

The 'Remembered Family' and Dynastic Senses of Identity Among the English Gentry c. 1600-1800.

Gervase Holles was anxious to distinguish his account of his family's history from the exaggerated stories told by some of his contemporaries. The latter reflected 'a wayne affectation to fly beyond the moone and to credit themselves (as they thinke) with long and fictitious pedigrees'.¹ Reflecting on his home county, he asked rhetorically,

how many have wee in Lincolnshire that will affirme themselves to have been gentlemen there ever since the Normans' entrance, when I know there are scarce sixe families in the whole county that can make prooffe they had one foot of land there in the 20th yeare of K. Henry the third [1236].²

For Holles, the desire to fabricate an illustrious ancestry 'commonly procedes from poverty of worth which perswades them to fill with words what they want in virtue'. Instead, Holles assured his son Frescheville that his history would enable the family 'not only to justify theis descentes... by unquestionable authority of record, but also to set the right stamp and value upon every person' within it.³

In fulfilling this objective, Holles created a unique work of collective family biography, rich in personal detail, character description and psychological insight.⁴ However, his desire for accuracy truncated the length of the lineage he described. His account of the Holles family tree began with John Holles of Stoke, Warwickshire, six generations earlier, and he could only begin the detailed discussion of his ancestors' characters with his great-great grandfather Sir William Holles (1471-

¹ G. Holles, 'Memorials of the Holles Family' ed. A. C. Wood, *Camden Society*, 3rd ser., 55 (1937), 3.

² Holles, 'Memorials', 3.

³ Holles, 'Memorials', 2.

⁴ A. Pritchard, *Biography in the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto, 2005), pp. 206-18.

1542). Documentary sources enabled him to pursue the lineages of some relatives by marriage in more depth, but only to describe 'the genealogical part without the historical', or the 'unspirited dead and useless carcase'.⁵ For Holles, the revivifying element was personal, biographical knowledge, and this was transmitted more by familial story-telling than by historical 'evidences'. He believed that his account should begin with John Holles, because his father's cousin, the Earl of Clare, had heard *his* grandfather mention him, so that it was plausible that he should 'receave from him what the name of his great grandfather was'.⁶

Holles wrote his 'memorials' in exile and complained repeatedly about the chronological constraints imposed by a lack of documentary evidence. As will be shown below, however, they adopted the same genealogical profile as many other less elaborate family memoirs. Together, these family histories raise a question that has not, so far, been addressed by the existing literatures on the gentry, genealogy and heraldry, and on the evolution of history and biography in early modern England. This concerns the social meaning of ancestry in the formation of gentry identities, in a period in which lengthy formal genealogies were being regarded with greater suspicion, but in which ideas of 'bloud and name' continued to compete with humanist emphasis on 'personall and acquired nobility', as Holles put it.⁷ This article will argue that ancestry remained very significant, but that the

⁵ Holles, *Memorials*, 2.

⁶ Holles, 'Memorials', 12.

⁷ Holles, 'Memorials', 8, 4; for discussions of lineal versus personal definitions of gentility, see S. Shapin, *A Social History of Truth Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago & London, 1994), pp. 43-4, 46; P. Corfield, 'The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentlemen', in N. Harte & R. Quinault (eds), *Land and Society in Britain 1700-1914: essays in honour of F.M.L. Thompson* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 12-18; A. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 212-42; J. Gillingham, 'From Civilitas to Civility: Codes of Manners in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 12, (2002), 267-91.

most important ancestors became those remembered, relatively immediate, ‘flesh and blood’ relatives who dominated Holles’ narrative.

I

Recent research has explored the gentry’s attitude to their lineage in relation to two other subject areas: the evolution of early modern forms of history-writing; and contemporary understandings of the value of biography. Daniel Woolf’s comprehensive survey of pre-modern historical thought has traced the rise and subsequent decline of ‘genealogical mania’ among the gentry in early modern England. He argues that the preoccupation with pedigrees among some gentry families ‘reached new heights in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries’, partly to legitimise newcomers at a time of rapid social mobility.⁸ As Broadway has pointed out, this influx of new armorial families also led established families to expand the number of quarterings of their arms, as ‘a means of social differentiation’.⁹ However, in the century after the Restoration Woolf, Broadway, and Heal and Holmes all detect declining interest and rising scepticism among the gentry about lineage and the claims of pedigree.¹⁰ Woolf suggests that this was because the sixteenth-century system of formal, heraldic proofs of status had been overwhelmed, and discredited, by the numbers of aspirant Gentry families.¹¹ Instead, status was tied increasingly to legal proofs of landed title in the present, rather

⁸ D. Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past. English Historical Culture 1500-1730* (Oxford, 2003), p. 87.

⁹ J. Broadway, ‘No historie so meete’. *Gentry culture and the development of local history in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Manchester, 2006), p. 166.

¹⁰ F. Heal & C. Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 38-42.

¹¹ C.f. L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1642* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 66-9; A. Everitt, ‘Change in the Provinces: the Seventeenth Century’, *Department of English Local History Occasional Papers, New Ser.*, 1 (Leicester, 1969), pp. 37-8; A. Simpson, *The wealth of the Gentry, 1540-1660: East Anglian Studies* (Chicago &

than the unbroken descent of ancestral estates. At the same time, contemporary commentators now regarded an obsession with lineage as the preserve of the social climber, 'the last refuge of families teetering on the brink of economic ruin', or a reflective perspective generated by advancing years.¹² Shorn of their legitimising social function, genealogical interests in the eighteenth century became 'a species of cultural currency', with individual family histories becoming vehicles to illustrate regional, national or international histories.¹³

Allen Pritchard has examined family histories as specimens of biographical method in the seventeenth century. Focusing particularly on Holles' 'Memorials', he has argued that this style of collective familial biography was specific to the seventeenth century, because it was a cultural hybrid. On the one hand, it delineated forebears as individual characters, through descriptions of appearance, and idiosyncrasies of manners and speech, prefiguring later single-subject biographies. On the other, it set these within lineal relationships, because it continued to be 'shaped by an aristocratic sense of family, defined by noble rank, ancient genealogy, and grand alliances'.¹⁴ In fact, it will be shown below that although the length of Holles' familial biographies was unusual, their concentration on relatively recent generations was typical of many other Gentry memoirs extending well into the eighteenth century.

Other research has highlighted the more strategic and (perhaps) manipulative ways that lineage was used to bolster elite identities. Liddy and Steer have reinterpreted the actions of the

Cambs., 1961), p. 212; J. T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War* (London, 1969), pp. 15-16.

¹² Woolf, *Social Circulation*, pp. 128-9; N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 81-2.

¹³ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 113.

