

Gender, the City and the Environs of London: Work, Family and Elite Status, 1740-1870¹

Although the significance of the London mercantile elite to the economy of Britain in the period of industrialisation is not in doubt, there has been surprisingly little research into their residences, family lives, and relations with other social sub-groups within the “London hinterland”.² This essay will draw on research on about fifty families to discuss the significance for elite status of residence in the north-east of the London hinterland” in the period 1740-1870, with regard to debates about suburbanisation, class, family and gender history..

From the 1670s, the two Essex villages of Walthamstow and Leyton, six miles north-east of the City of London, provided a second, weekend, retirement or permanent home for a wealthy mercantile elite of bankers, professionals and businessmen. Indeed, Rogers regarded the “country villas” in Leyton as “typical” of the residences of the London aldermen (and hence the “big bourgeoisie” of eighteenth-century London).³ The location of the two parishes enabled residents to travel into the City of London and the docks, during the eighteenth century as well as the nineteenth, the Bosanquets of Forest House, Turkey and Levant merchants, being one example.⁴ The building of the Lea Bridge Road in the 1770s, and the development of a regular stage-coach service facilitated commuting,⁵ and also made it easier for

¹ Place of publication is London unless stated otherwise.

² One exception being M.C.Martin “Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870”, *London Journal*, Vol 19, No 2, 1994, 119-151. See also M.C.Martin, “Children and Religion in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870”, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000. M.Greenhalgh, “The Transfer of Wealth and Power: Gentlemen Landowners and the Middle Classes of Bromley, 1840-1914 “unpublished PhD thesis, University of Greenwich, 1995. Thanks to Professor Angela John for the loan of this thesis. See also F.M.L.Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia* (Leicester University Press, St Martin’s Press, 1982). F.M.L.Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780-1980* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001), 9-10, 87.

³ N.Rogers, “Money, Land and Lineage: the “Big Bourgeoisie” of Eighteenth-Century London”, *Social History*, 4, (1979), 449-50, n.51.

⁴ G.L.Lee, *The Story of the Bosanquets* (Phillimore & Co, Canterbury, 1963), 53, 64.

⁵ See also Rogers, “Money, Land and Lineage”, 449-451.

farmers to bring in their produce. The healthy location of the two parishes prompted the move for individual families, and the foundation of a number of boarding schools and orphanages. A large number of artisans and domestic servants were employed, while agricultural workers supplied the London food market. Unlike nearby West Ham, on the River Lea, there were no “smelly industries”, such as bleaching and soap-boiling.⁶

At the beginning of the period, the poor lived in clusters of cottages in specific areas, such as Wood Street, Hoe Street, Marsh Street and Clay Street in Walthamstow, Leyton Street, in Leyton, and the rich in mansions, some over a long period of time.⁷ By the 1850s, the commons in Walthamstow had been enclosed and cottages for clerks and artisans built. The coming of the railway to the centre of Walthamstow in 1870, and the introduction of cheap workmen’s fares, accelerated the transition from commuter residence to artisan suburb.⁸

Work, Family and Residence

Several patterns of residence have been noted over the period. Some, as with the “magnates” among the aristocracy,⁹ integrated the two parishes into a pattern of multiple residence. Thus, the Maynards, the only local gentry family, who rarely appear in local records between 1745 and the 1860s, owned property in London, in Easton, Essex, and Shern Hall Manor in Walthamstow.¹⁰ David Barclay the Quaker

⁶ W. R. Powell, ed, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, A History of Essex, Vol VI* (Oxford, 1973, Repr 1976), 76-89, 178-82, 241-44, 251, 269. Martin, “thesis”, 50-131.

⁷ See maps of 1777, 1840, 1881 in Martin, “thesis”, 14, 43-4, 73-4.

⁸ *VCH Essex, VI*, 178-182, 241-50.,

⁹ F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1725-1836* (Fontana, 1988), 154.

