Introduction

In the summer 1695, a masked woman hurried into a house on Little Queen Street in Piccadilly in London and upstairs to an apartment she had rented by the day. She was accompanied by three women: her maid, Dinah Alsop; a midwife, Mrs Richardson; and a nurse, Mrs Pleasant. That night, as London bustled beneath her, still masked, she went into labour. As she cried out in pain, her mask slipped, revealing her identity. She was Anne Gerard, the Countess of Macclesfield, wife of Charles Gerard, a prominent army officer, who had recently been released from the Tower on suspicion for his involvement in the treasonous Rye House plot of 1683 and Monmouth Rebellion of 1685. Between two and three o'clock in the morning she gave birth to a baby girl she named after herself, Anne. That evening, while she lay in the front room recovering, her baby was hastily christened in the back room.

As the House of Lords would later hear, the baby was not her husband's. The father was a 'tall Gent' that had frequented Beaufort House from time to time (the residence in Chelsea that she had been living in alone, separated from her husband for a decade). He was rumoured to be Richard Savage, an army officer and fourth Earl Rivers.[1] Mother and baby remained in Little Queen Street for three or four days before Mrs Richardson took little Anne to Walthamstow to look after her at her own house while the countess returned to Beaufort House as if nothing had happened. Baby Anne was not given the last name Mason (the countess' maiden name) nor Gerard (the countess' married name) but Savage.[2] Two years later, the countess gave birth to another baby, a little boy called Richard, in almost identical circumstances, although this time, his last name was written in the baptism register as Smith. Although the playwright and poet Richard Savage later claimed to be Anne and Richard's illegitimate offspring, Anne kept their paternity a secret until her death and claimed both had died as babies.

[1] ODNB.

[2] 'An Act for dissolving ye Marriage betweene Charles Earle of Maclesfeld, and Anne his Wife and to Illegitimate the Children of the said Anne', Parliamentary Archives, Palace of Westminster, London, HL/PO/JO/10/1/496/1197.

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We know about Anne and her clandestine births because her husband, Charles, petitioned parliament to disinherit the countess and her 'spurious Issue'. He was granted a bill of divorce, the first of its kind, in January 1698, allowing him to marry again and ensuring that she and her children lost the title of Macclesfield. The case captured the imaginations of early modern writers. The sordid details of the disastrous marriage and the countess' infidelity were broadcast in a court case that called on servants, midwives, nurses and even the minister that baptised the children to give testimonies. This, in turn, became the subject of numerous sensationalist pamphlets that were eagerly consumed by literate Londoners. Childbearing was of great interest in early modern England at all levels of society.

Although Charles' case and resulting divorce might at first glance seem to herald the beginning of what has been perceived as a dissolution or disintegration of marriage and family from the seventeenth century onwards, in the form of divorce, it is in fact quite the opposite. The case enshrined in law an expectation that women would carry out the work of childbearing exhaustively and intensively solely for their husband's name and family and they would do so with just the right amount of fuss. Beneath the vitriolic insults that Charles and his supporters hurled at her was another complex and longstanding notion that the material benefits of marriage for women were entirely conditional on the performance of this procreative work. This was called generation in early modern England, a term that pre-dates our modern 'reproduction' and refers to all the stages of making babies.[3] This kind of capacious terminology is apparent in the titles of childbearing guides of the period that were addressed to 'teeming' or 'breeding' women.

The Macclesfields' court case lays bare for the historian the profound instability of the system of generation that had huge stakes for the entire family of a couple but was a process that mothers were very often represented (inaccurately) as the sole workers in. Generation redounded to family name, and by extension the stability of households and the Church, but it could not be easily or effortlessly managed, however much some authorities might have wished otherwise. Anne through her 'open Adultery', getting pregnant by another man but also more importantly 'using vile Practices to have her spurious Issue imposed and obtruded upon him [Charles]', or in other words, dragging the family name through the mud, had endangered the orderly performance of gendered domestic labour, inheritance and lineage.[4] In a

[3] Nick Hopwood, Rebecca Flemming and Lauren Kassell, 'Reproduction in History', in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.

[4] Anonymous, *Reasons for the Earl of Maclesfeld's Bill in Parliament for Dissolving the Marriage between him and his wife, and illegitimating their spurious issue* (1697).