¹⁴ Pritchard, *Biography*, p. 218.

lineage-obsessed John, Lord Lumley.¹⁵ Lumley was notorious among his contemporaries at the turn of the seventeenth century for his preoccupation with his own ancestry, illustrated by his efforts to fill the church at Chester-le-Street with memorials to his forebears. Liddy and Steer argue these schemes were not those of ‘a genealogical megalomaniac’, but rather part of a more concerted, political campaign to rehabilitate his family from the ignominy of his father’s execution for treason, and dispel doubts created by his own Catholicism.¹⁶ Similar political concerns have been identified in the battle over genealogy between Edward Arden and the Dudleys in Warwickshire in the 1570s and 1580s.¹⁷ Here again, a Catholic county ‘affinity’ used genealogy to defend its power-base in the face of encroachment by influential Protestant courtiers, disputing the pedigrees by which the Dudleys claimed the earldom of Warwick.¹⁸

Looking more widely, Peter Sherlock has commented that lineages were represented on elite tombs in early modern England not to revere ancestry, or differentiate against newcomers, but as ‘an attempt to create a reality, rather than reflect it’.¹⁹ Perhaps only one-third of the peerage between 1400 and 1700 ever received a memorial. Elaborate commemorations of multiple ancestors tended to be in the style of John, Lord Lumley, ‘often erected by one person, or in two or three bursts across several centuries’, or by individuals intent on inserting themselves or their ancestors within a broader family narrative.²⁰ Similarly, Katharine Hodgkin’s review of the family

¹⁵ C. D. Liddy & C. Steer, ‘John Lord Lumley and the Creation and Commemoration of Lineage in Early Modern England’, *The Archaeological Journal*, 167: 1 (2010), 197-227.

¹⁶ Liddy and Steer, Lumley, 198.

¹⁷ C. Enis, ‘Edward Arden and the Dudley earls of Warwick and Leicester, c. 1572-1583’, *British Catholic History* 33 (2), (2016), 170-210.

¹⁸ Enis, Arden, 184.

¹⁹ P. Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2008), p. 22; Heal and Holmes, *Gentry*, p. 24.

²⁰ Sherlock, *Monuments*, p. 39.

histories written by three seventeenth-century gentlewomen, Anne Clifford, Anne Fanshawe and Lucy Hutchinson, illustrates how they made selective and strategic use of lineage stories.²¹ History writing fitted with gendered assumptions about women's role in the broader social 'reproduction' of the family, 'transmitting the past through the present for the use of the future'.²² However, this was achieved only through 'a process of selection and ordering which identifies the significant strands of lineage and history for each writer', and in which women, therefore, intervened directly in shaping the story that was passed on, and the family's conception of itself.²³

These interpretations are helpful in revealing how genealogies were not so much the solid building blocks of gentry identity, but the sinuous rope that lashed together often shakier social foundations. However, such interpretations do not really reveal the Gentry's subjective understanding of their own familial histories; that is, where they drew the outer generational boundaries of their ancestry; and how they used these histories to sustain and project personal, familial and social identities in this period. Contrary to the current historiographical emphasis on the group's 'obsession' with lengthy genealogies, the article will show that the gentry often displayed a surprisingly restricted knowledge of their forebears, which resembled that possessed by other social groups. Personal recollections and family histories reveal the practical limits of knowledge and memory and describe a 'remembered family' that was normally confined to only a few preceding generations. In addition, this research will demonstrate that such truncated family trees could still be very important sources of elite social and familial identity. By exploring the didactic uses of the 'remembered family', the article will suggest that recent ancestors could possess more power as moral examples than a longer litany of impersonal dynastic 'ancestors', because the memory of their

²¹ K. Hodgkin, 'Women, Memory and Family History in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Memory Before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, E. Kuijpers, J. Pollmann, J. Müller and J. Van Der Steen (eds), (Brill, 2013), pp. 297-314.

²² Hodgkin, *Women*, pp. 305-6, 304, 302-3.

²³ Hodgkin, *Women*, p. 313.

personal character or physical traits accentuated their vitality as identifiable, active historical agents. It will review the significance of the 'remembered family'; the dynastic extent and 'shape' of remembered families as these can be reconstructed from extant family histories; the means by which family knowledge was transmitted between the generations; the ways in which these unvarnished family histories were used to supply 'home truths' about conduct and morals for future generations; and how the remembered family illustrates the gentry's flexible use of their family history, and their capacity to formulate alternative concepts of lineage and ancestry. While it supports the current emphasis on the importance of lineage in shaping elite identities in early modern England, the article argues that we should rethink how such groups defined and understood their ancestry in this period.

II

Nearly 150 years after Gervase Holles constructed his painstaking account, Edward Gibbon worked a sketch of his family's history into various drafts of his own memoirs. He admitted that until recently he had known only about his father and grandfather, 'a country gentleman and a wealthy merchant', because 'I found neither tradition nor memorial... as our Genealogy was never a topic of conversation'.²⁴ For all he knew, their founder might have been 'a son of the Earth, who by his industry – his honest industry, perhaps – had raised himself from the Work-house or the cottage'.²⁵ However, through the chance discovery of the seventeenth-century work of a herald ancestor,

²⁴ E. Gibbon, 'Memoirs of My Life' in *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, J. Murray (ed.) (London, 1896), p. 356-65. See P. M. Spacks, *Imagining the Self: Autobiography and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 92-127.

²⁵ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, 356.

Gibbon had been able to extend his family tree back through a series of 'esquires' in Rolvenden, Kent, to a first documented reference in 1326.²⁶ Even so, he was only really able to name them from Elizabeth's reign onwards, and the first one to merit any significant detail was 'my lineal ancestor in the fifth degree, Robert Gibbon of Rolvenden, Esquire', who was a militia captain and died 'in the year 1618'. Gibbon began the family's history from this point, when Robert's younger son, also called Robert, had moved to London and joined the Cloth-workers' Company. Robert Junior was Gibbon's great-great-grandfather, but the detail of the family's story still only really commenced with the advent of Gibbon's grandfather, Edward, who he knew about from his father's recollections.

Gibbon's brief family history drew a distinction between what can be termed the 'ancestral family', a more extensive grouping whose members were often recalled only as bare names, and a more tangible, meaningful 'remembered family', whose outer limits were marked by his great-great-great grandfather. It appears that the latter, rather than more formally codified family genealogies formed the basis of the practical dynastic and didactic lineage for these writers. As Delany has noted, although early modern English autobiographies did not follow a single, dominant model, they often began with a brief outline of the subject's family history.²⁷ Like Gibbon, these authors generally confined their recollections to the five or six most recent generations, extending to great grandparents, or great-great grandparents.²⁸ These immediate ancestors formed the core of the

²⁶ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, 357-61.

²⁷ P. Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1969), pp. 8-9.