¹⁰ M. Blunden, *The Countess of Warwick* (Cassell, 1967), 5-7. Waltham Forest Local History Library, W34.41, S. Wilderspin, “A history of Walthamstow workhouse, 1725-1836”, unpublished thesis, 1970, details unavailable, 7-12.

merchant (1729-1809), was described as “of Walthamstow and Youngsbury”.¹¹

Cardinal Wiseman, by contrast, took houses briefly in Walthamstow (1849-58), then Leyton, until 1862.¹²

A significant group moved out to the two parishes gradually, and remained over several generations. An unmarried young man might live in lodgings, start married life with a house in Central London and with increasing wealth and family responsibilities, either obtain a weekend or holiday home in Walthamstow or Leyton or settle there permanently.¹³ Such families included the Presbyterian/Unitarian Solllys, the Anglican Bosanquets, Wigrams, Cottons, Forsters, the Quaker Dillwyns and the next generation of Quaker Barclays.¹⁴ Within the two parishes, the death of a breadwinner could necessitate the move to a smaller house, as with the family of William Morris, artist, designer and socialist. in 1847.¹⁵ Many others moved around frequently within the two parishes, renting a series of houses.¹⁶

Decisions about residence were often made in relation to life-cycle stage, not only for a larger house to accommodate a growing family, but also in relation to children’s health. The Wigrams, who lived in Union, then White Lion Court EC, from 1772, first took a small house in Wood Street Walthamstow because their third child, Catherine (b. 1775) was delicate, the whole family moving there in 1782.¹⁷ Yet, while the main family residence might shift to the two parishes, businessmen such as Sir Robert Wigram (1744-1830) might keep up their own premises in the metropolis where they

¹¹H.Barclay and A. Wilson-Fox, *A History of the Barclay Family, with Pedigrees from 1067-1933. Part III. The Barclays in Scotland and England from 1610 to 1833* (St Catherine Press, 1934), 243-7.

¹²F. Temple, *An Account of Etloe House* (Leyton Public Libraries, 1958), 16.

¹³R.S.Wigram, *Biographical Notes Relating to Certain Members of the Wigram family* (privately printed, The Aberdeen University Press, 1912), 18-19.

¹⁴See Martin, “thesis”, 556-572.

¹⁵Ibid, 567.

¹⁶J. Kennedy, *A History of the Parish of Leyton* (Leyton Phelp Bros, 1894), 314-340. G. F. Bosworth, *Some Walthamstow Houses and Their Interesting Associations* (Walthamstow Antiquarian Society, Official Publication No 12 (1924). *More Walthamstow Houses and Their Interesting Associations* (Walthamstow Antiquarian Society Official Publication, No, 20, 1928).

¹⁷Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 19.

could sleep if required: in his case, No. 3, Crosby Square.¹⁸ Birth and death events might take place in London, by accident or design: Catherine Wigram died at Crosby Square in 1786 after bringing the children up to the theatre, while Mrs Solly came up to St Mary Axe, London for her confinements, 1797-1813.¹⁹

Increasing wealth and status might lead some to move to the West End of London, residence of the gentry or aristocracy,²⁰ or to take a house there: as did Robert Wigram in Portland Place from 1812.²¹ Sir Edward North Buxton, the brewer and MP, listed by Michael Thompson as one of the “half-millionaires” who died between 1809-60,²² lived in Leytonstone with his family between 1840-47, but had moved to Upper Grosvenor Street by 1849.²³ An alternative was to move to a country house or estate, as with the Bosanquets of Dingestow Court, Monmouthshire.²⁴

In the second generation, teenage boys and young men often left home after being educated, either at local private schools, private schools located elsewhere in the London hinterland, or, less frequently, public school.²⁵ Henry and Money Wigram went to live at their workplace, Blackwall Yard in 1806, aged 15 or 16 respectively.²⁶ William Pocock, a cabinet-maker and his wife Hannah moved to Leyton from Central London in the 1780s, but their eldest son was apprenticed to the architect to the Bank of England, and then developed a very successful architectural and surveying business

¹⁸ Ibid, 18-19.

¹⁹ Ibid, 20. H. Solly, *These Eighty Years: the Story of an Unfinished Life* (Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1893), 5.