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1685 letter to Anne, Charles described how he had tolerated her 'youth and folly' initially, but once she taunted him by saying she would never have his children, pretended to get pregnant every time he went out of town and spoke about Charles and *his* family with 'scorn and contempt', he resolved to leave her. Within this we can see a cultural assumption that some parts of having babies ought to be made public and celebrated – through announcing pregnancy to family and friends and including them in the rituals of delivery, Christening and Churching (the ceremony after birth in which a newly delivered woman went to Church to give thanks) – and some parts kept just between a couple. Poor male sexual performance or infertility, for example, was to be shrouded from even close family members and shared only between husbands and wives. Anne violated this norm.

The fact that the countess had given birth and christened her babies secretly was taken as incriminating evidence that she been unfaithful *and* she had deliberately sought to pass off her illegitimate children as legitimate. When Elizabeth Wiget, one of the women present at the birth of Richard, was asked why she thought the woman she had attended was not of 'Quality', or of good means and repute, she remarked 'I thought she would have had soem Woman friend with her & not have trusted to a stranger.' John Smith, when questioned about Richard's baptism, noted that he assumed the infant was 'base born' because there was no one else there, alluding to the sinfulness of his conception as well as his perceived lowly social status. For middling and elite individuals in England during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries there was an expectation that birth would be an event witnessed by others and documented in family paperwork. The tension between displaying certain parts of domestic life for the good of family name and status, and the insistence that women keep other bits secret, can, through careful work, be parsed out in all kinds of documentary evidence in family archives. This book shows that these cultural and social expectations shaped the experience of having babies even whilst the minds and bodies of men and women might not live up to these lofty ideals.

Prior to the Enlightenment, historians have argued that women were wholly in control of childbirth and that this took place away from family interests and incursion. This is because the chambers that women gave birth in were usually female-only. When 1970s sociologists and historians started being interested in women's experiences in the past, parturition seemed an obvious focus and case study for understanding the experience of being a woman. Having babies was represented as uniquely central to women's social and biological selves in the past and present. The moment at which men entered the birthing chamber in the eighteenth century as man-midwives was represented as a turning point where women irrevocably lost bodily agency, a trend that was reified and intensified by the formation of lying-in institutions in the eighteenth century

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and then the rise of hospital birth at the end of the nineteenth century.[5] By attending births, men supposedly disrupted the feminine, supportive, intuitive and importantly, private, ceremony of childbirth.[6] In some accounts, male practitioners literally killed off their competitors by accusing female midwives of being witches.[7] Whereas previous accounts posit the eighteenth century as the moment at which science, medicine and rationality replaced superstition and ignorance, these feminist accounts of birth configured these developments as harbingers of patriarchal intrusion and interference.[8]

Making Babies in Early Modern England takes a long frame that considers not just the moment of delivery but the ways that family members shaped and made the experience of generation from conception to after-birth care. The book examines the paperwork that early modern families created that documented this process (albeit in tellingly fragmented or selective ways). These records reveal that making babies was a lengthy, complex and fluid process that men were far more active in directing and producing than has previously been accounted for. Despite this, women *and* men sought to write about childbearing in ways that showed their household as mirroring the prevailing ideals of domestic labour, which were neatly and discretely gendered where men provided and women laboured to birth, heal, clothe and feed family members. Women were expected and compelled to do the majority of the work of bearing children, including the difficult and attentive medical work and care involved in the months after birth. Although this laborious work was not always properly credited, as Anne's case reveals, it was not inevitable that women would take on this work gladly for their husband's family and name. This was one reason why making babies was such a preoccupation of early modern households.

Whilst this book finds that having babies embedded women literally and figuratively within family structures, other historians have suggested that generation allowed them to circumvent domestic expectations and worlds. Rachel Weil summarises that because women knew more about having babies than men in the period, they could 'speak authoritatively on a matter of political importance' to raise questions about power, privilege and property

[5] For a summary of scholarship, see: Salim Al-Gailani, 'Hospital Birth', in Hopwood, Kassell and Flemming, ed., *Reproduction*; Ann Oakley, *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), is a particularly notable feminist critque of institutionalised maternity care.

[6] Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23.

[7] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (Oyster Bay, NY: Glass Mountain Pamphlets, 1971).

[8] See, for example: Oakley, *The Captured Womb*.

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rights.[9] Adrian Wilson pithily claims that 'Before childbirth belonged to medicine, it belonged to women', distinguishing between the social practices of delivery that were attended by only women and the involvement of men as necessarily making it more scientific and medical. The majority of medical encounters in the period were at the outset domestic.[10] These worlds of professional and domestic medicine, this book finds, were far from distinct. Linda Pollock and Laura Gowing who have cautioned that the delivery room was not unconditionally supportive, still see it as a female world, albeit not necessarily a peaceable one.[11] Midwives and other women attending a birth might police and enforce certain practices and behaviours and the social rituals of childbirth like gossips (female friends, neighbours and family members who assisted and accompanied women while they laboured) and feasting were denied to those who were unmarried.

