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SEAL, KEMSING AND IGHTHAM – 1560 TO 1650

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Seal, Kemsing and Ightham are three villages to the north east of Sevenoaks; this study is an attempt to build up a picture of them, and in particular Seal, at the end of the sixteenth, and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

In the early 1500s, the Tebold family of six daughters and three sons was growing up in Seal; this was an extraordinary family. Because each generation has its John, they have been identified as John (1), (2), (3). John(2) Tebold, a yeoman who married about 1500, stood surety for Thomas Boleyn when he was appointed Sheriff of Kent in 1513.¹ Boleyn was godfather to John's eldest son Thomas, vicar of Seal from 1525 to 1542, who was a scholar and travelled on the continent. Awarded a B.A. at Cambridge in 1528, he matriculated at Tübingen in 1536 and studied at Louvain University where he died in 1550.

Though only of yeoman stock, at least three of John Tebold's daughters married very well. They had eight husbands between them, including one of Henry VIII's physicians, the Common Sergeant of London from 1563 to 1583, a Warden of the Company of Fishmongers in London, a gentleman of Otham in Kent, a Merchant of the Staple and Roger Manwood, Chief Baron of the Exchequer in the time of Elizabeth.

The second son, Richard, was a lawyer of the Middle Temple and became Secondary to Queen Elizabeth's Remembrancer; he divided his time between Seal where he is buried and Great Saint Bartholemews in London where he had a house.² The youngest son, John(3) lived in Seal, where the family was by then part of the parish gentry. He died on 25th February, 1577/8 'in the assured hope of a joyful resurrection'

¹ Letters, Papers, Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII, Vol. 1. part 1, no. 1732 (12).

² Margaret Stevens, *Past Generations of Seal and Kemsing*, Seal and Kemsing History Publications No. 1.

according to a palimpsest brass on the wall of the Lady Chapel in Seal Church (only a fragment of which has survived). His wife, Clemence, lived for another 28 years by which time she was mother, grandmother and great-grandmother to 115 children.

It was interest in the Tebolds (or Theobalds, as they became known by the end of the century) which led to the study described in this article. The main source of information has been the first volume of Seal baptisms, burials and marriages covering 1561 to 1655. This data has been entered into a computer data-base and, together with information from other sources, used to reconstitute (as far as the available data allows) families living in the village at that time. The village of Kemsing has been analysed in a similar way and the annual totals for baptisms, burials and marriages in Ightham obtained.

Although it is intended to carry the investigation further, particularly by carrying out a study of the Ightham register similar to that for Kemsing and looking at more of the wills that have survived, it was thought worthwhile to make the basic data and some of the initial conclusions available to others studying populations and social factors for this period. Note that dates are given in the modern form, that is with the year starting on 1st January.

THE PARISH RECORDS

The first volumes of the parish records for Seal, Kemsing and Ightham were transcribed and indexed in the 1930s and presented to the individual parishes,³ and it is these transcripts which have been used. From the initial entries of 1561 until 1602, the original register for Seal was written in one hand – that of the vicar, Gilbert Jenyns, each page being signed by him and his two churchwardens, John Godden and Andrew Homewood (or Holmewood). Although records of baptisms, burials and marriages were kept in most parishes from the middle of the sixteenth century, it was not until 1597 that ministers and churchwardens were instructed to keep them in bound volumes so that, up to then, many were written on single sheets of paper. In many cases, the minister copied the existing sheets into a new volume so that it is usual for the first forty years to be in the hand of the minister at the end of the century even if the originals had been written by a number of different people.

³ By Thomas Colyer-Fergusson.

In Seal, Gilbert Jenyns was the vicar from 1561 until he resigned just before his death early in 1603 and, during these years, wrote the wills of many of his parishioners. Andrew Homewood also died in 1603 and, with children born in the early 1550s, he could have been churchwarden throughout the second half of the century. It is not, however, possible to identify the John Godden who signed the pages for the first forty years. After 1601, the standard of writing is not so high and some of the pages at the end are badly stained perhaps due to the book having been taken out to South Africa and only recovered by accident after being missing for over a hundred years. The page of marriage records for 1602 to 1606 is missing and there is a gap in the record of burials for the years 1644 and 1645.

All the entries in the register up to 1600 have been entered into the data-base together with most of those to the end of the book, the ones omitted for the second part of the period being surnames for which there is only a single entry. This has given a collection of over 3,600 people, which includes wives whose existence has to be assumed from references to births such as 'John, son of John Wood'; 'Thomas, son of James'.

The Kemsing register up to 1650 has been treated in the same way as the second half of the Seal register, that is surnames for which there are a number of entries have been recorded in a 'Kemsing' data-base.

So far the only data obtained from the register for Ightham are the basic counts of the number of baptisms, burials and marriages. From these it can be conjectured that whilst the population of Kemsing was about one-third that of Seal, that of Ightham was about two-thirds.

THE PARISH OF KEMSING AND SEAL

Seal and Kemsing were known ecclesiastically as the parish of Kemsing and Seal (or Kemsing cum Seal) and they did not become separate ecclesiastic parishes until 1874. Before then the two churches had the same vicar but their own churchwardens and kept their own records. They were in the hundred of Codsheath, and, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the manor of Seal was owned by Thomas Boleyn and when Boleyn died without a male heir, Henry VIII seized it in his position as widower of Anne Boleyn. It formed part of the settlement Henry made on Anne of Cleves and reverted to the crown on her death during Mary's reign.

The village of Seal was, and still is, on the east-west road linking Maidstone and Westerham and running just north of Sevenoaks. Kemsing is about a mile and a quarter to the north of Seal, just south of the Pilgrims' Way, which also runs east-west. What is now called

Childsbridge Lane, joining Seal and Kemsing, was one of the few crossings of the valley between these two roads and added to the local importance of the two villages.

The parish of Sevenoaks comes to within a small distance of Seal village to the west, but Seal extends southward as far as Under River. In the sixteenth century, in addition to the village itself, Seal consisted of a number of hamlets – Godden, Stone Street, Bitchet Green and Fawke to the south and Fuller Street and Chart to the east. Kemsing, the smaller village, had a hamlet, Everham (Heverham) to the east.

As would be expected, there was a considerable amount of intermarriage between the Kemsing and Seal families. Although initially there appears to be significant differences between the vital statistics of the two, most of this is due to the small number of families in Kemsing and the wide range for all the available figures. The Tebolds owned land in Kemsing and the younger ones lived in Kemsing for the first years of their marriage moving to, presumably, larger houses in Seal when coming into their inheritance and with interchanges such as this and the closeness of the two villages, no basic reason other than size can be seen for any difference.

There was an almshouse in the village to which Richard Tebold bequeathed 4*d.* a week in 1570 but also, much more generously, he requested that his 'house that standeth upon the land . . . in Kemsing . . . shalbe taken down within one year after my decease by my executor and set up beside the Alms house in Seal Town upon a parcel of land that I bought . . . and that the foresaid house and the land . . . shall lie to the said almshouses for ever'. He also left £3 6*s.* 8*d.* for the 'mending of the house over the town well adjoining to the cross at Seal'.⁴

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Two hundred years later than this study Hasted described the parish of Seal as being 'very rich and fertile',⁵ although he was not so complimentary about Kemsing. Seal and its neighbours were part of a pastoral community with lambs, sheep and bullocks being left to sons and daughters by their yeomen and husbandmen fathers. Orchards and an apple mill for making cider are also mentioned and Kentish cob nuts were another useful crop.

⁴ Will of Richard Tebold, 1570, Public Record Office (abbreviated to PRO) Prob 11/52, f244-248.

⁵ E. Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of Kent*, Vol. 3, 1797, 51.

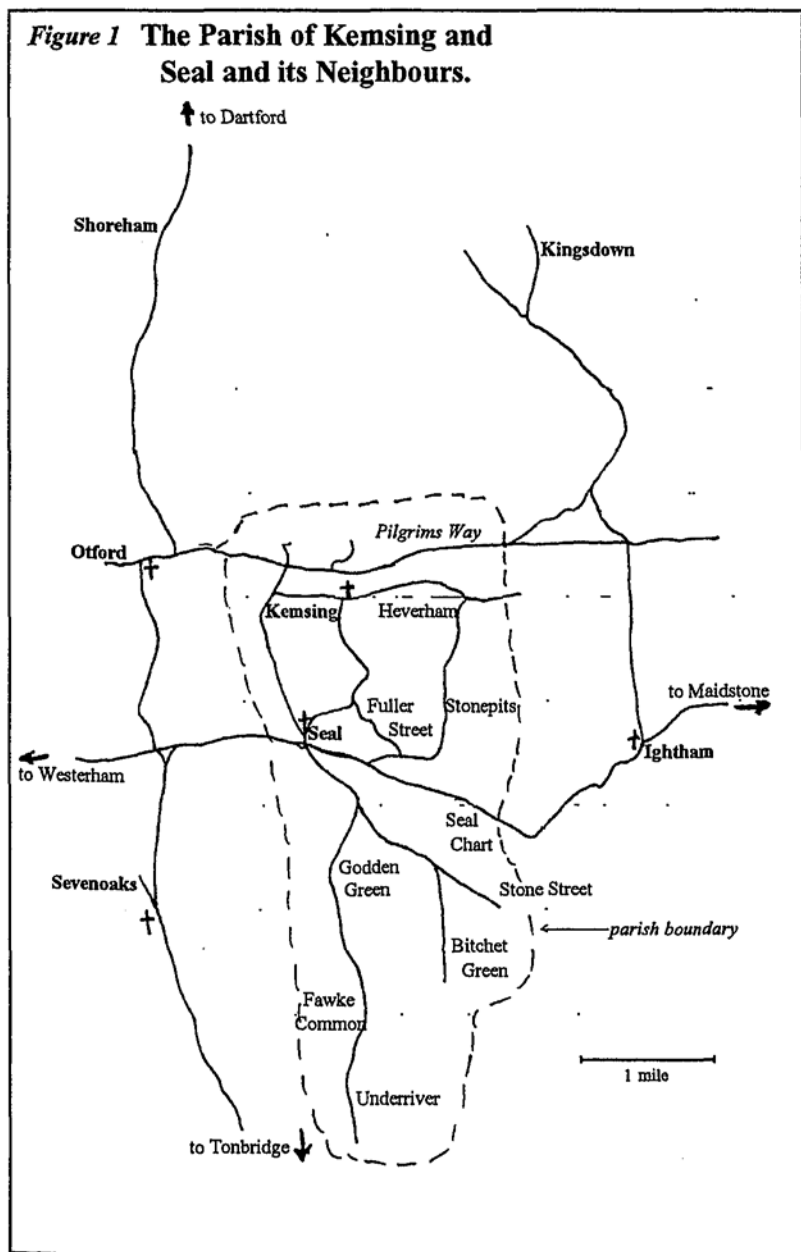


Fig. 1. The parish of Kemsing and Seal and its neighbours.

