with thirty per cent of the testators in this category. However, it is noticeable; that Protestant wills had only one less than reformist wills in this period, and that it is only in this reign that neutral wills were the highest out of all the categories.

The first mixed Protestant/traditional preamble appeared in 1544 in Castor. This preamble combined the elements of both Protestant and Catholic theologies, and supplemented this with Catholic bequests of money to the high altar, the bells, the sepulchre light, the mother church and the local church.⁵⁷ These mixed wills peak in the reign of Elizabeth I, and the last one was in 1638 by Vincent Fruimore of

⁵⁵ NRO, 1st Series P271, will of John Typladys dated 1552, Castor.

⁵⁶ NRO 1st Series M56, will of John Fermer, 7 Feb 1553, Blakesley.

⁵⁷ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 1, fol. 23, will of Robert Curteys the elder 20 May 1544, Castor.

Castor.⁵⁸ The first mixed traditional/reformist will appeared in 1553. Although the preamble of this will was reformist, the testator combined this with a bequest to the bells of Castor. This was a possible indication of a bequest for the ringing of the bells on his burial. Bell ringing was a traditional bequest that had been linked to the burial of the testator in commemoration of the soul and was a practice limited in Reformation England. The mixed traditional/reformist wills also peak during the reign of Elizabeth I. Arguably, the peak of these two categories during this reign was because until now the religion of the country had been rather unsettled, and it was only in this reign that the church of England became established more firmly with its Protestant ideologies. Furthermore, it was during Elizabeth's reign that religious toleration was more frequent and differing religious ideals allowed. However, these two categories are still low in number in comparison to the number of wills in the other categories.

As would be expected, and has been found in other studies, traditional wills dominate the early years of the period under study, disappearing after 1625, when there was a will of mixed traditional/reformist qualities. What is very noticeable about the wills of the three Northamptonshire parishes is the high number of traditional wills in the reign of Edward VI. Although this reign was short, it was fervently Protestant, and for such a high percentage of the wills in this reign to be traditional, indicates that the sweeping Protestant reforms made in this reign had little impact on the people. Although it is no surprise to see traditional wills were the

⁵⁸ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough, Book 13, fol. 188, will of Vincent Fruimore, 20 January 1638, Castor.

most frequent in the reign of Mary I due to her own religious leanings, the religious outlook of the people was still traditional before her accession. Cross also found this to be the case and argues that the religion of the people during the reign of Edward VI, despite legislation remained traditional in outlook.⁵⁹ The last year for a will to have what could be classed as a traditional preamble was in 1559, when there were three of these.⁶⁰ Of the 58 wills classed as traditional or traditional/reformist only forty-two had actual traditional preambles, the remaining wills were classified due to their bequests. Kingsthorpe has the highest number of wills with traditional preambles. Blakesley only has two in total, and these appear early in 1545 and 1550. Castor only has a total of six, which appeared sporadically between 1545 and 1559.

As can be seen from table 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 all three parishes accounted for Protestant preambles as the most frequent. Castor had the greatest proportion of Protestant preambles, with forty-eight per cent, Blakesley had the next highest with 45.3 per cent and Kingsthorpe had the least with 31.8 per cent. Kingsthorpe had neutral preambles appearing the second most frequently with 28.7 per cent of the sample, and so did Castor with twenty-seven per cent. After this initial similarity between the three parishes, the results diverge. The third most frequent preambles in Kingsthorpe were traditional with 21.7 per cent and fourth were reformist with 12.1 per cent. Arguably, traditional preambles were high in number in this parish due to the sample having a larger number of earlier wills than the other two parishes.

⁵⁹ Cross, Church and People, p 85.

⁶⁰ NRO 1st Series R125, will of Agnes Slynn, 1559, Kingsthorpe; NRO 1st Series R72, will of Nicholas Willinson, 25 August 1559, Kingsthorpe; and NRO Testators loose Will C & D Box, fol. 139, will of Thomas Colson, 16 September 1559, Castor.

However, even though this is the case, Kingsthorpe is the only parish to have only traditional wills between 1543 and 1558; the other two parishes had wills in a range of categories illustrating a mixed religious outlook. Thus, it could be suggested that Kingsthorpe was more traditional in its outlook, and adhered to the old religion for a longer period. As can be seen from table 6.3, Castor had reformist wills as the third most frequent with 14.9 per cent and traditional wills fourth with only 4.7 per cent. Blakesley in table 6.4 also had reformist preambles second most popular with 24.4 per cent of the wills. Third were neutral preambles with 16.3 per cent and fourth were wills with mixed protestant/traditional ideologies with seven per cent.

Table 6.2 – Religious Categorisation of the wills Per Parish – Kingsthorpe

Period/ Category	Traditional	Traditional/ Reformist	Neutral	Reformist	Protestant/ Traditional	Protestant	Total
1543-1547	17						17
1548-1553	8						8
1554-1558	7						7
1559-1580	2	6	10	4		2	24
1581-1603		1	11	8		2	22
1604-1625			12	4	1	6	23
1626-1649		1		2		13	16
1650-1653			1			1	2
1654-1659						1	1
1660-1685			6	1		10	17
1686-1688			1			2	3
1689-1694			1			7	8
1695-1702			3			6	9
1703+							0
	34	8	45	19	1	50	157

Source: NRO Wills of Kingsthorpe

The mixed categories only accounted for a very small percentage (as Mayhew also found).⁶¹ In Kingsthorpe mixed traditional/reformist preambles only account for 5.1 per cent of the total and there is only one will with a Protestant/traditional preamble (0.6 per cent). In Castor mixed Protestant/traditional accounted for 3.4 per cent and mixed traditional/reformist only 2 per cent. Blakesley resulted in seven per cent with Protestant/traditional and 4.7 per cent with traditional/reformist. Testators rarely illustrated mixed religious beliefs in the three Northamptonshire parishes, preferring to demonstrate their convictions in their wills. This is all illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Table 6.3 – Religious Categorisation of the wills Per Parish – Castor

Period/ Category	Traditional	Traditional/ Reformist	Neutral	Reformist	Protestant/ Traditional	Protestant	Total
1543-1547	4		1		1		6
1548-1553	2	1	2	1		1	7
1554-1558		1	5				6
1559-1580	1	1	3		2	2	9
1581-1603				1	1	7	9
1604-1625			8	10		8	26
1626-1649			10	3	1	16	30
1650-1653			1				1
1654-1659			1			2	3
1660-1685			5	6		20	31
1686-1688				1		4	5
1689-1694			1			5	6
1695-1702			3			3	6
1703+						3	3
	7	3	40	22	5	71	148

Source: NRO, Wills of Castor

As figure 6.1 illustrates wills with Protestant preambles account for nearly half of the wills in Castor and Blakesley and nearly a third of the wills in Kingsthorpe.

Kingsthorpe has a higher proportion of traditional and neutral wills in comparison to

⁶¹ Mayhew, 'The progress of the Reformation in East Sussex', p. 46.

Castor and Blakesley. Blakesley has a higher proportion of reformist wills than the other two parishes. Kingsthorpe has the slightly highest proportion of mixed traditional/reformist preambles and Castor has the highest proportion of mixed protestant/traditional.

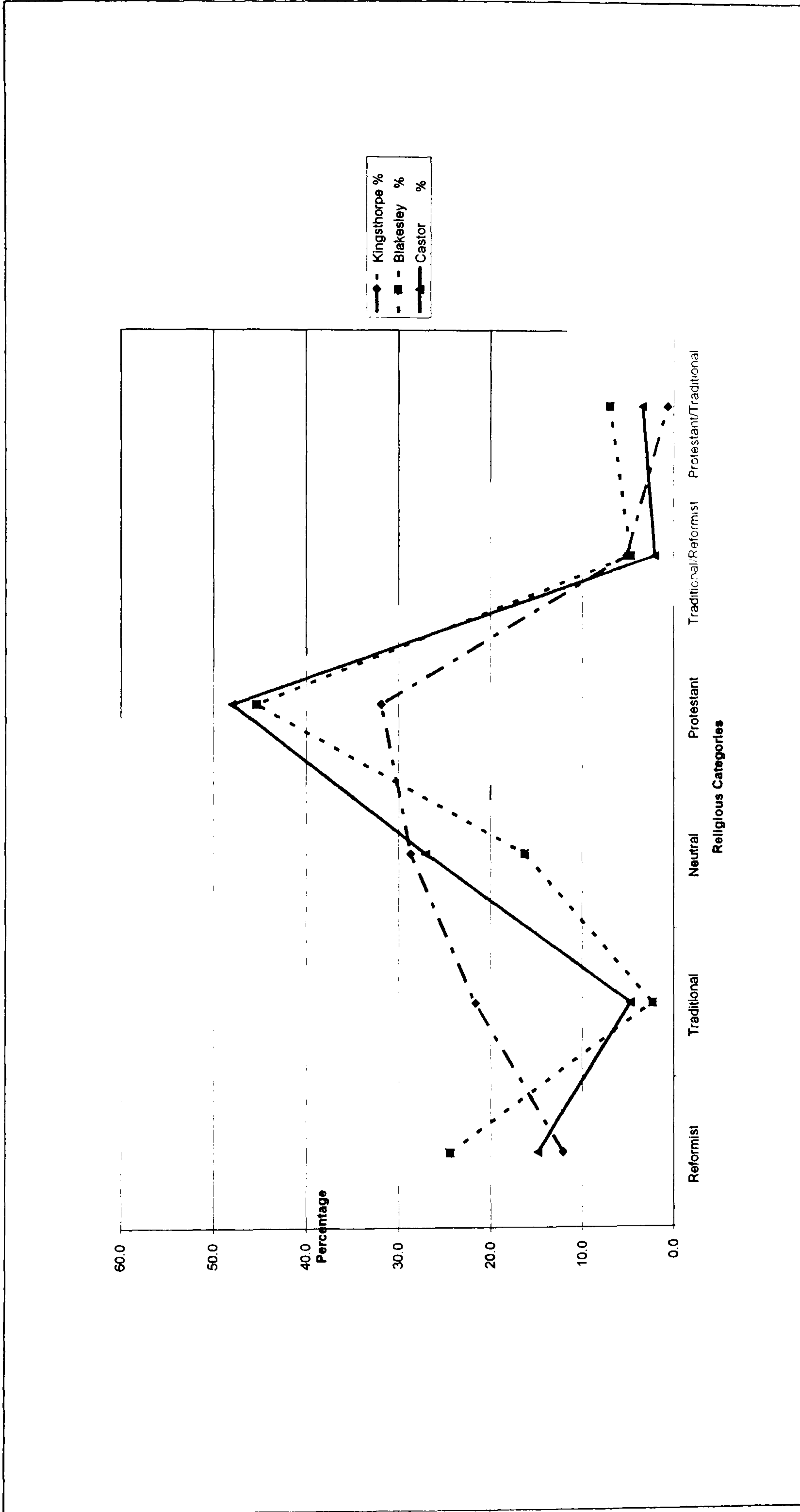
Table 6.4 – Religious Categorisation of the wills Per Parish – Blakesley

Period/ Category	Traditional	Traditional/ Reformist	Neutral	Reformist	Protestant/ Traditional	Protestant	Total
1545-1547	1						1
1548-1553	1			1	1		3
1554-1558		1			1		2
1559-1580		2		3	1		6
1581-1603		1	3	3	2	1	10
1604-1625			3	4	1	3	11
1626-1649			3	6		3	12
1650-1653			1				1
1654-1659				1		1	2
1660-1685			1	2		10	13
1686-1688						4	4
1689-1694						7	7
1695-1702			3	1		10	14
1703+							0
Total	2	4	14	21	6	39	86

Source : NRO, Wills of Blakesley

Thus, figure 6.1 and tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 illustrate that although all three parishes have the highest proportion of protestant preambles. Castor has the greatest lean towards this. Blakesley is showing evidence of a more cautious approach due to its higher proportion of neutral preambles and reformist leanings. Kingsthorpe however is a real mixture, as although the majority of wills are protestant, it also has a high proportion that are traditional and neutral. Arguably, Kingsthorpe was taking longer to accept the new religion in comparison to the other two parishes.