Single pregnant women were poked, prodded, inspected and often forced to give birth outside. Anne too of course was forced to rent a room away from the marital home in order to give birth to her illegitimate child. This option of renting a room was not available to most unwed mothers. In these accounts, getting pregnant within wedlock offered women privacy and agency, and was an experience that at least temporarily removed them from the family. Elite married women most certainly had a more positive experience of childbearing than the impoverished and unmarried women that have been central in other accounts, but this book shows the ways in which women's extraordinary and exhaustive labour was often subsumed within broader familial narratives rather than attributed to them as individuals. In doing so, it resists the distinction that has been present in previous accounts between parts of family life that were political, public and almost exclusively male and those that were domestic, private and almost exclusively female. The analogies that reformers and others made between the family and the state – that the disorder of the former would lead to the disarray of the latter – were ideological and artificial rather than structural and organic. This framework allowed those furthering a certain social and political agenda to link those hierarchies to a substantially less

[9] Rachel J. Weil, 'The Politics of Legitimacy and the Warming-Pan Scandal', in *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 87.

[10] Adrian Wilson, 'The Ceremony of Childbirth and Its Interpretation', in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McLaren*, ed. Valerie Fildes (London: Routledge, 1990), 70.

[11] Linda A. Pollock, 'Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England', *Social History* 22, no. 3 (1997): 286–306; Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Laura Gowing, 'Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present* 156 (1997): 87–115.

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contested and more familiar patriarchal order.[12] The family, it appears, was constantly shifting and contested but nevertheless an important force in identity, community, religion and governance. As the Macclesfields' case indicates, law alone was not sufficient to clarify the complexities of the early modern family project of proper and godly procreation. The domestic world was central to male positioning and fashioning, but not always in ways that were commensurate or even compatible with women's labour.

This book considers childbearing even, or perhaps especially, within domestic spaces to be as much a medical experience as a social one, and in doing so, frames these efforts as 'work', or as Mary Fissell has suggested 'bodywork'.[13] It becomes clear that generation required the input of more than simply a mother and more than a father too. Making and reproducing one (elite) family often drew on the work and effort of others who were not related by blood but nevertheless considered part of the 'family' when it was advantageous to employers. Early modern people commonly referred to those who lived in the same confines as them 'family', even, and perhaps especially, if they were servants.[14] Whilst this has often been raised in relation to the subject of affect, this terminology is accidentally revealing. Servants were very often physically and emotionally involved in sustaining and furthering their employers' lineage. As Sarah Knott has noted, we can learn much from the work of anthropologists on 'shadow mothers', 'care chains' and 'alloparenting'.[15] *Making Babies in Early Modern England* is not just about what we now might term biological parents but about nurses, servants, friends and midwives, even though which tasks and activities made up their work as individuals is often unclear. Although it may have been more favourable for families to represent babies as exclusively raised by their mothers, this was rarely the case. It is important to note that although this book uses the term 'woman' to describe those who got pregnant and gave birth to babies because those are the terms that early modern people used, it simultaneously acknowledges that not all mothers birth and not all people who give birth are female. Assuming the opposite, however, was (and continues to be) a powerful thread in normative representations of making babies.

[12] Susan D. Amussen, 'Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560–1725', in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 196–217.

[13] For more on 'bodywork' and its intersection with women's (especially medical) work more broadly, see: Mary E. Fissell, 'Women, Health, and Healing in Early Modern England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82, no. 1 (2008), 10–12.

[14] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[15] Sarah Knott, 'Theorizing and Historicizing Mothering's Many Labours', *Past & Present* 246, no. Supplement 15 (2020): 1–24.

