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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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Editors

David A Barrowclough
Mary Chester-Kadwell

Associate Editor (Archaeology) Professor Stephen Upex

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Contents

Mary Desborough Cra'ster, 1928–2008 John Pickles, Peter Gathercole, and Alison Taylor	7
A fen island in the Neolithic and Bronze Age: excavations at North Fen, Sutton, Cambridgeshire Leo Webley and Jonathan Hiller	11
A fen island burial: excavation of an Early Bronze Age round barrow at North Fen, Sutton Aileen Connor	37
The Bartlow Hills in context Hella Eckardt with Amanda Clarke, Sophie Hay, Stephen Macaulay, Pat Ryan, David Thornley and Jane Timby	47
Senuna, goddess of the river Rhee or Henney Stephen Yeates	65
A reappraisal of the evidence for the 'northern arm' of the Fleam Dyke at Fen Ditton Scott Kenney	69
An excavation at Station Quarry, Steeple Morden, Cambridgeshire Laura Piper and Andrew Norton	73
Excavations at Scotland Road/Union Lane, Chesterton Duncan Mackay	77
A curious object from Firs Farm, Caxton Aileen Connor	89
A morphological analysis of Ickleton, Cambridgeshire: an admission of defeat Christopher Taylor	91
Funerals, the final consumer choice? Ken Sneath	105
The 'Age of the Windmill' in the Haddenham Level N James	113
Upware and Bottisham sluices K S G Hinde	121
Changes in the landscape of west Cambridge, Part V: 1945 to 2000 Philomena Guillebaud	127
The CAS Collection of Cambridgeshire 'Sketches' John Pickles	143
Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2008 Tom Lyons, Elizabeth Shepherd Popescu and Sarah Poppy	147
Reviews Christopher Taylor, Christopher Brookes, Evelyn Lord and Sam Lucy	163
<i>Index</i>	167
<i>Abbreviations</i>	173
Recent Accessions to the Cambridgeshire Collection Chris Jakes	175

Funerals, the final consumer choice?

Ken Sneath

When writing Martin Chuzzlewit in 1843, Charles Dickens posed the question, 'Why do people spend more money upon a death, Mrs Gump, than upon a birth?' he was reflecting a trend that was common in the previous two centuries. This article sets out to explore funerals focusing on Huntingdonshire in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is largely based on evidence from probate accounts. Whilst historians have made extensive use of probate inventories, probate accounts are much less commonly used, in part because relatively few survive. However, the accounts provide important insights into many subjects, not least the funeral practices of the early modern period. The article begins with a consideration of the probate process, examines the validity and representativeness of the sources and finally explores what the sources tell us about funerals.

The probate process

Church courts were established separately from secular courts during the eleventh century (Arkell 2000, 3). Church courts operated under Canon Law and their responsibilities ranged from church administration to the most intimate aspects of personal life (Ingram 1987, 7). Church courts were also responsible for testamentary business and oversaw the distribution of 'moveable goods' including credits and leasehold property but not real estate which comprised freehold and copyhold land and buildings. The inheritance of freehold and copyhold land was initially the responsibility of manorial courts and subject to common law (Arkell 2000, 7).

Production of an inventory as part of the process of probate and administration was required in ecclesiastical law from 1342 although some inventories were produced before this date. The requirement to produce an indented inventory of the deceased's estate as a 'true and just account' was laid down in statute in 1529 (Grannum & Taylor 2004, 91–2). In 1653 the Court for the Probate of Wills and the Granting of Administrations was established in London but the court ceased to function in 1659. In theory all wills of persons dying in this period should be amongst

the records of this civil court which are held at the National Archives. However, it appears that some executors and administrators avoided this new court because of the expense and inconvenience involved. Some wills seem to have been implemented without formal probate and others were proved retrospectively after restoration of ecclesiastical courts in 1660 (Grannum & Taylor 2004, 17). Prior to 1858 when ecclesiastical probate was superseded by civil district registries, there were three levels of ecclesiastical court: prerogative, consistory and archdeaconry as well as deanery and peculiar jurisdictions. (Erickson 1993, 32–3). Individuals with property outside the jurisdiction of prerogative courts had their wills proved at either the relevant consistory court or the prerogative courts of Canterbury and York.

