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## PROBATE ACCOUNTS AS A SOURCE FOR KENTISH EARLY MODERN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY

JACQUELINE BOWER

Early modern ecclesiastical court procedures created three documents in connection with the administration of a deceased person's estate. These were the will, if the deceased had made one in his lifetime, the probate inventory and the probate account. The probate inventory listed the deceased's moveable goods, including cash and debts owed to him, which had come or were expected to come into the hands of his administrators. The probate account showed how these assets were subsequently disposed of by the administrators. It listed such expenditure as funeral costs and the payment of debts owed by the deceased at his death, showed how much was left when all such payments had been made and, often, how this was distributed to the heirs.

The value of probate inventories to social and economic historians is well known; probate accounts are very little known. This is partly due to their patchy survival; some counties have several thousand, others only a few dozen. Few if any collections have been properly indexed and are thus largely inaccessible to researchers. In order to remedy this, a major E.S.R.C. funded indexing project is now under way, beginning with the Canterbury Diocese accounts. This is by far the largest surviving collection, totalling about 13,500 accounts. The objectives of this project are twofold. The first objective is to publish an index to the documents by name, place and occupation, with an introductory analysis, as part of the British Record Society's series of indices to testamentary records. This will enable the documents to be used by historians, including family historians, for whom they are an

All document references are to the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, formerly Kent Archives Office. I should like to thank the staff of the Centre for their assistance during the fifteen months spent indexing the accounts.

excellent source. The second objective is to create a computer file or database which will hold, in coded form, the specific information in each account. This will enable future researchers to extract those accounts which contain details of, among other topics, agriculture, wages, illness or funeral customs. In due course it should be possible to produce statistics based on all 13,500 accounts which will throw new light on wealth and financial activity in seventeenth-century Kent. The aim of this paper, in the interim, is to give a flavour of the information available in the accounts, and to indicate how they could be used in research.

The earliest surviving account in the Canterbury Diocese collection is that of the estate of Edward Crayforde of Great Mongeham, presented to the court by his administrators in 1569.<sup>1</sup> Crayforde had actually died eleven years before that, in 1558, and this is reflected in the distinctly Catholic nature of his funeral arrangements. Expenditure included payments to six men to carry tapers and for tapers to burn during the service, three priests and two clerks to say masses and dirges, alms to the poor to pray for his soul, and payment to four priests to celebrate masses at his month's mind.

The account of Edward Crayforde's estate was delayed for eleven years because he left three daughters, Margaret, Parnell and Myllisent, aged seven, six and three at his death. The cost of the girls' upbringing was claimed by their guardian from their father's estate and from the rents subsequently received for his lands.

A late sixteenth-century authority on matters of probate and administration said 'sumptuous and delicate expenses are not to be allowed, but honest and moderate, according to the conditions of the persons.'<sup>2</sup> This advice does not seem to have been followed by the Crayforde girls' guardian. Fabric bought to make clothing for them included broadcloth at 7s. 7d. a yard, velvet at 18s. a yard, tafetta, worsted, fustian, sarsenet, bays, cambric, linen, cotton, lawn and silver striped canvas. Their gowns were trimmed with gold, with silk ribbon, black and red fringe, fine pearled lace and white fur and white fox skin. The materials and making of one cloth gown came to £1 13s. 0d., at a time when a serving man might earn £2 a year.

Husbands and fathers often died leaving under age children, and their upbringing had to be provided for out of their father's estate. The final settlement of the estate, with distribution of the balance, would in such cases often be delayed until all the children had come

<sup>1</sup> PRC2/1/4; PRC2/1/169.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Swinburne, *Brief Treatise of Testaments and Last Wills*, 1st edn., 1590, quoted in Amy Louise Erickson, 'An Introduction to Probate Accounts,' (Eds.) G.H. Martin and Peter Spufford, *The Records of the Nation*, London, 1990, 278.

of age. The guardians of Edward Crayforde's daughters seem to have had no problems beyond keeping them supplied with the latest fashions in clothes. Other guardians had more difficult tasks.