Figure 6.1: Comparison of religious will categories per parish



Religious Categorisation of the wills by gender

As can be seen in table 6.5, there are strong similarities between the religious outlooks of the male and female testators. When a comparison is made between the wills split by gender and the general results outlined by parish in tables 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4, the following results were found.

In Blakesley, the top three categories (in order) of protestant, reformist and neutral preambles in the wills are reflected in the results split by gender, as both sexes follow this pattern. It is also noticeable that the wills written by men in Blakesley, follow the complete pattern outlined in table 6.4, with the mixed categories appearing fourth and fifth highest and the wills with traditional preambles having the least in number.

In Castor, the wills written by males also follow the top three categories outlined in table 6.3. The top three categories (in order) of protestant, neutral and reformist wills found in table 6.3, is also represented in the results of the male wills in table 6.5. After these top three categories, the results differ slightly, with the mixed category of protestant/traditional sharing fourth highest with the wills categorised as traditional. The wills of female testators also closely follow the general result outlined in table 6.3. As with wills written by men, the wills with protestant and neutral categories share the two highest in number. After this, the results differ with traditional and reformist wills sharing third highest.

Kingsthorpe has the most mixed result when the differing genders are compared, however as with the other two parishes, it still closely follows the initial analysis (outlined in table 6.2). Those wills written by men have the highest number shared equally between protestant and neutral preambles. In the general analysis, wills with protestant preambles are the most frequent, followed by neutral. After this the results of those wills written by men, follows the general results identically, with the third highest number of preambles in the wills of male testators being traditional, fourth and fifth were the mixed categories. The female testators also follow the general pattern with slight variations. Wills categorised as Protestant appear to be the highest, with the variation being that the neutral and traditional categories share the second highest in number and the reformist and traditional/reformist share the third highest in number.

Table 6.5 – Religious Categorisation by Gender and Parish

Sex	Religious Category / Parish	Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	%
Female	Neutral	3	8	8	19	25.0
	Traditional		2	8	10	13.2
	Reformist	4	2	2	8	10.5
	Traditional/Reformist			2	2	2.6
	Protestant/Traditional				0	0.0
	Protestant	7	17	13	37	48.7
	Total Wills	14	29	33	76	100.00
Male	Neutral	11	32	37	80	25.4
	Traditional	2	5	26	33	10.5
	Reformist	17	20	17	54	17.1
	Traditional/Reformist	4	3	6	13	4.1
	Protestant/Traditional	6	5	1	12	3.8
	Protestant	32	54	37	123	39.0
	Total Wills	72	119	124	315	100.00

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

Overall, in all three parishes, wills written by female testators do not cover all the categorisations due to their being so few. In Blakesley and Castor, there are no female testators to be found in either of the mixed categories and in Kingsthorpe only a couple of female testators to be found in the traditional/reformist category.

It could be argued that gender had little effect upon the religious convictions of the testators. Both sexes had similar patterns of religious categorisation. As the period progressed, in all three parishes (especially in Kingsthorpe which appears to be strongly traditional in the earlier period) there was a move away from the traditional preambles, which over the course of the period progressed through a mixture of categorisations to an eventual overwhelming Protestant feel (although each parish arrived at this result in differing speeds).

Religious bequests

Religious bequests play a strong influence in the categorisation of the preambles in wills. For those wills that had no preamble or had a neutral preamble, the religious bequests could place that will within a specific religious category. In addition, a will that could be categorised strongly in one religious category, could be moved into a mixed category based on the religious bequests contradicting the religious stance of the preamble. However, it is not easy to identify a bequest in a will as always having a religious motive. As the church was changing in England, traditional practices were slowly being eradicated along with traditional feast days in the ritual year. As Cressy notes, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the Reformation resulted in

many religious festivals and holy days being eradicated. With this also came the disappearance or secularisation of many religious practices, such as bell ringing, tithes giving, prayers for the dead and alms giving. Beginning in the late sixteenth century, and developing during the seventeenth, a new calendar emerged centred on the Book of Common Prayer, and linking in celebrations from the reigning monarch's calendar (such as the anniversary of the accession, defeat of the Armada, gunpowder plot etc.)⁶²

Table 6.6 – Breakdown of religious Bequests in the wills per parish

Religious Bequests	Blakesley	Castor	Kingsthorpe	Total	%
No religious bequests	59	100	96	255	42.7
Poor	19	43	40	102	17.1
Mother church	14	7	39	60	10.1
High Altar / Forgotten Tithes	5	7	37	49	8.2
Church	13	27	8	48	8.0
Bells	4	12	25	41	6.9
Traditional	2	6	26	34	5.7
Protestant	4	0	1	5	0.8
Cathedral church	0	2	1	3	0.5
Total	120	204	273	597	100

Source: NRO, Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

As the period progressed what may have appeared as a religious bequest earlier in the period, may have lost its religious motivation later on. Religious bequests slowly evolved into secular bequests. For example, under the traditional Catholic Church, what was once a practice designed for the remembrance of souls in purgatory, the

⁶² D. Cressy, Bonfires and Bells, National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England, (London, 1989), pp. xii-xiii.

practices of bell ringing and money to the poor became increasingly linked with secular and communal bequests, disassociated from the remembrance of the deceased person's soul and prayer's for the dead. As was the case with the preamble analysis, the categorisations of the bequests in this analysis are initially static in an evolving religious period. The results in table 6.6 only give a limited picture of the bequests outlined in wills per parish, and are not linked to dates. The date the will was written, gives more of an indication as to whether a bequest was of a religious or secular motivation. Thus, the bequests will also be broken down individually and linked to the year in which they were written, to identify whether they were religious or secular in motivation, and to give a more detailed picture.

The total number of bequests in the wills with a possible religious motivation for the three parishes was 597. A very large proportion of the testators did not specify any religious bequests at all (42 per cent). Within the religious bequests have been included bequests to the high altar and bequests to the poor. Bequests to the poor are difficult to categorise, as they arguably were a remnant of the traditional bequests to the poor in return for praying for the soul of the deceased. Traditional bequests were made to the poor with the intention that in return they would pray for the soul of the deceased, but the Reformation clergy had discouraged this practice. Bequests to the poor, specifically requesting prayers for the soul, were replaced with direct bequests to the poor, with no mention of soul praying. Poor bequests accounted for the highest number of religious bequests in all the three parishes (102 in total). Alice

Atterbury in Castor made the last bequest to the poor in 1691.⁶³ Before this, there was one bequest in 1689 by Anne Newman of Blakesley.⁶⁴ Before 1689, there was a gap of fourteen years with the last poor bequest in 1675.⁶⁵ Up until 1675, they were quite frequent. Seventy-four of the bequests to the poor were generally to widows, cottages, and children, to the poor of the town or to the maintenance of the town. Seventeen were to the poor man's box and were concentrated between the years 1548-81. Seven were specifically for the poor or those who carried the body at the day of burial. Four were a specific bequest to the poor on a yearly basis. These bequests to those on the day of the burial or are repeated on a yearly basis further indicate the possibility of soul praying for the deceased. The distribution of alms at death to the poor was a traditional method of generating prayers for the souls of the dead in reciprocation for receiving money or food.

Two religious bequests are evidently original and pious. Thomas Latham from Kingsthorpe in 1558 gave to the church 'a cross, a vestment and a corporas case' and this supports his traditional preamble.⁶⁶ These were possibly items hidden on behalf of the church during the early years of the Reformation and were now being returned. It is noticeable that they were being returned during the reign of Mary I. At the other end of the religious spectrum was Mary Watts from Blakesley in 1620,

⁶³ NRO 3rd Series L269/270, will of Alice Atterbury, 9 May 1691, Castor.

⁶⁴ NRO 3rd Series S165, will of Anne Newman, 4 November 1689, Blakesley.

⁶⁵ NRO 3rd Series D216, will of Dorothy Tibbes, 20 October 1675, Blakesley.

⁶⁶ NRO 1st Series O9, will of Thomas Latham, 6 September 1558, Kingsthorpe.

who had two Protestant bequests, one for books of Holy Scripture to her sons and one of a large bible to the church.⁶⁷

Traditional bequests accounted for thirty-four of the total. There were four bequests for sepulchre lights and three for torches. Nine testators specifically mentioned bequests for the priest or someone to pray for their soul and sometimes all souls. One mentioned money for an obit to be established. Two gave a bequest to the ghostly father, and a further two involved the curate and the vicar. One testator mentioned a mass to be said on the anniversary of his death and two mentioned bequests for dirges. One testator gave money to two specific altars in the church. There were also six bequests in four wills for crosses and other church items.

Traditionally, church bells had been rung for the soul of the deceased. This practice had been limited in the reign of Elizabeth I to only one peal when the person died, one peal before the burial and one after the burial.⁶⁸ There were forty-one bequests to the bells of the various churches and most were stated as bequests just for the bells or for the reparation or maintenance of the bells. These bequests to the bells were arguably a leftover of the traditional outlook. Two specifically gave money for the ringing of the bells (one of these specifically mentioning ‘a peal rung for my soul’) and four gave bequests to the ringers, surprisingly one of these was as late as

⁶⁷ NRO 1st Series AV27 (Reformist preamble but protestant bequests), will of Mary Watts, 20 April 1620, Blakesley.

⁶⁸ D. Cressy, Birth, Marriage And Death. Ritual, Religion, And The Life Cycle in Tudor And Stuart England, (Oxford, 1997), pp. 422-3.

1638.⁶⁹ Bequests to the high altar of forgotten tithes can also be classified as traditional, as these were also linked to the welfare of the soul. In all, there were forty-nine of these bequests, the majority of which were in Kingsthorpe. Bequests to the mother/cathedral church of Peterborough, were in the same vein as forgotten tithes, and could possibly be classed as traditional. There were sixty-three of these and the first bequest of this was from Edith Dalande in Castor in 1543.⁷⁰

Surprisingly the last will to have a bequest to the mother church was as late as 1621, and was from Thomas Warwick in Blakesley, with a Protestant preamble.⁷¹ Before this, there were two wills in 1600 both from Blakesley.⁷² The majority of these wills (sixty) all occurred before 1600.