During the eighteenth century the practice of exhibiting probate inventories substantially diminished. The rate of reduction varied significantly across England reflecting local diocesan decisions rather than a central ruling (Cox & Cox 2000, 27; Tarver 1995, 66). For example, Winchester inventories almost disappeared from diocesan records by 1720. Wrightson and Levine also found that in Whickham the survival of inventories was rare after the second decade of the eighteenth century (Wrightson & Levine 1991, 239). Styles asserted that in most parts of England, probate inventories survive in only very small numbers (if at all) after 1730 (Styles 2007, 137).

A major complication in the probate process was 'peculiar jurisdictions' which were exempt from the authority of their local archdeacon and sometimes also from their bishop (Tarver 2000, 4). Prior to 1852 the parishes of Brampton, Buckden, Leighton Bromswold and Stow Longa in Huntingdonshire were separate 'peculiar'. They were granted to Prebends who then held, exercised or farmed out the duties and privileges that were held by the Archdeacon in the other parishes of the Archdeaconry (Fig. 1).

It was the custom of ecclesiastical courts that proved wills to insist that local men make an inventory of the personal estate of the deceased. The purpose of a probate inventory was to avoid disputes over

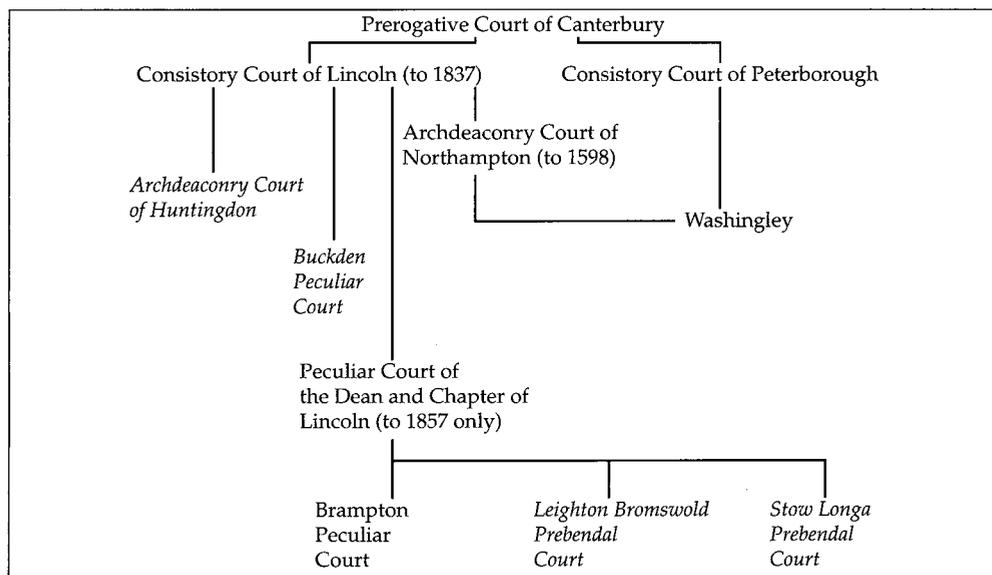


Figure 1. Probate arrangements in Huntingdonshire.

estates. Inventories also helped to safeguard executors or administrators against excessive claims on the estate and provided evidence for the determination of fees due to the probate court (Overton et al. 2004, 13). Usually within a few days of the death appraisers recorded in an inventory movable goods including livestock and crops, furnishings, cash and debts due to the deceased. Appraisers should have been people who were 'honest and skilful' (Grannum & Taylor 2004, 93). Estabrook suggested that appraisers were ordinary people usually familiar with the deceased and possibly of the same status or occupation (Estabrook 1998, 130).

Probate accounts

'Accountants' presented probate accounts in respect of certain estates to church courts. Accountants were executors of estates where there was a will and administrators acted in cases of intestacy. Accountants were predominantly female. In the surviving probate accounts for Huntingdonshire, 58% of accountants were female. Accountants were 'charged' with the value of the estate as set out in the probate inventory. Probate accounts reveal how assets were disbursed and record payment of funeral costs, debts owed by the deceased, wages due to employees, court fees, medical expenses, rents and payments for the care of surviving children. Unlike probate inventories they are not therefore a 'snapshot in time'. Farms continued to function and children had to be cared for. Probate accounts recorded payments over what could sometimes be a considerable period of time following the death of the deceased person. The account served two functions: to acquit the accountant of further responsibility for debts of the deceased and to ensure that the residue of the estate was distributed accord-

ing to the will or in cases of intestacy, according to law (Erickson 2000, 103).

