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EARLY MODERN THANET: A CLOSED OR OPEN  
SOCIETY? EVIDENCE FROM A STUDY OF  
MARRIAGE MAKING AND MARRIAGE HORIZONS  
*c.1560-c.1620*

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This survey of marriage in early modern Thanet formed part of an M.Phil. thesis for the University of Kent which examined social networks and relationships in the Thanet parishes at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. The intention was twofold: to describe who formed networks of marriage, kinship and fictive kinship, service, credit, shared religious convictions and took part in the testamentary process, and to provide a possible answer to the question, 'Was early modern Thanet an island in a psychological as well as a geographical sense?'<sup>1</sup>

*Sources and Methods*

All the records used for this research were available locally at Canterbury Cathedral Archives, with the exception of a small number which were found at the Centre for Kentish Studies and The National Archives. Most were available in microform.

The primary sources for this research were the parochial registers and bishop's transcripts for the seven Thanet parishes of Birchington, St John the Baptist, St Nicholas at Wade, St Peter's, St Lawrence, Minster and Monkton, containing the baptisms, marriages and burials of the inhabitants. Not all parishes have registers covering this period although those for Birchington run from 1538, but by combining them with the transcripts into one Microsoft Access database almost complete coverage was achieved. They vary also in the amount of detail they contain, with those of St Lawrence being possibly the least informative. The registers for St John's up to c.1604 had already been transcribed for earlier research, and the other parishes were added to the existing record.<sup>2</sup> Separate tables were compiled for baptism, marriage and burial. One spelling for all names was adopted to aid access and variants were combined, except in

the case of Cowper/Cooper and a local name which appeared as Fleete or Affleete indiscriminately but was shown by entries in the St John's register to refer to the same family. Dating was New Style with the year assumed to begin in January. It was also assumed for convenience that in a small population all holders of the same name were likely to be kin to some degree although this could not be proved definitively, and the family of Crispe may have been an exception to this (see below). This database enable answers to be provided for such questions as: which families did men or women of a specific family marry into; how many widows remarried; who were servants; which children belonged to which conjugal couple. Again some conclusions were tentative as the similarity of names meant that individuals could not always be distinguished and family reconstruction was therefore difficult.

Another useful source was the probate documents produced when a person died. In theory there were three: a will and testament (usually combined though legally separate) an inventory of a deceased person's goods and the probate account for their estate. Unfortunately all three rarely survive for Thanet testators and the coverage is patchy from parish to parish. **Table 1** shows the distribution of the surviving documents.

TABLE 1. NUMBERS OF WILLS, INVENTORIES AND PROBATE ACCOUNTS FOR THANET c.1560-1620

Parish	Wills	Inventories	Probate Accounts
Birchington	67	37	21
Minster	8	1	1
Monkton	28	16	7
St John the Baptist	119	2	5
St Lawrence	81	2	1
St Nicholas at Wade	63	53	41
St Peter the Apostle	87	1	-
<i>Total</i>	493	110	76

These probate documents were examined for the years up to c.1620, so individuals and families who appeared in baptism and marriage registers as well as some of those moving in to Thanet were included. The wills studied were the registered wills filed at Canterbury. The majority of these wills were made by men as married women did not usually make wills, although two examples have been found for Thanet; thirty-eight were made by widows and seven were those of single women. A cover sheet was produced for each of these wills which recorded the testator,

status or occupation, specific domicile within the parish if given, marital status and offspring, kinship, master/servant relationship, significant 'others', charitable bequests, property holdings, and those individuals who took part in the testamentary process. These documents were helpful in showing re-marriage and offspring not found in the parish registers. In some cases further evidence of kinship was shown in the other two documents, but as the survival rates are so patchy any conclusions drawn from this material are necessarily tentative.

The final source was the depositions made by Thanet people, or people involved in Thanet cases, in the ecclesiastical courts. As well as the internal evidence of those many cases which concerned disputed promises to marry, the short 'biography' given at the beginning of each deposition provided valuable information about the movement of population into and around Thanet.