Edward Hirst, vicar of Linsted, and his wife Susanna died within a short time of each other in 1619 or earlier.<sup>3</sup> They left four children, Charles, then aged eleven, Martin, nine, Elizabeth, seven, and Ann, five. The children were brought to Canterbury, where the girls were boarded out at a cost of £14 a year each, to cover their board, clothing and schooling. After two years, the woman with whom they were living died and they had to be placed elsewhere. The boys, meanwhile, were boarded in another household at £10 a year each and sent to school. Their schooling cost £1 10s. a year each and their clothing was provided separately by their guardian. The guardian also provided their school books – Latin Testaments, Ovid, Terence, Cato, grammars and phrase books, exercise books, paper and ink and satchels. He also provided the boys with bows, arrows and shooting gloves, and occasional spending money.

In 1622, Charles Hirst was placed as an apprentice with an apothecary in London, but, it was said, 'he could not like thereof'; after he had been there a month on trial, he wanted to leave, but became ill and had to remain until he had recovered. The guardian thus had to pay the apothecary for Charles' board and lodging and for the apothecary's treatment during his illness. After this, Charles was bound apprentice to a scrivener in London, but again refused to stay there. This time, the master refused to repay the £25 premium he had received with Charles. After a further period boarding in Canterbury, which had to be paid for out of his father's estate, Charles went as a sailor to the East Indies. His wages during the voyage were to be 20s. a month; the cost of fitting him out to go to sea was £17.

William Knowler's guardianship of John Thackwell, son of Edward Thackwell of St. Nicholas-at-Wade, was even more troubled. When he presented his account of Thackwell's estate in 1627, Knowler claimed recompense for keeping John for two years. John, he said, was 'a very badd qualited boy and much given to beastliness and extraordinary slovenness in soe much that if this accomptant hadd beene acquainted with his bad qualities . . . before such time as hee received him into keeping . . . hee this accomptant would not have undertaken to have kept him two yeares for all his fathers estate.'<sup>4</sup>

The Canterbury diocese accounts contain sufficient information for a substantial study of children and family in the early modern period.

<sup>3</sup> PRC2/39/9.

<sup>4</sup> PRC20/7/231.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> PRC2/18/75.

<sup>6</sup> PRC20/11/37.

<sup>7</sup> PRC2/39/9.

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> PRC2/9/459.

<sup>9</sup> PRC1/3/58.

<sup>10</sup> PRC21/9/264.

an accountant. One account of 1592 dealt with the estates of Marion Tibball, a widow of Herne, and her three previously deceased husbands, William Staple, John Bret and Paul Tibball.<sup>11</sup> In another account of 1600, Elizabeth Parramore, also of Herne, became responsible for administering the estates of her late husband, his previous wife, and the previous wife's previous husband.<sup>12</sup> In 1691, Mildred Wimble administered the estate of her late husband John of Rainham. His inventory was worth £426 17s. Out of his goods Mildred had to pay £44 to her two daughters of a previous marriage to Thomas Godfrey and £240 to her two sons by another marriage to a man called Carpenter as their portions of their respective fathers' goods. When these sums, Mildred's own marriage portion and John Wimble's debts had been deducted, the account finished with a negative balance of over £220.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes the accounts afford glimpses of the personalities of those involved. One such is the administration by John Homersham of the estate of his father William, a wealthy yeoman of Ospringe, who died about 1692. John was a servant to a tradesman, a Mr Denn, whose assistance he sought in settling his father's estate, since he himself was, he said, 'young and unskilled in such matters'. Young John was evidently a conscientious administrator, recording such small sums as 1s. 6d. spent on yarn for his young sisters to mend their stockings. William Homersham's affairs were somewhat complicated – John had many debts to collect, and the lease on a malthouse to dispose of. He had frequent meetings with his father's business associates in connection with these matters, and one feels that the older men took advantage of him to a certain extent. There are many entries such as 'spent at several times at Mr John Philpott's upon receiving debts that were due . . . 7s.' 'Spent at Mr Higgs . . . 3s.' 'Spent at Mr Cheeseman's . . . 8s. 6d.' 'Spent at another meeting about the malthouse . . . 2s.' Evidently, young John was having to buy a round of drinks at every such meeting.<sup>14</sup>

Debts owed by the deceased normally account for a significant proportion of payments made by accountants. As well as leaving unpaid bills for household goods, many men had borrowed heavily by means of bonds, bills and mortgages. In the post Restoration period especially, credit seems to have been readily available even to men of quite moderate means. Many borrowed from relatives or other

<sup>11</sup> PRC21/12/329.

<sup>12</sup> PRC21/15/170.

<sup>13</sup> PRC2/42/22.