²⁸ The term 'memoirs' is employed in this study instead of autobiography, because the focus of this research is on author's conceptions of the immediate history of his or her family (whether paternal, maternal or both), and not to engage with the vexed question of what constitutes the 'autobiographical subject' within early modern life-writing more generally. For this, see C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge MA, 1989); F. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore MD, 1989); M. Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-*

‘remembered family’, and its store of moral exemplars. For example, in 1655 Sir Hugh Cholmley of Whitby began his relation of his ancestry with his great-great-great-grandfather, Sir Roger, d. 1538, a cadet of the original Cheshire family,²⁹ even though the breadth of his local genealogical knowledge matched that of Holles and Sir John Oglander.³⁰ Lord Herbert of Cherbury denied knowing very much about his family history, ‘since I was but eight years old when my grandfather died, and that my father lived but about four years after’,³¹ so he chose to begin his account with his great-grandfather, Sir Richard Herbert of Colebrook, Monmouthshire. A decade later, Sir John Bramston of Skreens, could relate six generations of his family in Whitechapel, back to his great-great-great-grandfather John Bramston, in the reign of Edward IV.³² In 1683, the biographer of George Byng, first lord Torrington, was able, ‘chiefly from his own discourses’ with Byng to trace his ancestry back to Robert Byng, of Wrotham Kent, his great-great-grandfather, High Sheriff of the county in 1582.³³ In the eighteenth century, Roger North extended his account of his numerous siblings and their families to include 30 individuals, but started his brief family history with his great grandfather.³⁴

identity in England, 1591-1791 (Cambridge, 1997); *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical writing in its Social Context since the Middle Ages*, R. Dekker (ed.), (Hilversum, 2002); D. Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven & London, 2004); A. Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010).

²⁹ ‘The Memoirs and Memorials of Sir Hugh Cholmley of Whitby 1600-57’, J. Binns (ed.), *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Rec. Ser. CLIII* (1997-98), 61.

³⁰ Heal & Holmes, *Gentry*, pp. 20-23; A. Nicholson, *Gentry. Six Hundred Years of a Peculiarly English Class* (London, 2011), pp. 107-36.

³¹, *The Autobiography of Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury*, S. L. Lee (ed.), (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 2-3.

³² ‘The Autobiography of Sir John Bramston of Skreens’, *Camden Society* o. s. 32 (1845), 4.

³³ ‘Memoirs relating to Lord Torrington’, *Camden Society*, n. s. 46 (1889), 1.

³⁴ Roger North, *The Lives of the Rt. Hon. Francis North... The Hon. Sir Dudley North... and Rev. Dr. John North* (London, 1826), xv-xxi.

Perhaps more surprisingly, antiquaries appear only to have been able to do the same with their family histories.³⁵ The Oxford antiquary, Anthony à Wood, was able to trace his family to his great-grandfather, whose first name Wood omitted. He had died in Lancaster gaol in 1568 after becoming a Catholic priest. Thereafter, Wood was able to give a full account of his great-aunts, uncles and aunts and cousins, 'soe... that wee may not be numbred among the ignorant who scarce... like mere brutes know nothing of their fathers and mothers'.³⁶ In the mid-eighteenth century even the antiquary William Stukeley began his account of his family only with his grandfather, John Stukeley, who was born in 1623. Like Gibbon, Stukeley depended on his father's recollections for any information about his grandfather.³⁷ The same was true of Arthur Young at the end of the century, who could mention his grandfather, Bartholomew, but only to recall that he had been able to maintain a coach-and-four from a plot of land in Norfolk 'which in these present times just maintains the establishment of a wheel-barrow'.³⁸

Other memoirists were less cautious about their ancestral claims, but also ended up focusing on more recent times. The Newcastle merchant Ambrose Barnes gave a rather fanciful account of his ancestors, who were 'originally Saxon', and included 'two of this name who have been Lord Mayors of London' (without any indication of lineal ancestry), but began the substance of his family history in the late sixteenth century with his grandfather Ambrose, a Yorkshire gentleman.³⁹ Thomas Comber, a late seventeenth-century Dean of Durham claimed that his family began with 'de Combre, who came to England with William the Conquerour', but the detail of his family history commenced

³⁵ 'The diary of Abraham de la Pryme The Yorkshire Antiquary', *Surtees Society* LIV (1869), 3.

³⁶ 'The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-1695, described by Himself', A. Clark (ed.), *Oxford Historical Society*, XL (1900), 3, 19.

³⁷ 'The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley M.D.', *Surtees Society* LXXIII (1880), 2-5.

³⁸ *The Autobiography of Arthur Young*, M. Betham-Edwards (ed.), (London, 1898), 2-3.

³⁹ 'Memoirs of the Life of Mr Ambrose Barnes late Merchant Sometime Alderman of Newcastle Upon Tyne', *Surtees Society*, L (1866), 23, 27.

more mundanely with the statement that 'my fathers Granfather was a Councillor at Law, and justice of the peace in the Reign of Qu: Eliz.'⁴⁰

Although Woolf has emphasized the role of women as keepers of family memory in this period, female memoirists ranged over similar territory to their male counterparts.⁴¹ Few memoirists were more devoted to the marital family than Lucy Hutchinson, but she did not extend her account of her own family, or that of Colonel Hutchinson's, more than three or four generations. She was confident that her own family, the Apsleys, derived from a town of the same name, 'where they had been seated before the Conquest', but 'particulars concerning my father's kindred or county I never knew much of, by reason of my youth at the time of his death, and my education in far distant places'.⁴² Consequently, she began her account of her own family with her grandfather. Her history of the Hutchinsons, began with Col. Hutchinson's grandfather, supplemented by an anecdote relating to his maternal grandfather, Sir John Byron.⁴³ Ann, Lady Fanshawe, alluded to the family's deep roots in Derbyshire, in the parish of Dronfield, but only because she had seen 'severall grave-stones, with the names of that family, many of them very ancient' in the church there.⁴⁴ Again, though, her detailed knowledge of the family began with her husband's grandfather in the reign of Henry VIII.⁴⁵ In the 1720s, it was reported to the Essex antiquarian William Holman that Lady Audley of Audley End understood that 'her great-grandfather was Chancellor Audley's god-son and his near

⁴⁰ 'The Autobiographies and Letters of Thomas Comber Sometime Precentor of York and Dean of Durham', C. E. Whiting (ed.), *Surtees Society* CLVI (1941), 1.

⁴¹ D. Woolf, 'A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500-1800', *American Historical Review*, 103, 3 (1997), 645-79.

⁴² L. Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel John Hutchinson* (London, 1995), p. 8.

⁴³ Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ *The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett and Ann, Lady Fanshawe* J. Loftis (ed.), (Oxford, 1979), p. 103.