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The Politics of Generation

Having babies was a veritable obsession in the seventeenth century and intersected with a variety of political, religious and social hierarchies. Protestant Reformers advocated godly marriage as an appropriate and pious route to salvation in contrast to celibacy, which was lauded by the pre- and counter-Reformation Church. Bearing children was 'a thing so much needful to all mankind', the authors of a 1656 guide to giving birth, *The Compleat Midwifes Practice*, explained.[16] Robert Barret reminded readers in his 1699 *A Companion for Midwives* that the 'whole World is govern'd by' the womb's 'fertile product'.[17] John Oliver, a churchman and the president of Magdalen College, Oxford, wrote in the epistle of his 1663 *A Present for Teeming Women* that 'much of the comfort of the present generation, and the honour of God, and future being of his Church in succeeding generations, is concerned in those Infants un-borne.'[18] In 1571, the second tome of sermons by the Church of England to be preached in church every Sunday instructed parishioners in the 'Homily on the State of Matrimony' that marriage would help individuals 'avoid Fornication' and bring 'forth fruit'. These children were blessings from God and ought to be 'brought up' by godly parents 'in the knowledge of Gods word.' This would ensure that 'the knowledge of God and true Religion might be delivered by Succession from one to another.'[19] Martin Luther preached that Eve, and by extension women, had caused the Fall, and that they could be sanctified by bearing children.[20] Childbirth was therefore intertwined not only with the survival of the Church but with the practice and experience of devotion in early modern England.

Early modern people had plenty of obvious models of the devastating consequences of childlessness. Henry VIII's literally deadly attempts to secure an heir indirectly caused the Reformation. After the Restoration in 1660, childlessness again dominated the conversation around Charles II's throne

[16] Thomas Chamberlayne, *The Complete Midwife's Practice Englarged, In the most Weighty and High Concernments of the Birth of Man Containing a perfect Directory, or Rules for Midwives and Nurses* (London: 1656), 1.

[17] Robert Barret, *A Companion for Midwives, Child-bearing Women, and Nurses Directing them how to Perform their Respective Offices: Together with an Essay, Endeavouring to Shew the Influence of Moral Abuses upon the Health of Children* (London: 1699), 59.

[18] John Oliver, *A Present for Teeming Women, or, Scripture-directions for Women with Child How to Prepare for the Houre of Travel. Written first for the private use of a Gentlewoman of Quality in the West, and now Published for the Common Good* (London: 1663), sig. A2v.

[19] 'An Homylee of the state of Matrimonie', in *Certaine sermons or homilies appoynted to be read in churches in the time of the late Queene Elizabeth of famous memory and now reprinted for the use of private families, in two parts. The second Tome of Homilees, of such matters as were promised, and instituted in the former part of Homilees* (London: 1571), 476.

[20] Ulinka Rublack, 'Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany', *Past & Present* 150, no. 1 (1996): 84–110.

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and lack of heir. His wife, Catherine of Braganza, had three miscarriages. He was succeeded by his brother, James II, who also struggled to produce heirs. His wife, Mary of Modena, similarly suffered a series of miscarriages and still births, which were gossiped about in court and in pamphlets that speculated about an attempted Catholic coop of the British crown. When Mary gave birth to a living, healthy baby boy in 1688, James II's enemies fostered a conspiracy that she had in fact had a stillborn child that was swapped out for a 'pretender' in a warming-pan. The details of Mary's pregnancy and birth became central parts of public discourse, and the scandal a key contributor to the Glorious Revolution.[21] Queen Anne's eighteen pregnancies, which ended either in miscarriage, stillbirth or premature death between 1684 and 1700, intersected with her father's own fertility troubles and her childlessness and associated poor health was an omnipresent part of her reign from 1702 onwards. Conception and birth were not only practically essential to the perpetuation of political stability but used to contextualise and understand civic events. Tales of babies born with missing heads, as animals, in multiples of 365 or with deformities were common in pamphlets and ballads exploring the diabolical and disorderly, and parliamentary and religious factionalism. What could go wrong in generation provided a model for thinking about what might go wrong in Heaven and on Earth.[22]

These contexts fed into a pervasive fear that fertility was flagging and the population dwindling in the period. Satirical pamphlets such as the 1643 *The Mid-wives just Petition* fretted about the 'naturall depopulation of towns and Cities', especially in London, which would become 'very thin of people'.[23]

[21] Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 230–243; Corrine Harol, 'Misconceiving the Heir: Mind and Matter in the Warming Pan Propaganda', in *Vital Matters: Eighteenth-Century Views of Conception, Life and Death*, ed. Helen Deutsch and Mary Terrall, UCLA Clark Memorial Library Series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 130–147; Weil, 'The Politics of Legitimacy and the Warming-Pan Scandal'.

[22] Kathryn M. Brammall, 'Monstrous Metamorphosis: Nature, Morality, and the Rhetoric of Monstrosity in Tudor England', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 1 (1996): 3–21; David Cressy, 'Monstrous Births and Credible Reports: Portents, Texts, and Testimonies', in *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29–50; Harriet Lyon, 'The Fisherton Monster: Science, Providence, and the Politics in Early Restoration England', *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2016): 333–362; Alexandra Walsham, '"Tongues of Heaven": Prodigies, Portents, and Prophets', in *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 167–218.