Wool was an important commodity and Seal had contacts with the wool town of Cranbrook throughout the period studied; for example, Clemence, the wife of John(3) Tebold, came from there and one of John(3)'s sisters married into the Sharpey family of Cranbrook. John(1), the grandfather of the family described above, mentions in his will of 1501⁶ his two shops, one in Seal and the other in Sevenoaks, cloth in the shops, sheep, pastures and feeding places. William Olyver, who died in 1526,⁷ had a shop in the market place of Sevenoaks as well as 'a little house' called the Forge in Seal Street. In addition to land in Seal and Kemsing, he also owned land in Leigh and Tonbridge illustrating the wide-ranging geographical interests of the men at this time.

Keeping the footpaths in repair was of importance to everyone and this can be seen from some of the wills. In 1520, Alice Olyver left money for the 'mending of the foul ways between Muster Oak and Smellet Green';⁸ the Muster Oak could have been by the village green whilst the William Olyver, yeoman, who died in 1576 and was perhaps her grandson lived in the 'Mansion House of Smythet' (Smellet).⁹ Fifty years later Richard Tebold left £6 13s. 4d. to be spent in 'mending of the footpath leading over my great meadow between Seal and Kemsing with planks'.

The will¹⁰ of Sylvester Miller, a widow of Kemsing who died at the end of the sixteenth century, shows something of the contents of an 'ordinary' house of the times, the household items mentioned being listed in Table 1. The will was written in January 1594/5 although Sylvester was not buried until 28th October, 1597, and the will probated in 1599. Sylvester and her husband John, who died in 1590, had four children, the eldest, Margaret, being born before 1562 which implies that Sylvester was about sixty when she died. Margaret married a John Godden about 1580 and they lived in Kemsing with their three daughters, two of whom were alive in 1597. This John Godden could be the son of the John Godden who was churchwarden of Seal.

The house included a kitchen, parlour and hall, each of which contained a table and form and a chamber in which was a bedstead and frame. It also had glass in the windows and 'joined work', none of

⁶ John Tebold, 9th September, 1501 (written in English); PRO Prob 11/13 f49.

⁷ Will of William Olyver of Fawk, 1526; PRO Prob 11/22, f123.

⁸ Will of Alice Olyver, widow; 1520; Centre for Kentish Studies (abbreviated to CKS) DRb/Pwr/7/214.

⁹ Will of William Olyver, 1576; CKS DRb/Pwr/15/10a.

¹⁰ Will of Sylvester Miller, CKS DRb/PW18 1599.

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which was to be taken from it. Glass was not unusual by this time; twenty years earlier, Thomas Christopher, yeoman, asked for the glass of the windows 'to be standers to my house always'.¹¹ Houses of men such as Richard and John Tebold had wainscot panels and silver and gilt cups and bowls augmented the pewter ware.

TABLE 1: THE MAIN ITEMS BEQUEATHED BY SYLVESTER MILLER, WIDOW, 1596/7

To:	
Bedding:	
Sylvester	a best featherbed and coverlet a pair of blankets and two pillows
Margaret	my best red coverlet
Richard	a flock bed
Pots, Dishes, etc.;	
Sylvester	two platters and two pewter dishes a pewter pot and a great iron pot the little copper kettle
Margaret	two platters and two pewter dishes a little iron pot
Sylvester and Margaret	my great copper kettle and one little brass pot three great candlesticks
three granddaughters	one platter each
Richard	an <i>iron</i> kettle
Nicholas	a brass pot
Richard and Nicholas	a brass cauldron and two brass kettles
Furniture:	
Sylvester	my great joined chest
Margaret	my bedstead and my little joined chest a table standing upon a frame

¹¹ Will of Thomas Christopher, 1577; CKS DRb/PW11.

Richard	a bed and a bedstead a table with a form in the parlour a bedstead and frame standing in the chamber a boarded chest my folding table and form standing in the kitchen
Nicholas	the table and form standing in the hall the stuff bed he lieth on and the four curtains thereto belonging
Richard and Nicholas (to be equally divided between them)	the hangers hanging in the kitchen all my armouries (including a corslet, pike, sword and dagger)
Implements, etc.:	
Sylvester	a brand iron
Margaret	the other brand iron
Richard and Nicholas	all my implements of husbandry my pony, to take the use of him between them both

Sylvester Miller's eldest son, Richard, was born in 1563 and married in 1589 with one daughter alive when the will was written. Her two younger children, Nicholas and a daughter also called Sylvester, who were thirty and twenty-seven, respectively, when their mother died, were both unmarried and living at home presumably helping her run the family smallholding. There was wheat in the barn from which to pay her debts and the 'residue' of corn was to be given to her three grandchildren, but no mention of any animals on which to use the branding irons listed in Table 1.

No inventories seem to have survived from the period but some idea of relative values can be obtained from the Assize Records.¹² The bay mare, stolen from John Cocker of Seal in 1577 was valued at £5, a grey gelding stolen from John Rowse in 1586 at £3 and four cows stolen in 1587 at £4. Sheep were of much lower value – usually five shillings with lambs about one-sixth of a pound. This makes the value of a cow about four times that of a sheep, a ratio which is still approximately the

¹² (Ed.) J.S. Cockburn *Calendar of Assize Records. Kent Indictments Elizabeth I* H.M.S.O. 1979.

same today. The values given for wheat and malt respectively are equivalent to £0.033 and £0.025 (3.3p and 2.5p) per peck (2 gallons volume). Since Sylvester Miller asked that the £4 she owed John Godden be paid out of the wheat in the barn, there must have been at least 120 pecks (30 bushels) stored there.

A velvet cap (3s.), a shirt (4s.), a cloak (30s.), a dagger (4s.), a pair of shoes (15d.) and a silver spoon (6s.) stolen from Henry Reynolds, gent., show what would have been found in the houses of the parish gentry. Below, when crime in Seal is looked at in more detail, the value of goods stolen from a yeoman's house are given.

LAND INHERITANCE

The way in which land was passed on to children seems to have varied considerably even though only a few wills have so far been studied in detail. William Christopher of Stonestreet, a yeoman whose family is described in more detail later, died in 1592 leaving his lands (acreage not given) to eventually be divided equally between his eight, possibly nine, sons.¹³ For the first six years after his death, the profits from them were to be used, by the eldest son, for the education of the younger children. But with what must have been much smaller amounts, other arrangements had to be made.

John Beecher, yeoman, who died in 1566, left all his land to his eldest son William, who had married the previous year, with the proviso that his two younger sons were each paid an amount (unreadable) of 'good and lawful money of England' when they came of age. John's wife Margaret, 'in consideration that William Beecher, her eldest son, hath all the lands given by his father' left all her possessions to be divided between the other two sons and four daughters.¹⁴

This William Beecher, a millwright, who died in 1605, had a large number of children, but they were effectively two families, those of his first wife born between 1567 and 1580 and three young children by his second wife, Agnes, aged 6, 9 and 10. Agnes must also have died before 1605 since the 'well-beloved wife' ordained by William as his sole executrix is called Marion. The land he had inherited from his father is described as four parcels of land 'containing, by estimate eight

¹³ Will of William Christopher, not dated, buried October 1592; CKS DRb/PW16.

¹⁴ Wills of: John Beecher, June 1566, CKS DRb/PW8.
Margaret Beecher, August 1568, CKS DRb/PWr13/375.

acres' which William had mortgaged, borrowing £20 from Robert Pelsolt. Marion had thus first to redeem the land.

The conditions of the loan were that 'one and twenty pounds and twelve shillings' were to be paid 'on the twentieth day of September next coming', an interest rate of 8 per cent assuming it had been for a year. In order that Marion could repay this loan, William bequeathed to her and her heirs forever one of the four parcels of land 'for to be sold if needed and required for the payment of the sum of one and twenty pounds and twelve shillings to the said Robert Pelsolt'. This parcel was the largest of the four being about four acres leaving only another four to be inherited by the children and then only after Marion had had them 'for and during her natural life'. William specified that they should then go to Richard his youngest son or, if he died without heirs, to William his second son.

William's eldest son John is not mentioned at all. He had however married in 1593 when he was the minister of Rotherfield in East Sussex. This implies that his father had spent money on his education which saw him well settled and could account for his lack of an inheritance. Another interesting point about this family is that it contained an 'eldest daughter Dorothy' and a 'youngest daughter Dorothy', but there were twenty-two years between them and the elder one could already have been married by the time the younger one was born.

The last example of land inheritance given here is even more complex with bequests spread over at least twelve years.¹⁵ It also merits mention because of the high annual income which it implies was available from land. Robert Frenche and Agnes Pynden, who married in 1578, had twelve children; they, and most of the children, were still alive in 1617 when Thomas, the sixth child, died at the age of 25. Thomas classified himself as a yeoman and owned a considerable amount of land, capable of producing £25 a year clear profit – where did this come from? At 25, he could hardly have had time to 'make his fortune', but as the second son in a large family, how could he have inherited it at this early age? Did he benefit from a wealthy godfather or a relation on his mother's side? The only Pyndens recorded in Seal or Kemsing are Agnes and her father William murdered in 1590, as described below.

Thomas could not write but he put his mark on each page, the will being written by a John Olyver. Following a few minor bequests, he gave his father all the residue of his goods after his legacies and debts had been paid and his body decently buried and made him his executor.

¹⁵ Will of Thomas Frenche, November 1617; CKS DRb/Pw24.