There were a very small number of Protestant bequests. The first will to include such indications was that of Mary Watts from Blakesley in 1620 (already outlined above).⁷³ The only other will to bequest books of divinity was that of John Mottershed from Kingsthorpe in 1669, when he gave them to his nephew along with manuscripts of his own.⁷⁴ This will had an extremely long Protestant declaration of faith concerning the fate of his soul and his resurrection. The remaining two wills

⁶⁹ NRO, Consistory Court of Peterborough Book 2 fol. 113, will of Thurstan Kerby, October 1557 and NRO 2nd Series E256 (Reformist preamble but traditional bequest), will of Robert Becket, 30 Jan 1638.

⁷⁰ NRO Consistory Court Book 1, fol. 197, will of Edith Dalande, 12 July 1543.

⁷¹ NRO 1st Series AV83 (Protestant preamble), will of Thomas Warwick, 30 Dec 1621.

⁷² NRO 1st Series W174, will of Nicholas Whyte, 10 April 1600 and NRO 1st Series W174, will of Edmond Haddock, 1 March 1600.

⁷³ NRO 1st Series AV27 (Reformist preamble but protestant bequests), will of Mary Watts, 20 April 1620.

⁷⁴ Family Records Centre, PCC will Microfilm Box 336 fol. 80, will of John Mottershed, 27 May 1669.

had simple bequests to the vicar to preach a funeral sermon.⁷⁵ Castor had no wills with Protestant religious bequests, however out of the three parishes; it had the highest wills of a Protestant category, indicating they had a higher number of Protestant preambles. Bequests direct to the church accounted for forty-eight, the majority of which were direct cash amounts to the parish church (thirty just to the church and fourteen towards maintenance/repairing). Castor had the highest number of these, followed by Blakesley and then Kingsthorpe. Four bequests were to the church for the testator's burial.

Regarding the occupation of the testator, this can also be examined to see if specific religious bequests were given by specific occupations, to see if occupation had any influence. Carpenters left seven wills with no religious bequests, as compared to three bequests to the church. Labourers had thirty wills that had no religious bequests and seven with religious bequests. Masons had five wills with no religious bequests compared to a total of four with religious bequests. Millers had four with no bequests and two with religious bequests. Spinsters had six wills with no religious bequests and two with religious bequests. Tailors had four wills with and two with none. Yeomen had thirty-seven wills with no religious bequests and only twenty-five religious bequests.

⁷⁵ NRO 4th Series ix 143, will of Richard Wayte (Blakesley) dated 29th October 1658 and NRO 2nd series G195, will of John Warwick (Blakesley) dated 15th October 1636.

Gentlemen had the highest number of bequests to the poor out of all their religious bequests, followed by bequests to the church. Gentlemen only had four wills with no religious bequests, and the rest of the bequests were given to the high altar, to traditional causes, protestant causes and the establishment of a grammar school. Husbandmen, despite having thirty wills with no religious bequests, still gave mostly to the poor followed by various bequests to the church. Traditional bequests to the bells and the high altar followed in importance. Although widows had thirty-six wills with no bequests, there were still fifty-three religious bequests. Of these fifty-three, thirteen were to the poor, ten to the high altar and ten to the mother church. The bequests within the occupation of priest were unsurprisingly distributed through traditional bequests. Vicars gave the poor three bequests, the church two, the bells two and the mother church one. Surprisingly three wills of vicars had no religious bequests at all.

Servants and farriers had many traditional bequests. Blacksmiths left two wills with no religious bequests, and the remaining were split between traditional bequests and the poor. For those testators who had not specified an occupation, the results are mixed. Sixty-three stated no religious bequests. The poor received the highest number of bequests with thirty-five, and the mother/cathedral church received twenty-two. Bequests to the church and the totalled eighteen each, and the high altar received sixteen. The traditional category only received eleven.

What can also be analysed is whether the frequency of what could be deemed religious bequests, increased or decreased over time? As can be seen from table 6.7

over half of the wills had no religious bequests at all (65.2 per cent), peaking in the reigns of Charles II and his father Charles I.

Table 6.7 – Breakdown of religious Bequests in the wills per reign

	Period	Total Wills	No bequests	High Altar/Tithes	Mother church	Church	Poor	Bells	Traditional	Protestant
Henry VIII	1543-1547	24	1	18	20	8	7	16	25	
Edward VI	1548-1553	18	2	9	10	4	12	4	3	
Mary I	1554-1558	15	2	10	10	7	8	6	4	
Elizabeth I (a)	1559-1580	39	16	12	16	10	11	11		
Elizabeth I (b)	1581-1603	41	29		6	5	8	2	1	
James I	1604-1625	60	37		1	8	29	1		2
Charles I	1626-1649	58	43			5	16	1		1
Common Wealth	1650-1653	4	3				1			
Cromwell x 2	1654-1659	6	4				2			1
Charles II	1660-1685	61	55				6		1	1
James II	1686-1688	12	12							
William & Mary	1689-1694	21	20				2			
William III	1695-1702	29	28			1				
Anne	1703+	3	3							
Total		391	255	49	63	48	102	41	34	5

Source: NRO, Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

What is also illustrated in table 6.7 is that the bequests are more frequent in the earlier part of the period under study. The reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I

and the first half of Elizabeth I's reigns carry the bulk of the wills with bequests. In addition, these reigns show the highest number of traditional Catholic bequests. Not unsurprisingly, Henry VIII's reign sees the larger number of bequests that can be deemed as traditional and linked to the health and wealth of the deceased's soul. Apart from two isolated bequests, traditional bequests have disappeared by the reign of Elizabeth I. Bequests to the high altar or payment of forgotten tithes disappears by the second half of Elizabeth I's reign.

Bequests to the local church remain consistent until the reign of Charles I, and then disappear altogether. Houlbrooke also notes the decrease in bequests to the church, church repairs and tithes by the 1550's, along with bequests to the mother/cathedral church. He also notes how communal bequests such as road/bridge mending, support of poor girls' dowries or poor scholars did not increase or compensate for this decline.⁷⁶ Bequests to the bells appear in wills until the reign of Charles I. However arguably, they only appear more frequently until the reign of Elizabeth I, and peak in the reign of Henry VIII. Bequests to the poor are the most frequent form of religious bequest throughout the three parishes during the period under study. Although again most frequent in the earlier reigns, these type of bequests still remain current, with the last ones appearing in the reign of William and Mary. These bequests peak in the reign of James I, and are to be found frequent during Charles I. Houlbrooke found that bequests to the poor were also most frequent during 1558-1660.⁷⁷ After the reign of Charles I, religious bequests became few, and even in this

⁷⁶ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 118.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 128.

reign the bulk were only to be found in bequests to the poor, with very little other bequests appearing. As was the case in the Northamptonshire wills, Houlbrooke also found that charitable giving after the Restoration was infrequent.⁷⁸

Although Houlbrooke found that religious or charitable bequests declined after the Reformation, he also discovered that bequests to the poor did increase in the short term, although these also eventually disappeared.⁷⁹ This can also be seen in the three Northamptonshire parishes. The traditional practices disappear by the first half of Elizabeth I, and the continuing charitable bequests do not appear in the same high number. Bequests to the poor are the only charitable bequest that appears with some frequency throughout the three parishes and as was the case with Houlbrooke these were lower in number than the traditional pre-Reformation bequests and too disappeared eventually.

Overall, Castor had the highest number of wills with no religious bequests, followed by Kingsthorpe and Blakesley. Kingsthorpe had the highest number of bequests to the high altar and the highest number of traditional bequests along with bequests to the bells, indicating a possible stronger leaning towards the traditional religion. Castor has bequests indicating that the appeal of the new religion was stronger here than in the other two parishes. Blakesley appears indeterminate, with a high number of wills with no bequests (fifty-nine out of a total eighty-six wills). Arguably, the fact that Kingsthorpe was a closed community may explain this lean towards

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 134.

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 129-130

retaining the traditional religion. Whereas the other two parishes were open communities, susceptible to moving populations and thus the easier dissemination of new ideas concerning religion, the community of Kingsthorpe was less mobile. New ideas would arguably have taken a longer period to become introduced into the parish, and a longer period to become accepted. In comparison to the open parishes receiving people of different religious convictions from different regions that would have influenced the religious convictions of the resident population, the people of Kingsthorpe would have had to give themselves the impetus to change their own religious convictions. Thus, Kingsthorpe would have remained traditional for a longer period than the other two parishes, as it slowly accepted the religious changes of the period. This is also supported in the fact that, out of the three parishes, Kingsthorpe had the highest proportion of traditional preambles.

Scribal Influence

This analysis was difficult for the wills from the three parishes, as many of the wills were copied and the original handwriting of the scribe was no longer available. As a result, the handwriting of wills cannot be compared (as Spufford suggested), and only an analysis of witnesses present at the bedside or overseers/supervisors can be done, to make an educated guess as to the identity of the scribe.

A few names did come to the forefront stating themselves as will writers. William Garret appeared in the will of Joan Orlibear in Kingsthorpe as receiving money for

writing the will.⁸⁰ William Garrett also appeared in numerous wills as a witness. Henry Bondbare was stated on the will of Mary Cooper from Blakesley as the writer of the will.⁸¹ Gregory Palmer is noted in the will of Alice Cooke of Kingsthorpe, as the writer of her will in 1638.⁸² He also appeared in the wills of Robert Beckett and John Smith of Kingsthorpe as the first witness.⁸³ Two of these wills shared the similar preamble of 'soul into the hands of the sacred trinity hoping to be saved only by the merits and passion of our gracious saviour, my particular redeemer Jesus Christ the righteous'. This was in the wills of Alice Cooke and John Smith. The third will of Robert Beckett is different, and does not mention the trinity, but does hope to be saved through Jesus Christ. Thomas Mayo is noted as the will writer in the will of Ales Crosse of Castor in 1588.⁸⁴ Thomas Walesby is noted as the will writer in the will of Agnes Hills of Kingsthorpe in 1597.⁸⁵

Only a small number of will writers noted themselves as so within the wills.

Therefore, to try to gather evidence about the influence of scribes, one must look at the frequency of names appearing in the wills and whether appeared more than once.

Izaker Brookes, Matthew Chaulke, Elisabeth Chaulke, Richard Pulcher, John Brookes, Simon Child, William Garrett, Robert Mylner, Robert Ridge, Simon Rogers, William Roott, John Smith, Cement Whithead, John Young, Anthony

⁸⁰ NRO 4TH Series X131, will of Joan Orlibear, Kingsthorpe, 5 July 1665.

⁸¹ NRO 1st series OE 120, will of Mary Cooper, July 1629.

⁸² NRO 1st series AE95, will of Alice Cooke, 4 July 1638.

⁸³ NRO 2nd series E256, will of Robert Beckett, 30 January 1638 and NRO 2nd series H263, will of John Smith, 7 October 1637.

⁸⁴ NRO Testators Box C&D loose wills fol. 32, will of Ales Crosse, Castor 27 June 1588.

⁸⁵ NRO 1st Series W19, will of Agnes Hills, Kingsthorpe, 13 January 1597.

Smith, are just a few of the names that appear more than once in the witness/overseer/supervisor section of the wills.