Some published primary sources were also used, principally in the context of marriage, the microfiche of Cowper's *Canterbury Marriage Licences*, which provided information about marriage horizons. Other sources were also used for the whole thesis and are listed in its bibliography, but the above documents are those concerned specifically in the study of marriage.

### *The Character of Early Modern Thanet*<sup>3</sup>

Thanet at this period might be described as a patchwork; its administrative, landholdings, population and settlement patterns were all far from simple. The lack of detailed household listings or censuses makes it difficult to reach definitive conclusions. Thanet lies at the easternmost point of Kent, bounded by the Thames estuary, the North Sea and the Channel. The main access at this period was by water, although in the fifteenth century a bridge had been built across the Wantsum Channel at Sarre on the land route to Canterbury. The island has an area of about 45 square miles and its highest point is 181ft above sea level. Its plateau of chalk is crossed by several dry valleys and to the west and south it is bounded by marshes, which have grown as the Wantsum Channel and the River Stour have silted up. Thanet's agriculture also presented a patchwork appearance; although there is no evidence of co-operative farming, there do appear to have been several large open fields in multiple occupation; several wills list small parcels of land held by the testator and specify the neighbouring owners on each side. The main crop was barley, much of which was sent to London, the island's brewing industry then being in its infancy. The main stock appears to have been sheep, although pigs are also mentioned. The inhabitants in many cases were able successfully to combine agriculture with fishing, principally for mackerel.

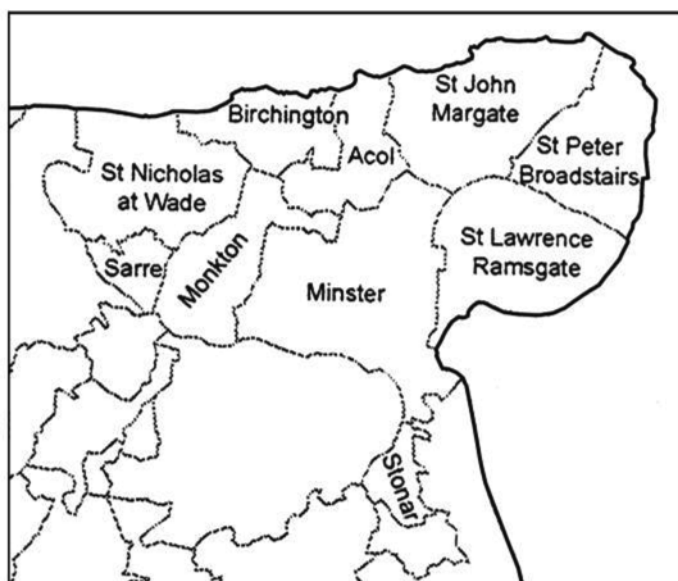
In the Middle Ages ownership of land in Thanet had been divided



between the two Canterbury ecclesiastical institutions of Christ Church Cathedral Priory and St Augustine's Abbey. Following the Dissolution most of this land fell to the Crown but by the late sixteenth century had been dispersed to various lay land owners, although the Queen still had an interest as did the countess of Shrewsbury, the earl of Leicester and some county magnate families such as Hales and Manwood. Wills show that many testators held land in small parcels across the parishes of the island, and on the mainland, some of which had come into the family as part of a wife's dower.<sup>4</sup> There were seven active parishes in Thanet, as well as Stonar which had a lay rector but no church or clergy (**Map 1**). St John's, St Lawrence and St Peter's had been founded from Minster, but at this period were parochial. Birchington was in some degree subordinate to Monkton until the nineteenth century and St Nicholas paid dues to Reculver. Stonar was part of the Deanery of Sandwich, but the other churches came under the Deanery of Westbere, with the exception of Monkton and St Nicholas which were exempt parishes. Acol appears to have been subsumed under Birchington at this period; Sarre was part of St Nicholas at Wade.