[23] *The Mid-wives just Petition or, A complaint of divers good Gentlewomen of that faculty. Shewing to the whole Christian world their just cause of their sufferings in these distracted Time, for their want of Trading* (London: 1643), sig. A2r. Reprinted in Lisa Forman Cody, ed., *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works. Printed Writings, 1641–1700: Part I. Writings on Medicine*, vol. 4, II (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). Doreen Evenden has argued that the *Petition* is a serious proposal to parliament made by London midwives, but Cody notes that the satirical tone suggests it was a spoof, xvii.

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Couples should make love not war, the petition written by a (real or imagined) company of midwives proposed. It blamed recent conflicts on the number of women who lay 'in their beds like cold marble images cut out by some Artificers hand' rather than having passionate sex with their husbands.[24] This was not unfounded. Despite a rise in the English population in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in the seventeenth century, the population began to fall.[25] Generation was at once simultaneously a profoundly quotidian and individual experience, as well as interwoven into the most fundamental questions about the perpetuation of humankind, economic prosperity, the meaning of life and the nature of God in early modern England.

Sources and Methodology

When I began this project, I assumed I would mostly be spending my time reading women's letters and diaries. I got very good at spotting the looser and less stylised handwriting of women in the reams of paper bundled together in stout boxes of 'family papers' that I was ordering to reading rooms in local record offices and national libraries. I expected I would find a lot of letters between mothers and daughters imparting knowledge gained through experience and hearsay. I also imagined the advice that pregnant or newly delivered women might receive would be gentle and sympathetic. I thought I would really have to hunt for information about sex, menstruation, labour and breastfeeding, for surely it would have been indecorous to write openly about such things in the period? One reason I made these assumptions is because archivists themselves have often sought to separate out 'personal' from 'official' or 'political' correspondence in the paperwork left by families, which often fall largely along gendered lines. Archives are always subjective and are co-created by historical actors, archivists and historians.[26] Nineteenth-century editors of many early modern diaries and letters were disinterested in what was deemed corporeal and scatological. Birth often fell into this category. When Alice Thornton's three volumes of writings were bequeathed to the British Library in 2013 after being held in a private, and therefore inaccessible,

[24] *Ibid*., sig. A4r.

[25] E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 161–162; Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 63–64.

[26] Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Alexandra Walsham, 'The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe', *Past & Present* 230, no. 11 (2016): 9–48; Elizabeth Yale, 'The History of Archives: The State of the Discipline', *Book History* 18 (2015): 332–359.

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collection for years prior, I discovered that the 1875 'transcriber' Charles Jackson had left out more than half the material on giving birth.[27]

Sitting in archives amongst these papers, however, I quickly discovered that literate middling and elite men as well as women were obsessed with some of the details of generation and what women's bodies felt and looked like in early modern England. They wrote in their letters, diaries, almanacs, account books, commonplace books and spiritual meditations about their own and others' conceptions with candour. They weighed in with their own advice, contradicted the due dates pregnant women proffered and freely blamed them for causing miscarriage by not eating properly or being too sad. They were also not always polite, but often admonishing and sometimes cruel in a way that made it very quickly apparent to me that family members perceived women to be labouring for them and their interests rather than for the couple or the community. Families kept recipe books stuffed with culinary and medicinal recipes to increase fertility, increase milk supply and intensify labour pains.

Many families kept lists of the birth (and death) dates of their children, sometimes continued across many generations. Recipe books, account books or bibles were often filled with the birth (and death) dates of their children, sometimes continued across many generations. Just to cite a few, Dorothy Frances Feilding recorded the birthdays of her children in the beautifully bound book of poetry, select reflections, biblical passages and medical recipes.[28] Anne Glyd wrote 'A memorial of our childrens births', beginning with her son John Glyd on 22 September 1650, and on another page when her daughter, also called Anne, married and when her grandsons were born (Figure I.1). Francis Witton copied out his wedding day and the birth and death dates of his seventeen children, including two listed as stillborn on a piece of paper kept with other family papers of the non-conformist Henry family.[29] These papers survive not by chance but because families thought it said something important about them and their identity. Families were made and remade through the process of bearing and raising children. Over the course of researching this book, I had to write to surviving family members to request permission to use the documents in their archives: these collections continue to

[27] Raymond A. Anselment's new edition, Alice Thornton, *My First Booke of My Life: Alice Thornton*, ed. Raymond A. Anselment (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), is a more faithful transcription. Cordelia Beattie has recently discovered the 'lost' fourth volume of Thornton's meditations now held in Durham Cathedral Library and Archives, 'Thornton's Memoirs', Comber 7. See: Cordelia Beattie, 'The Discovery of Two Missing Alice Thornton Manuscripts', *Notes and Queries* 66, no. 4 (2019): 547–553. This is the basis for a digital edition of Thornton's works (https://thornton.kdl.kcl.ac.uk, last accessed 10/03/2025).