Probate accounts survive in much smaller numbers than inventories. Based on data obtained from a project on probate accounts led by Peter Spufford, Erickson calculated that about 43,000 accounts for England and Wales are extant. This represents less than 5% of the number of surviving inventories (Erickson 2000, 104). However, the total includes over 10,000 accounts (24%) from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and a further 19,590 accounts (46%) that relate to just two counties, Kent and Lincolnshire. Huntingdonshire, with 310 surviving usable accounts, has the seventh highest survival rate of probate accounts in England.

The reason for the relatively low number of surviving probate accounts is a matter of controversy. Peter Spufford wrote that accounts once existed as commonly as inventories and therefore argued that it is 'surprising' that so few court copies of these records have survived (Spufford 2000, 214). Clare Gittings suggested that probate accounts were not considered of such importance as wills and were often not preserved by ecclesiastical courts. She argued that administrators' accounts have survived in much greater numbers than executor's accounts and therefore the reason that these accounts were kept was that where there was no will, the account was the only document showing how the estate had been distributed and was therefore of greater significance as a probate record (Gittings 1991, 51). On the other hand, Mortimer has recently argued that probate accounts were a minority aspect of the probate process. Mortimer accepted Tarver's argument that the small number of extant accounts is a reflection of the small number created (Mortimer 2006, 3). Tarver's argument was based on two surviving probate books, one for Derbyshire and the other for Warwickshire. The Derbyshire

book covered the period November 1678 to August 1681 and recorded 151 grants of probate, 125 letters of administration and four probate accounts (1.4% of estates for which probate had been granted). The Warwickshire book covered the period May 1679 to November 1684 and recorded 581 grants of probate, 420 letters of administration and 127 probate accounts (12.7% of estates for which probate had been granted) (Tarver 2000, 235–6).

Parliamentary legislation is crucial in evaluating the role of probate accounts. Ecclesiastical courts were suspended during the Interregnum and an Act of Parliament in 1685 removed the powers of church courts to call for accounts. After 1685 accounts were only to be created at the instigation of relatives or creditors of the deceased (I James II c17). The number of probate accounts was therefore strongly biased by time period. Mortimer studied probate accounts in four of the five counties with the highest survival rates of probate accounts *i.e.* East Kent, West Sussex, Berkshire and Wiltshire. In all four counties approximately two-thirds of surviving probate accounts relate to the first half of the seventeenth century. All four counties had substantially fewer accounts after 1685 when the power of the church courts to call for accounts was removed. Huntingdonshire followed a similar pattern with 93 accounts for the period 1680–84 but only 24 for the years 1685–89 (Table 1).

However, very few accounts survive for the first half of the seventeenth century in Huntingdonshire, two-thirds of which relate to the period 1670–1684.

Based on his analysis of surviving accounts by time period, Mortimer argued that the majority of accounts were created at the instigation of church courts rather than at the instigation of a relative or creditor of the deceased (Mortimer 2006, 8). Mortimer argued that there is 'little room for doubt' that the principal reason for accounts to be submitted to the courts was debt. Mortimer calculated that debts and other expenses approximating to about two-thirds of an estate in East Kent triggered calls for accounts to be created. About three-quarters of accounts created prior to 1685 were called for by the courts as a result of perceived financial burdens upon the estate and therefore upon beneficiaries. (Mortimer 2006, 8–11) Mortimer's conclusion is that probate accounts are bi-

ased sources with much higher levels of debt than the average estate (Mortimer 2006, 17).

Thus, two possible causes of bias in extant probate accounts are that relatively few accounts were originally created, and that those that have survived are not representative of those that were created. In the former case, bias is created because the accounts that were created dealt with special cases *e.g.* as Mortimer argued, estates with above average levels of debt. But Bower argued that the requirements of the Probate Act of 1530 meant that accounts once existed as commonly as inventories with duplicate copies in the hands of the courts and of the accountants who had rendered them. Furthermore, Bower argued that the 1671 Act for the Better Settling of Intestates' Estates had little effect on the pattern of survival of accounts. Bower suggested that it was not until 1685 that there was a fall in the number of accounts (Bower 1999, xxi–xxii). If Bower is correct then there is no need to presume that accounts *originally created* prior to 1685 reflect persons with above average levels of debt.