⁴⁵ *Fanshawe*, p. 104.

relation', but at this distance she was uncertain 'whether he was his nephew or second-cousin'.⁴⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in the eighteenth century the poet Laetitia Pilkington also chose to begin her account of her ancestry with her great-grandfather, the earl of Killmallock, although she explained that her grandmother had eloped with a Catholic Jacobite officer, who was her mother's father.⁴⁷

Although personal memoirs included the 'remembered family' as historical context for the life of the author, or of the biographical subject, this relatively 'present-centred' perspective is significant. Even if writers stressed the importance of their recent ancestors, these family histories were used primarily to create a backdrop for the expression of the author's life-history and identity. While these sketches of family history often conveyed real moral or emotional meaning, none really expressed Mervyn James' idea that early sixteenth-century lineal identity was something to which the individual family member sublimated his or her own sense of self. '[Family] honour therefore was not merely an individual possession, but that of the collectivity, the lineage'.⁴⁸ Although Gervase Holles hoped that his son would be inspired by his 'paynes to praeseve the memories of my ancestors', so that 'some of your posterity will have the same piety for the preservation of yours', he also argued that it lay 'in himselfe to become the parent of his own nobility', rather than relying on inherited name alone.⁴⁹ In this sense, the brevity of the lineage recited in most personal memoirs tends to emphasize the relative freedom of the (auto)biographical subject from these deeper dynastic 'obligations'.

If extended lineages were less important to the Gentry than James suggested, this may explain why the parameters of their 'remembered families' matched those of other social groups. The Somerset excise officer, John Cannon, was able to sketch out a family tree very similar in length

⁴⁶ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 116.

⁴⁷ *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington, written by herself* (London, 1751), pp. 10-12.

⁴⁸ M. James, *Society, Politics and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 325.

⁴⁹ Holles, 'Memorials', 4-5.

to that described by John Bramston or Lucy Hutchinson. In the 1730s, he recorded his great-grandfather and mother, the parents of his grandfather, John, born in 1601 or 1602, who he could just remember in the late 1680s.⁵⁰ Among his mother's family, he found one John Hooper in the parish register of neighbouring Balstonborough, 'buried there in the year 1570, who was... our author's great-great-grandfather', but again began the account with John's grandson Thomas, that is, his own grandfather.⁵¹ In memoirs addressed to Sir George Crewe Bt. in 1820, the Staffordshire wholesale dealer, John Lomas, recounted 'about 80 or 90 years back my great grandfather, George Lomas, served as game keeper to Sir John Harpur, your great grandfather'.⁵² In this instance, Lomas had the advantage of remembering his great grandfather because he had lived 'I was told to the age of 102'.⁵³ David Vincent noted that the nineteenth-century radical, Samuel Bamford, could also discuss his great-grandfather, James Bamford, who lived in the first quarter of the preceding century.⁵⁴ The early nineteenth-century Preston weaver, Benjamin Shaw, echoed Lord Herbert of Cherbury and Lucy Hutchinson in his professed ignorance of his ancestry.⁵⁵ Even so, Shaw began his pedigree with his great-grandfather, Richard Shaw, who lived at Smorthwaite Hill, Sedburgh, 'but when he was Born or died I cannot tell'.⁵⁶ William Cobbett was equally, and characteristically, blunt.

⁵⁰ 'The Chronicles of John Cannon Excise Officer and Writing Master Pt. 1, 1684-1733', J. Money (ed.), *Records of Social and Economic History*, n. s. 43 (London, 2009), 8-9.

⁵¹ Cannon, 13.

⁵² D. Brown, 'The Autobiography of a Pedlar: John Lomas of Hollinsclough, Staffordshire (1747-1823)', *Midland History*, 21 (1996), 163.

⁵³ Brown, Lomas, 163.

⁵⁴ D. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Autobiography* (London & New York, 1981), pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵ 'The Family Records of Benjamin Shaw Mechanic of Dent, Dolphinholme and Preston, 1772-1841', A. G. Crosby (ed.), *Record Society of Lancashire & Cheshire CXXX* (1991), 2.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Shaw, 2.

With respect to my ancestors, I shall go no further back than my grandfather, and for the very plain reason, that I never heard talk of any prior to him.⁵⁷

Similarly, Naomi Tadmor has suggested that the eighteenth-century Sussex shopkeeper Thomas Turner was much more concerned to *establish* a dynastic record for his successors, beginning with his own father, than he was to situate himself within a longer familial lineage.⁵⁸

III

These examples illustrate that the 'remembered family' tended to adopt a characteristic shape, irrespective of social rank. It extended back four or five generations beyond the present, but rarely went further, because the survival of personal anecdotes relied on a chain of oral transmission. At the furthest extremes, (as Holles noted) grandparents might share the stories recounted to them by their grandparents, spanning five or six generations in all. Beyond that, the chain of person-to-person contact was broken. Again, it is significant that the gentry appear to have followed these patterns of largely oral recollection, despite the greater likelihood that they would possess written 'evidences' of lineage, if only in the form of property deeds.

There is some suggestion that Gentry authors regarded family memory as a more authentic source of knowledge than corrupt heraldic genealogy. In the mid-seventeenth century Sir Christopher Guise doubted the heralds' suggestion that his ancestor Sir Philip Guise 'came in with the Conqueror', and preferred instead to 'follow more certayne lights of my own evidence', that traced their estates in Gloucestershire back 400 years, and 12 generations 'from the time of Henry

⁵⁷ *The Progress of A Plough Boy to a Seat in Parliament As Exemplified in the History of the Life of William Cobbett Member for Oldham*, W. Reitzel (ed.), (London, n. d.), p. 2.

⁵⁸ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, p. 82.

3'.⁵⁹ Gervase Holles was forced to swallow his prejudices when recounting the ancestry of his grandmother Frescheville's family. 'For though I give little credit to such pedigrees as we finde in the Heralds Office, being most of them extremely false and many of them meare impostures', he trusted this one because he could find no 'errours', and because it had been written by a known relative, Sir Peter Frescheville, 'whom I knew to be a most worthy and learned gentleman'.⁶⁰ The familial connection overcame Holles' suspicion of the professional institution. However, such concerted genealogical research was distinct from the 'remembered family', which rested more on immediate anecdotal detail and personal transmission. When Christopher Guise came to recount the detail of his family history, he began with his errant great-great-uncle, Ancelme Guise, in the reign of Henry VIII, and then concentrated on the adventures in the late Elizabethan period of someone he remembered, his grandfather, Sir William Guise.⁶¹

However, even if the 'remembered family' was not very deep, historically, it could sometimes be quite wide laterally. The memoirs of Sir Hugh Cholmley illustrate its potential breadth. Writing his memoirs in 1655, Sir Hugh listed six generations of his father's family from the late fifteenth century. In the period up to the death of his father, in 1631, this encompassed 73 named individuals, the bulk of whom originated in the three generations preceding his own. These are represented in Table 1.

⁵⁹ 'Memoirs of the Family of Guise of Elmore, Gloucestershire written by Sir Christopher Guise and Sir John Guise', *Camden Society* n. s. 28 (1917), 107.

⁶⁰ Holles, 'Memorials', 150.

⁶¹ Guise of Elmore, 108-110.