²⁰ See L. Schwarz, “London, 1700-1840”, in P. Clark, ed, *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, II, III (hereafter *CUHB*) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 663-666. I am indebted to Professor Sarah Palmer for the loan of these volumes.

²¹ Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 29.

²² F.M.L.Thompson “Life After Death: How Successful Nineteenth-Century Businessmen disposed of their Fortunes”, *Economic History Review* 2nd ser, 43 (1990), 52.

²³ Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, “Letters of Lady Catherine Buxton (1814-1911)”, Collected by Lady Victoria Buxton (Typescript) T/G 88, 85.

²⁴ Lee, *Bosanquets*.

²⁵ See M.C.Martin, “Children in London’s rural hinterland, 1740-1870”, unpublished paper, Local Population Studies Society annual conference, “Children and Childhood in Industrial England”, University of Hertfordshire, 12 April 2003.

²⁶ Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 28.

in Central London.²⁷ Unusually, Mary Bosanquet (1739-1815) left home, aged twenty-one, in 1760 at her parents' request, because of her Methodism. She lived in lodgings in Hoxton Square, London, returning in 1763-8 to live in her own property and run a Methodist orphanage.²⁸ Most daughters of the local elite, however, stayed at home until marriage, apart from spells at boarding school for some.²⁹

The relationship between marriage, residence and contact with extended family was complex. Charles Bosanquet (1769-1850), West India merchant, was born in Leytonstone, married in 1796 but bought "The Firs", Hampstead in 1804, after his married brother Samuel moved into Forest Lodge, dower house of the family estate, with Charles and his family.³⁰ Octavius Wigram (1794-1878), lived in 36 Wimpole Street after his marriage in 1830, but during his mother's widowhood between 1830-41, both he and his brother Edward occupied their own houses in Walthamstow, near their mother's. After her death Octavius moved to Dulwich.³¹

Both families demonstrate the frequent presence of three generations of the same family, found in all the most prominent local dynasties. Although the Cambridge group have demonstrated from quantitative sources that the nuclear family household form was the norm in Britain since the early modern period, Thane has argued that many old people lived near their kin, if not in the same household, and were able to provide mutual support.³² While this is usually associated with working-class

²⁷ C. Binfield, "Architects in Connection: Three Methodist Generations" in J. Garnett and C. Matthew, eds, *Revival and Religion since 1700: Essays For John Walsh* (The Hambledon Press, 1993), 153-181.

²⁸ H. Moore, *The Life of Mrs Mary Fletcher, Consort and Relict of the late John Fletcher, Vicar Of Madeley, Salop. Compiled from her journal, and other authentic documents*, 5th edn, (J. Kershaw, London, 1824), 21-34.

²⁹ Martin, "Children".

³⁰ Lee, *Bosanquets*, 81.

³¹ Bosworth, *More Walthamstow Houses*, 6. Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 19.

³² P. Thane, *Old Age in British History: Past Experiences, Contemporary Issues* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000), 133-46, 287-307.

communities,³³ Walthamstow and Leyton demonstrated a great deal of cross-generational contact, while the size of housing enabled the wealthy to accommodate kin if required.³⁴ Such support occurred elsewhere in the “London hinterland”: after the bankruptcy of Isaac Solly, the timber-merchant in 1837, his eldest son, who had lived with him in Leyton House, accommodated his father, mother and younger sister with his own family in Southgate from 1840.³⁵

Class and occupation

. As already indicated, many residents were merchants and bankers, some of whom became extremely wealthy . Some had risen from serving apprenticeships, to a successful career at sea, or as a merchant: indeed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries some younger sons of gentry were apprenticed to prestigious trades.³⁶ The most prominent residents were from families of gentry or at least of yeoman, or mercantile origin.³⁷

Trainor speculated that “while in London the externally oriented City elite had limited dealings with manufacturers, in provincial cities the two were tightly linked”.³⁸ Yet some of this London elite were themselves manufacturers. William Cotton, Robert Wigram and Charles Turner were all involved with Huddart’s rope works, Frederick Young started work in 1833 in the Copper Foundry in Limehouse, Henry Green was apprenticed as a shipwright aged fourteen, while the Powells went into

³³ See M. Anderson, “What is new about the modern Family?”, in M. Drake, ed, *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History* (Open University /Blackwell, Oxford, 1996) , 78. F.M.L.Thompson, “Town and City”, in, ed, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain: Vol I, Regions and Communities* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990) (hereafter *CSHB*), 55-58.