Erickson also accepted that accounts were never made for the same number of estates that produced inventories but she did not attempt to quantify this difference. Erickson speculated that the circumstances that produced accounts were cases of conflict over an estate or liability to debt. Evidence of conflict over an estate was relatively rare but the largest items of expenditure in extant accounts were usually debts. Erickson found that about a quarter of accounts ended in debt (Erickson 1993, 38). However, the majority of accounts had assets to disburse after debts were paid and so Erickson concluded that prior to 1685 there was no pattern to extant accounts other than random survival (Erickson 2000, 114–5).

Mortimer is correct to challenge Erickson's assumption that courts which called for accounts on the grounds of debt would restrict themselves to those cases that ended in a negative balance (Mortimer 2006, 8). Debts were a significant element in many accounts that were not overdrawn after debts and other expenses were paid. This is not surprising in the light of the extent of borrowing and lending in early modern England. Muldrew showed that most households in King's Lynn were engaged in litigation over debt. However, Mortimer's conclusion that when debts and

Table 1. Surviving probate accounts from five counties.

	Huntingdonshire		East Kent		West Sussex		Berkshire		Wiltshire	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1600–1629	3	1	4808	43	400	36	696	45	459	35
1630–1649	6	2	2319	21	307	28	382	25	418	32
1650–1659	1	0	6	0	22	2	9	0	6	0
1660–1669	1	0	993	9	53	5	125	7	39	3
1670–1679	122	39	1413	13	183	17	181	12	231	18
1680–1684	93	30	754	7	121	11	103	7	73	6
1685–1689	24	7	258	2	9	1	32	2	37	3
1690–1719	36	12	538	5	4	0	28	2	40	3
1720–1749	14	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1750–1799	10	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	310	100	11089	100	1099	100	1556	100	1303	100

expenses amounted to about two-thirds of an estate, a call for an account by the court was triggered cannot be sustained in Huntingdonshire (Mortimer 2006, 8). In Huntingdonshire almost half (48%) of surviving accounts dated prior to 1685 recorded total payments from the estate that were less than two-thirds of the charge. Further research is required before a final answer to the problem of why such low levels of accounts have survived can be given. Mortimer argued that accounts were a minority aspect of the probate process on the basis of very limited evidence by Tarver. However, we may at least conclude with Mortimer that probate accounts are biased sources because debt levels at least in surviving probate accounts are much higher than in the inventoried population.

The accounting process of probate accounts suggests general confidence in their accuracy. The Probate Act of 1530 provided for a substantial financial penalty if administration of estates was not carried out properly (21 Henry VIII c5). This involved keeping scrupulous records of all payments and 'casting an account' to bring back to court (Bower 1999, xix). The court inspected the accounts and expenses deemed inappropriate were rejected. Payments of any debt of more than £2 had to be supported by an acquittance or a cancelled bond. Payments of smaller amounts were attested by the accountant's oath (Erickson 1993, 35–6). However, courts could interpret this guidance liberally, as the archdeaconry court of Huntingdon allowed an amount of £29 in J Thoday's account (1676) for 'various debts due by the said deceased whose names this accountant cannot remember'.

Funeral Rituals

Probate accounts provide a good deal of information about funeral rituals. Erickson suggested that funeral amounts were generally between £1 and £2 but varied widely with an individual's wealth. Erickson did not attach dates to her estimates of funeral costs but she is likely to be referring to the period for which most probate accounts survive *i.e.* about 1590–1690 (Erickson 2000, 108). The mean cost of a Huntingdonshire funeral recorded in 249 probate accounts in the quarter century 1675–1700 was £5 and the median £3. The cost of individual funerals ranged from seven shillings and six pence to £106. The range is a crude measure of dispersion and a more useful measure, the standard deviation was £7.89 (CV=1.58) in Huntingdonshire.