[28] Feilding family, 'Commonplace book c. 1684', Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Osborn b226.

[29] 'Notes of Marriage of Francis Witton and Sarah Sergeant on 6 April, 1675, and of Birthdays of Family members', Cheshire Record Office, Chester, ZDBAS/12.

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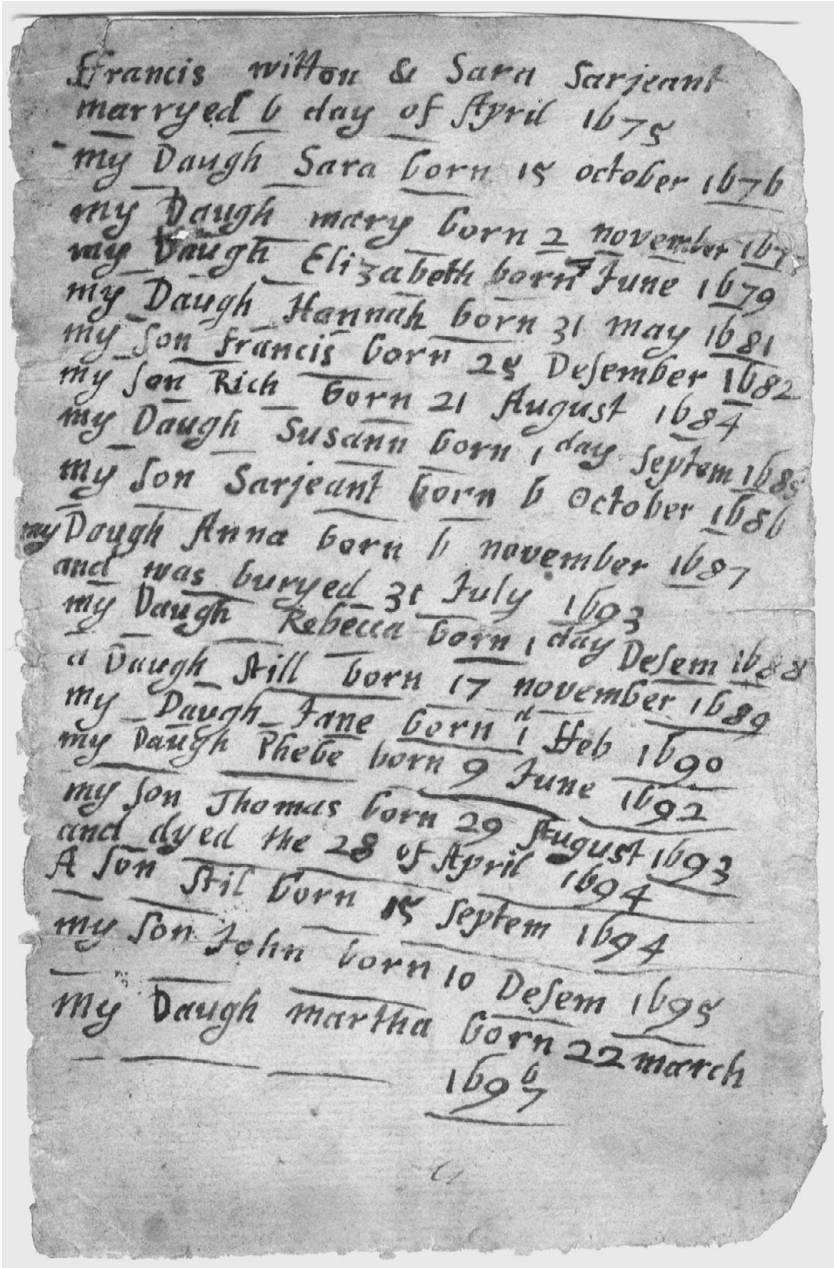


Figure I.1 'Notes of Marriage of Francis Witton and Sarah Sergeant on 6 April, 1675, and of Birthdays of Family members', Cheshire Archives and Local Studies. Reproduced with the permission of Cheshire Archives and Local Studies and the owner/depositor to whom copyright is reserved.

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represent and embody the status and reputation of what were once prominent aristocratic families. The revived interest in genealogy and family history shows that many people still feel that lineage and reproduction is central to understanding oneself.