But the real work for an executor did not start until Robert and Agnes had died; since Agnes was only 53 when her son died this could have been some years later. Thomas had one elder brother, Robert who had a son also called Thomas, and six younger brothers. After the decease of father Robert and mother Agnes, Robert the brother was to inherit all the lands and tenements but the six younger brothers were each to be paid 'fifty pounds good and lawful money of England' by Robert or his son Thomas. The first payment was to be made within two years of the decease of the parents, the next within four years and so on until the youngest brother received his payment within twelve years of the decease of his parents. Thomas also divides his land into three portions with each of his six younger brothers being awarded a half of one portion should Robert default in the payment of any of the fifty pounds.

THE BASIC STATISTICS

Practically the only information available from which to estimate the population of Seal is the parish register and Fig. 2 shows the baptisms, burials and marriages recorded from 1562 to the 1650s. Because the population is small, there are large fluctuations from year to year; in general, there are about three baptisms for every two burials but, in some years, the number of recorded deaths rises considerably. Many of those in 1603 were noted as being due to the plague, but 1638 was the real disaster year with deaths about three times the average; no reason is given for any of these which cover the whole spectrum of the population.

The number of baptisms and marriages rose dramatically at the end of the 1640s and this is discussed below.

What the graph does not show is that ten of the burials in 1563 were between the 1st and 9th May. What struck so many adults¹⁶ (two in one household but no children) in this particular spring? The deaths of William Frenche, buried on 1st May, and James Porter, buried on the 9th May, were not so sudden that they could not write their wills – William's was written on 28th April.¹⁷

¹⁶ The full list of deaths are:

May 1, William Frenche; Richard Sutton; John Persolt

May 2, Margaret, wife of James Porter; John Goodhew

May 4, Mary Campernell, widow

May 5, Edward Bartholomew

May 7, Thomas Rudland

May 9, Robert Bletcher; James Porter

¹⁷ Will of William Frenche of Goodwyn, Seal, yeoman, 18th April, 1563, CKS DRD Pwr 13/79.

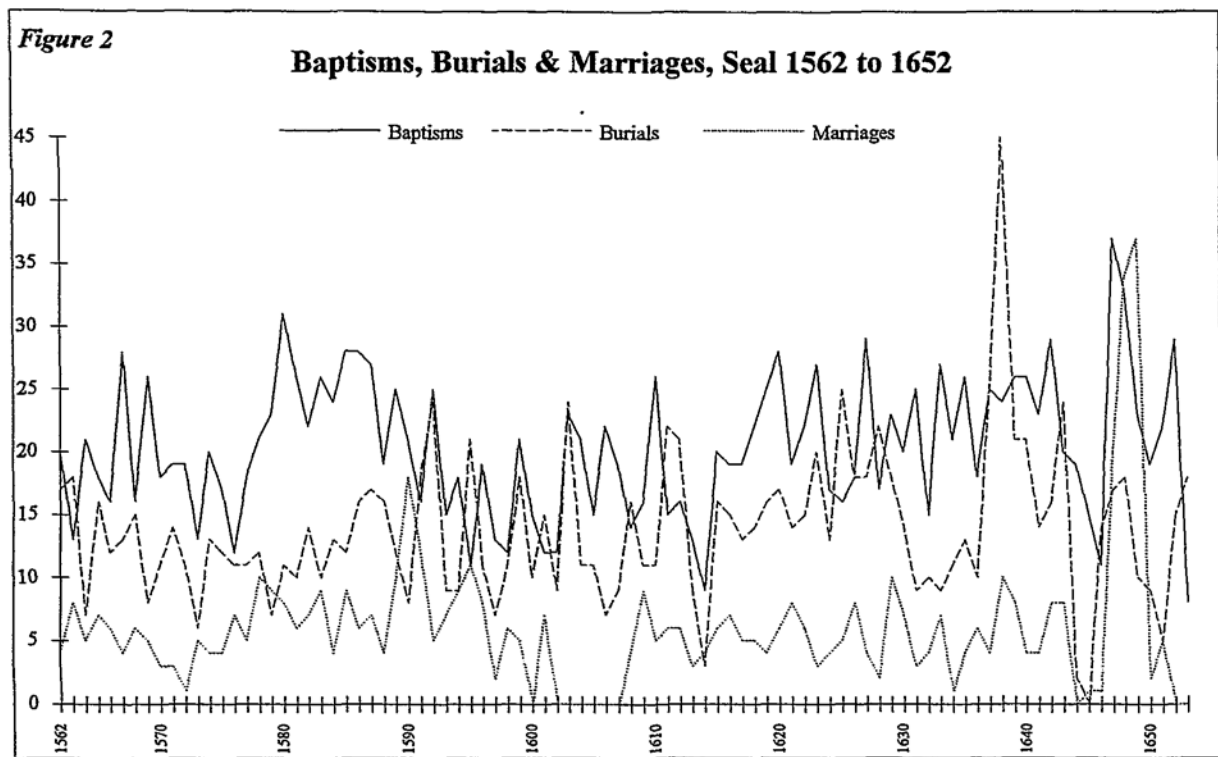


Fig. 2. Baptisms, burials and marriages, Seal 1562 to 1652.

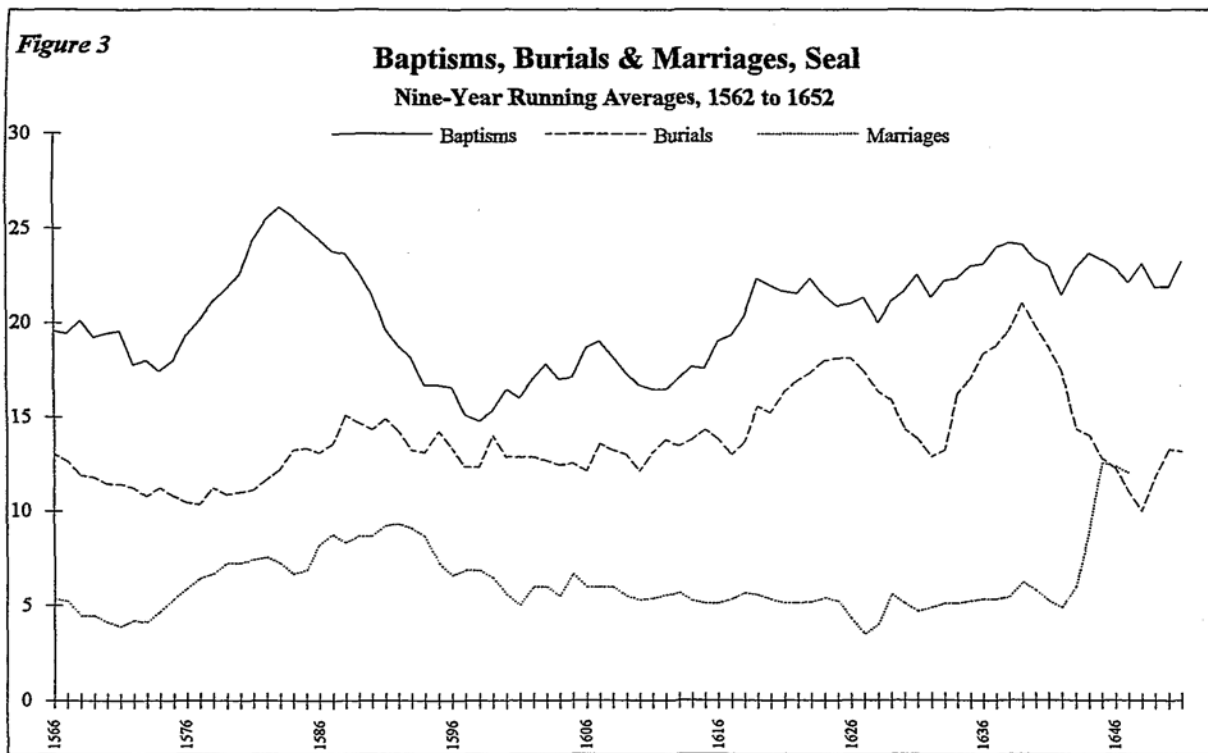


Fig. 3. Baptisms, burials and marriages, Seal.

Fig. 2 shows that the number of births recorded per year is nearly always more than the number of deaths but a better picture is obtained by plotting a running nine-year average (Fig. 3). On average, over these nine decades, the birth rate was approaching one and a half times the death rate. In general, baptisms may have been under-recorded by between 10 and 15 per cent and burials by between 5 and 10 per cent¹⁸ and, if the raw data was increased in line with these figures, the average birth rate would be 1.5 times the average death rate.

Figs. 4, 5 and 6 show, for Seal, Kemsing and Ightham, the nine-year moving averages for, respectively, the recorded baptisms, deaths and marriages. The highest birth rates were in the 1580s, falling to not much more than the death rate in the 1590s before rising again in the seventeenth century when the death rate was also higher than at the beginning of the period.