Table 1: Numbers of Family Members Recalled in the Memoirs of Sir Hugh Cholmley, to 1631

Primary Relation	Number of Family Members Recalled	Percentage of All Family Members
G-G-G-Grandfather (1440-?)	1	1
G-G-Grandfather (c. 1470-1521)	4	5
G-Grandfather (1515-83)	10	14
Grandfather (c. 1556-1616)	18	25
Father (1580-1631)	23	32
Sir Hugh Cholmley (1600-)	14	19
Children (1620-)	3	4
Total	73	100

The family tree was at its broadest as it accommodated his great-grandfather's two marriages, 9 children, and their 8 spouses, and his grandfather's 10 progeny and their 9 spouses. This was partly a simple function of family size, but also because these stories encompassed the largest number of completed recent life-cycles in the family – relatives about whom there was the most to say. By contrast, Sir Hugh could add little to his account of his grandfathers in the fourth and fifth degree, recording their involvement in Henry VIII's wars with the Scots, but few dates or details.⁶² It was only from the time of his great-grandfather, approximately a century earlier (c. 1550), that he was able to flesh out the personalities of his ancestors with anecdotes, beginning with the dispute between Sir Richard Cholmley and the earl of Westmorland, because the latter married two of Sir Richard's sisters in turn.⁶³ Although Sir Hugh stressed that his great-great grandfather had been tall, strong and black-haired, he was only able to give detailed physical descriptions of his great-grandfather and great-grandmother (who had died in 1583 and 1598 respectively).⁶⁴ Table 1 implies that the decisive figure in transmitting these stories may have been Sir Hugh's grandfather, who overlapped sufficiently with him and his father to be able to provide tales of the family at least from the time of his youth. As many as 51 out of the 73 named individuals within the family pedigree

⁶² Cholmley, 62.

⁶³ Cholmley, 63.

⁶⁴ Cholmley, 62, 66.

might have been recalled by his father and grandfather. Similarly, Christopher Guise heard from his own grandfather about the wastefulness of his great-great-uncle Ancelme; Anthony à Wood's father heard many stories about his grandfather Richard from his aunt Emma who was a 'verie old woman' when she died in 1634; while the eighteenth-century memoirist, James Fontaine relied on what he had heard from his 'mother, my older brothers, and my aunt Bouquet, my father's sister'.⁶⁵

Table 2: Numbers of Generations Recalled in Memoirs of Christopher Guise, Gervase Holles, Anthony à Wood and Roger North

Generations	Guise c. 1650		Holles, 1658		Wood, c. 1690		North, c. 1730	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
G-G-G-G-Grandfather	0	0	6	5	0	0	0	0
G-G-G-Grandfather	0	0	9	7	0	0	0	0
G-G-Grandfather	1	4	14	11	0	0	1	2
G-Grandfather	2	8	22	18	1	3	9	18
Grandfather	12	48	21	17	10	32	10	20
Father	9	36	34	27	10	32	16	32
Current	1	4	19	15	10	32	14	28
Total	25	100	125	100	31	100	50	100

Table 2 shows that the 'remembered family' was also at its widest in the preceding two to three generations in the memoirs of Holles, Sir Christopher Guise, Anthony à Wood and Roger North. Although Guise traced his family back 13 generations, and Holles listed 19 generations of families of Frescheville and Clifton (to whom he was linked by his grandmothers), their accounts focused largely on the three most recent generations.⁶⁶ 74 of the 125 relatives mentioned by Holles fell into this category, while between 22 to 30 individuals in histories by Guise, Wood and North history did so. While the outer limits of the 'remembered family' stretched to great-great-great grandparents, in fact, most of those recalled were much more closely aligned to the narrator.

⁶⁵ Guise of Elmore, 108-9; Anthony Wood, 3; J. Fontaine, *Memoirs of a Huguenot Family*, A. Maury (ed.), (New York, 1853), p. 14.

⁶⁶ Guise of Elmore, 107-8; Holles, 'Memorials' 163, 182.

Again, the same process applied in other social groups. The most detailed illustration of this is found in Richard Gough's *History of Myddle*, one yeoman-farmer's collective biography of all the families who possessed seating-rights in the church of his Shropshire village, written in 1701.⁶⁷ In total, this *History* explains the property rights to 77 pews or seats in Myddle church, which required Gough to recall up to eight preceding generations for each family, and discuss at least 1,081 individual residents!⁶⁸ Gough could cite seven generations of his own family in Myddle, a patrilineal descent through a succession of men called Richard, all possessed of the same tenement at Newton on the Hill. Gough understood that his family had 'descended of that antient family of the Goughs of Tylley', and knew that his great-great grandmother's name was Anne, 'butt of what family I cannot certainly say; and yet, by what I heard, I may rationally guesse, that shee was the daughter of one Hayward, of Aston, neare Wem'.⁶⁹ In the next five generations preceding his birth, Gough was able to mention 36 siblings or step-siblings of his lineal ancestors.⁷⁰ These were most numerous in the generations of his father and grandfather, partly because his great-grandfather had married twice and Gough was able to account for 17 of his children and grandchildren, but partly because these were the family members that Gough and his father best remembered. Although he traced some of these relatives over subsequent generations, in his own time his account narrowed to a description of his children and grandchildren surviving in 1700, when he wrote. As with Sir Hugh Cholmley, then, his own 'remembered family' was at its broadest and most detailed in his father's and grandfather's

⁶⁷ R. Gough, *The History of Myddle*, D. Hey (ed.), (London, 1981); see D. G. Hey, *An English rural community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts* (Leicester, 1974).

⁶⁸ Author's calculations. Four-fifths of all the people recorded in his work (862) appear to have lived in Myddle during Gough's lifetime, rather than in earlier generations.

⁶⁹ Gough, *Myddle*, p. 153.

⁷⁰ See H. French, "'Ancient Inhabitants": mobility, lineage and identity in English rural communities, 1600-1750', in *The Self-Contained Village? The Social History of Rural Communities, 1250-1900*, C. Dyer (ed.), (Hatfield, 2007), pp. 72-95.

generations, and in his own youth and young adulthood, encompassing roughly the century between 1560 and 1660.

IV

These constraints of memory were important, because it appears that most memoirs were written primarily with a didactic purpose in mind. They amounted to a source of moral instruction, whose authority derived from the immediacy and intimacy with which they recounted the lives of family members, as Sir Hugh Cholmley explained,

to performe the duty [of] a Historian, which is to expresse all things with as much truth and clearenesse as may bee... [so] that you and succeeding posterity may immetate the good and avoide the ill.⁷¹

The link to a living narrator appears to have enhanced the 'truth and clearenesse' of such examples, because it supplied the personal detail that animated the lives of the 'unspirited dead', as Holles called them. The sense of familial identity and belonging may have been accentuated by restrictions on access to such 'secrets'. Candour was a feature of memoirs that were designed to remain unpublished, in which the unvarnished history and the lessons it contained were reserved for the eyes of descendants only, as in the case of Cholmley, or the middling John Cannon.⁷² As Sir Hugh Cholmley observed, in writing his unexpurgated family memoirs he was acutely aware that his behaviour 'may be likened to the birds which defile their owne nests, and to cast dust in the faces of

⁷¹ Cholmley, 62.