Laqueur argued that there was almost no relationship between costs of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century funerals and the size of the deceased's estate. He argued that in this period funerals were a demonstration of status quite independent of their economic position. For Laqueur this situation had changed by the nineteenth century when funerals had become a consumption good. Money now made the man and death became the occasion for a final accounting, a stocktaking of worldly success. Those of relatively low status could have a lavish funeral if they could afford it (Laqueur 1983, 109–115). By contrast, Fritz suggested that 'the invasion of commerce

into the rites of passage' took place in the seventeenth century. A consumer-oriented mentality drove 'ordinary ranks' to imitate elite society and provided the emerging undertakers with an untapped market (Earle 1989, 79). This led the pamphleteer T T Merchant to complain that 'persons of ordinary rank may for the value of fifty pounds make as great a figure as the nobility and the gentry did formerly' (Fritz 1994–5, 246). Estabrook saw funeral costs as a reflection of the urban/rural divide. In Bristol and its surrounding villages, the funeral expenses of ordinary urban dwellers often exceeded those of the most substantial yeomen (Estabrook 1998, 153).

Evidence from Huntingdonshire did not support Laqueur's contention that there was almost no relationship between costs of early modern funerals and the size of the deceased's estate. Huntingdonshire accounts showed a significant positive correlation between funeral costs and inventory values ($p < 0.01$). The strength of the relationship was moderate (Pearson correlation coefficient 0.310).

Macfarlane wrote that seventeenth-century funerals were dignified occasions, filled with processions, tears, solemn gestures and lengthy sermons, but they were also occasions for feasting and exchange of gifts (Macfarlane 1970, 100). Gittings argued that the most striking feature of funeral details contained in probate accounts was the amount of money spent on food and drink (Gittings 1991, 53). It commonly amounted to half the cost of burying someone and could be as much as three-quarters or more of total costs (Gittings 1984, 97). Food and drink amounted to more than half the total cost of burial in over two-thirds of Huntingdonshire probate accounts. In Huntingdonshire, expenditure on food and drink for mourners varied widely and was not necessarily related to social rank. A barber from Godmanchester, John Dickenson, had goods worth £47 15s when he died in 1676. His funeral cost over £6, more than the funerals of half the gentry whose records survive. Two-thirds of the cost of Dickenson's funeral was spent on food and drink; bread and cakes at £2 10s and a hogshead of beer for £1 12s 6d. At Mary Harrison's funeral in St Ives in 1679, £8 was spent on bread, beer and cakes for mourners. An indication of the amount of food that could be purchased for such sums is revealed by Joane Lord's probate account. Expenditure on her funeral included 20 dozen cakes at £1 10s and 20 dozen loaves at £1 2s. Although the amounts were small, the Overseers of the Poor in Godmanchester and Kimbolton provided beer for mourners at paupers' funerals. Hospitality for mourners could extend beyond food and drink. For example, tobacco and pipes costing 10s were provided at the funeral of William Proud of Ramsey in 1676.

Cressy argued that in their funeral customs, the elite tried to distinguish themselves from the masses. People could be buried in the most expensive lead coffins or their shrouded body might be placed in a reusable parish coffin for the duration of the funeral ceremony. Gittings suggested that poorer people would at least be carried to the grave in the

communal coffin and then the body was buried just in its shroud (Gittings 1999, 157). The earliest surviving parish coffin dating from around 1645 is from Easingwold, Yorkshire (Litten 1991, 157).

Cressy commented that people of rank preferred personal coffins and 'would not be seen dead' in the common parish box. However, he argued that none but the wealthy could look forward to decomposing in their own wooden box (Cressy 1997, 430–4). Funeral expenditures recorded in Huntingdonshire probate accounts did not accord with Cressy's argument because most accounts included a coffin. In Huntingdonshire, more than three-quarters of the probate accounts related to the period from 1676–1688 and the median value of Huntingdonshire coffins was ten shillings. An excavation of a Quaker burial ground in 2006 at Hemingford Grey in Huntingdonshire suggested contrary to Cressy that use of coffins was widespread. The excavation found that all people interred between 1687 and 1721 were buried in coffins (Pitts 2007, 6). Gittings pointed out that more than the bare minimum funeral was usually provided for paupers and in Kent, a coffin was always used at a pauper burial from the mid-seventeenth century onwards (Gittings 1984, 61). Sharpe found that in Devon at the end of the eighteenth century deceased paupers were 'usually' provided with coffins at a cost of 7s 6d (Sharpe 2002, 298). Overseers of the Poor accounts in Great Gransden, Huntingdonshire recorded a coffin costing 10 shillings provided for 'an old beggar man found dead under a haycock' in 1680 (Huntingdonshire Archives HP 36/12/1). Overseers of the Poor in both Godmanchester and Kimbolton also provided coffins for a number of pauper funerals (Huntingdonshire Archives HP 36/12/2/1; Huntingdonshire Archives HP52/12/5). In Godmanchester, the price of seven coffins for paupers in the three year period 1787–9 was lower than comparative prices for those recorded in probate accounts. Five coffins cost nine shillings and the other two cost six shillings.