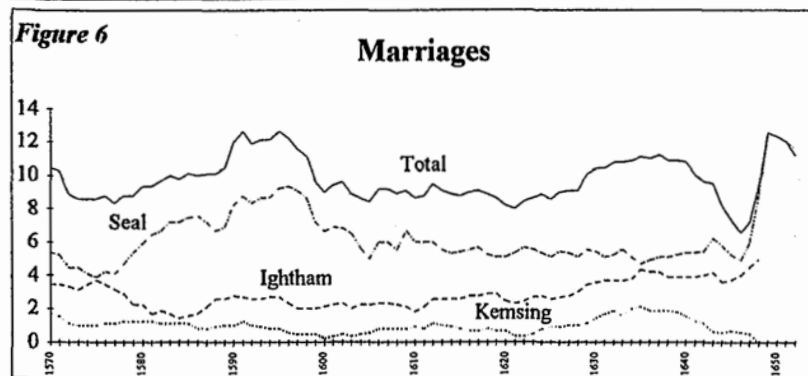
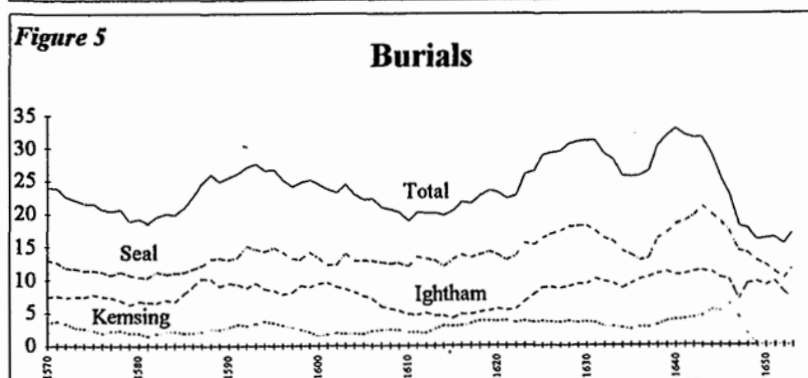
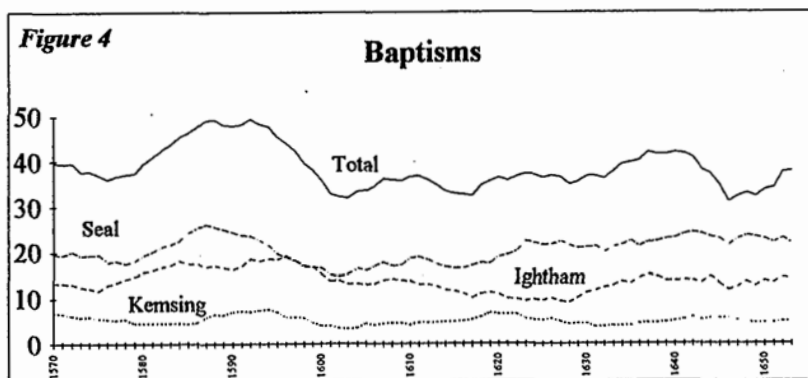
THE 1640s

The baptisms and, even more so, the marriages rose to very much more than the average in the second half of the 1640s and detailed figures are given in Table 2. The births average 23 over these ten years which is not many more than would be expected overall, but the peak of 37 is two years before the peak in marriages. This was the time of the Civil War, but practically nothing is known about the village in that period. Sir Jacob Astley, forced to surrender at Stow-on-the-Wold in the spring of 1646, said to his captors 'Well, boys, you have done your work and may go home and play – unless you fall out with one another',¹⁹ but it looks as if there was more to this jump in the figures than men coming home from war.

Also many of the infants baptised came from families outside the parish of Seal – ten of those baptised in 1647 came from Sevenoaks, eight in 1648 and three in 1649. The number of marriages average 11.5 per year which, even allowing for the mid-1640s when hardly any were recorded, is over twice that expected from the rest of the period. The records do not say where either the brides or grooms came from and there is no mention of licences being granted, but many of the names are unknown in Seal. Baptisms are later recorded for some of those who married, but most appear to have been resident in the village for

¹⁸ Hey, p. 45.

¹⁹ Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, Vol. 2, London, 1962, p. 208.



Figs. 4-6. Nine-year running averages, Seal, Kemsing and Ightham.

only a short time, if at all. It appears that, in the three years 1647, 48 and 49 about fifty men brought their brides to Seal (or fifty women brought their husbands-to-be to Seal).

TABLE 2 SEAL – BAPTISMS AND MARRIAGES IN THE 1640S

year	bapt.	marr.	year	bapt.	marr.
1641	23	4	1646	11	1
1642	29	8	1647	37	20
1643	20	8	1648	33	34
1644	19	0	1649	23	37
1645	15	1	1650	19	2

ESTIMATING THE POPULATION OF SEAL

No taxation records to help estimate the number of people or households have survived but estimates have been made using family reconstitution – see Table 3. For this purpose, each family where the existence (either by birth and/or death) of more than one child is recorded is taken as a household (column D). This number has been multiplied by 5 (column E) to give an estimate of the population.²⁰ The estimate in column F was obtained by counting the people (including children) in the reconstructed families. Given the nature of the data, these estimates do not differ very widely, and column G, which was used to calculate the yearly birth, death and marriage rates per thousand for each decade, is the mean of the two.

Column G shows that the estimated population reached over 700 in the 1580s but ended the period with about the same as at the beginning – of the order of 450.

From a manuscript which survived at Knole,²¹ a credible agreement with these figures may be obtained. On 3rd April, 1648, the inhabitants of Seal (defined apparently as men and usually heads of households)

²⁰ Hey uses 5 (p. 41) whilst Wrightson and Levine use 4.75 (p. 45).

²¹ Only notes taken from this manuscript (probably now in the archives at Maidstone) by Commander Stagg have so far been studied.

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TABLE 3: BASIC STATISTICS FOR SEAL

decade	A bapt	B bur	C marr	D	E	F	G	H birth	I death	J marr
1562 to	195	131	51	93	465	399	432	45	30	12
1572 to	200	104	59	121	605	568	587	34	18	10
1582 to	236	136	78	150	750	716	733	32	19	11
1592 to	161	135	55	141	705	627	666	24	20	8
1602 to	183	131		104	520	475	498	37	26	
1612 to	190	138	54	115	575	492	534	36	26	10
1622 to	214	172	52	112	560	525	543	39	32	10
1632 to	231	179	52	124	620	559	590	39	30	9
1642 to 51	228	141	116	102	510	468	489	47	29	24
total	1838	1267	517							
aver./yr	20	14	6							

- A,B,C baptisms, burials and marriages from the parish register
 D number of families per decade estimated from family reconstitution
 E estimate of population by multiplying column D by 5
 F population per decade estimated from family reconstitution
 G mean of columns E and F
 H,I,J birth, death and marriage rates per 1,000 per year

were listed giving the names of 94 men divided into Seal village itself, Fuller Street and Chart, Chart, Stone Street and Bitchet, Godden and Fawke. It remains, if possible, to discover the purpose of this list but multiplying 94 by 5 gives 470 as the population at that time.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Some justification for the resulting birth and death rates can be obtained by looking at other studies. The nine-year moving averages for Terling, a village in Essex, are similar to those for Seal at least until about 1600. From about 1565 to 1620, the number of births per year rose from 18 to approaching 30 with the death rate similar to the birth

rate at the beginning and end of this period, but much lower during the middle of it. The authors estimate the population of the village to have grown from about 330 in 1524/5 to approximately 580 in 1671.²² Wrigley²³ takes 30 per thousand as an estimate of the normal crude death rate at this time corresponding reasonably to the figures given in column I in Table 3.

The marriage rates seem on the high side for the estimated population. Quite a number were of people who did not live within the parish and were, therefore, married by a licence from the faculties – as many as nine in the 1590s. Some of these, as is shown by their names, were of people belonging, or at least related, to families living in Seal but, like Myddle in Shropshire in the late seventeenth century, Seal in the sixteenth could possibly have been a favourite church for weddings.²⁴ Alternatively, it could be that the clerk was particularly zealous since he even noted when people had certificates from other parishes.

With the number of births continuing to exceed deaths, the expected population in the late 1640s should be approaching double that of the 1560s instead of it being almost the same. In this it differs from the experience of Terling which expanded by about 75 per cent – although the number of births and deaths did not rise by a similar amount. In Seal, up until about 1580, additional children above those needed to keep the population static, seem in general to have been absorbed into the local population, sometimes moving to a neighbouring parish on marriage, sometimes choosing a partner from 'outside'. As the century drew to a close, many of the 'extra children' must have moved away since there is no record of them other than their baptism. This probably indicates that there was no longer sufficient land in Seal to support them.

There are later connections between Seal and Deptford which, with other towns in north Kent, was likely to be one of the places where some of the young men and women of Seal went to look for work, but much the largest magnet was London, always able to absorb as many young people as the surrounding country could provide. Seal had connections with the capital via Richard Tebold and others so that positions could be found for those attracted by the hope of advancement before they left the village.

²² Wrightson and Levine, 45, 46.

²³ E.A. Wrigley, *Population and History*, London, 1969, 75.

²⁴ Hey, 46.

THE CHRISTOPHER FAMILY

A closer look at the Christophers, one of Seal's best documented families, shows the situation in more detail. Fig. 7 gives the descendants of William(1) yeoman of Bitchet, and Margaret, his wife, who both left wills, which have survived, and this tree has been drawn so as to include the time factor.

James, their eldest son, married about a year after his father's death – did he need his inheritance before he could start a family? Of James's descendants, his grandson Robert had two daughters and a son who survived infancy, but there is no record for any of them in Seal after 1632. Richard Storyer, the husband of James's elder daughter came from Ightham so that any children born to them might have been baptised there. His other daughter, the second wife of William Beecher, the millwright who died in 1605, had three children born in the 1590s but nothing, other than their baptisms, is recorded for them.

The second son, William(2), lived at Stonestreet; he married Agnes in 1564 and they had nine children, all of whom, ranging in age from 25 to 5, were alive in 1592 when their father died leaving a second wife, Bridget, pregnant. Of these nine, only two are known to have married: Margaret, the only daughter, when she was 32 and William(3), the eldest son, who at 23 was left executor of his father's will with the duty of bringing up and governing the other children 'well and orderly as they ought to be at the discretion of honest men of the said parish'.²⁵

As described above, William's lands and tenements were to be divided between his eight sons and, 'if my wife be with child of a manchild, to have as good portion as any of the other sons in my lands'. In addition, his wife was to be paid 20s. per year 'out of his lands'. It is noticeable that, whilst the original William calls himself a 'yeoman', later members of the family including James are given as husbandmen. If the inherited land kept being divided between large numbers of sons, each holding soon became too small to support a family.

The Christopher wills illustrate the pastoral nature of the neighbourhood. In 1562, William(1) left '60 sheep to be equally divided' between his four sons and a daughter and, in 1577, James, left his eldest daughter 'one bullock and my wife to keep it til it hath a calf'!. In 1592, William(2) left his second son one ewe, one lamb and a 'great black wether with one horn'.

John, the third son of William and Margaret, moved from Seal

²⁵ Will of William Christopher, died 1592, CKS DRb/PW16.