William Garrett appeared in a further eight wills as the first witness. Seven of these are in Kingsthorpe and one in Blakesley between the years 1685 to 1699, which is a different time period to when the will of Joan Orlibear was written in 1665. The preamble in the will of Joan Orlibear was ‘my soul into the hands of Almighty God who lent it me and my body to the earth hoping to have remission of all my sins’.⁸⁶ The preambles of the eight wills in which Garret appears as witness are very close in wording to the will of 1665. It could be argued that he was the will writer of these as well.⁸⁷ These wills including the will of Joan Orlibear all included the shared feature of no religious bequests. Seven of these wills were classified as reformist, while the two wills that stressed ‘assuredly believing in everlasting life’ were classified as Protestant.⁸⁸

William Garrett also appeared in three other Kingsthorpe wills as the third witness. If we look at these wills, it can be seen that the preambles also follow the pattern of

⁸⁶ NRO 4TH Series X131, will of Joan Orlibear, Kingsthorpe, 5 July 1665.

⁸⁷ NRO 3rd Series T287, will of Hannah Morris, Kingsthorpe, 6 December 1696; NRO 3rd Series T201, will of Judith Weston, Kingsthorpe, 30 March 1693; NRO 3rd Series V209, will of John Billingham, Kingsthorpe, 11 April 1699; NRO 3rd Series S218, will of Dorothy Jenoway, Kingsthorpe, 3 March 1693; NRO 3rd Series O121, will of Joanne Langley, Kingsthorpe, 26 November 1685, NRO 3rd Series Q80, will of John Wilson, Kingsthorpe, 7 June 1688; NRO 3rd Series M139, will of Richard Hollis, Kingsthorpe, 24 July 1691; NRO 3rd Series V280, will of John Watson, Blakesley, 12 December 1696.

⁸⁸ NRO 3rd Series Q80, wills of John Wilson, Kingsthorpe, 7 June 1688 and NRO 3rd Series M139, will of Richard Hollis, Kingsthorpe, 24 July 1691.

the will preamble of Joan Orlibear that Garrett was writer of. The earliest of these wills was that of Samuel Wright in 1680, and had a very similar preamble to that of John Billingham in 1699.⁸⁹ Francis Weston in 1692 had the same preamble of Hannah Morris and Judith Weston.⁹⁰ The fact that the preamble was the same as Judith Weston is unsurprising when one notes that Francis was the husband of Judith. The third will of these three was that of George Morris in 1698.⁹¹ He also had the same preamble as the second variation outlined above. Garrett appeared in further wills as fourth witness. He appeared in the will of Thomas Morris the Younger in 1684 in Kingsthorpe.⁹² Secondly, there was the will of Anne Doxie in 1698, which had a variation of the preamble.⁹³ Again, these wills had no religious bequests. Garrett appears to have influenced fourteen wills.

Richard Pulcher appeared in fourteen wills from Kingsthorpe as the first witness. He also appeared in a further three as first supervisor. This was during the years 1545 to 1547, with one solitary will in 1551. Pulcher was noted as curate in some of the wills and it was probably in this occupation that he became the writer of the wills. Arguably, William Garret was also a curate, and this was why he appeared in so many wills. These wills had traditional preambles and traditional religious bequests, with ten of them containing provisions to the ghostly father or a request for prayers

⁸⁹ NRO 3rd Series R136, will of Samuel Wright, Kingsthorpe dated 28th December 1680.

⁹⁰ NRO 3rd Series T202, will of Francis Weston, Kingsthorpe, 28 April 1692.

⁹¹ NRO 3rd Series V80, will of George Morris, Kingsthorpe, 16 March 1698.

⁹² NRO 3rd Series K198, will of Thomas Morris the Younger, Kingsthorpe, 8 March 1684.

⁹³ NRO 3rd Series V172, will of Anne Doxie, Kingsthorpe, 2 June 1698.

for the soul. The preamble of these wills was based around one preamble found in nine wills, of which the wording was amended in other wills. The main preamble used was to give the 'soul to Almighty God my redeemer and saviour/creator/maker, to our Lady Saint Mary, and to all the celestial company of heaven to pray for me' and this was found in ten of the wills.⁹⁴ Four variations of this preamble existed that his name was linked with. The first variation dropped the reference to God as a saviour/creator or maker; however, the basic premise remains the same.⁹⁵ The second variation was also along similar lines as the first variation with a slight difference in the terminology referring to God, and was found in the will of Thomas Caztte in 1545.⁹⁶ The third variation dropped the phrase 'pray for me', which is perhaps significant, especially when it is noted that these three wills were written in the reign of Edward VI.⁹⁷ The fourth variation appeared in 1546, a few months before Edward's succession.⁹⁸ The traditional elements of the preamble remain in these third and fourth variations, with the reference to Mary and heaven (especially

⁹⁴ NRO 1st Series K86, will of Thomas Shepherd Junior, Kingsthorpe, 26 June 1546; NRO 1st Series K85, will of William Bett, Kingsthorpe, 17th May 1546; NRO 1st Series K85, will of Richard Person, Kingsthorpe, 30 May 1546; NRO 1st Series I133, will of John Paybody, Kingsthorpe, 16 July 1546; NRO 1st Series K65 will of Thomas Watson, Kingsthorpe, 27 June 1546; NRO 1st Series I87, will of Margaret Branks, Kingsthorpe, 23 May 1546; NRO 1st Series I166, will of Elizabeth Deconson, Kingsthorpe, 6 May 1546; NRO 1st Series K43, will of Maryon Childs, Kingsthorpe, 3 July 1546; NRO 1st Series K44, will of Elizabeth Child, Kingsthorpe, 14 September 1546 and NRO 1st Series I286, will of Lewys Hurlocke, Kingsthorpe, 16 August 1547.

⁹⁵ NRO 1st Series K11, will of Sylvester Drynkewell, Kingsthorpe, 3 May 1545 and NRO 1st Series K52, will of John Horpyn, Kingsthorpe, 24 March 1546.

⁹⁶ NRO 1st Series K5, will of Thomas Cazette, Kingsthorpe, 26 April 1545.

⁹⁷ NRO 1st Series M15, will of Richard Pytmer, Kingsthorpe, 6 November 1547; NRO 1st Series K66, will of William Brooke, Kingsthorpe, 25 September 1551 and NRO 1st Series K11, will of Elizabeth Adams, Kingsthorpe, 10 July 1647.

⁹⁸ NRO 1st Series I132, will of Bartholomew Cannon, Kingsthorpe, 14 September 1546.

the fourth referring to heaven as celestial). Due to the different monarch and changing religious mood of the country, these testators may have felt it prudent to eradicate the statement of praying for the soul from their wills. Even though this clause has been dropped, the will of the fourth variation requests his ghostly father to pray for him. Furthermore, the three wills of the third variation, refer to Richard Pulcher as their 'ghostly father' and two of these wills make bequests to him (one of which is money for 'his pains').⁹⁹ All of the seventeen wills that involve Richard Pulcher indicate that he was the scribe, and that he influenced the preamble. The similarities are striking, as are the numerous traditional religious bequests for soul praying, masses and the church. These similar traditional preambles and religious bequests could be because the religion of the country still had not effectively been reformed. It could also be that when the minister of the church is writing a will, an individual was highly unlikely to refuse his way of writing or the input of religious bequests into the will, due to the fear of upsetting the church.

Another curate, who was actively involved in the will making process, was William Root. He appears in wills from Kingsthorpe in the period 1548-69. There appears to have been five basic variations of a preamble that he wrote.¹⁰⁰ The later wills that

⁹⁹ NRO 1st Series M15, will of Richard Pytmer, Kingsthorpe, 6 November 1547; NRO 1st Series K66, will of William Brooke, Kingsthorpe, 25 September 1551 and NRO 1st Series K11, will of Elizabeth Adams, Kingsthorpe, 10 July 1647.

¹⁰⁰ NRO 1st Series L10, will of Clement Talbot, Kingsthorpe, 22 November 1557; NRO 1st Series L151a, will of Robert Barker, Kingsthorpe, 9 August 1558; NRO 1st Series O9, will of Thomas Latham the elder, Kingsthorpe, 6 September 1558; NRO 1st Series K99, will of John Hopkyns, Kingsthorpe, 18 February 1548; NRO 1st Series R126, will of Richard Skynner, Kingsthorpe, 5 May 1560; NRO 1st Series S82, will of John Watts, Kingsthorpe, 7 March 1569.

William Root appeared on are neutral in phraseology. In nine of these, there appeared a range of traditional religious bequests. Only Richard Skynner had no religious bequests whatsoever. As was the case with Richard Pulcher, there are a high number of religious bequests in the wills.

Thomas Booker, also a curate, appeared in nine wills in Castor during 1622-46. In eight of these wills were seven other variations of one main preamble and one nuncupative will in which he appeared as first witness.¹⁰¹ The basic form of the preamble ran 'my soul into the hands of Almighty God my creator trusting to be saved by the only merits, passion and satisfaction of Jesus Christ my only saviour and redeemer'.¹⁰² Four other wills followed the basic wording of this preamble with a slight variation in the wording; however, the emphasis was on 'trusting to be saved'. These wills ranged from 1622-1646 and included three men and one woman.¹⁰³ All these wills so far included two widows and two labourers, one husbandman and one yeoman. Two other wills that followed the basic wording of the preamble outlined above but stressed 'hoping to be saved' rather than 'trusting to be saved' was that of Christopher Wilson in 1623 and Thomas Wilbore in 1637.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 G62, will of Jane Wilbour, Castor, 9 September 1638.

¹⁰² NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 G305, will of Robert Graunte, Castor, 18 August 1639.

¹⁰³ See NRO Consistory Court of Peterborough Book 14, fol. 128, will of Nicolas Bacon, Castor, 24 June 1646; NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 D93, will of Seth Wilson, Castor, 16 May 1622; NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 D257, will of Margaret Wilson, Castor, 13 June 1625 and NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 L305, will of John Watts, Castor, 13 July 1628.

¹⁰⁴ NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 D6, will of Christopher Wilson, Castor, 1 January 1623 and NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 M115, will of Thomas Wilbore, Castor, 24 March 1637.

One preamble that was longer and appeared more eloquent was that of Dorothy Goods, a gentleman. This preamble stated,

my soul into the hands of Almighty God my creator in sure and certain hope and persuasion of the remission and fortunes of all my sins and salvation of my soul by the only merits and mediation of Jesus Christ my sole saviour and redeemer and my body to the ground to be interred in Christian burial in the parish church of Castor steadfastly hoping to rise again to eternal life.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps because this testator was of a higher social status than the other wills that Thomas Booker was involved in, and of a higher educational standard, this testator dictated his preamble to the curate rather than the curate merely writing the preamble for him. This preamble is one of the unique ones to be found amongst the wills, although other wills throughout the three parishes do appear to have elements of this will or shortened versions of it. In only three of these wills were religious bequests. Two had bequests to the poor and one to the local church. With these specific wills that had a curate as scribe, religious bequests do not appear to have been forced upon the testator. This could be the case for the earlier wills with curates/priests as scribes. Perhaps it was just an illustration of the period that these wills had a higher proportion with religious bequests, as local lay religion had more community consciousness concerning the welfare of the soul.