In the eighteenth century, coffins were made of wood but covered with fabric, usually baize. Upholstery pins were nailed to the surface of the coffin in various patterns and the coffin was finished with stamped metal motifs which were cheap to produce. Coffins finished in polished wood did not become fashionable until the introduction of French polishing in the mid-nineteenth century.

The funeral ritual adhered strictly to the hierarchical niceties of genteel funerary decorum. Significant amounts could be spent on mourning clothes, particularly gloves. Gifts of gloves and hatbands to mourners maintained perceptions of status (Finn 2000, 148). The most expensive funeral in the Huntingdonshire probate accounts at £106 5s 10d was that of a clergyman, Francis Barnard of Wyton in 1682.¹ Barnard's funeral represented 36% of the value of his inventory value.

Barnard's coffin at £5 was ten times the common sum of 10s and his burial linen was a further £5. Gloves provided for mourners at Barnard's funeral cost £39 15s 8d. This sum is put into perspective by comparison with John Berridge's funeral at Upton in 1722 when 14 pairs of gloves were provided for 1s per pair. A horse and related charges for Barnard's burial was £4 13s whereas a horse for Francis Marchant's funeral at Stanground in the same year, 1682 cost only 10s.

Parish bells tolled when a person was dying and rang again when the funeral service took place. Tolling of the bell was variously interpreted by Protestant and Catholic but after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 it symbolised the rehabilitation of the ceremonies of the Church of England. Joyce Jeffries, an elderly single Herefordshire gentlewoman, paid 3s 6d for ringing five peals at the burial of her cousin about 1640 and the catholic squire William Blundell had ringers to the value of 4s towards the end of the seventeenth century (Cressy 1997, 421–4). The range of payments for bell ringing is illustrated in Huntingdonshire where the cost of digging James Cooper's grave and ringing the bell was 2s in 1681 whereas in the following year John Peachey a gentleman from Needingworth had ringers costing 10s. Bells also tolled for the poorest in society. In 1789, Overseers of the Poor in Godmanchester provided beer costing 3s and 2s 10d for the toll bearers at the funerals of John Ray and a deceased person recorded as Bright.

Cressy commented that strictly there was no fee for a Christian burial but custom required payment of fees to the church. Only men dying with goods valued at £6 13s 4d or more were required to pay mortuary fees and then only when constrained to do so by local custom. The fee was assessed on a sliding scale from 3s 4d to 10s (Cressy 1997, 456–7). John Dickenson's mortuary payment was 10s but Peacock's mortuary in 1682 was only 7s 6d despite the value of their goods being almost the same.

Funeral sermons became more common from the seventeenth century onwards and followed a set pattern (Mytum 1994, 14). A text would be expounded to remind mourners of their own mortality, followed by a biography of the deceased. Jupp suggested that the description of the deceased's character was awaited with keenest anticipation. The preacher carefully selected what was good from the person's life and drew a veil over the rest. In this way he could both satisfy the expectations of the congregation and his own conscience (Houlbrooke 1999, 188). Gittings suggested that income from funeral sermons was a lucrative business for clergymen. She argued that the usual fee was 10s prior to the Restoration and £1 thereafter (Gittings 1984, 138). Mortimer found that most funeral sermons in Berkshire cost 6s 8d or 10s with the higher charge twice as common as the lower. He speculated that the two figures depended on whether the

1. Francis Barnard was almost certainly a member of the prominent Barnard family of Brampton Park, Huntingdonshire. Edward Earl of Manchester sold the manor of Houghton and Wyton to Robert Bernard of Brampton Park in 1651. (Page, Proby and Inskip Ladds, 1932, 179). Following his funeral on December 19 1679, the Wyton parish register recorded that Francis Barnard's body was transferred to Brampton for burial. (Huntingdonshire Archives, HP 101/1/1/1)

incumbent preached or whether an external preacher spoke (Mortimer 1990, xix–xx). In Huntingdonshire, fees for funeral sermons were almost always 10s in the last quarter of the seventeenth century and not the higher fee of £1 suggested by Gittings.