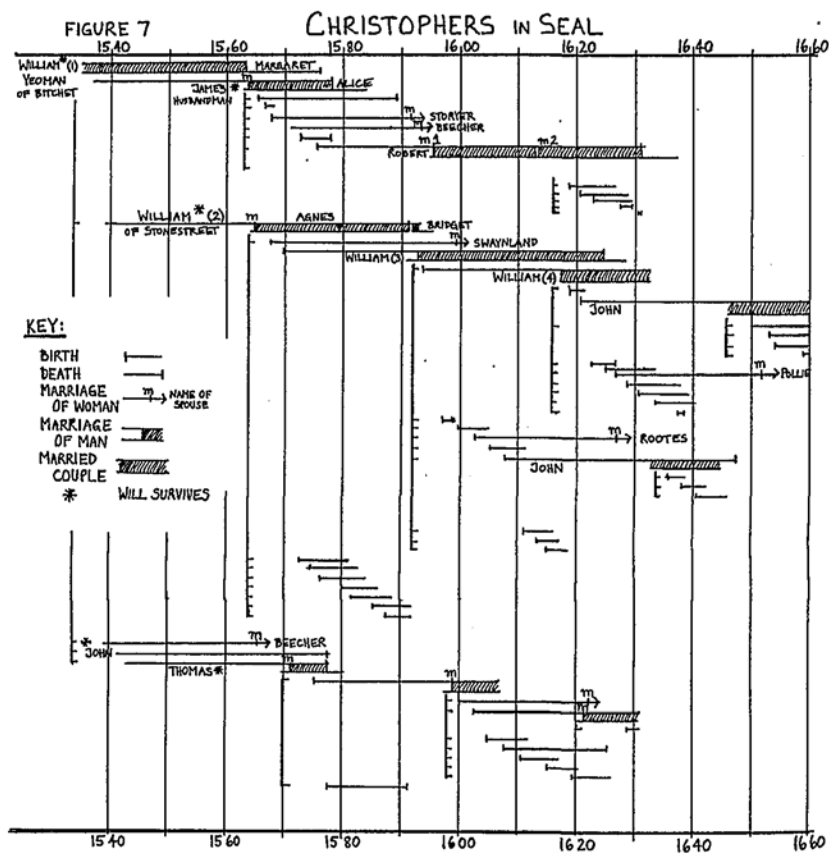


Fig. 7. Christophers in Seal.

between 1574 when he wrote his will²⁶ and 1577 when, just prior to his death, he added a codicil. He had taken a post as servant to Henry Fourmayne, a yeoman of Cobham (towards Rochester and about 12 miles away). In his main will, John leaves his younger brother Thomas a tenement with about three acres of land and the residue of his lands,

²⁶ Will of John Christopher, initially written 1st August, 1574, codicil 28th May, 1577; CKS DRb/PW11.

John names two parcels of land each of three acres with a 'residue of lands, hereditaments', goods, cattle, etc. John's burial is not recorded – he died in Cobham and the records for the relevant period have not survived.

tenements, hereditaments, goods, cattle, etc., after his other bequests have been met, but the obvious reason for the codicil is that Thomas has already died leaving a widow, Isabell. Thomas's will has also survived²⁷ but, although dated 18th May, there is no year given.

The only recorded burial of a Thomas Christopher at Seal at about this time is in May 1578, but this is taken as that of another Thomas since 1578 does not fit in with John's will:

- Isabell was pregnant when Thomas wrote his will and Alice, their daughter, was baptised in June 1577
- John Olyver married Isabel Christopher, widow, in November 1577.

Thus, John, in Cobham, must have written his codicil less than a fortnight after Thomas's death in Seal.

Out of 55 baptisms recorded for the Christopher family there were:

6	children died under 2 years old
5	who died at 4, 5, 15, 17 and 24, respectively
13	married
31	no record other than baptism.

Even if some of the 31 Christophers died without their burial being recorded, most of them must have either married outside the village or, having moved away to find work, never returned to live in Seal.

INFANT MORTALITY

The Christopher story of one or two children from a family marrying and the rest known only from their baptisms is repeated for many other families besides the Christophers. Nearly two-thirds of those baptised in the parish are never mentioned again, and it is possible that some of these were early deaths not entered into the register. The number of infants whose burial is recorded within a year of baptism (many of them within a month) averages about 8 per cent for the whole period, the variation being shown in figure 8.

The eleven Christopher deaths recorded up to the age of 24 is exactly equal to the average for all families, that is one in five. Some families had a tragic history including Sylvester Miller's son Richard and his wife Joan Kips. Margaret, their eldest child, was the only one mentioned by her grandmother but they had a son baptised in

²⁷ Will of Thomas Christopher, 1577; CKS DRb/PW11.

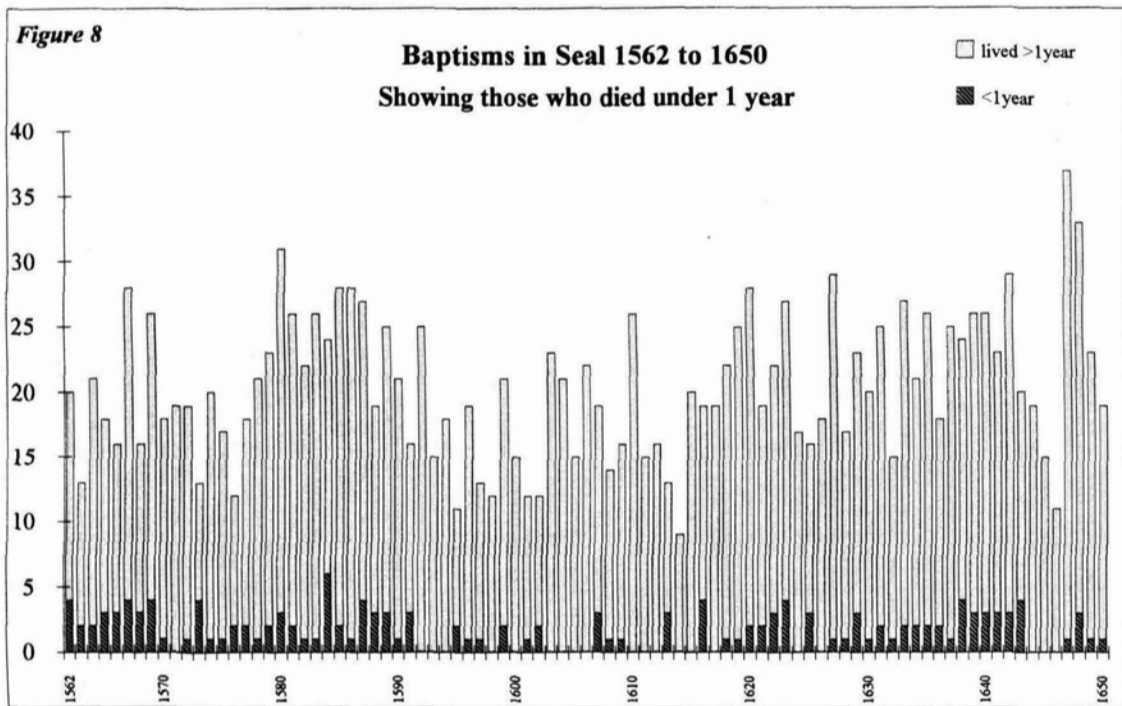


Fig. 8. Baptisms in Seal 1562 to 1650.

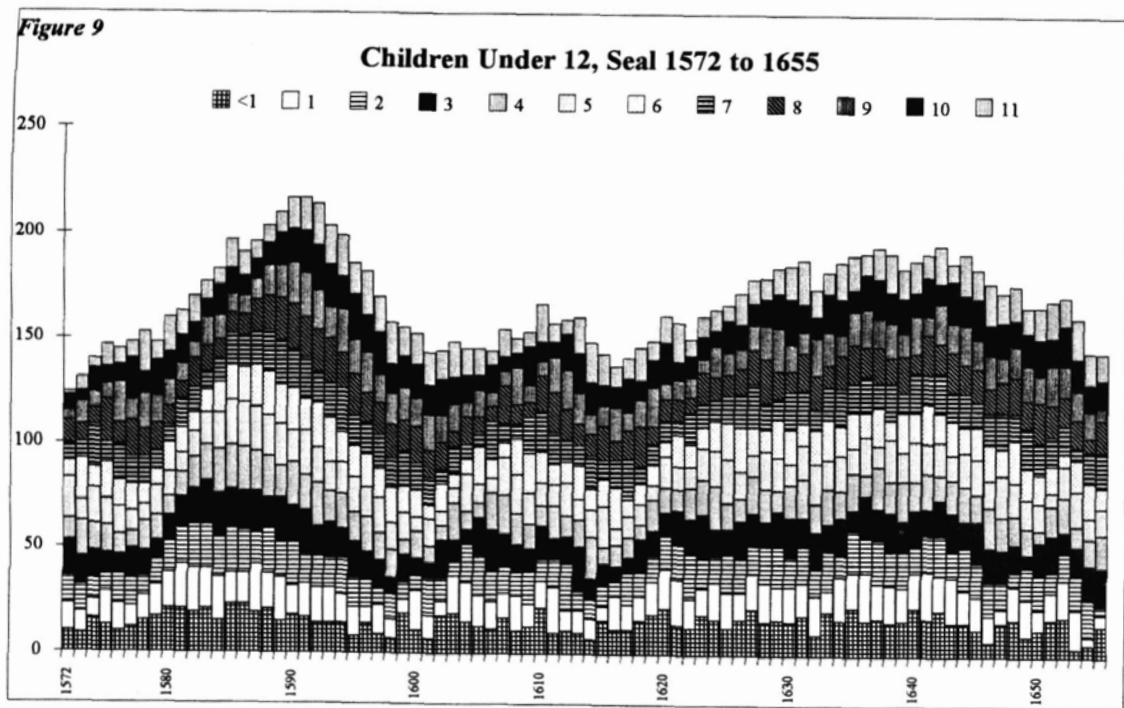


Fig. 9. Children under 12, Seal 1572 to 1655.

December 1594 after she had made her will. Later they had twin sons, baptised on 11th September, 1601, but both buried before the end of the month and another son, in 1605, who died when he was sixteen months old. The Bowles of Seal had seven children born between 1615 and 1630 with the burials of the middle five all recorded when they were a few months old.

But these families are no more typical than Robert and Agnes Frenche described above who both lived into their fifties and had twelve children, ten (if not eleven) surviving to adulthood and four marrying and having children. Or John and Johane Gardner with nine children, Johane dying a few months after the birth of the youngest, but with twenty-four grandchildren being recorded for the four of the nine who married.

