

They may throw some light on the subject of how close and affectionate family relationships were. Sara Samon of Milton-next-Sittingbourne, whose husband Henry was drowned in 1612, was evidently greatly shocked at the news of his death. In her account of his estate, she says

'Whereas this Accomptant beinge at the time of the death of her said husband . . . verie great with childe, did upon the firste report of that heavy accident fall presently in travell and was delivered some 5 weekes or a moneth at least before her time and that not without great danger of her life; she (although by God's mercy she escaped death) was notwithstandinge soe exceeding dangerously sicke that for a longe time together she laye without all memory or understandinge and past all hope of life, Insomuch that the poore weake infant wherof she was at that time (by God's grace) delivered was faine to be presently put forth to nurse.'

Sara Samon was never able to nurse her child herself, and a total of £3 10s. had been spent for wet-nursing, at 2s. 6d. a week.⁵ Mary King also evidently felt affection for her husband Edward, of St. John's in Thanet. When he was taken ill at an inn in London in 1638, she travelled 'in the night . . . to make haste to be with ye said deceased before he died', although like Sara Samon she was pregnant at the time.⁶

Other accounts give a different picture of family relationships. Thomas Badcocke of Patrixbourne died before 1681. By the time the account of his estate was presented to the court, his widow Mary had remarried. Out of the total estate of £227 17s. 3d., she had claimed her own marriage portion of £60, and placed out in different households Thomas's three sons and one daughter, aged from five to fourteen.⁷ The money paid with each child suggested that their respective masters and mistresses were expected to keep them until they were 15 or 16, spending £2-£3 a year on their keep. This splitting up of siblings at an early age must have influenced their attitude to family and kin in later life. How often would children like the Badcockes see their mother and each other once they had been placed out separately? Would they have lost touch with their families by the time they reached adulthood?

In contrast, the manner in which the balance of an estate was distributed, at the discretion of the judge and usually detailed at the foot of the account, seems to demonstrate a high regard for family relationships. This is probably accounted for in part by the particular inheritance customs of Kent. Usually, all children received an equal

⁵ PRC2/18/75.

⁶ PRC20/11/37.

⁷ PRC2/39/9.

share of the balance. Minor sons' shares were paid at 21, minor daughters' usually at 18 or marriage, whichever was earlier. Sometimes, when sons were to inherit land, daughters received a larger share of the money. Married daughters who had already been given portions had smaller shares than their younger sisters. A son whose apprenticeship had cost his parents or guardian a considerable sum might be awarded less than his brothers. If a son or daughter predeceased his or her father, his or her share was divided equally among his or her children.

When the deceased left no children, the estate was carefully divided among all surviving kin – aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces. Portions were set aside for relatives who had not been heard of for some time. This scrupulous distribution was taken too far in the view of some next of kin. When Nicholas De Vincke of Canterbury died about 1597, the £26 11s. 10d. balance of his estate was distributed between his sister Jane Snellard and his half sister and brother Catherine le Condre and Peter Ducke, the two latter being awarded £4 each. Jane Snellard objected, claiming that Peter Ducke 'was and is in service with the Spaniard, or under the Spanish dominions in the Lowe Contrey, and a Rebell unto her Majestie, and that it is uncerten whether he be now liveing or not, and that both the said Catherine le Condre and the said Peter Ducke were or are but the brother and sister by the half blood onely unto the said deceased, and such as the said deceased in his lifetime never shoed any affeccon or liking unto.'⁸ Richard Webb of St. Lawrence-in-Thamet, who died in 1639, was another who had little affection for his half brother and sister. When he realised that his illness was likely to be fatal, he told his aunt and cousin that he wished all his goods except one chest to go to his full sister Mary, 'whome he intirely loved'. The chest was to go to his half brother Henry Baker, 'whome in the opinion and observation of his said Aunt and Cozen he the deceased very little esteemed of.'⁹

If a man or woman died while administering someone else's estate, accounting for these goods could become extremely complicated. In the early 1590s, John Kemp and John Morys both named as their executor a woman called Rooke. She died before completing the execution and her estate and those of Kemp and Morys passed to Thomas Rooke. He also died before completing the administration, and the task of disentangling four separate estates fell to Margery Rooke.¹⁰ The frequency of remarriage also complicated the task of

⁸ PRC2/9/459.

⁹ PRC1/3/58.

¹⁰ PRC21/9/264.