³⁴ Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 18, 20.

³⁵ Solly, *These Eighty Years*, 271, 359-60.

³⁶ S. E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: the Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660-1720*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002), 41-48.

³⁷ Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 2-15, Solly, *Eighty Years*, 1-4. Savell, *Cotton Family*, 1. Barclay, *Barclay Family*, 235.

³⁸ R.Trainor, “The Middle Class” in M.Daunton, ed, *CUHB*, III, 688, 694.

glassmaking in 1834.³⁹ George Young,, Robert Wigram and Captain William Money became MPs and were knighted.⁴⁰ Hypotheses about a different kind of culture between merchant princes, manufacturers and even gentry require further scrutiny in this context.⁴¹

For some, living on the outskirts coincided with social mobility within the middle class, with some of the second or third generation going to public schools, and university, gaining prominence in the professions and moving away.⁴² As Rogers noted of London aldermen,⁴³ some daughters intermarried with the gentry and aristocracy, notably Eleanor Todd, with Lord Maitland, son of the seventh Lord Lauderdale, in 1782:⁴⁴ also Sarah Cotton with a younger son of the Devon gentry Aclands in 1846.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the social status of this group remained insecure when compared to the gentry and aristocracy. In 1820, Robert Wigram advised his wife to stay in Walthamstow after his death “as our long residence here gives us a respect that in a strange place you can not expect to find”, and to keep up Walthamstow House as a base for his children.⁴⁶ This letter indicates how residence in this type of community could provide opportunities for the *haute* or even lesser bourgeoisie to obtain social status in an environment in which both hospitality and philanthropy would be highly

³⁹ Savell, *Cotton Family*, 20. Cambridge University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society Archive, Frederick Young Papers, MSS 11c99, Sir Frederick Young memoir, 16-17. R. Morris, *The Powells in Essex and their London ancestors*, (The Loughton and District Historical Society, Loughton, 2002), 59. B.Lubbock, *The Blackwall Frigates* (James Brown & Co, Glasgow, 1924), 46.

⁴⁰ Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 24, 27.

⁴¹ Rogers, “Money, Land and Lineage”, 453. See Greenhalgh, “thesis”,33-4 for the London-based business origins of major landowners in Bromley in 1841.

⁴² *VCH Essex*, VI, 251. Lee, *Bosanquets*, 77. M.L.Savell, *Some Notes on the Cotton Family in Leyton*, Leyton Pub Libs, 1963), 45-49.

⁴³ Rogers, “Money, Land and Lineage”, 445.

⁴⁴ K. L. Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1958), 97.

⁴⁵ Savell, *Cotton Family*, 39-43.

⁴⁶ Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 31-4.

visible.⁴⁷ In contrast with Thompson's argument that withdrawal to the suburb might signal a lack of commitment to city-dwelling,⁴⁸ many of this elite group held prestigious City offices, as Chairmen and Directors of public companies, as well as being active in metropolitan and local philanthropy, and also acting as JPs, and High Sheriffs of Essex.⁴⁹

Gender and work

The notion that the move to the suburbs coincided with a withdrawal of female involvement in the family enterprise, due to the physical separation of home and work is central to Davidoff and Hall's thesis that gender difference was central to the making of the middle class, 1780-1850, though they did suggest, London "may have been different",⁵⁰ Peter Earle found that there was little evidence of husband and wife teams working together in London 1670-1730, while withdrawal from involvement in the business symbolised or accompanied high status.⁵¹ Tosh also claimed that "London was exceptional in its traditional separation of home and work in government departments and large capitalist enterprises".⁵² Conversely, Greenhalgh has suggested that the suburbs might provide more opportunities for women's work by the late nineteenth century.⁵³

No evidence has been found of local elite women having been involved in their husband's occupation whilst living in Central London. The Quaker Barclay-Fry-

⁴⁷ Martin, "Women and Philanthropy", 134-135.