Washing, winding and watching were all involved in preparing the body for burial. Neighbouring women and female servants were frequently employed to clean and dress a corpse (Cressy 1997, 428). Winding the corpse in a sheet or burial shroud was the minimum requirement for a decent burial for only animals were buried naked. Legislation in 1678 required all bodies to be buried in wool to support the domestic woollen industry (Willett & Cunningham 1992, 55). This is reflected in payments in probate accounts where woollen cloth is expressly recorded. The woollen sheet for Atkins of Holywell in 1681 cost as much as 18s whereas woollen to wind the body of James Cooper of Stanground in the same year was only 6s. Overseers of the Poor accounts for Great Gransden recorded affidavits sworn to affirm that five paupers were buried in wool in 1678. However, these accounts also recorded two cases where the body was buried in linen: Andrew Lilly in 1682 and Mary Griffin in 1683. Each case incurred a fine of £5 of which half went to the informer and the other half to the poor of the parish. In the case of Mary Griffin, the informer was Barnabas Oley, Vicar of Great Gransden, who was buried in the church two years later (Fig. 2).

Cressy argued that the custom of sitting up all night watching the body applied to both rich and poor. The intention was to safeguard the body and to ensure that there was somebody present if the corpse revived. In the late seventeenth century, John Aubrey reported the practice in Yorkshire of watching and sitting up all night until the body was interred while drinking beer, taking tobacco, and sometimes engaging in 'mimical plays and sports' (Cressy 1997, 427). In 1720, women were paid 2s 6d for laying out Henry Careless, a waterman from Godmanchester, and a further 3s 6d was paid for watching the body, victuals and drink for the watchers and for the fire and candle.

William Gouge, one of the most widely read conduct book writers in the seventeenth century, argued in his *Domesticall Duties* that it was the duty of children to bring the bodies of their deceased par-

ents for burial with 'decency and honour' (Cressy 1997, 415). Testators in Huntingdonshire frequently expressed their concern that their body was given a 'decent Christian burial'. The *Directory of Publique Worship* of 1645, which superseded the Canon of 1603 and lasted until 1660, reflected Puritan teaching that corpses should be immediately interred without any ceremony (Schofield 2005, 98). The Puritan rector Samuel Hurlstone stipulated in his will of 1616 that his body should be buried 'without any delay after my death, without popish pomp, vain compliments and ringing' (Spurr 2006, 292). However, being buried 'without pomp' could be variously interpreted. The significant levels of expenditure on funerals recorded in probate accounts could be viewed as avoidance of meanness rather than vanity and ostentation. One example of desire for a simple funeral was that of John Brown of Broughton. His will commended his soul into the hands of Jesus Christ and humbly hoped that he would take care of it. His loving wife Mary Brown was enjoined to bury his body in 'a frugal manner'.

Mortimer found that many individuals in the Berkshire probate accounts were buried within the building of their church (Mortimer 1990, xix). This was not the case in either Huntingdonshire or Yorkshire. There were only two references in extant probate accounts to burial inside a church. Both were gentlemen. The will of Matthew Burgh, gentleman and alderman, required his body to be buried in the parish church of St Augustine in Hedon, Yorkshire. Robert Ramsden, a gentleman, was buried in the parish church of Halifax in 1757. The usual place of burial was the Anglican parish churchyard. Although the unbaptised or suicides were not legally provided for, even these were often buried in an unconsecrated part of the churchyard (Morgan 1989, 95).