<sup>14</sup> PRC2/42/39.

neighbours, but it is possible to trace the operations of some money-lenders on a much larger scale. Israel Jacob, a Canterbury apothecary who died in 1692, was such a man. He appears frequently as a creditor in accounts from the 1670s onwards. Randolph Partridge or Partherich, a Dover apothecary, may have operated in a similar fashion in the first half of the seventeenth century. Peter Earle has noted that, while an apothecary needed little capital in order to set up in business, that business could be extremely profitable. An apothecary might well, therefore, have sufficient surplus cash to take up money-lending as a secondary occupation.<sup>15</sup>

Of the accounts presented to the Courts from 1672 onwards, 127 have been identified as those of yeomen's estates. The value of these estates before any deductions ranged from £1957 11s. 8d. down to £23 5s. 6d. 27 yeomen left over £500, and the median value was £230 3s. 6d. The distribution of inventories within the range coincides almost exactly with that found by Chalklin in his study of Canterbury diocese probate inventories for a similar period.<sup>16</sup> After all the deductions had been made, however, 31 accounts, or 24.4 per cent, were left with a negative balance. The balances ranged from £1870 7s. 6d. to -£853 2s. 5d. Only five were left with over £500 and the median value was £58 18s. 6d.

Sometimes accounts finished in the negative because administrators were unlucky victims of sudden price fluctuations due to weather conditions or government policy. In 1685, Anne Parker, administratrix of her sister-in-law Jane Cantis of Monkton, accounting for the much lower than expected value of the harvest gathered after Jane's death, declared

'by reason of the extream hard and long frost, such as (in the judgement of all men) had not been in many ages, if ever before . . . the greatest part of the wheat starved in the ground, and it is generally knowne that many persons ploughed up their land again, the wheat being almost wholly lost, and others had not so much wheat as seed which they sowed.'

There are several references in the accounts to the damage done to crops and livestock by the hard winter of 1683-84. This was, of course, one of the Great Frosts of the seventeenth century, when the Thames froze over and John Evelyn walked across the ice from Lambeth to Westminster.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class* (1989), 72. No probate inventory seems to have survived for Israel Jacob, and his will is uninformative about his business affairs.

<sup>16</sup> C.W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent* (1965), 232.

<sup>17</sup> PRC20/13/485.



John Foster, administering the affairs of his late brother Thomas of St. John's, Thanet, in 1691, also had to ask for an allowance for the effects of bad weather. Thomas, he said,

'in his lifetime had a house in Lease upon Margate peer . . . he paid and was to pay £4 per annum for the same . . . there was four yeares to come of the said Lease at the time of the said deceased's death, and by reason of the late flood washing away part of the said peer and the said house standing very neer the same, he [the administrator] cannot hire out the said Tenement.'<sup>18</sup>

Two accountants reported losses due to the reform of the currency in the 1690s. Ann Culmer, presenting her account of the estate of her late husband Daniel of St. Peter's in Thanet in May 1696, declared that

'since the deceased's death she hath sold so much of his goods as amounteth to £45 and tooke in gold for the same 13 guineas at the rate of 30s each, they then going current at that rate, which comes to £19 10s, and this deponent could not dispose of them before they fell to 22s each, whereby this accomptant hath lost or is likely to loose 8s by each guinea . . . the rest of the money taken in sale of the said goods was clipt silver, . . . amounting to the sume of £25 10s, and that she could not dispose of the same, but hath it still . . . by her, and is now likely to loose the sum of £8 10s by the same.'

Ann Culmer claimed that she was likely to lose £13 13s. out of her husband's total estate of £55 14s. 4d. due to the currency reforms.<sup>19</sup>

Robert and John Taylor accounted for the estate of John Taylor of Kingsnorth in May 1697. John had died shortly after Lady Day 1696, and the inventory of his goods was taken towards the end of April 1696. The accountants said

'great part of the said Inventory doth consist of Cattle and such like stocke which at the time of the said apprizement bore great prizes by reason of the badness of the then current coin of this Realme . . . In few days afterwards, to witt after the 4th day of May . . . the greatest part of the said coin by Act of Parliament was not to pass in any payments . . . which caused great fall and abatement in the price of Cattle and other stocke by reason of the scarcity of money that was currant by law.'