Of course, it was not just childbirth that families wrote about in early modern England. Although the majority of people were not literate in this period, elite and middling sort families wrote things down for all kinds of purposes. Men and women kept notebooks, journals and commonplace books; scribbled in the blank spaces of almanacs; and kept track of their spending in account books and wrote out useful culinary and medicinal recipes. Letters were important tools in negotiating business, managing the household and maintaining the connection between separated friends, spouses and family members, and sometimes all three at once. These sources have often been understood as 'life-writing' or 'ego-literature' and connected to a Protestant imperative to self-examine and self-define.[30] Writing helped individuals fashion and display their credit and status, which intersected in complex and not always obvious ways with wealth.[31] The records that individuals and families kept on paper might not conform to an obvious genre and might present multiple perspectives and narratives at once.[32] Women *and* men wrote letters, diaries and account books, but women, historians have shown, were particularly active in keeping genealogical records.[33] Keeping 'house' and reciprocal accounts was central to the performance and construction of men's economic

[30] Michael Maschuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alex Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier: The Life of an Eighteenth-Century Protestant Capitalist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Jason Scott-Warren, 'Early Modern Bookkeeping and Life-Writing Revisited: Accounting for Richard Stonley', *Past & Present* 230, no. supplement 11 (2016): 151–170.

[31] Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998); Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); K. Tawny Paul, 'Accounting for Men's Work: Multiple Employments and Occupational Identities in Early Modern England', *History Workshop Journal* 85 (2018): 26–46.

[32] Andrew Cambers, 'Reading, the Godly, and Self-Writing in England, circa 1580–1720', *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 4 (2007): 796–825; Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Sheila Ottway, 'Autobiography', in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco, Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 231–247.

[33] Katharine Hodgkin, 'Women, Memory and Family History in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ericka Kuijpers et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 297–313; Megan Matchinske, *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Mihoko Suzuki, 'Anne Clifford and the Gendering of History', *Clio* 30, no. 2 (2001): 195–229.

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and political identity too.[34] These two imperatives converged in middling and elite family paperwork.

While much of this scholarship has focused on how writing and keeping records facilitated the emergence of a sense of self, others have highlighted that keeping records on paper could be done on behalf of others and as part of a collective project, which this book draws on and contributes to. Brodie Waddell notes that the writings of middling-sort literate individuals such as the tradesman Joseph Bufton indicate many individuals recorded theirs and others' not for self-exploration but to create an account for the community at large.[35] Recipe books, in particular, were constantly revised and added to by multiple generations of family members.[36] I borrow the term 'paperwork' from Elaine Leong's work on recipe books because it usefully captures the ways in which the stuff of family archives evade classification and often collaboratively compiled and curated.[37] Generation sat comfortably alongside other aspects of the everyday and extraordinary that people wrote about in these texts.

These families were the kinds of people who could afford the increasingly numerous books on conduct, medicine, philosophy, religion and other subjects available in the seventeenth century. They could also afford the services of medical practitioners of various kinds and levels. They thus make an ideal case study for examining the ways in which prescription interacted with practice in the period. This book uses family paperwork and medical and conduct books to ask how families defined their experiences in relation to prescriptive frameworks and norms. The casebooks of medical practitioners provide yet another glimpse into the ways individuals understood their bodies and what being healthy meant to them. Finally, ballads, pamphlets and other cheap print were similarly obsessed with generation in the period. These texts reached a far more socially diverse audience than relatively expensive childbearing guides, and thus they offer a window into the assumptions, fears and humour of the

[34] Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hannah Barker, 'Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower-Class Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Manchester', *Social History* 33, no. 1 (2008): 12–35; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[35] Brodie Waddell, 'Writing History from Below: Chronicling and Record-Keeping in Early Modern England', *History Workshop Journal* 85, no. Spring (2018): 239–264.

[36] Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Sara Pennell, 'Perfecting Practice? Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England', in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, ed. Victoria Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 237–258; Jennifer K. Stine, 'Opening Closets: The Discovery of Household Medicine in Early Modern England' (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1996).

[37] Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge*.

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people that elite families often employed to assist in making and remaking their families. The book begins in the second half of the sixteenth century with the rise of vernacular medical print and the raft of childbearing guides that were aimed at literate householders. It ends in the early eighteenth century where other histories of 'reproduction' begin with the institutionalisation of a pro-natalist state.