⁷² Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 61. Cannon hoped that all who might read his memoirs would see that they were 'an impartiall account of... his vices & virtues, morals and natural inclinations, both to piety & goodness, delineating all the secret springs & motives... the manner of his being seduced and drawn into many eminent dangers, snares, & temptations to immorality'. Cannon, 1, 7.

my Ancestors'.⁷³ Similarly, Holles warned the reader that 'neither my nearnes of bloud or particular affection to any person... shall sway my anything from the exact rule of truth and justice'.⁷⁴ Others felt they had little cause for concern. Roger North congratulated himself that although he was one of twelve brothers and sisters, 'a flock so numerous and diffused' had never contained 'one scabby sheep in it'.⁷⁵

Lord Herbert of Cherbury suggested that familial relationships added extra power to these moral lessons, because they conveyed 'such observations as their father, grandfather and great-grandfather might have delivered to them' instead of 'vulgar rules and examples' from outside the family (and, by implication, from other social groups).⁷⁶ Here, the assumption was that the internal power of the family as a source of instruction was amplified because these examples also carried the patriarchal authority of its male heads. Roger North argued that having illustrious ancestors ensured that 'the descendants must know that the world expects more from them than common men'.⁷⁷ Although he was anxious to warn his son not to rely on family honour alone, 'because his own value, and not his ancestors' must set him off', he believed that such dynastic obligations would act as a 'perpetual monitor' to encourage virtuous behaviour, unlike 'persons of upstart principles' for whom 'antiquity of families is rather a matter of ridicule than of honour'.

There were two ways in which the 'remembered family' was invoked to convey a more 'dynastic' sense of familial belonging: as originators of inherited characteristics (particularly physical looks); and as figures whose actions continued to resonate within the family down to the present. While most memoirists agreed with Gibbon that 'it is an obvious truth that parts and virtue cannot

⁷³ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 61.

⁷⁴ Holles, 'Memorials', 9.

⁷⁵ North, *Lives*, xxiii.

⁷⁶ Lee, *Edward Lord Herbert*, p. 1.

⁷⁷ North, *Lives*, xxiii.

be transmitted with the inheritance of estates', some traced the inheritance of more obvious qualities which they imbued with a certain power – looks.⁷⁸ While physical descriptions were a pronounced feature of Holles' text, other memoirists also included them.⁷⁹ Sir Hugh Cholmley dwelt repeatedly on the black hair, and saturnine features of his ancestors, as a sign of masculine vigour. He described his great-grandfather as 'tall of Stature and with all big and strong made... his haire and eies blacke and his complection very browne', whose judicious improvements of his estate were undermined because he had been 'extraordnarely given to the love of woemen'. His wife, Lady Katherine Clifford had been blonde-haired, which 'gave a change to the blackness of our family'.⁸⁰ Cholmley noted these competing traits in his own father, Sir Richard, in whom the recessive family colouring emerged in adulthood, 'his complection grew browne and something inclinable to swarthy'.⁸¹ Cholmley did not make the humoural connection explicitly between complexion and character, but observed that he possessed 'a haughty sperret and chollericke', and 'two [sic] much like his Grand father in his love of woemen'.⁸² Holles made a slightly rueful note of similar hereditary tendencies. Drawing attention to his father's 'exemplary continency' he observed that this was 'a Crowne the males of our family have not bene comonly too ambitious of'.⁸³ Lord Herbert confined himself to exterior characteristics, but recalled that his father had been 'black-haired and bearded, as all my ancestors of his side are said to have been, of a manly and stern look, but withal very handsome'.⁸⁴ The identification of family traits was not confined to gentry memoirists. Anthony à Wood dwelt on his grandmother's appearance, 'fat, of large eyes and Roman nose', and character,

⁷⁸ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 354.

⁷⁹ Pritchard, *Biography*, p. 212.

⁸⁰ Cholmley, 66.

⁸¹ Cholmley, 70.

⁸² Cholmley, 71-2.

⁸³ Holles, 'Memorials', 202.

⁸⁴ Lee, *Edward Lord Herbert*, p. 3.

‘so good, charitable... that... shee was called by some “*loving Mrs Wood*”, even though she had died over thirty years before he was born.⁸⁵ William Stukeley observed that both his father and grandfather were of ‘middle stature, fattish’, but that both had shared ‘great Agility & vivacity, very quick in speech and ready witt ... & would return an answer before a question was well ask’d’.⁸⁶ Although thoroughly convinced of his own ‘genius’, Stukeley acknowledged that these were not really qualities that he had inherited.⁸⁷

Descriptions of physiognomy or behavioural patterns ‘embodied’ these recent ancestors, both by allowing the reader to imagine their appearance and by identifying traits that had descended into current generations. The identification of these inherited features added an authenticity to such accounts by pointing out shared dynastic qualities that did not require verification by documents or the intervention of heralds. While the recurrence of these features might only be recollected over two or three generations, they helped reinforce a sense of shared ‘blood’ that was more obvious, and potentially more meaningful, than a more extended, but ‘disembodied’ family tree.

Beyond this, though, memoirs tended not to attribute much agency to heredity in looks and character. Although Sir Christopher Guise was so careful to trace the descent and disposal of family properties, and illustrate the dangers created by character failings, it was clear that these were the faults of specific individuals, rather than inherited deficiencies. He blamed his grandfather’s ‘passionate hand of government’ for his own sufferings as a child in his household, and the character of his grandfather’s second wife, who ‘could never be brought to take any care of the house or

⁸⁵ Anthony Wood, 6.

⁸⁶ Rev. William Stukeley, 2.

⁸⁷ D. B. Hancock, *William Stukeley. Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 30-53.

estate; a goship, a makebate, a wastall'.⁸⁸ Her children followed her divisiveness, but Sir Christopher reasoned that this was because of their familial position, rather than because of any inherited disposition, 'the malice of cadets, who are often the most unnaturall enemyes of theyr oune house' because of their limited rights of inheritance.⁸⁹

Although these forebears offered emotive historic examples, memoirists also emphasized the ways in which their actions or choices reached into the present. In this respect, Gentry families drew on cautionary tales from the lives of the 'remembered family' to augment those provided by living relatives, in order to inculcate behavioural lessons to their children, particularly their sons.⁹⁰ Sometimes criticisms of the dead could be more acute than those of the living, although memoirists such as Lucy Hutchinson, Sir Hugh Cholmley and Ann, Lady Fanshawe, tried to inspire their children by writing self-consciously hagiographic accounts of their deceased spouses.⁹¹ In another respect, though, recounting the choices made by the 'remembered family' served a broader 'dynastic' function, because these also provided a powerful historical explanation of the family's current circumstances, particularly in relation to urgent problems of property and inheritance.