The accountants claimed that the greater part of the deceased's cattle still remained on their hands; they claimed allowance of £107 out of the estate to cover the extra year's rent they had paid for land to pasture the cattle, wages to the men who looked after the cattle, and payment of interest on the deceased's debts, which they had intended to pay with the proceeds of the sale of the cattle.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> PRC2/42/5.

<sup>19</sup> PRC2/42/114.

<sup>20</sup> PRC2/42/136.

Several accounts mention the different stages of harvesting – reaping, threshing, carrying the corn to the barn, and to the market where it was eventually sold, with the wages paid for each stage of the work. The existence of gangs of harvestmen hired for the period can be demonstrated, and sometimes the food that was supplied for them during the harvest. John Spaine, handling the estate of his father Thomas, a yeoman of Knowlton, in 1629, had to feed and pay his harvest workers for seven weeks. One week's provisions included 31 cheeses, 50 lb. of butter, 82 lb. of beef, two fitches of bacon, salt, honey, pears, vegetables, wheat, malt and hops for brewing.<sup>21</sup>

Sara Samon of Milton-next-Sittingbourne had to pay wages in rather more unusual circumstances. Her husband Henry died in 1612,

'drowned at sea and the ship or Catch wherof he was owner together with the men and goods lost as he was goinge towards London some fortnight after Michaelmas in 1612 . . . The Catch wherin the said Henry Samon was lost being a ship of good burthen and vlew, was suncke or cast away within 9 or 10 miles of Milton in such sort notwithstanding as that there was good hope that she might have beene againe weighed up and recovered (as in likelihood she had, if the stormes and waives which at that time exceedingly raged had not hindred the same) wheruppon this Accomptant by the advyce of her frends and the most expert saylers in the Towne attempted and endeoured to save her and to that purpose hyred a Catch and diverse seafaringe men to the number of 18 or therabouts who for the space of 4 or 5 dayes together laboured exceedingly and tooke great paines in the busines . . . In which said enterprise this Accomptant layed out and disbursed eight pownds . . . as may be easily coniectured by the tediousnes danger and difficulty of such a busines in regard wherof the master or owner of the foresaid Catch had 30s for his paines and the rest of the mariners 2s a peice everye day . . . beside their dyett and all other necessary chardges.'<sup>22</sup>

Shipwreck could happen at any time, but in the late seventeenth century ship-owning was proving to be a risky business in other respects. In 1679, the widow and administratrix of William Spenser of St. Lawrence, Thanet, declared that the deceased had owned parts of several vessels, his shares being appraised at £259 10s. She had tried to sell these, 'but cannot without great losse . . . by reason of many vessells have been bought of the Frensh and Dutch att low and meane prizes, [so] there is no person will buy the parts of the vessells of the said deceased unless she would sell the same att lesse by halfe than they are valued.'<sup>23</sup> In 1680, the administrators of a smack owner of Oare and a hoy owner of Faversham each claimed allowance of 20 per cent of the appraisers' valuation of their respective vessels.<sup>24</sup> In

<sup>21</sup> PRC2/30/119.

<sup>22</sup> PRC2/18/75.

<sup>23</sup> PRC2/38/184.

<sup>24</sup> PRC2/39/1; PRC2/39/52.

1681, Diana Bollard of Dover claimed to be unable to sell her late husband's one-sixteenth share in a pink, valued at £16.<sup>25</sup> In 1683, Catherine Butler of Faversham had difficulty with her late husband Philip's shares in three pinks, valued at £70. She could get no profit from the vessels, nor could she sell her shares in them, 'trading being so small nobody will give anything.'<sup>26</sup> Complaints of the poor prices offered for boats continued throughout the 1680s.

Deaths from plague were nearly always noted in the accounts, due to the expense of burying several members of the household at once, of keeping the house shut up during the infection, and of disinfecting the house afterwards, all of which had to be paid for out of the deceased's estate. Sandwich seemed to be especially susceptible to plague in the 1620s and 1630s. There was a town official, the pest master, who, on a plague death being reported, ordered the infected house to be shut up for eight or nine weeks. During this time, the household had to be provided with food – at the town's expense, since money could not be received from the infected house to pay for the provisions. Sometimes, infected people were ordered from their homes to stay in tents on open ground away from the town until the infection was over.<sup>27</sup> When the house was declared free of infection, women went in to wash and air the linen and clean the house before the goods were appraised. Rosewater was used, and pitch and rosin burnt to clear the air.<sup>28</sup> If, due to fear of infection, the house was left standing empty for some time, when the administrator did go in he sometimes found the house had been broken into and goods stolen in the meantime.