The number of children in the village under twelve has been calculated for each year from the record of baptisms and burials and the result is given in Fig. 9. Taken with the population estimates in Table 3, these young children must have made up from one-fifth to one-quarter of the total population.

NURSE CHILDREN

Human traffic between Seal and London was not just one way. In wealthy families, it was usual for babies to be breast-fed by wet nurses and these infants could be sent considerable distances from the homes of their parents. In some areas within reach of London, wet nursing seems to have been carried out in an organised way, as described for Chesham in Buckinghamshire by Dorothy McLaren;²⁸ Chesham is a similar distance from London to Seal. There, between 1578 and 1601, 6 per cent of the total burials were of nurse children. In Seal, from 1565 to 1598, 25 such burials were recorded – 5.6 per cent of the total for those years, a very similar figure to that for Chesham. Of these, three-quarters are recorded as being from London, but the others include the ‘daughter of Fletcher of Kingsdown’ and ‘Thomas, son of Thomas Gylmyn of Shoreham, gent’ (Kingsdown and Shoreham are each about 4 miles from Seal – see Fig. 1). Since the register records only those who died, the actual number of infants nursed in Seal cannot be determined from the available records. After 1598, there is only one recorded death of a nurse child – in 1638.

McLaren writes of the infants being taken from London to Chesham

²⁸ McLaren, 43.

in the carts making their return journey after delivering corn to the capital. In Seal it would be more likely to be meat, wool or produce from their orchards than corn, but the same principle could apply. Organising such a journey (about 25 miles) could not have been simple. The wet nurse would herself have had to go up to London to collect the baby so that it could be suckled on the journey back since a newly born infant, or even one a few weeks old, could hardly survive the time of the journey without a feed.

The parish registers sometimes state where the nurse child who died had been nursed and, in most cases, it is possible to pinpoint the family into which the baby was introduced. Two children nursed in the Brampton family died in the autumn of 1577: Fletcher's daughter mentioned above and Ann whose parentage is not given. William and Elizabeth Brampton had six children of their own, the first five born between 1568 and 1579. The Brodes were another family where the wife added to the family resources by being a wet nurse, but two of those in her care died, John Price in June 1580 and Savell Stocker in the following April. She herself had two children baptised in Seal: Peter, named after his father, in January 1579, and Margaret in November 1581. In both the Brampton and Brode families, no deaths of their own children are recorded. The Christophers of Stonestreet carried on this function over at least two generations – perhaps providing the service to the same families.

BASIS FOR THE DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The data collected for Seal have been divided into three groups:

1. Families with six or more live births, the date of baptism being given for each, and with the baptism of a seventh child or the burial of husband or wife also recorded; there are 48 such 'complete' families. Another 10 for which the birth of a sixth child is the last recorded event have been added to this group to give a total of 58 families. The marriage date is known for 32 of these;
2. Other 'families' where there is a smaller amount of detail available but some of it, such as age at marriage, time interval between marriage and birth of first child, can be used to amplify the data for the 'complete' families;
3. The other recorded events, generally isolated ones such as baptism of a child or a burial which cannot be 'fitted into' a family.

The presence of the third group needs to be remembered when looking at some of the detailed statistics. For example, for the total entries, the proportion of infants dying at under a year is about 8 per cent (see Fig. 8 above), but it is ten per cent for groups 1 and 2. This is because group 3 includes a higher number of unconnected baptisms than deaths of infants.

TABLE 4 - FATE OF THOSE BAPTISED IN SEAL

Group	died: <1 yr	died: 1 to 10	died: 10 to 20	died: > 20 yrs unm'd	marr.	no record	Total	no. of fam.
1	73 17%	34 8%	9 2%	7 2%	58 13%	256 58%	437	58
2	55 7%	66 8%	18 2%	20 3%	116 14%	540 66%	815	230
Total	128 10%	100 8%	27 2%	27 2%	174 14%	796 64%	1252	288

Table 4 shows that 18 per cent of the children baptised die before reaching their tenth birthday and only 14 per cent of them are married in the village whilst for practically two-thirds there is no record other than that of their baptism. Even so, some statistics can be derived for those families for which there is basic data.

THE 'AVERAGE' FAMILY

The mother and father of the 'average' Seal family married in their mid-twenties with one in nine of the brides pregnant. The others waited approaching twenty months for their first child and the average number of children was four, spaced over the first eight to ten years of marriage. Three out of five families saw all their children survive to at least their first birthday, but only one out of five raised all their children beyond their tenth birthday. Since this average couple lived to their mid-forties, many children were under age when one, if not both, parents died.

But then, as now, no family fits the average.

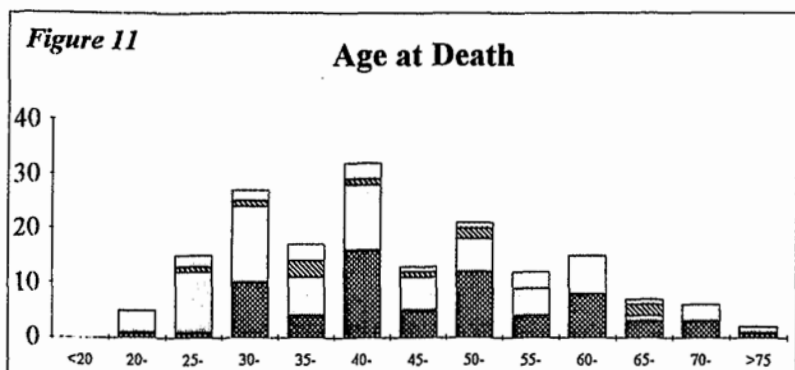
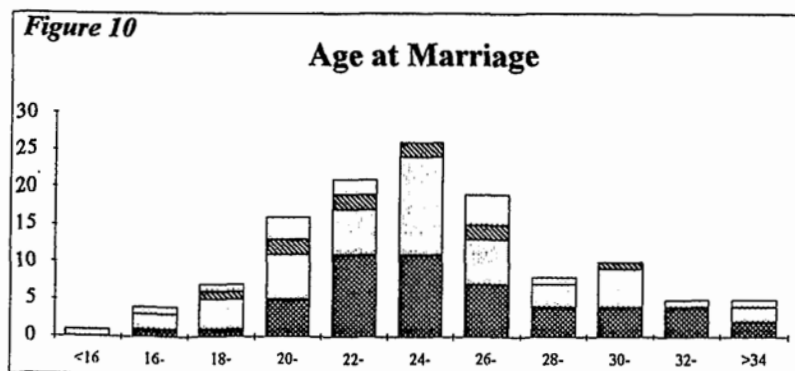
The baptisms of 19 sets of twins are recorded in Seal and 5 in Kemsing. As might be expected, the likelihood of early death is much higher than for single births, 31 per cent compared with the 10 per cent

shown in table 4. Although there is no indication of what happened to over half of the 38 children, four of them including one pair are known to have married.

MARRIAGE AND DEATH

For Seal, the baptism and marriage records can be matched up for 51 men and 49 women thus making it possible to calculate the ages at which they married. These are shown in Fig. 10; the average for men and women is 26 and 25, respectively, although there is no significant difference between these. The ages of both in a pair are available for only ten couples and there is such a wide range from the groom being

■ Seal - men □ Seal - women ▨ Kemsing - men □ Kemsing - women



Figs. 10-11. Seal and Kemsing parents.

13 years older than his bride to her being nearly 7 years older than him, that the average difference of 1.2 years is meaningless.

Looking at the age at marriage in Kemsing, where it is available for 10 men and 13 women, this initially appears to be slightly lower particularly for the men but, given the small number of cases where it is possible to calculate it, the difference is not significant.

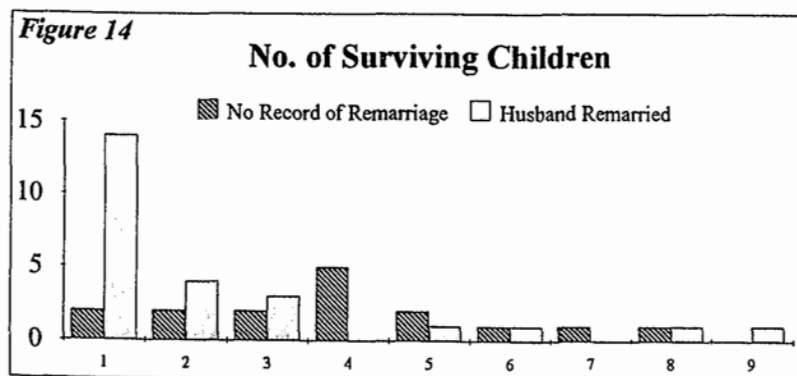
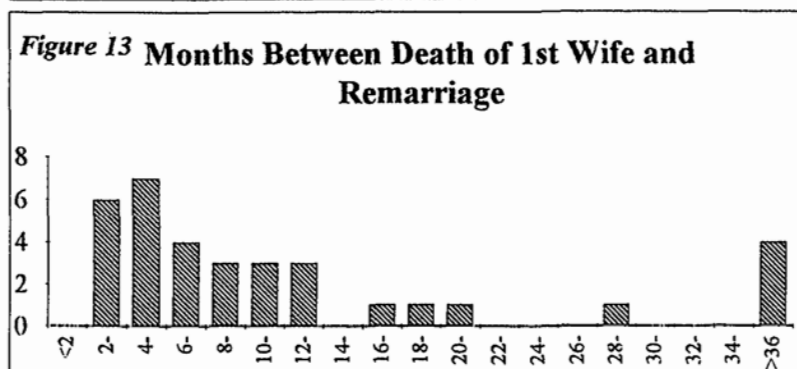
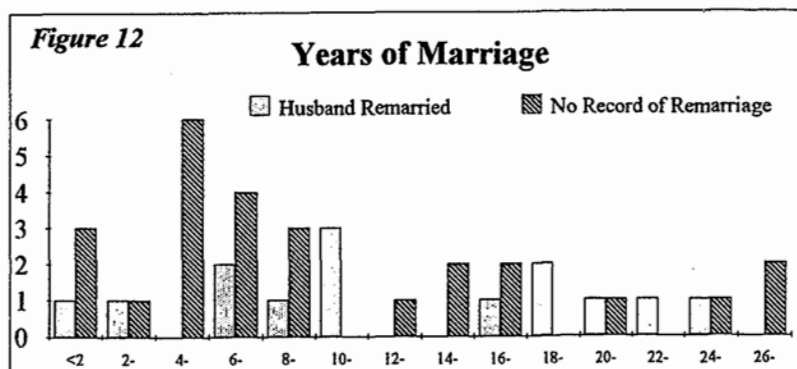
The age at death for the fathers and mothers of Seal families is known for 19 men and 11 women and can be estimated for another 72 men and 65 women in Seal and 11 men and 16 women in Kemsing. Again there is no significant difference between the various groups or between the men and women, the average being mid to late forties; Fig. 11 shows the variation.