The secular administration was even more complicated. Thanet formed part of the Hundred of Ringslow, but several of its settlements were limbs of the Cinque Ports. Thus, Birchington, Woodchurch, St John's and St Peter's came under Dover, while Sarre in St Nicholas parish, and Ramsgate in St Lawrence parish, were limbs of Sandwich. The remainder of the parish of St Lawrence was part of the county administration. There were also county JPs resident in Thanet, and one, Sir Henry Crispe, was a member of the quorum.

Thanet contained no towns, though sources show that there was a degree of urbanisation in the harbour areas which later became Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate, and also at Birchington and St Nicholas. Settlement was scattered across the island in small centres which can still be traced by name on modern maps: Dumpton, Flete, Vincent, Northdown, Cliffs End, Hereson. The population was probably less than 5,000, though it is difficult to be more specific. Two versions of Archbishop Parker's Return to the Privy Council of 1563 give either a population of 2,099 in 442 households, or 1411 in 297 households, while the 1565 Visitation for Birchington, Monkton and St Nicholas totals 442 in 93 households, or 756 based on 432 communicants. Two Visitations in 1565 and 1569 cover different parts of the island, but if combined give a notional total of 2,199 inhabitants in 463 households, or 3,330 based on 1903 communicants. Whatever the total size of its population may have been, a comparison of baptism and burial figures between 1560 and 1599 (see **Table 2**) shows that the population, with some ups and downs, grew during the latter part of the sixteenth century in common with other parts of the kingdom. Some of the differences may be caused by discrepancies and lacunae in



Map 1 The Parishes of the Isle of Thanet in the Early Modern Period.

the records.

TABLE 2. BAPTISMS AND BURIALS FROM THE PARISH REGISTERS  
1560-1599

Parish	Baptisms	Burials	+/-
Birchington	596	472	+124
Minster	537	566	-29
Monkton	32	80	-48
St John's	998	637	+361
St Lawrence	1,125	861	+264
St Nicholas	93	52	+41
St Peter's	544	481	+63
<i>Thanet total</i>	3,925	3,149	+776

The life cycle events recorded in the database give a somewhat misleading impression of a static population if studied in isolation, but this is not borne out by an examination of other sources especially the ecclesiastical court depositions. For each deponent a short biography was included which listed parish of origin and other places where the individual had lived,

although we have no way of knowing if all are listed for each individual. These deponents can be divided into Kentish and non-Kentish born. Twenty-three were not born in Kent and came from all parts of the realm; there were four from Yorkshire, two from Gloucestershire, Somerset, and Norfolk, and one from each of Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Durham, Ely, Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex and the Isle of Wight. Double this number of deponents was Kentish born and thirty-five appear to have moved directly to the island. Most had moved no more than 20 miles, nine had moved between 20 and 30 miles, and another 12 more than 30 miles. A far smaller number of women deponents were also listed. Both locally born men and outsiders moved about the Thanet parishes. The women, one of whom came from as far afield as Derbyshire, also moved about the island. Not all those coming into Thanet were English; the burial registers list several foreign names, some of whom were clearly merchants, not permanent residents, but the Churchwardens' Accounts and registers of Birchington list three Italians, and two Portuguese who acted as godparents and were buried in the parish church. These were clearly permanent residents. The burials of visiting merchants re-enforces the impression of the island as an open society with trade, cultural and social links with many other communities.

The diverse origins of those living in Thanet are well illustrated by the deponents in a case concerning a brawl in the street at Acol near Birchington. The case itself was the normal encounter between a woman and a man in which the usual gendered insults were exchanged and some mild scuffling took place, though as her husband and the man involved were part of the Cinque Ports administration, there was probably a political sub-text. The present interest lies in the fact that almost none of those involved or witnessing were of local origin. The woman's husband came from Burnshill in Lancashire and of five deponents domiciled in Birchington, only one was Kentish: he came originally from Paddlesworth, near Folkestone. The others were from Lancashire, Sussex, Lincolnshire and 'Bristow'.