Coroners' inquests are always noted in the accounts, because the coroners' expenses were paid out of the estate. Usually, the deaths were accidental – accidents involving horses or wagons were most common, but one man was killed when a sandpit collapsed on him, another fell out of a tree.<sup>29</sup> Occasionally, there is a hint of something more sinister. Katharine Andrewes and her husband George of Nonington died within a week of each other in March 1677. One of the items in the probate account is the expenses of 'prosecuting Laurence and his wife who were the death of the deceased.'<sup>30</sup> When Rafe Chillenden of St. Nicholas-at-Wade was murdered in 1609, his administrators included rather more detail in their account. Chillen-

<sup>25</sup> PRC20/13/99.

<sup>26</sup> PRC2/40/93.

<sup>27</sup> PRC2/27/172.

<sup>28</sup> PRC2/34/269.

<sup>29</sup> PRC2/36/154 and 39/70.

<sup>30</sup> PRC20/12/250.

den was attacked by his servant John Lee and died of his injuries. Lee was tried at Rochester Assizes, found guilty and hanged. By the wish of Chillenden's family, Lee's body was brought back to Thanet and hung in chains there. The cost of transporting the body from Rochester to Thanet, the chains and the gibbet had to be paid for out of Chillenden's estate.<sup>31</sup> There are several cases of suspected murder or manslaughter, and one exhumation, recorded in the accounts.

Many accounts related to members of the large Dutch/Flemish communities in Canterbury and Sandwich in the early seventeenth century. These accounts reflect the generally comfortable, if not wealthy, circumstances of these people. The Flemish seemed to keep their family and business relationships within their own community; if the names of the deceased and his administrator are Flemish, then almost all the other names in the accounts are likely to be Flemish also. Some of the Flemish still had family or business contacts with Flanders and sometimes young members of their families were sent back to Flanders to live with relatives there. Many Flemish apparently never learned English, or at least preferred to conduct their affairs in their native tongue. Many of their wills, inventories and accounts were drawn up in French or Dutch (English contemporaries apparently did not distinguish between the two). One expense frequently incurred by administrators, therefore, was payment, usually about two shillings, to have these documents translated into English before they were presented to the court. One Sandwich notary, Peter Ente, seemed to derive a good part of his business from translating accounts and otherwise acting for members of the Flemish community in matters of probate.

Some accounts record payments for building work on houses and farm buildings. They show whether roofs were thatched or tiled and to what extent brick was used. When Richard Estman of Canterbury died in the mid-1590s, he was carrying out extensive rebuilding at five tenements he leased and rented out. His accountant's expenses included expenditure on sand and stones for paving, 3000 tiles, 1200 bricks, and wages to a pavier, carpenter, mason and plasterer.<sup>32</sup>

Probate accounts tell us what arrangements were usually made for nursing the sick – how frequently the physician or apothecary was called in, how often women neighbours were paid to sit with the deceased person. We can learn what refreshments were offered at

<sup>31</sup> PRC20/2/63; (Ed.) J.S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, James I*, H.M.S.O. (1980) 68. The Assize records state that Lee attacked Chillenden with a hedge stake, and that Chillenden died of his injuries the following day, but neither the account nor the Assize records give any indication of Lee's motive.

<sup>32</sup> PRC2/11/43.

funeral feasts – usually wine at gentry funerals and beer at yeoman funerals – even the ingredients of the ‘cakebread’ that was served to mourners.<sup>33</sup> Accounts describe how a deceased person’s goods were sold. In country areas, announcements of a sale were made in parish churches. In towns, the town crier was employed. In Sandwich, the announcement was made in English and also in French, Flemish or Dutch. The sale, which might be held over two or more days, was called a ‘liefcope’, and was handled by professional auctioneers or ‘liefcope men’. They would be paid – 1s. 6d. for every pound they raised in the sale on one occasion in 1618 – and given their meals during the time they were employed.<sup>34</sup>

One of the great advantages of probate accounts as a source for early modern economic and social history is that they contain information on the everyday lives (and deaths) of people of yeoman rank and below, which is not available elsewhere. The Canterbury Diocese accounts alone contain sufficient material to occupy historians for years to come.

<sup>33</sup> Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (1984) uses probate accounts in her discussion of funeral customs.

<sup>34</sup> PRC20/3/178.