There are also a number of other names that appeared on more than one will, indicating they were will writers. Izaker Brookes appeared in thirteen wills from 1564 to 1597 in Kingsthorpe and in one will in Castor in 1625. In Castor, William Allenson appeared in four wills between 1562 and 1567. Thomas Brookes, clerk,

¹⁰⁵ NRO Index Peterborough Wills Volume 2 D321, will of Dorothy Goods, Castor, 18 June 1627.

appeared in two wills in the period 1634-8. William Cannock appeared in three wills in 1613-4. Six wills in Castor had the name Edward Gardner attached, with five appearing in the period 1603-17. One appeared in 1679 and another will in Kingsthorpe had the name Edward Gardner on it from the year 1686. Perhaps these last two were from a relation of the original Edward Gardner. William Dry appeared in three Castor wills in 1671, 1675 and 1676. Thomas Dunckley appeared in two Castor wills in 1683 and 1699. Geoffery Hawkins appeared in three wills in 1664, 1678 and 1681. John Younge in three wills from 1543-46. Thomas Wilbore appeared in two wills in 1630 and 1633 and Christopher Wilbore appeared in two wills in 1610 and 1615. John Wilbore appeared in two in 1630 and 1640. The large number of names appearing throughout these wills with frequency indicates that a large number of males may have acted in the role as scribe. Acting as a scribe could be done by anyone who had the skill and education to read and write. Furthermore, this high number of people acting as scribes would have led to a wide variation in the wording used in preambles.

In Blakesley William Archbold appeared in two wills in 1559 and 1565. John Butler appeared in three wills in 1598, 1602 and 1613. Matthew Chaulke appeared in four wills 1689-1696 and William Chaulke appeared in five wills 1673 to 1696, one of which also had Matthew Chaulke as first witness. John Henson appeared as witness in two wills in 1545 and 1550. Thomas London appeared in two in 1620 and 1622. William Spilsworth appeared in four wills as the first witness in 1674 to 1688. One of these (the will of George Raynbow) has also been counted under Matthew

Chaulke, although Chaulke was only second witness whereas Spilsworth was first witness. Spilsworth's influence can be seen in the preamble, as they are so individualistic in wording. The wills of George Raynbow of 1684 and William Calvert of 1688, where Spilsworth was first witness, although having a preamble that at first glance appears individualistic to each will, can be seen to have the same emphasis and wording.¹⁰⁶ A third will where Spilsworth appears on as second witness also has the same wording as above.¹⁰⁷ Two further wills that have Spilsworth as first witness also share the same preamble.¹⁰⁸ All five men had different occupations. Occupation did not affect the wording of preambles, but the influence in the scribe in this case is apparent. The scribe may have offered the testator a range of preambles and the testator would choose one. Alternatively, the scribe may have automatically matched the preamble to the testator, leaving no room for choice.

In Kingsthorpe William Atkins appeared in five wills 1670-96, one of which had William Garret as the possible scribe. Francis Andrews appeared in three wills between 1581 and 1583, one of which is linked to Izaker Brookes as the possible scribe. Samuel Clerke appeared as first witness in eight wills between 1611 and 1629. Walter Burnell appeared in three wills 1600-1639. Simon Cooke appeared in nine wills 1560 to 1585, and three of these wills have been identified as linked to

¹⁰⁶ NRO 3rd Series Q91, will of George Raynbow, Blakesley, 30 July 1684 and NRO 3rd Series S48, will of William Calvert, Blakesley, 5 June 1688.

¹⁰⁷ NRO 3rd Series K72, will of Robert Smith the Elder, Blakesley, 1684 (month missing).

¹⁰⁸ NRO 3rd Series P45, will of William Humphreys, Blakesley, 5 May 1686 and NRO 3rd Series D6, will of John Saybrook, Blakesley, 9 February 1674/5.

Izaker Brookes. Robert Coke appeared in five wills 1546-1558. Three wills had Francis Cooke as witness, two of them as first witness in 1624 and 1628. The third was in 1696 and must have been a relative of this first Francis Cooke; William Garrett also witnessed this will. John Westhouse is first witness to three wills from 1559-60. William Morris appears in six wills from 1648 to 1674, and one of these was linked into William Atkins. Thomas Grandborrowe appeared in four wills from 1574-83. This list of names that appear in more than one will, indicate the wide range of people that acted as witnesses. Not all of them will have been active scribes, but at least a percentage of them would have been actively involved in the making of the will. Once again, this large number of names shows how actively the community was involved in the will-making process and how they could influence the outcome of the wills. Kingsthorpe appears to have had the most active and noticeable scribes, followed by Castor. Blakesley appears to have had the east number of prominent scribes. This may be because the sample for Blakesley is smaller than Kingsthorpe or Castor, or it may be that Blakesley had a smaller community than the other two parishes. Perhaps because the Blakesley community was smaller, neighbours and friends just acted for each other when the need arose.

A small number of wills do appear to have highly individualistic preambles. These original preambles do suggest originality and that they are not formulaic. The preamble of Richard Smythe, clerk states,

[I]do willingly and with a free heart, render and give again unto the hands of the Lord my God my spirit which his fatherly goodness gave unto me when he fashioned this my body in my mothers womb, by this means making me a living creature nothing doubting but that this my Lord God for his mercies

sake will renew my soul into his glory and place it in the company of heavenly angels and blessed saints.¹⁰⁹

However, these individual preambles are small in number, and appear to be still not completely individualistic. In many cases, they appear to have the same emphasis; it is just that there is a slight difference in wording. For example, one testator left, 'my soul into the hands of Almighty God who made me and all the world, secondly to God the son who redeemed me and all mankind, thirdly to God the Holy Ghost who sanctified me and all the elect people of God, hoping for a joyful resurrection.'¹¹⁰

This is just a slightly wordier version of the majority of the preambles that dedicate their soul to God and to Jesus Christ the redeemer. It could be suggested that the variations between preambles were due to the personalities and writing style of the scribe, and not the individual preferences of the testators. Singular original preambles do exist, however although these could be the voice of the testator, they are few in number. The various scribes, with little variation arguably wrote the majority of preambles.

How closely these preambles reflect the testator's true religious belief is difficult to gauge. It is safe to argue that a testator would not choose scribes who did not reflect their own religious outlook. It is also highly unlikely a scribe would write a detailed preamble of 'controversial' religious feelings, if the testator did not want it. Those

¹⁰⁹ NRO Consistory Court of Peterborough Book 4 fol. 238, will of Richard Smythe, Castor 30 January 1574.

¹¹⁰ NRO 4th Series ii35, will of Dorothy Budworth, Castor 28 Jan 1670-1.

preambles that do stand out as original; reflect the true feelings of the testator. A small number of the wills in the three parishes do appear to have individual preambles, not alike to any other. Despite this small number, it is easy to agree with the arguments of Zell, Alsop and Spufford of the existence of scribes, and their heavy influence upon the wording of the preamble. It is difficult to agree completely with Alsop or Spufford that the preamble may have been unrelated to the beliefs of the testator. In cases of testators with religious beliefs that did not agree with the state religion of the time, a neutral statement would have been used. These neutral statements would have been used by these groups of testators and by testators who gave no indication to the scribe of religious preference. With religion a strong force in society, it is highly unlikely a testator would be forced to use a preamble that he/she did not agree with. As Marsh argues, in times of religious difficulty a shortened preamble or a neutral preamble could indicate a different religious viewpoint to the one current at the time. The language of preambles is full of pitfalls but glimpses of testator religious belief do appear if one looks carefully. One must also look at religious bequests to see if they give a glimpse into the souls of the testators, as these give a clearer picture than preambles. The argument as to whether a scribe (especially if he was the local priest/cleric) could press the testator to include religious bequests against his/her desire has to be considered. It is hard to see a testator on making a document that was so important to them close to death, conceding a part of the estate to religious causes, when distributing it to the family and friends would have been much more important to them.

With this evidence of scribes in mind, there are a small number of cases in the Northamptonshire wills that the religious bequests do contradict the religious tone of the preamble. Alsop also found this in a number of wills in his study.¹¹¹ In this study, these mixed bequests and preambles have led to a mixed classification. There are also a larger number of wills with a neutral preamble, and the religious bequests indicate the religious view of the testator. These wills were classified by the religious tone of the bequests. This suggests that apart from a small minority, testators placed no strong importance on the wording of the preamble, apart from choosing scribes who were of the same religious mindset, and if religion were of importance to them, they would place their importance on specific religious bequests. Only 137 wills in this study had one or more religious bequests in them. For only a small percentage of the will making population, religion and the safety of the soul was of not as high importance as the immediate issue concerning the worldly estate that needed to be settled. This small number also makes it difficult to focus solely on religious bequests as the determinant for religious studies of the wills. Over 65 per cent of the wills had no religious bequests, which if one focuses solely on religious bequests could indicate that religion was of little importance to the will-making population. Although the unreliability of the preambles as strong indicators of religious preference outweighs the reliability, it nevertheless must be noted that they are the only indicators of religious preference of the common people that survive today. This is also important, when one notes that rigidity of the classification of the preambles and bequests, and that the marching of time would

¹¹¹ Alsop, 'Religious Preambles', p. 23.

have had an impact on the classifications themselves. With this in mind, as long as it is remembered that they are merely indicators and not concrete conclusions, then a combination of preambles and bequests can be used to illustrate the religious viewpoints of the era.

The influence of Testator Occupation

The preambles of the wills were also examined to see if the occupation of the testator had any bearing on the religious tone. The wills of gentlemen were most frequently categorised as Protestant. In all three parishes, yeomen and husbandmen can also be said to lean in this direction. Clerks, curates and vicars did not have a strong Protestant leaning, preferring to be hesitant about their religious viewpoint and having a mixture of reformist or mixed Protestant/traditional outlook. The one will from a priest had a traditional flavour. The occupations that had a neutral stance included the gardener, joiner and the doctor of divinity. Those occupations that had a higher reformist number of wills than any other category included labourers, carpenters, masons, shepherds, tailors and weavers. Of those testators that did not specify an occupation, the highest category was neutral, with reformist and traditional following behind with similar quantities. Protestant wills were the fourth highest quantity, and the mixed categories had very few between them.

Women also tended to prefer a reformist or Protestant outlook on their wills, with the one maiden showing a reformist leaning. There were six spinsters with reformist wills and one that was traditional/reformist. Widows had nineteen with a Protestant

stance and fourteen that were reformist. Traditional wills had a total of ten, although this is insignificant in comparison with the reformist and protestant categories. It is difficult to conclude from these results as to whether the occupation of the testator had anything to do with the religious overtone of the will. The results of religious belief sorted by occupation are very mixed, and it is more likely that the year the will was made and the parish it was made in would have had a more conclusive effect upon the religious overtone of the will.