Sometimes these choices were depicted positively. Indeed, if we return to the examples quoted in Section II above, although Holles, Sir Hugh Cholmley, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Sir John Branston, George Byng, Lucy Hutchinson, Lady Audley and Anne, Lady Fanshawe began their accounts only five or six generations earlier, it appears that they selected individuals who

⁸⁸ Guise of Elmore, 111.

⁸⁹ Guise of Elmore, 114.

⁹⁰ See H. French & M. Rothery, *Man's Estate. Landed Gentry Masculinities 1660-1900* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 105-14; A. Harris, *Siblinghood and Social Relations in Georgian England. Share and Share Alike* (Manchester, 2012), p. 26-54.

⁹¹ See D. Hirst, 'Remembering a Hero: Lucy Hutchinson's *Memoirs of her husband*', *English Historical Review* 119: 482 (2004), 682-91; Binns, Cholmley, 39; Loftis, *Ann, Lady Fanshawe*, pp. 104-5.

represented a 'starting-point' in the recent history of the family. For Holles, Sir Hugh Cholmley, Lord Herbert, Sir John Bramston, Lady Audley and Anne, Lady Fanshawe, these great- or great-great grandfathers represented the first members of the family who moved to, acquired or lived on, the current patrimony. As Holles wrote, '(like the river Arethusa) we have run some time as it were under the ground in obscurity until Sir William Holles the father [his great-great grandfather] layd the foundation and ground worke'.⁹² In other instances, Sir Hugh Cholmley, Lucy Hutchinson, Sir Christopher Guise and Roger North among others, singled out recent ancestors who had consolidated the dynastic position of the family through advantageous marriages.⁹³ Similarly, Ann Lady Fanshawe dated the rise of her husband's family to his great-grandfather, who followed his uncle as a Remembrancer in the Exchequer, and 'who, with his office and his Darbyshire estate, raised the family to what it hath been and is now'.⁹⁴ In these ways, the 'remembered family' could function as a source of meaningful dynastic 'origins' stories.

However, more attention seems to have been paid to ancestors who had behaved with no regard to their posterity, behaviour that contradicted all the imperatives of a carefully constructed family history. Such miscreants exhibited two besetting sins, whose effects continued to be felt in the present – living beyond their means (often by associating too much with their betters), and selling the family patrimony. Sir Christopher Guise was particularly scathing about his great-great-uncle Ancelme, 'a courtier', whose 'dissolute vices' were never compensated for by any 'advantages of the King's favour, butt rather vaynely and wickedly spending his estate in luxury', and whose extravagances became the stuff of songs 'sung to me by country people, soe that his ill fame is the only thinge remaining of him, to the terror of others and a warning to avoid courts and courtiers'.⁹⁵

⁹² Holles, 'Memoirs', 11-12.

⁹³ Cholmley, 65, 73-4; Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, p. 9; Guise of Elmore, 111-2.

⁹⁴ Loftis, *Ann, Lady Fanshawe*, p. 104.

⁹⁵ Guise of Elmore, 108.

After having disposed of 14 manors to pay for his excesses, Ancelme had compounded his folly by squandering Henry VIII's offer of a gift of property, 'he desired the kinge to give him an ayre of goshawks that timbred yearly in the forest of Deane'. In Guise's view this foolish decision, 'turned the kings commiseration into contempt'.⁹⁶ Similarly, Sir Hugh Cholmeley and William Stukeley both traced their grandfathers' financial difficulties to their being drawn into higher status company. Sir Hugh regretted that his grandfather spent too much time with his cousin, George, 3rd earl of Cumberland, 'which drew him to live in higher Port and to greater expence and being much addicted to fleet hounds and horses which are vaine chargeable sports... and trusting too much his servants'.⁹⁷ Stukeley depicted his grandfather as a victim of his own quick wit, 'his conversation being very agreeable made him acceptable among the Nobility & Gentlemen... which was no small Detriment to his Affairs, keeping them Company at their Sports & Diversions, Raceing, Hunting, Gameing & the like', creating debts which had forced the sale of part of his estate.⁹⁸

Lucy Hutchinson was scathing about the poor match made by her grandfather's eldest brother, after the death of his first wife. He married one of his maid-servants, and had three sons. However, his eldest son held them 'in such contempt, that a great while after, dying without children, he gave his estate of inheritance to my father, and two of my brothers'.⁹⁹ She brushed aside the rest of her father's brothers, observing sharply that they left 'but three daughters who bestowed themselves meanly, and their generations are worn out, except two or three unregarded children'.¹⁰⁰ Sir Hugh Cholmley dated the troubles in his family to another marriage, between his grandfather's eldest brother Francis and his wife, Joan Boulmer. His great-grandfather, Sir Richard Cholmley had always disliked Joan, 'who though of a gwd family had noe gud fame and was of an

⁹⁶ Guise of Elmore, 108.

⁹⁷ Cholmley, p. 68.

⁹⁸ Rev. William Stukeley, 2.

⁹⁹ Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, p. 9.

humour he liked better for a M[ist]r[e]s then wife for his sonne'.¹⁰¹ Sir Richard entailed the family estates away from his eldest son, who had no children, and whose wife prevailed on him to cut down woods at their house near Whitby. Like all Cholmley men, Francis had been 'a tall blacke man... valliant and complete gentleman in all points savying that he was soe exceedingly over topped and guided by his wife which it was thought she did by witchcraft or some exstrardary meanes'.¹⁰²

These 'dynastic' consequences also shook the irony out of Gibbon's review of his family's history, as he recounted his grandfather's misfortunes following the South Sea Bubble. As a Director of the Company, he reached his economic zenith, 'and partook of its transient glory'.¹⁰³ However, Gibbon recalled that 'in the year 1720 he was buried in its ruins, and the labours of thirty years were blasted in a single day'. Gibbon waxed indignant at the '*unjust, illegal, and arbitrary*' proceedings of parliament which had required the directors to surrender their shares, in return for much lower compensation. By this move, Gibbon's grandfather had given up shares worth a phenomenal £106, 543 5s. 6d., and been granted a mere £10,000 in compensation – enough to maintain a solid country estate, nonetheless.¹⁰⁴ The remaining portion of Gibbon's account of these events does not survive – perhaps, this section of the family's history was still too tangible, controversial and shameful to incorporate into his slightly facetious 'remembered' narrative.

Such familial misjudgements were worthy of mention because they functioned both as 'humanist' moral examples of individual virtue or vice, and because they contributed to a 'dynastic' explanation of recent family history and might enhance Roger North's 'perpetual monitor', consciousness of the family's collective reputation. The examples cited above demonstrate that the

¹⁰¹ Cholmley, 65.

¹⁰² Cholmley, 67.

¹⁰³ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, pp. 374-5.