Some wives died as a result of complications in childbirth, but others lived into their sixties or seventies. It can be deduced that ten of the 317 wives in groups 1 and 2 died directly as a result of complications in childbirth, but there are others such as the first wives of John Bryan and Richard High who must have died shortly after the births (or at least baptism) of their second children given the dates at which John and Richard married again. In addition, there are wives buried between eighteen months and two years after the birth of a child who may have succumbed to problems during a subsequent pregnancy. However, men were prone to accidents, which made them no more likely to live into old age than their wives.

SECOND MARRIAGES

Second marriages of both men and women were fairly common. William Beecher who died in his sixties has already been introduced. He married Joane Christopher in 1565 and they had seven children, the youngest one to survive being nearly sixteen when his mother died in her fifties in 1592. William married Johane's niece Agnes three months later and they had three more children but sometime between the birth of the third, in 1598, and William's death at the beginning of 1605, Agnes died and William married for the third time. His brother Humphrey, although also living into his sixties, was much less fortunate since both his wives died in their thirties and he had, at the most, only one surviving child.

Alice and John Browne had two children in 1616 and 1619 but John died before the youngest reached her sixth birthday. Alice married William Guy in 1626 and they had 22 years of married life together with the baptisms of two children being recorded. A similar story is that of Steven and Mary Barre who married in November 1571, had three children and were only eighteen months short of their ruby



Figs. 12-14. Second marriages.

wedding when Mary died in 1610. Mary's first husband John Fuller had died in 1570 after they had been married for four years with, at the most, the baptism of one daughter being recorded. Elizabeth Stone was another woman who married twice; she had six children by her first husband who died in 1585 after sixteen years of marriage. She married William Marten fifteen months later, but died herself in June 1590; her husband could be the William Marten who married Margaret Stone, relationship to Elizabeth not known, in October 1590.

For Seal, the time between marriage and death of the wife is known for 21 couples and can be estimated for another 21; this period ranges from less than a year to over 28 years and Fig. 12 shows that there is no relationship between length of first marriage and whether or not the widower remarried. Twenty-seven of these 42 widowers are known to have remarried and there are another six who remarried after the death of their wives, but the length of the first marriage cannot be estimated. The second marriage was usually only a few months after the first wife's death but, in five cases, was over two years – see Fig. 13 – the median value is 7.6 months.

It does look, however, as if the more surviving children there were from the first marriage, the less likelihood there was of the father remarrying. The median number of children for the 25 remarriages where this number is available is one whereas it is four for those where the widowed father apparently managed without a second wife – see Fig. 14.

Pynden Frenche may have received the £50 he was due from his brother Thomas's land by the time his wife died in 1631 after giving birth to their ninth child. Six children, including the baby (in as far as there is no record of her burial) survived, the eldest one being eleven at this time. There is no record of Pynden remarrying, and he seems to have stayed in Seal since one of his sons dies in 1637 and he himself a year later.

Widows seemed no more likely to remarry than widowers. Only four out of the 26 whose husbands died relatively early are known to have remarried although some of the others might have moved out of the parish, perhaps returning to their original 'home'. Life could be hard for widows with children and eighteen of the known widows had 55 children between them, but many of them would have had no option but to carry on as best they could with the help of extended families and neighbours. As the children grew older, some might have stayed single and helped look after the family business as did Sylvester Miller's son and daughter. Widow Crust was left with three daughters aged 1+, 5 and 7 in 1618, and the two youngest grew up and stayed with her until their deaths in 1644 and 1646, the widow herself dying sometime between these two dates.

BIRTH INTERVALS

In Seal, if the bride was not already pregnant, the first child was baptised, on average, just under 20 months after the wedding. In Kemsing, the average time between marriage and baptism of the first child was nearly half as much again (29 months), a difference which is significant at the 0.5 per cent level. The intervals between subsequent births (see Table 6) support this intimation of a lower fertility for Kemsing compared with Seal, but not at such a level of significance.

TABLE 5: TIME FROM MARRIAGE TO FIRST BAPTISM

	average (months)	number	standard deviation
SEAL	19.6	151	14.6
KEMSING	29.5	29	22.6

Considering just the families in group 1, the intervals between successive baptisms where there is no record of the first infant dying at under one year are given in Table 6 – the numbers available are not the same for each interval because of the omission of baptisms following the death of the first infant. This shows that, after the baptism of three children, the interval between births gradually increased, the average difference of 33.4 months between the baptism of the fifth and sixth and the 27 months for the first two intervals being significant at the 0.1 per cent level.

TABLE 6: BIRTH INTERVALS SEAL GROUP 1 AND KEMSING FAMILIES

Birth Interval	SEAL			KEMSING		
	average (mnths)	number	stand. dev.	average (mnths)	number	stand. dev.
1-2	26.8	49	9.6	30.0	19	9.4
2-3	27.0	49	8.0	29.5	16	12.9
3-4	28.8	43	8.0	28.3	16	11.7
4-5	33.1	49	16.8	34.5	18	11.4
5-6	33.9	46	14.3	36.2	18	16.9

The increasing interval between successive births suggests that parents, once they had two or three children, tended to practise some form of family limitation as described in more detail by Wrightson and Levine who have a larger amount of data for Terling than is available for Seal.

Even for the earlier children in a family, the average gap between births was over two years and one reason for what might at first be considered a longer than expected interval was the prolonged breast-feeding which was the custom at this time.²⁹ The hormone prolactin promotes the production of milk and, at the same time, inhibits the functioning of the ovaries; it continued to be produced for longer and, therefore, had more of a contraceptive effect than it does now because babies were fed on demand, during the night as well as the day, and solids were not introduced until much later than is now common. The main reason for breast-feeding for so long was because it was much safer and the child needed to build up its resistance to diseases which could be picked up so easily from the food and water available as an alternative. Thus, the delaying of the next conception was a side-effect of giving an infant the best start in life.

If breast-feeding was indeed a main reason for the length of the gap, it is to be expected that if a baby died soon after birth, the next one would be conceived much more quickly and Dorothy McLaren shows this to be the case for the populations she studied. Table 7 shows the intergenetic intervals when the first child survived for at least a year and when it died within the year for the group 1 families in Seal; also included are those given by McLaren for Chesham. The differences in Seal between the interval when the previous child survived and did not survive are significant, at the 1 per cent level for the first and at the 0.1 per cent level for the middle intervals.

FERTILITY RATES

Another way of looking at the number of births and intervals between them is by calculating fertility rates and these are shown in Table 8. These were obtained by first totalling the number of live births recorded for a group of families and dividing this total by the sum of the years taken to produce them. Thus, in Group 1's 58 families 359 live births were recorded over a total period of 823.5 years giving a fertility rate for this group of 435.9 per thousand women years.

²⁹ McLaren, 23.

SEAL, KEMSING AND IGHTHAM

TABLE 7: BIRTH INTERVALS, SEAL GROUP 1 FAMILIES AND CHESHAM

Birth Interval	First Child Survived Over:			First Child Died Within:		
	average (months)	no.	stand. dev.	average (months)	no.	stand. dev.
SEAL						
1-2	26.7	48	9.9	15.3	6	2.4
2-3, 3-4, 4-5	29.4	131	12.3	19.8	34	6.8
5-6, etc	33.3	102	14.5	25.6	19	13.4
CHESHAM						
1-2	29.2	13		16.4	4	
2-3, 3-4, 4-5	32.6	33		23.3	6	
5-6, etc	31.2	11		29.5	6	

Figures for Chesham from Dorothy McLaren:
 'Marital Fertility and Lactation 1570-1720', 1985
 (periods converted from weeks to months for comparison)

TABLE 8: FERTILITY RATES PER THOUSAND WOMEN YEARS

	no. families	no. children	no. years	fertility rate
SEAL - Group 1	58	359	823.5	435.9
SEAL - Group 2	91	409	1010.9	404.6
SEAL - 1 & 2	149	768	1834.4	418.7
KEMSING	36	176	477.9	368.3

The fertility rate can also be calculated separately for each family by dividing the number of children in the family by the period over which they were born and these are shown in Fig. 15.

The averages of these separately calculated fertility rates are shown in Table 9 and the difference between the average for Seal and that for Kemsing is significant at better than the 5 per cent confidence level.

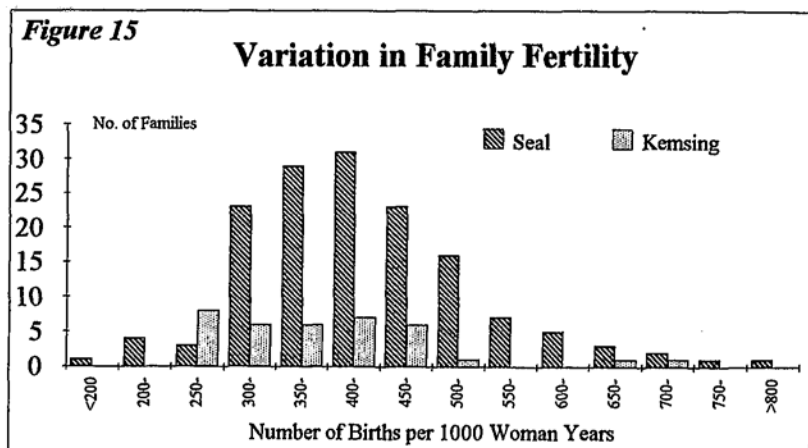


Fig. 15. Variation in family fertility.