Coster in his study of three Yorkshire parishes found that preambles increased in length throughout the period, but did occupation affect preamble length?¹¹² In Northamptonshire, the occupation with the highest average number of words was that of a blacksmith. The average number of words in the preamble was fifty-two. However as there were only three wills, (eleven words in one will, fifty two in another will and the third will had ninety-three), one can see there was a wide diversity of preambles, even amongst those of the same occupation. Gentlemen averaged out at forty-five words in the preamble amongst the three parishes. When one looks at the breakdown of the wills written by gentlemen, eleven preambles ranged between fourteen and sixty-nine words, one had five words and one had 163. This result for gentlemen is more reliable than that for the blacksmiths as there were more wills to be counted, and the range of diversity amongst eleven of the wills is not as wide. The clerical profession averages thirty-three words in the preamble,

¹¹² W. Coster, 'Community, Piety and Family in Yorkshire, Wills between the Reformation and the Restoration', in Diana Wood (ed.), Life and Thought in the Northern Church c1100-1700, Essays in honour of Claire Cross, Studies in Church History, Subsidia 12, (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 522.

slightly more than the majority of rural occupations. Of the three main occupations of labourer, yeoman and husbandman, they average at fewer words in the preambles, than the educated or wealthier groups. Yeomen averaged twenty-five words, labourers twenty-one and husbandmen twenty. The diversity of the length of preambles ranges from five to sixty-five words amongst husbandmen, five to fifty-four amongst labourers and four to sixty-seven amongst yeomen. Women appear to have used few words, with spinsters averaging thirty words, widows twenty and one maiden only nine. One gentleman wrote the longest preamble, however, there were also long preambles written by a blacksmith, a vicar, a yeoman and a husbandman, as well as long preambles written by those with no specified occupation. The average preamble for all the occupations was twenty-two. The smallest preamble was only four words long and belonged to a yeoman. Ninety-three wills only had one to ten words (over 23 per cent) and thirty-two wills had no preamble (of which seventeen were nuncupative), over 8 per cent.

Occupation did not appear to influence the length of preamble used, nor did social status. Regarding the influence of preambles becoming longer throughout the period, this was inconclusive in the three Northamptonshire parishes. Preamble lengths varied between the wills and the progression of time did not appear to influence their length. Different people within the same social groupings used wide varying types of preambles, and this was due to personal choice rather than occupational standing. Although those of a higher social standing appear to have a longer preamble than

those of an agricultural and lower social standing, this is merely an average. and there are great disparities between those testators of the same occupational standard.

As can be seen from the table 6.8, the general summary indicates Kingsthorpe and Castor had a trend towards protestant and neutral categories, and Blakesley had a trend towards protestant and reformist categories. By combining the preambles and religious bequests into categories, an overall impression can be gained of the religious outlook of the three parishes. Despite the evidence in Northamptonshire of the existence of scribes and formulas, the religious overtones of the wills do give an overview of the religious mood of the testators, but not a detailed picture.

Table 6.8 – Percentages of wills religious categorisation per parish

Category	Kingsthorpe No of wills	Kingsthorpe %	Blakesley No of Wills	Blakesley %	Castor No Of Wills	Castor %	Total No	Total %
Protestant	50	31.8	39	45.3	71	48.0	160	40.9
Neutral	45	28.7	14	16.3	40	27.0	99	25.3
Reformist	19	12.1	21	24.4	22	14.9	62	15.9
Traditional	34	21.7	2	2.3	7	4.7	43	11.0
Traditional/ Reformist	8	5.1	4	4.7	3	2.0	15	3.8
Protestant/ Traditional	1	0.6	6	7.0	5	3.4	12	3.1
Total	157	100	86	100	148	100	391	100

Source: NRO Wills of Castor, Blakesley and Kingsthorpe

As has been seen from other regional examinations, conservatism was evident in the wills of the three Northamptonshire parishes. Very few individualistic religious preambles are noticeable and common strings of preambles were used with slight

variations in the wording. As would be expected the earlier years of this study showed traditional religious overtones, with the local priests having a hand in the will writing. However, there was no significant swing to committed Protestantism in the reign of Edward VI nor a significant swing back to Catholicism in the reign of Mary I. Kingsthorpe remained traditional until the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, and then the religious emphasis began to diverge. Castor and Blakesley also had a more diluted version of this pattern, although neutral/reformist categories appeared earlier in these parishes, with perhaps Castor taking an earlier more committed stance towards the reformed religion. Arguably, there appears little difference in the religious preambles used in the three parishes. Kingsthorpe preambles and religious bequests do appear to remain traditional the longest and then move to evidence of acceptance of the reformed Anglican religion. Whether this can be linked to the closed nature of the community and its close governing by the parish hierarchies it is difficult to say, however the fact that the open nature of the Blakesley and Castor communities led to a move to the Protestant religion earlier than in Kingsthorpe may be supporting evidence of this. The more mobile fluid populations of these communities would have led to the dissemination of ideas faster and the lack of parish governing by the social hierarchies would have enabled the new religious ideas to spread with little resistance. However, this is a weak argument, as all three parishes appear more conservative than proactive in their religious convictions and the effect of the differing economies and societies in each parish appear to have had little effect.

The results outlined above agree with the findings of Attreed, Spufford and Evans. The traditional preamble did slowly disappear, but as in Attreed's study it was evident until the reign of Elizabeth I. Traditional bequests were still evident after the reign of Elizabeth I indicating that bequests were closer to the heart of the testator than the preamble. The fact that traditional wills still occurred during Elizabeth I's reign disagrees with the evidence of Litzenger in Gloucestershire and is more in line with the arguments of Cross that the reforms of Edward VI did little to affect the local people and they in fact remained conservative. This study does agree with Litzenger's findings that protestant preambles only increased in popularity from the 1570's onwards. Protestant ideas take hold in Castor the earliest, possibly, as this parish was next to the cathedral town of Peterborough. The results from this analysis do little to support the findings by Mayhew in Sussex that despite slight evidence of conservatism after 1556, Protestantism was a strong force during the 1550's, and that this indicated strong support for the Reformation and all its changes.¹¹³ There appears to have been no conservative revival in the wills of the three parishes in Northamptonshire during the period under Mary, and there was no sweeping enthusiasm for Protestant doctrine under Elizabeth. In fact, the results indicate hesitant reformist religious tones rather than dedicated protestant belief. People were still conservative in their religious outlook, although this conservatism was slowly melting towards the Protestant way of thinking.

¹¹³ Mayhew, 'The progress of the reformation in East Sussex', p. 58.

This study concludes that wills can be studied carefully to give an indication of the religious beliefs of the local people. Bequests and preambles can be studied along with witnesses to understand the wider picture of the religious beliefs of a community.¹¹⁴

Through an analysis of the wills of the three parishes, the different religious moods that they cultivated can be seen, and it can be identified that each parish was a religious community within its own right. Comparisons with other regional studies further illustrate that there were also differentiations within England with different areas responding individually to the religious changes of the Reformation in their own way, and that no two places demonstrated the same religious patterns.

¹¹⁴ Marsh, 'In the name of God', p. 248.

Conclusion

This study has shown that the analysis of the wills for evidence of kinship and community relationships has been largely successful. Strong conclusions can be drawn from the evidence that (as was the case with other regional studies) effective kinship relations within early modern Northamptonshire were limited to the nuclear family; and that outside of this they were weaker and in some cases barely existed. As was also discovered by Wrightson, nuclear family ties were strong, even between children who had left home and established their own homes and their own families. Outside of this nuclear unit, wider kinship networks were not important within wills.¹ Although wider kin relationships, friendships and relations with neighbours could be close and important, these were recognised in some instances but were not technically affective as ties of kinship.

In the three Northamptonshire parishes, kinship recognition was restricted in its range. The early modern family was nuclear in structure and not extended. No matter what stage in life the testator was at, the recognition of kin in the Northamptonshire wills was largely limited to the nuclear family. This was also found in similar studies by Wrightson and Levine, Cressy, Houlbrooke, Howell, and Johnston.² Some wider kin in the Northamptonshire wills were recognised along with the nuclear family; however, they usually received small bequests and tokens

¹ K. Wrightson, English Society 1580-1680 (Chatham, 1982), pp. 50-1.

² K. Wrightson and D. Levine, Poverty, Piety in an English Village Terling, 1525-1700 (Oxford, 1995; Reprinted 1999); D. Levine and K. Wrightson, The Making of an Industrial Society, Whickham 1560-1765 (Oxford, 1991), p. 330; D. Cressy,

of affection. Some were installed as guardians of minors, to receive a bequest if the minor died prematurely. In-laws and other kin through marriage, although recognised in some of the wills, appeared to a lesser extent than kin through blood. In the Northamptonshire wills after the nuclear family, nephews received the highest number of bequests. Only in cases where a nuclear family member could not be discerned in the will, did larger bequests appear to pass to members of the wider kinship circle. In the Northamptonshire wills, older testators (at the later stages of the life cycle) recognised the widest range of kin. Those testators with young families of their own initially appear to have recognised the widest range of kin (usually with token items), but the larger bequests were still concentrated into the hands of the widow and the testator's children. The social category of a testator had limited impact on the range of kin recognised, rather kin recognition appears to have been governed by personal preference. In agreement with Spufford, wills were mainly written by married testators with young children and the need to look after this immediate family was the primary motivator for making a will.³

Money was the most commonly bequeathed item in all three parishes regardless of gender. It was widely bequeathed to a wide range of kin, as it was the quickest and easiest way to bequeath a legacy. Land or housing was concentrated into the hands

'Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England', Past and Present, 113 (1986), p. 54; R.Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750 (Oxford, 1998), p. 140; C. Howell, Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition, Kibworth Harcourt 1280-1700 (Cambridge, 1983), p. 255; J. Johnston, 'The Probate Inventories and Wills of a Worcestershire Parish 1676-1775', Midland History (1971), p. 31.

³ M. Spufford, Contrasting Communities, English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, (Cambridge, 1974; Reprinted Edition, 2000), p. 115.

of the nuclear family of wives and children, as Coldicott found in Hampshire.⁴ In agreement with Spufford, Zell and Evans, for those testators with young children, the norm was for the widow to look after and live on the land until the eldest son's maturity, from which point she was to be given house room.⁵ Only when male testators had no children or wife did bequests of this kind go to the wider kin group.

As Wrightson, Levine, Houlbrooke and Zell also discovered, close kin fulfilled the role of executor.⁶ Wrightson and Levine found in Terling that 87 per cent of the people appointed were kin, and of these 78 per cent of them were wives or children.⁷ In Northamptonshire, nearly half of the male testators appointed their wife, followed by sons, daughters, and then brothers. This focus on the nuclear family to perform this role was arguably due to the need of the testator to feel that the interests of the family were being protected. Obviously, those beneficiaries of the nuclear family would protect and ensure that legacies were performed if they also acted in the role of executor, they would ensure the speedy and efficient execution of the will.

⁴ D. Coldicott, A Long Sutton Miscellany, including a study of the Wills (1502-1856) and Probate Inventories (1558-1709) from the Parish of Long Sutton and Well, Hampshire, (London, 1979), p. 11.

⁵ Spufford, Contrasting Communities, p. 88 and pp. 112-3; M. Zell, 'Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century Wills as Historical Sources', Archives 14 (62) (1979), p. 70; and N. Evans, 'Inheritance, Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern Society as revealed by Wills' in P Riden (ed.), Probate Records and the Local Community, (Gloucester, 1985), p. 63.

⁶ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, pp. 136-137; and Zell, 'Fifteenth and sixteenth century wills', p. 67.

⁷ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, pp. 99-100.