¹⁰⁴ Gibbon, *Memoirs*, p. 378.

most powerful source of this collective identity-formation remained cumulative oral memory over two or three generations. The obvious irony is that by recording these tales, memoirists allowed them to escape the bounds of the 'remembered family', and to acquire the functions of more foundational 'ancestral' stories. Indeed, Holles hoped that this would occur, advising his son to get his notes 'fayrly transcribed into a booke of velame... and the pedigrees and matches with their atchievements handsomely drawne and well painted... and then it will last many generations' to become 'a treasure not unworthy the cabinet of you and your posterity'.¹⁰⁵ Frescheville Holles did not carry out his father's request, and further research is required to understand how families might have re-read and re-used these manuscript memoirs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁶

V

The gentry were not indifferent to their lineage or ancestry, nor did they turn away from the desire to link their current status and possessions to ideals of lordship, manorial tenures or dynastic longevity. As Jan Broadway has argued, the attributes of pedigree remained integral to the identity of established Gentry families, as a means of standing out from the thickening throng of newcomers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰⁷ However, the gentry were capable of maintaining several different opinions about the subject at the same time. Many were prepared to follow Lucy Hutchinson, Christopher Guise, Thomas Comber and Ambrose Barnes, in asserting tenuous origins among the followers of William of Normandy in 1066, while also taking their great-grandfathers as

¹⁰⁵ Holles, 'Memorials', 5.

¹⁰⁶ Woolf gives the example of the Wilbrahams of Cheshire who maintained a family diary among multiple generations from 1513 to 1962. Woolf, *Social Circulation*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁷ Broadway, *No historie so meete*, p. 167.

the starting-point of the meaningful discussion of known, named antecedents. The latter option was adopted even by individuals like Guise or Comber (or Gibbon), who had documents which named earlier members of the lineal family.

Each perception of ancestry served a different purpose. Emphasis on a long, but vague, pedigree demonstrated the depth of local roots, and embedded such families in county society and place. The desires of Holles, Lucy Hutchinson, Sir Hugh Cholmley and Ann, lady Fanshawe, to show how they (or their husband's family) were connected to senior branches of families in other counties, illustrates how recent local origins could be overridden by such longer-term associations. Conversely, as Sherlock, Liddy and Steer, Enis and Broadway have noted, extended ancestry might also be invoked to shore up a family's status and self-worth at times of financial, demographic or political crisis, because it was something that current misfortunes could not erase. In addition, men like Ambrose Barnes prove Daniel Woolf's point that an interest in ancestry helped to form a shared cultural capital between rural and urban gentry families, prefiguring the antiquarian interests of eighteenth-century literary and philosophical societies. As Woolf, Karen Harvey and Stobart and Rothery have also shown, such 'ancestral' cultural capital could also be attached to houses and material objects associated with remembered forebears among landed and 'middling' families alike.¹⁰⁸ Thus, in a general sense, ancestry and lineage continued to provide a resonant social rhetoric of identity and belonging, by emphasizing individual families' solid social foundations within localities, and the extent to which they were dynastically and culturally enmeshed within the wider armigerous or landed elite.

Yet, for a wide range of gentry memoirists 'family history' seems repeatedly to have meant the *remembered* family, which extended back only five or six generations before the present time. This study has shown that this was a distinctly different historical entity from the 'dynastic family'

¹⁰⁸ Woolf, *Social Circulation*, pp. 116-20; Harvey, *Little Republic*, pp. 157-65; J. Stobart & M. Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016), p. 106.

created by formal researches into ancestral genealogy. It derived its power as a source of meaning and identity more from its relative proximity to the present, than from its deep roots. The remembered family was composed of individuals with distinctive personalities, quirks of character, consequential actions, and (occasionally) directly inherited traits. Indeed, comments by the most systematic family memoirists (Holles and Guise) imply that the remembered family might be regarded as more authentic, and more 'truthful' than the works of the heralds, *because* knowledge of these details depended on the preservation of dynastic identity by those with the most direct, personal interest in doing so.

Gough's *History* also reminds us that the shape of the remembered family, and its primary function as a temporal anchor, was similar across the social order. Family accounts that begin with great-grandparents can be observed as widely as literacy extended within the population in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. The higher literacy and socio-geographic stability of the gentry does not appear to have advantaged them over Samuel Bamford or Benjamin Shaw, despite the frequent re-settlement and economic marginality of labouring families. For each social group, recourse to the remembered family provided the most immediate and most sufficient answer to questions of familial and personal identity.

However, it has also been shown that the 'remembered family' could inform specific dynastic understandings of *Gentry* identity. At its fullest, it dwelt on fragments of human detail and character, but drew these into foundational narratives, stories about status and identity, and financial decisions whose consequences sometimes still conditioned the family's present social position. While these were not exclusive to the works of Gentry memoirists, they feature with sufficient prominence and repetition to suggest that they were a vital source of the family's subjective collective 'sense of self', even if this was not alone decisive in shaping the writer's personal sense of identity. These narratives might be positive (in the case of Ann, lady Fanshawe) or negative (in the case of the Guises or the Cholmleys), but either way, they contributed firmly to

formulating, explaining, or excusing the writer's account of the family's unique identity and historical trajectory. Perhaps, as Lord Herbert of Cherbury hoped, the gravity of their moral lessons might have been enhanced by the patriarchal sanction of long-dead grandfathers and great-grandfathers. If not, at least familial identity and belonging may have been strengthened by the knowledge that these stories formed the family's internal narrative – its stories to itself, about itself. Consequently, for the gentry the truncated 'remembered family' appears routinely to have become a vehicle that was also freighted with 'dynastic meaning', because it helped to explain how families became grounded in their current locations, and how the current lineage had evolved.

This dual function also helps explain these Gentry memoirists' apparent lack of reference to, or concern about, the extended lineage. Understanding it required specialist knowledge of heraldry, rules of inheritance, and ancestral deeds, all of which were disrupted by scepticism, geographical mobility, new blood, and frequent turnover among the gentry in the early modern period. Even if some distant forebears had been illustrious, in most memoirs the disembodied achievements of faceless ancestors provided only the lightest of backgrounds on which the characters of more recent relatives could be drawn. As Roger North insisted, if the family's 'name' acted as a 'perpetual monitor' of behaviour, the deeds of great-aunts and uncles appear to have contributed to it more powerfully than the achievements of more *distant* ancestors. Again, this was influenced by different contexts. Declining families, and families involved in inheritance disputes, exhibited a strong attachment to 'ancestral' lands and a powerful determination to invoke the prerogatives of ancestry to defend them. In general, though, the 'remembered family' embodied a much more relevant, intrusive, even unavoidable past, and supplied the most resonant sense of familial repute or 'name'. While this past was often domesticated, inglorious or even embarrassing, the 'remembered family' also conveyed sharp, piquant and meaningful stories that were sufficiently powerful to reduce even Edward Gibbon to silence.