The practice of erecting gravestones goes back to at least the medieval period although these were usually for high status individuals and survival of medieval gravestones is very rare (Houlrooke 1989, 38). Relatively few gravestones can be dated even to the seventeenth century (Gittings 1984, 143). Mytum and Chapman argued that this is partly due to erosion of inscriptions of early memorials or because broken stones have been removed. They also suggested that stones may sink into the ground and many early

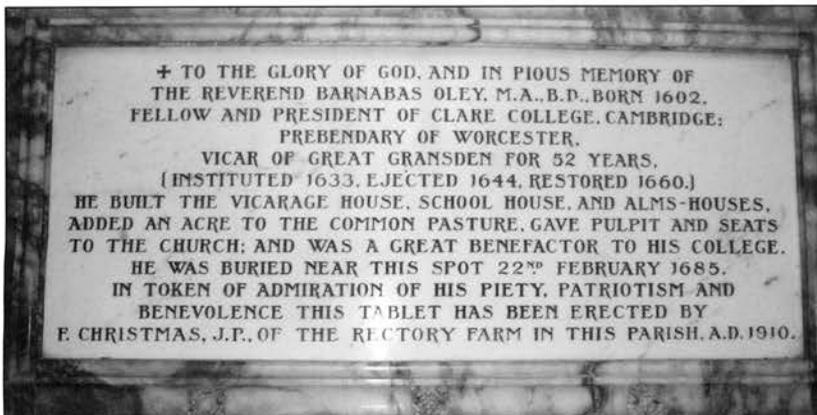


Figure 2. Memorial to Barnabas Oley in Great Gransden Church.

stones are partially buried so that their form and date cannot be easily ascertained (Mytum & Chapman 2006, 67).

One of the earliest known gravestones in Huntingdonshire is that of William Bandol, a yeoman who died in Stilton in 1613 (Fig. 3)

The Huntingdonshire probate accounts revealed that the median expenditure on headstones was 4s 6d in the 1670s but £1 11s 3d in the second half of the eighteenth century. The diary of Thomas Marchant provided an insight into how the costs of headstones were calculated. The diary recorded that the tombstone for Marchant's father cost 3 shillings a foot in 1714 plus 7s 6d for 'squaring him and working the edges' and a further penny a letter for the inscription (Bower 2005, 8). Tombstones for the middle ranks varied considerably in both price and quality. John Shawforth, a yeoman from Wheldrake, Yorkshire had a tombstone costing over £12 in 1793. Tombstones were also erected for those of relatively low status. Henry Apthorp, a butcher from St Ives had a gravestone which cost £2 2s in 1783 and setting his gravestone was a further 6s 8d. His funeral cost £8.4s 9d, 41% of his movable assets. One of the oldest dateable gravestones in Godmanchester churchyard is that

of Robert Vinter who died in 1723. The inscription reads, 'Here lyeth the Body of Robert Vinter who dyed February 16th 1723 aged 49' (Fig. 4).

Vinter's inventory reveals that he was a tailor with moveable goods valued at £34 8s 6d. Although there is no probate account to give details of his funeral it also probably represented a significant proportion of his assets. When Vinter died he was only 49 years old but perhaps saddest of all is that his moveable goods included three barrels of beer in his buttery worth 16 shillings which he had not got round to drinking!

Laqueur argued that funerals became a consumption good. There is one important difference between funerals and other consumption goods: the consumer is dead. However, many people expressed their wishes about their funeral arrangements before their death. These wishes ranged from precise details to general principles to be followed. Llewellyn cites one devout working person's desire to be 'simply not sumptuously...buried, I require no more' (Llewellyn 2000, 237–9). The actual purchaser of funeral goods is usually the executor or administrator of the estate and they may have an important influence on the funeral arrangements. In a purely material sense the more that is spent on the deceased's funeral the less



Figure 3. Gravestone of William Bandol (1613).



Figure 4. Gravestone of Robert Vinter (1723).

remains to be distributed to legatees. One of the important findings from the probate accounts is that the substantial proportions of movable assets spent on funerals show that consumption could have a broader meaning than merely material goods. It was also about exhibiting status and religious concerns including the desire for a decent Christian burial.

However, the relatively poor could also have a decent Christian burial. The limited evidence from probate accounts showed that in Huntingdonshire, the median cost of a funeral for inventoried husbandmen and labourers was no lower than that of the population with surviving probate accounts. The very poorest in society could have a dignified funeral and the use of coffins was widespread. Overseers of the Poor accounts suggested that even beggars could be buried in coffins rather than shrouds and beer was provided for mourners at paupers' funerals.

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