Houlbrooke further identified that the choice of the wife as sole executrix increased after the Reformation.⁸ Coldicott discovered in Hampshire that all but two male wills appointed the widow as sole executrix (the odd two shared the role with the son).⁹ The Northamptonshire female widows relied on their sons, and then upon their daughters. Coldicott also found this to be the case, with widows appointing sons, then unmarried daughters and thirdly married daughters.¹⁰ Houlbrooke also discovered that sons were chosen more often than daughters were; however, widows were more willing to choose daughters.¹¹ Moyse in her study of Helpston in Northamptonshire found that, in line with the three parishes under investigation, wives accounted for the largest number of executors.¹² A small number of sons-in-law were also named as executors within the female wills. This choice of kin by marriage rather than female kin by blood was no doubt due to the higher legal standing males had in society. This choice of kin was obviously effective in the speedy execution of the wills, with the majority of the wills proved in less than six months. Of those wills that appointed guardians or trustees to children or legacies, the larger percentage of them chose kin. In Northamptonshire, half of the testators appointed kin and half non-kin.

The role of wider kin was limited and restricted within wills, with testators concentrating upon nuclear close kin. For other roles that needed to be performed,

⁸ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, pp. 136-7.

⁹ Coldicott, A Long Sutton Miscellany, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹¹ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 137.

¹² M. Moyse, 'Helpston in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: A study based on Wills', Northamptonshire Past and Present 9, No.4, (1997/98), p. 336.

they chose members of the nearby community. In those wills that appointed kin, wives were chosen most often within this role. The appointment of kin as executors and guardians followed similar patterns to Terling.¹³

Following Wrightson's categorisations of open and closed parishes, the Northamptonshire parishes were analysed to see if they had any evidence that supported the idea of Blakesley as an open parish, and Kingsthorpe as a closed parish. The results were also analysed to see if Castor appeared to possess a mixture of open and closed qualities, or if a specific categorization could be determined.¹⁴ Blakesley with its dispersed settlement and moving populations may explain the low number of established families. In comparison, Kingsthorpe with its closed characteristics of a stable community had a large number of established families. Castor with the high number of established families indicates a closed rather than an open community.

Blakesley also illustrates low kinship levels with the lowest number of families connected through marriage, supporting its open highly mobile society. Kingsthorpe with its higher number of marriage connections evidenced characteristics of a closed society with a small population linked closely together. Blakesley as a smaller parish had the main number of families with more entries appearing in less than ten years, because Blakesley was a demographically younger parish with younger families, and had a higher turnover of population with more mobility. Blakesley had no

¹³ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p. 193.

¹⁴ Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 171.

established houses with more than seven hearths, and a lower population than Castor and Kingsthorpe. Castor and Kingsthorpe both had houses with more than seven hearths, with Kingsthorpe having houses with the highest number of hearths. These results also support the argument of Blakesley illustrating characteristics of an open community, with Kingsthorpe illustrating a closed community. Castor falls in between Kingsthorpe and Blakesley, but has a slight leaning towards a closed community.

Testators in all three parishes recognised the nuclear family of wife, son and daughter, followed by grandchildren with the highest number of bequests. In Kingsthorpe, they recognised a slightly wider range of kin than in the other two parishes. Female testators in Blakesley generally favoured sons, but this was less marked in Castor where sons were only slightly favoured and in Kingsthorpe, there was little difference in favouritism between the siblings. This may be due to the economic and social differences between Blakesley, Castor and Kingsthorpe. With Blakesley being more pastoral and rural in nature than the other two parishes, males were favoured in the wills to ensure the survival of the family and the estate.

The small range of kin recognised in Kingsthorpe in comparison to the other two parishes, and the negligible differences between the number of bequests to sons and daughters, is supporting evidence of Kingsthorpe being a closed community. The structured nature of a closed community with its strict social structures and maintenance of social and economic order would have ensured that the community followed a strict settlement pattern regarding inheritance and the passing of estates

and land through families. Land was highly concentrated into the hands of a few, and the people closely governed by the parish hierarchies. Women would have been in no position to challenge this order and would have been unable to readdress imbalances from their husbands' wills. Blakesley and Castor appear to have been freer to recognise a wider range of kin, evidence of open communities. The loose local governing of the community by the social hierarchies combined with the mobile nature of the population would have resulted in looser controls over inheritance and a wider range of people that the testator would recognise.

The highest number of bequests outside of the kin group, besides unknown groups and supervisors and overseers, were to godchildren but these children could be classed as kin. Often godchildren were nephews, nieces or grandchildren of the testator. Gottlieb also argues that godparents were often close kin of godchildren.¹⁵ In comparison to some members of the wider kin group, bequests to godchildren are quite high. Bequests to godchildren appear to have been most important to testators with their own nuclear family, and/or grandchildren. However, the role of godparent within the community is difficult to assess due to the overall low number of bequests to godchildren. After this group, in Kingsthorpe and Castor servants were the most important group outside of the family to receive bequests. In Blakesley, servants and friends were considered equally important. Friends also appear important in Kingsthorpe and it is only in Castor that friends do not appear to figure highly at all.

¹⁵ B. Gottlieb, The Family in the Western World - from the Black Death to the Industrial Age (New York, 1993), p. 193.

Only 181 wills specified bequests to non-kin, and it could be argued that the focus of the wills was on kin rather than non-kin. Some non-kin were rewarded with quite substantial bequests. However, the majority of the bequests to non-kin involved token bequests of money or small personal items. Kingsthorpe testators recognised the greatest numbers of non-kin, followed by Castor and then Blakesley. Whether this was due to Kingsthorpe being of a closed community, and Blakesley and (to an extent) Castor of an open nature, it is difficult to establish. Testators from all three Northamptonshire parishes gave mainly money to non-kin, followed by household items and animals. The range of bequests given to non-kin do little to establish any concrete arguments concerning the pattern of gift giving to non-kin and if there are any real apparent differences in the focus of the testators of the three parishes.

Nearly half of the wills stated some bequest for the benefit of the community. The larger number of these bequests gave money, food, clothes or some other token to the poor. Houlbrooke also identified gifts to the poor as the most common type of pious bequest.¹⁶ The bells of the local church were also a common subject of bequests in wills, with money or some other token given to them either so they could be rung, repaired or maintained. Actual specific different community bequests for the benefit of the local community only totalled four. These involved the mending of a causeway, a ridge and the establishment of a school. Charitable bequests were more often seen from male testators than female testators.

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, Death, Religion and the Family, p. 128.

Regarding the role that non-kin played in the wills, the role of supervisor and overseer and the witnesses to wills were mainly fulfilled by non-kin. They also performed in the role of guardian or trustee to an almost equal extent as kin. Non-kin were often chosen in the instances of witness or supervisor, as they tended to attend the testator's death, due to them living close by and being members of the local community. Neighbours, servants, friends and the scribe would all have attended due to the often swift nature of death and the lack of time for wider kin to attend. Furthermore, relationships between members of the community would have been in many cases stronger than with wider kin. Houlbrooke for the southern region and James for Durham also identified that friends and neighbours were frequently chosen to perform the role of overseer or supervisor.¹⁷ Wrightson and Levine in their analyses of Whickham and Terling identified that neighbours and friends appeared most frequently as witnesses.¹⁸

Only a very small number of wills mentioned anything regarding debts. Nearly three-quarters of the debt and credit loans made in the community were between non-kin members. In Terling only 17 per cent of the debts were between kin, 67 per cent were between neighbours and 16 per cent involved people outside of Terling.¹⁹

Cressy also argues that financial loans were more common among neighbours and

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 137, and M. James, Family, Lineage and Civil Society – A Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region 1500-1640 (London, 1974), p. 22.

¹⁸ Levine and Wrightson, Whickham, p. 286; and Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

¹⁹ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 100.

friends than kin.²⁰ The Northamptonshire testators follow the same pattern, for within those wills that detailed debts, 67.9 per cent involved non-kin and 28.6 per cent involved kin. Within the local community, it can be seen from the wills how little women were involved in the three Northamptonshire parishes in networks of debt and credit. However, it can be tentatively suggested that those females who needed loans of money sought it from the local community, whereas those females who lent money lent it mainly to kin. Here we catch a tantalising glimpse of the networks of friendship and neighbourliness that existed between early modern women.

The fact that non-kin were relied upon for money lending and in the roles of supervisor, overseer, witness and to some extent as guardians or trustees, illustrates how shallow the kinship levels were in the three parishes, and agrees with Wrightson and Levine's findings in Terling.²¹ Only the role of executor was fulfilled by kin and this was mainly restricted to immediate close kin. With such a low level of kin connection within the three parishes, community relations must have been based on high levels of non-kin interaction. Community strengths must have been built on interpersonal relationships between neighbours, friends, guilds, and members of society, rather than blood ties or ties of marriage. The low number of marriage connections in the families also illustrates the narrowness of kin relations within the three Northamptonshire parishes. The result of 40 per cent family connections is close to Terling's result of 39.3 per cent, illustrates how

²⁰ Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction, p. 51.

²¹ Zell, 'Fifteenth and sixteenth century wills, p. 67.

shallow the kinship levels were in the three parishes. However, when compared to Whickham's kinship links of 13.6 per cent between householders, Terling and the Northamptonshire parishes appear to have had more significant kinship networks.²²

Widows heavily dominated the wills of female testators, encompassing three-quarters of them. Female testators generally died later than the majority of the males. Bequests were of a more intimate and personal nature, and were often concentrated in the hands of their surviving children. McIntosh agrees to an extent with this by arguing that women left bequests that were more personal than those left by men, because they were more involved personally within the kin group or community.²³ Whether these bequests were particular to the woman or an adherence to the legacies outlined by the deceased father it is difficult to ascertain, due to the lack of paired married couple's wills. It can be seen (as was the case with the male wills) that the bequests were concentrated into the hands of the nuclear family; although the females do show a slight leaning towards other female kin in comparison to the male wills. Whereas males concerned themselves with land and houses, females deal more with money and household type effects. Money accounts for the greatest number of bequests to kin in all three parishes. What is also noticeable is that the female testators recognised a smaller range of kin than males.

²² Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 191.

²³ M. McIntosh, 'The Diversity of Social Capital in English Communities 1300-1640 (With a glance at modern Nigeria)', Journal of Interdisciplinary History 39 (1999), p. 472.

Nearly half of the bequests from female testators in Kingsthorpe were to non-kin. In Castor, only a third were to non-kin. In Blakesley, less than a third were to non-kin. Arguably, the fact that Kingsthorpe was a closed society, affected the numbers of non-kin recognised. The closed society of Kingsthorpe resulted in little population movement and closer interaction with neighbours and other members of the community, whereas in the more open societies of Castor and Blakesley, the fluidity of population movement resulted in little close relations with other members of the community. Consequently, in the open societies, relations between non-kin were not as closely maintained or nurtured.