TABLE 9: FERTILITY RATES PER THOUSAND WOMAN YEARS
CALCULATED SEPARATELY FOR EACH FAMILY

	no. families	average fertility rate	standard dev.
SEAL Groups 1 & 2	147	437.6	109.9
KEMSING	36	394.1	106.9

Even though the number of Kemsing families is small and there is a wide difference between them, the above data seems to point to a difference between the general behaviour of families in Kemsing compared with those in Seal. If some reason could be suggested for the apparent lower fertility rate in Kemsing, it might be feasible to consider these repeated differences as more than a statistical artifact. As it is, although Kemsing might not have had the parish gentry and better-off yeomen who lived in parts of Seal, it only needs the Symons children to be the result of more than one marriage and the Myllers to have had an unrecorded child in the large gap between two of their children for the difference in Table 9 to lose its statistical significance.

THE MOST FECUND FAMILIES

Some families, then as now, were more fertile than others and, in some cases there would be miscarriages and still-births to increase the time between live births. It is relatively easy to see how recording omissions could make a family appear less prolific than it really was, but more difficult to determine what factors were at play for those families where births were very close together. To conclude this statistical study, three of the families which appear in the right hand tail of Fig. 15 are considered.

If fertility is defined as number of live births divided by years, the Kempes with their five children in just over six years are the most fertile – see Table 10. With the shorter intervals after the deaths of their first and third infants, this family shows the effect of breast-feeding described above. Even taking this into account, the other intervals are only two-thirds of the averages given in Table 7.

TABLE 10: CHILDREN OF ROBERT AND JOHANE KEMPE

	date	interval (months)	
marriage	11 Feb 1610		
bap.: 1st child	2 Dec 1610	9.67	died 1 week
2nd child	8 Dec 1611	12.20	married
3rd child	29 Aug 1613	20.71	died at 3 weeks
4th child	31 Jul 1614	11.05	
5th child	2 Mar 1616	19.07	

Using the same definition, the Stowells are the next most fertile family. Peter Stowell was described at his marriage to Elizabeth Porter in 1630 as a gentleman of Rochester and, during the Civil War, he supported the king. He was mayor of Rochester in 1667 and is buried in the cathedral there. He and Elizabeth had four children baptised in Seal, the first born 15.6 months after the wedding and the others at intervals of 17.7, 16.0 and 13.1 months. The use of wet nurses was not confined to the aristocracy and the deaths noted above of two local 'nurse children' illustrate this within the area under study. If the parish gentry were, on occasion, using wet nurses, the Stowells are most likely to be an example of such a family.

Returning to the Tebolds, John (3) and Clemence were another very

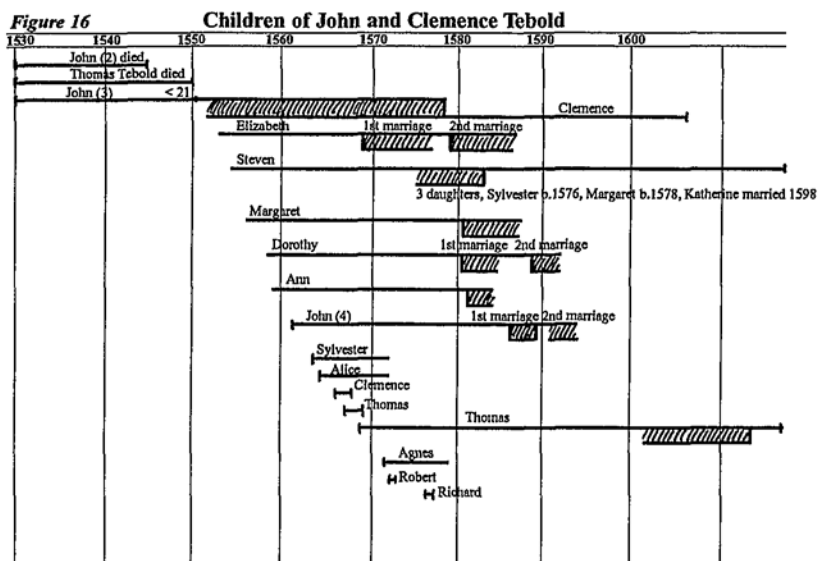


Fig. 16. Children of John and Clemence Tebold.

fecund family and also part of the parish gentry from the 1550s to John's death in 1577; their children are shown in Fig. 16. There are problems regarding the first half of the family because they were born before baptisms were recorded and there is a very short 'window' for the birth of the eldest two.³⁰

Given fourteen births in 23 years, Clemence could have had very few, if any, miscarriages and no still-births except, possibly, in the 1570s. Taking the first twelve births, the average time between each is 17 months and perhaps the John Tebolds were another family which employed a wet-nurse. It is possible that families such as the Tebolds,

³⁰ John(3) was not only under 21 when his father died in 1545, he was still under age when his eldest brother, Thomas, died in 1550. If he was born in 1530, he would only have been 38 when his daughter Elizabeth married in 1568 so that both must have married very young, possibly John at 22 (in 1552) and Elizabeth at 15. If Elizabeth was born in 1553, the interval between her and the sixth child - John(4), the first whose baptism is recorded - would have been about six years, about a year less than the interval from the sixth to the eleventh child. Steven and Thomas, this eleventh child, both became lawyers; Steven was a Commissioner to the king at Deptford in 1607 and Thomas a gentleman of Clifford's Inn. After Thomas, there were another three, possibly four more births but only one of these survived to her first birthday.

who would have had a number of servants living in, had a wet-nurse who was part of the household. In this case, there is much less likelihood of the practice being documented than if the infant were taken out of the district.

CRIME IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD³¹

There seems to have been a petty gang of sheep-stealers active in the neighbourhood of Seal 1583 to 1585. Thomas Wakelyn, a ploughwright from Ightham (there were families of Wakelyns in Seal) and Richard Wymbell, a husbandman from Wrotham, started their recorded crimes early in 1582 by stealing a peck of wheat, but a year later lambs and sheep were their quarry, Wakelyn being helped at one time by James Wood, a labourer from Seal. They were indicted at the Rochester Assizes in February 1585, with differing fates; Wymbell was found not guilty, Wakelyn was sentenced to hang, but Wood, although guilty escaped death by pleading benefit of clergy. Since at this time his wife must have already been pregnant with the baby baptised on 11th July, this leniency must have been beneficial to the family, if not to the local sheep-owners.

From the Assize Records it appears fairly common for labourers to have avoided severe penalties by claiming benefit of clergy. Others from Seal were James Skull found guilty of stealing 12 bushels of malt from John Polhill of Shoreham in June 1590 and Solomon Hasden who confessed to stealing a cow and a calf at Chelsfield in May 1591. Yet another is Jasper Johnson who can be identified by his unusual first name. He was baptised on 27th June, 1567, and twenty years later was one of a gang who burgled the house of Henry Reynolds, gent, at Hadlow where their haul included £100 in money belonging to Henry and £12 18s. 4d. belonging to Thomas Reynolds, a huge amount when it is remembered that a cow was valued at about £1.

A labourer who was not so fortunate was Simon Darby (from Farningham or Sevenoaks) who had two women as his accessories – Sybil Godfrey of Rainham and Margery Smale of Sevenoaks. Perhaps because of the sex of his assistants, their objectives were different. On 19 September, 1597, he stole from Andrew Homewood, a churchwarden of Seal, a French-green gown, a red petticoat and a piece of fustian. The French-green gown was valued at ten shillings (the

³¹ All the details in this and the next section are taken from the Calendar of Assize Records.

value of two sheep) and the red petticoat at five shillings. A month later Darby burgled the house of a tailor in Otford stealing 5 ells of medley-russet cloth, a gown and a doublet. On being found guilty, Darby was sentenced to hang, but the women pleaded benefit of clergy.

MURDER IN SEAL

Seldom is the cause of death known. Those who died of the plague in 1603 are noted in the parish record as is John Olyver of Bitchet who was 'killed with a fall in taking down a chimney in the parish of Chiddingstone and was buried there'; this was in the autumn of 1622 when he was about sixty.

One death where more is known is that of William Pynden since an inquisition was held at Seal, on his body, on the 5th March, 1590, before the coroner Thomas Tuttesham. John Meadherst, a shoemaker from Wrotham, Robert Waller and John Coker, labourers from Sevenoaks, John Kyng from Sevenoaks and John Willard of Chevening, both blacksmiths, and William Browne of Trottscliffe, an edgetool-maker were indicted for murder and burglary. The jury found that on the night of 3rd March, the accused burgled William Pynden's house while he, his wife Juliana and their servants, John and William Walkelyne and Elizabeth Style, were there. In the course of the felony, they stabbed William Pynden in the chest with a knife inflicting a wound from which he died the next day. From the account, they do not appear to have made much from the burglary - 2*s.* in money from a chest belonging to John Walkelyn and 16*d.* in a purse belonging to William Walkelyne.

The charged men, coming from Sevenoaks and a number of villages in the area, seem to have been a gang of thieves carrying out their crimes in different districts. On 18th February, Meadhurst, Waller, Browne and Kyng had a large haul from the house of Thomas Godden, yeoman of Trottscliffe. While Thomas, his wife and four children were there, they had stolen a bed-cover (60*s.*), a pair of sheets (20*s.*), nine shirts and smocks (20*s.*), three tablecloths (20*s.*), eight aprons (10*s.*), two pillows (4*s.*), four hand-towels (4*s.*), seven table napkins (7*s.*), two kerchiefs (3*s.*), two latten candlesticks (6*s.* 8*d.*), five fitches of bacon (25*s.*), three pairs of shoes (4*s.*) and two sacks. On 25th February, Meadhurst was in Cuxton where, together with Coker, a tailor from Cuxton, he stole 10*s.* in money from William Hudson, clerk, after assaulting him in the highway.

Except for Meadhurst who was still at large, all those indicted for the murder at the inquest were tried in March 1591, found guilty and sentenced to hang. The jury at the inquest included William Polhill,

William Porter, Robert Olyver, sen., Robert Pelsett (or Persolt), John Olyver, sen., John Baker and William Christopher, all known from the parish records.

But perhaps this was not the first time that William Pynden had met John Willard. At the Rochester Assizes, on 27th February, 1589, Pynden was on the trial jury which found Willard (then given as a labourer of Chipstead) guilty of grand larceny in that he stole some broad-cloth from two men in Benenden. At that time, Willard was allowed benefit of clergy.

For once the dates agree: William Pynden was buried on the day of the inquest.

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