⁴⁸ Thompson, "Town and City", in *CSHB*, I, 47.

⁴⁹ Lee, *Bosanquets*, 54-5, 71-4. Wigram, *Biographical Notes*, 24, 28-9. Savell, *Cotton Family*, 5, 20.

⁵⁰ L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* rev edn, (Routledge, 2002), 18.

⁵¹ P. Earle, *A City Full of People: Men and Women of London, 1650-1750* (Methuen, 1994), 114, 113-155.

⁵² J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale University Press, 1999), 14.

⁵³ Greenhalgh, "thesis", 8.

Gurney bankers and merchants did inhabit large business houses, in Lombard Street and Cheapside, where work was conducted on the premises, and some members of this group moved to Walthamstow and Leyton and other “town villages” such as Clapham and Hampstead. Movement, was not, however, in one direction. Elizabeth and Joseph Fry moved from their country house in Plashet to Mildred Court and back due to his business failure.⁵⁴ The Anglican Henry Powell (born in Walthamstow in 1853) and his wife Emma lived at the family glassworks in Whitefriars after their marriage in 1875, but by the early 1880s had moved back to Loughton, Essex.⁵⁵

Most members of my study were engaged in occupations which did not lend themselves to female participation: as overseas merchants, bankers, shipbuilders, ropemakers, and brewers: also as retired sea-captains or ship’s surgeons: in the Post Office, of which Anthony Todd was Secretary, 1762-98 (except 1765-8), and the Bank of England.⁵⁶ Moreover, many future wives grew up in wealthy households, already removed from the workplace, where involvement in the family enterprise would not have been expected or desirable.⁵⁷ For many, the move to Walthamstow and Leyton made it possible for some to buy or rent a larger house, employ more servants, and to become a focus for the local community. This could enhance their husbands’ status, providing more opportunities for entertainment and display, and for making connections with potential partners.⁵⁸ Significantly, some prominent local business partners such as the Moneys, Wigrams, and Cottons also gave each others’ names to their children, and asked them to be godparents.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Verily Anderson, *Friends and Relations: Three Centuries of Quaker Families* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1980) 143, 153-6, 163, 208, 273-4,

⁵⁵ Morris, *Powells*, 63.

⁵⁶ *VCH Essex*, VI, 251-2.

⁵⁷ Examples being Mary Dunster (1712-65): 3 daughters of the “half-millionaire” Quaker banker, Samuel Gurney, of Ham House, Upton, married local residents. Lee, *Bosanquets*, 53. *VCH Essex*, VI, 72. Thompson, “Life after Death”, 52.

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Anne Anderson for these insights.

⁵⁹ Martin, “thesis”, 353, n. 731. Bosworth, *More Walthamstow Houses*, 9.

Conclusion

This study has suggested significant patterns about the elite status of the residents of this particular part of the London hinterland. There was considerable fluidity of movement between metropolis and hinterland, while proximity to the docks and communication via the Lea Bridge Road made it particularly suitable as a commuter residence. Some used the two parishes as a base for long-term residence, and to develop social status and identification, but others only lived there for a short time, or as a holiday home. Movement was determined by a range of factors including marriage, work requirements, and size of family, and was to some extent linked to life-cycle.

No distinct pattern of women withdrawing from the family business has been identified, and the frequent changes of residence between metropolis and hinterland makes any such distinct change in lifestyle due to such withdrawal seem improbable. While, as Tosh has argued, London occupational structures made female involvement in family businesses unlikely, living in the London hinterland might provide other opportunities to contribute to the family “enterprise”.

For those who did remain, the two parishes provided opportunities for establishing local status, with no competition from resident gentry, in a way that, arguably was more feasible than in the metropolis, even for those in relatively powerful positions. Given that members of this elite might have moved from origins as apprentices, to baronetcies, a residential space in which to exercise authority could offer particular attractions. The local area also facilitated co-existence or even co-habitation with members of the extended family which curiously prefigured the “Old Walthamstow”, or working-class suburb, of the 1880s, or even the present.

Dr Mary Clare Martin

University of Greenwich