Regarding the position of women, in Kingsthorpe male testators gave approximately twice as many bequests of land or houses to sons in comparison to daughters. Sons also received more bequests of animals and farm tools, with daughters receiving more bequests of household items and only slightly fewer bequests of money. In Kingsthorpe, wives received a substantial number of bequests of the land or house and the residue of the estate, in fact more than their sons do. In the wills of female testators, sons received slightly more bequests than daughters did, but sons and daughters received equal bequests of land or houses. Females appear to be trying to address the disparity of the bequests of male testators. The female testators of Castor gave equal bequests to sons and daughters. Daughters received more bequests of crops, clothes and household items, whereas sons received more bequests of animals, furniture, money and the residue. In Blakesley, there was little difference between bequests to sons and daughters. Concerning provision for widows, a large proportion of the male testators specified a life interest in the estate, sometimes

limited to the maturity of the inheriting child. This was also the case in Terling, where widows with young children received a life interest, or an interest until the child reached adulthood.²⁴

Wives played the main role as executrices in the wills of the male testators from the three parishes under study. Wives were also appointed guardians to minor children and holders of children's portions. Wives were appointed as guardian in half of those wills that appointed them. Often these wives had no restrictions laid upon them, but in a small number of cases, wives were asked not to remarry, and if they did, they would lose their original inheritance. Regarding acting as witnesses, women only accounted for an insignificant percentage in the wills. Male and female testators undeniably focused on males to act as witnesses rather than females.

Regarding supervisors and overseers, females do not appear in this role in any of the wills of the male testators. If one also examines the wills of female testators, females do not appear here either in these roles.

Jointures are mentioned infrequently in the Northamptonshire wills, indicating that these may not have been used in the three Northamptonshire parishes. This may also be because the legacies to children and wives were specifically detailed in the male wills and were in line with a previous jointure arrangement. It may also be due to the fact that the volume of wills are so low from the higher ranks of male society, that there are too small a number of wills from this level to illustrate effectively the use

²⁴ Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, p. 97.

of jointure within the three parishes. Arguably, in the case of the three Northamptonshire parishes, jointures were used on few occasions, and it can be suggested that jointures were not a common feature within the inheritance strategies of Northamptonshire testators.

The parishes were individual units within their own rights with unique birth and death rates. The populations of the three parishes were small and families appeared and disappeared with great frequency. Despite the odd exception, the hearth tax records indicate that most of the populations of all three parishes were poor, with the majority of the houses only having one or two hearths. As all three parishes display evidence of a highly agrarian economy, this indicates that the appearance and disappearance of families was due to the high mobility of the people dependent on the instability of an agrarian economy and the need to find food and work.

The parishes of Castor and Kingsthorpe share the common factor that the majority of families appear in the registers between eleven and forty-nine years. Blakesley as a smaller parish had the larger number of families with entries appearing in less than ten years. Mobility within the parishes was high, and this could not have lent itself well to maintaining kinship links outside of the core nuclear family unit.

Nottinghamshire and Willingham in Cambridgeshire also showed evidence of this high mobility of the people.²⁵ Youings also points out that, ‘what is surprising, and

²⁵ Mitson, ‘The Significance of Kinship Networks in the seventeenth century: South West Nottinghamshire, in C. Phythian-Adams (ed.), Societies, Cultures and Kinship 1580-1850 (London, 1996) and Spufford Contrasting Communities.

perhaps serves to underline the high degree of migration, is how few blood relations people had in their own parishes.²⁶ Castor had the highest estimated population out of the three parishes; however, its growth was not as strong as Kingsthorpe and Blakesley. Blakesley had the fastest estimated population increase during the period, due to the low number of burials, with Kingsthorpe second and Castor third. The three parishes do not show any specific mortality years, although Castor witnessed four years with higher burial rates than normal, Kingsthorpe witnessed five and Blakesley a possible three, though they were not sufficiently severe enough to have an everlasting devastating effect. All three parishes show completely different years to the others in these years of higher burials than the norm, indicating that Northamptonshire did not witness any incidents to affect the mortality rate.

In Blakesley and Castor males on average lived between the ages of thirty-one to thirty-nine whereas in Kingsthorpe they lived longer between the ages of thirty-seven to forty-eight. Arguably, the closed community characteristics of a stable population, low mobility and concentrated land holdings increased the life span of the testators in Kingsthorpe.

Less consistent than the conclusions regarding kinship and community are those conclusions concerning religion and the impact it had upon the lives of the people. Due to the evidence in Northamptonshire of the existence of scribes and formulas, the religious overtones of the wills only give an overview of the religious mood of

²⁶ J. Youings, The Penguin Social History of Britain in Sixteenth Century England, (London, 1991), p. 340.

the testators rather than a concrete result. However, it could be suggested that although the scribe wrote the will, the testator would still need to agree with the preamble, as the will would be read back to them in the presence of witnesses before signing.²⁷ Similar to other regional examinations by historians, conservatism was evident in the wills of the three Northamptonshire parishes.²⁸ Very few individualistic religious preambles were noticeable and common preambles were used with slight variations in the wording. Houlbrooke argues that the majority of testators would have merely conformed to official religious policy, which explains the lack of religious variation. Only resolutely committed religious testators would have wanted overtly religious preambles.²⁹ The traditional preamble slowly disappeared and traditional bequests were still evident after the reign of Elizabeth I indicating that bequests were closer to the heart of the testator than the preamble. Protestant preambles only increased in popularity from the 1570s onwards. Protestant ideas took hold in Castor the earliest, arguably, because this parish was next to the developing urban town of Peterborough, which contained the county's cathedral, and thus more open to wider religious influences.

There appears to have been no conservative revival in the wills of the three parishes in Northamptonshire during the period under Mary I, and there was no sweeping enthusiasm for Protestantism during the reign of Elizabeth I. The results indicate a

²⁷ D. Beaver, 'Sown in Dishonour, Raised in Glory, Death, Ritual and Social Organization in Northern Gloucestershire 1590-1690', *Social History* 17 (1992), pp. 396-7.

²⁸ For example, see Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, Zell, 'Fifteenth and sixteenth century wills', Attreed, 'Preparation for death'.

²⁹ Houlbrooke, '*Death, Religion and the Family*', p. 120.

hesitant reformist religious tone in the wills. People were still conservative, although this conservatism was slowly melting towards the Protestant ideology. Kingsthorpe remained traditional until the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, and then the religious emphasis began to diverge. In Castor and Blakesley, there was a more diluted version of this pattern, although neutral/reformist categories appeared earlier in wills from these parishes. Castor took an earlier more committed stance towards the reformed religion, with the first Protestant will from all three parishes being written in the reign of Edward VI in Castor.

Priests would have acted as scribes prior to the Elizabethan religious settlement and the final eradication of the Catholic Church. The impact of the Reformation led to the disappearance of clergy acting as scribes in wills and their replacement by local people. This change led to a change in the religious emphasis in the dedication of the soul and the use of an increasing range of preambles. Each parish was a religious community in its own right, approaching the religious changes of the Reformation in its own manner. Whether the traditional emphasis on the wills from Kingsthorpe and the Protestant emphasis on the wills from Blakesley and Castor can be linked to the open and closed nature of the communities it is difficult to say. The open nature of the Blakesley and Castor communities may have led to a move to the Protestant religion earlier than in Kingsthorpe, due to the high mobility of the people and arguable lack of effective social control, which led to the introduction through this mobility of new religious ideas into these parishes earlier than in Kingsthorpe.

Overall, the analysis of the wills present a useful if somewhat limited picture. An idea has been developed of those relationships outlined in the wills between the testator and other members of the family and community, but they do not present the whole picture. The testator may already have settled items and passed inheritances on before the will was written, and these relationships are not recorded in the will. To capture a wider picture other sources need to be found and utilised. The wills present a distorted picture, and many important personal relationships may have been overlooked. An analysis of wills needs to be supported by other documentation, which although still does not give a complete picture it still acts as supporting evidence. The parish registers can illustrate the kinship density within communities, through the inter-marriage of families, and the baptism and burial rates of its inhabitants and the hearth tax figures can also act as supporting evidence for the wealth or poverty of an area.

Thus it can be strongly concluded, that if one keeps in mind that wills only present a small proportion of the routes that inheritance could pass to members of the kin group and community, then they can be used to demonstrate that kinship recognition was largely confined to the nuclear family, with some smaller recognition of the wider kin network. The bulk of the testators were men with young families. Kin were active in the roles of executor and guardians within the wills. Non-kin were active in the roles of witness and supervisor or overseer, and in the networks of debt and credit in the local society. Wider kin were sometimes noted with token bequests, and in those infrequent cases of larger bequests were rewarded with these in cases where no apparent nuclear family unit appeared to be present. Female wills followed

the lead of male wills, with a slight difference in that their bequests showed slightly more favouritism to other female kin, and the bequests appeared to be of a smaller more intimate nature. Regarding the allegiance of the three parishes to the open or closed categorisations outlined by Wrightson, the results support the idea of Blakesley as an open society and Kingsthorpe as a closed society. Castor was a little more difficult to place, with it demonstrating evidence supportive of both categories; however, the results show a slight leaning towards an open society more than a closed one.

Weaker conclusions were drawn arguing that religious change as evidenced in the wills was slow and conservative, with the people of the three Northamptonshire parishes accepting the religious changes of the country slowly and cautiously. The religious mood of the nation as evidenced in wills is a dubious and limited method of analysis. The existence of scribes and formulaic preambles, make it difficult to believe that true religious sentiments are being expressed by the testator. Although conclusions have been drawn regarding the religious sentiments expressed in the wills, this may have been stronger if it had been supported by other documentation such as church court records. Further work will need to be done on these records to underline the conclusions ascertained from the wills.

To examine whether the results in this thesis do outline a general pattern for Northamptonshire, further research would need to be undertaken for the other parishes in the county. Using the same methods of analysis, the surviving wills would need to be analysed and compared to the three original parishes analysed in

this thesis and the other parishes within the county. Although an attempt has been made to suggest a county pattern by analysing three parishes from the north, south and central parts of the county, stronger conclusions could be developed if more than these three parishes were analysed. Along with this, the parish registers could also be analysed to assess kinship density. Furthermore, if registers from neighbouring parishes are examined, one can also assess the level of migration between parishes. This has been difficult to do with three parishes from separate parts of the county. By analysing all the parishes within the county, a more expansive picture can thus be developed. Regarding the religious sentiments expressed within the wills, this will also benefit from a countywide analysis. By analysing neighbouring parishes, the evidence of scribes along with the frequency of common preambles can be examined to see if they were parish or county based. Furthermore, a detailed examination of the church court records from all the parishes may help to develop a more concrete picture of the religious sentiments of the Northamptonshire people.

However, this initial examination of the three parishes within this thesis does give an excellent detailed overview of the kinship, community and religious patterns to be found within Northamptonshire, and it is only a suggestion that by analysing the remaining parishes this would bring a more detailed and expansive conclusion to this work.

It can be argued in line with Cressy, Amussen and Johnston, that the wills illustrate a wealth of information, and when combined with other documents, allow a glimpse

into the lives of individuals in the early modern period.³⁰ Furthermore, the evidence from the wills demonstrate the differing reactions of the testators with regard to family, kinship, community and gender in an age of social and religious change. The evidence in this thesis from the surviving wills, combined with the records of the parish registers and the hearth tax records; provide a valuable insight into the lives of the people from the three Northamptonshire parishes under study, which effectively complements the work undertaken on other regions of the country.

³⁰ Johnston, 'Social Change in the Eighteenth Century: The Evidence in Wills from Six Lincolnshire Parishes 1661-1812', Lincolnshire History and Archaeology 27 (1992), p. 29, Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society, Gender and class in Early Modern England, (Columbia, 1988), p. 81; Cressy, 'Kinship and kin interaction', p. 59.

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