Book Structure

Making Babies in Early Modern England is structured in a way that mirrors the layout of early modern childbearing guides, beginning with efforts to conceive and ending with descriptions of how to 'order' mother and child after birth that set out an idealised vision of what to expect while expecting. Procreation was an experience that, despite the best efforts of authors, medical practitioners and interested family members, was often unpredictable and unknowable, however much families tried to impose order and make it seem easy in their paperwork. The structure of the book reflects an expectation or hope that rarely adequately described experience.

Chapter 1 asks how early modern people managed fertility at home. Conception and pregnancy were a source of fascination and gossip for elite families. Men and women both had to take on work to ensure they were fertile, and yet male procreative responsibility was minimised in paperwork. Historians have noted that despite the abundance of references to increasing lust and fertility in printed medical and popular texts, there is limited evidence of the diagnosis and treatment of barrenness, especially of men. Examining recipe books, casebooks and correspondence suggests men understood themselves to be potentially responsible for childlessness. Added to this, wives were represented as being in charge of diagnosing and remedying infertility for both themselves and their husbands, meaning that evidence of male treatment is often treated discreetly within records of medical practice.

Chapter 2 examines how women and their families deduced, or decided, they were pregnant. Childbearing guides of the period told women and their families that they might and indeed should know they were pregnant very soon after sex and connected this to sexual and moral continence. Women were encouraged to keep 'accounts' of their bodies to pinpoint conception reliably. These records, in turn, became part of other sorts of family paperwork that inscribed legitimacy and ascendancy. Writing about conception and pregnancy sought to impose certainty on what was otherwise an unknowable experience.

Chapter 3 looks at the social and material preparations that households made for an impending birth. Family members were fascinated by the look and size of women's bellies. Married women's 'big bellies' were celebrated: they displayed the fruitfulness of the family. The process of buying and borrowing

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things for childbirth including linens, baby clothes and birthing stools have often been represented as hallmarks of a celebratory and extravagant female culture. The process of imagining the unborn child alongside material preparations was instead a family affair that men were intimately involved in in ways that complemented the written accounts that families made.

Chapter 4 focuses on the choices that families made about who would deliver babies and where women would give birth. From the eighteenth century in England, man-midwives dominated the delivery of babies. Historians' accounts have suggested that this incursion was a dramatic and transformative moment in which men wrestled control of childbirth from women. This chapter suggests that this trend in practice was only the more obvious and tangible reflection of a broader pattern in which men and the family directed and controlled childbearing. Although the birthing chamber may have been female-only, women often travelled to their father or father-in-law's house to give birth. When man-midwives entered the birthing room, this chapter suggests they might not have seen it as the haven of female sociability that some historians have represented it as.

Chapter 5 examines early modern expectations of delivery and recovery from childbirth by women. Medical manuals expected women would give birth painfully but without complication, stay in bed (or 'lie in') for a month, go to church to give thanks to God for their survival and then the return to their normal selves. This chapter shows that although this ideal helped to frame women's experiences of delivery and recovery, it rarely captured the reality of the emotional and bodily difficulties they faced.

Chapter 6 asks how newborns were cared for and charts the formulaic regimen of getting babies to cry, watching them change colour, cutting their navel cord, searching their bodies for impediment, bathing them, swaddling them, putting them down to sleep and, finally, suckling them. Authors often expressed the expectation that mothers would do this work or if they were unable, nurses and servants, although these latter figures are rarely named or credited in the same ways. A great many families hired or retained nurses and servants during the period of childbearing who became temporary members of the family and carried out this care. Wet nursing is the most powerful example of elite families getting servants to prioritise their employers' family over their own. Asking someone who was close to or already part of the household meant families could maintain their control and authority over childrearing. Making babies was a family project, albeit one in which family members did not have equal stakes and one in which mothers' and other women's procreative work was often subsumed within everyday expectations of domestic labour.

The findings of this book – that although it was convenient to represent childbearing as unchallenging and women's work, it was actually central to the family as a whole and very complicated and laborious – unpick the cultural,

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social, medical and bodily threads that were the fabric of early modern life. As well as revealing the ways in which people understood medicine, health and generation in early modern England, placing the household centre stage when examining childbirth helps to dismantle a pervasive yet popular stereotype that birthing in the past was somehow more intuitive, natural and unbidden. Not only were parents and other family members constantly seeking to optimise the health of their unborn children, but they also saw the way women conceived, carried and raised children as mirroring and reflecting their own place in the world and their family, the status of their soul and whether they would be welcomed into the Kingdom of Heaven. Making babies was a way of enacting, displaying and proving piety and rectitude of self, family and community and brought together a myriad of religious, medical and domestic traditions and practices.

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