Most of these migrants appear to have been involved in agriculture in some way or were domestic servants following the usual peripatetic habit of young unmarried people at the period, but there were also tradesmen of one sort or another, and several people involved in brewing. It is not easy to provide a clear picture of the social structure of early modern Thanet, but it can be reconstructed to some degree from various sources. **Fig. 1** illustrates this structure. All three sources unsurprisingly show that yeomen and husbandmen formed the largest part of the population, though there may be some question as to whether they were all involved in agriculture, or whether in some cases it was a status rather than an occupational description and some individuals followed more than one trade or occupation.

This short description of early modern Thanet shows it to have been a small yet growing population, mainly involved in agriculture and

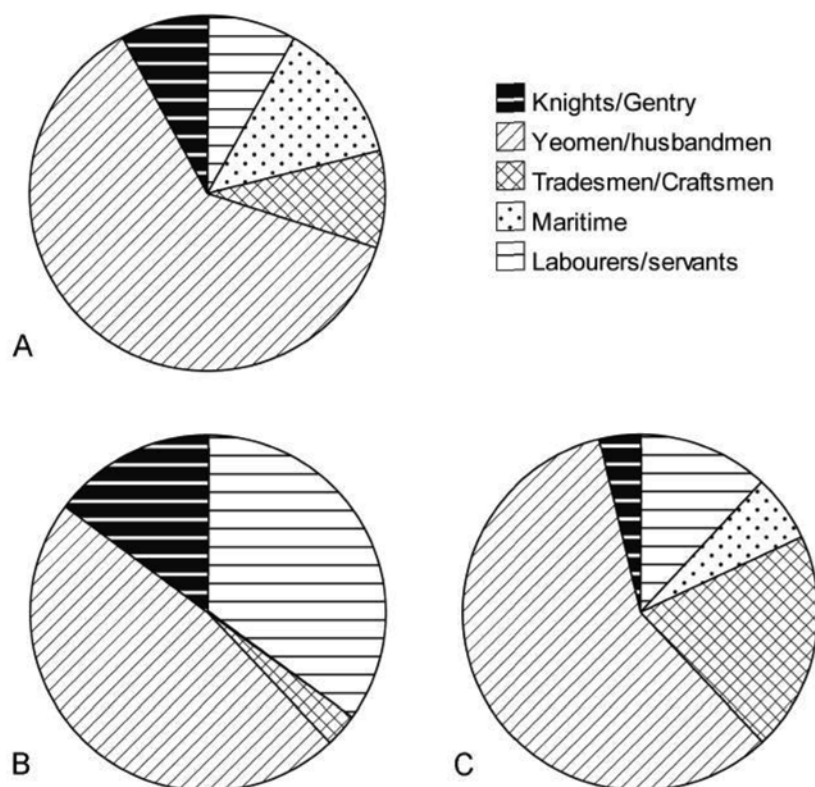


Fig. 1 Status and Occupation in Thanet as shown in three Documentary Records: A) Testators 1560-1620; B) Burial Registers 1560-1605; C) Deponents in Canterbury Diocesan courts 1560 -1620

maritime pursuits, but with increasing urbanisation round its harbours which traded with London, coastal ports and the Continent. It received constant infusions of new blood from all parts of the kingdom, but especially from the villages of the Stour valley between the island and Canterbury. This city also provided it with many of the specialist services its rural character lacked. We now turn to a specific examination of the geography and formation of marriage to discover what this tells us of the insularity or otherwise of Thanet at this period.

### Marriage in Early Modern Thanet

Marriage and the kinship it establishes are the basic social networks in

any community. As Armstrong has said, 'One result of marriages is that they establish social networks by linking different families together'. It is generally agreed among historians that early modern England conformed to the 'western' family system first identified by Hajnal, of a late age of marriage and of households consisting of a nuclear family of one conjugal couple and their children, rather than extended or multi-generational households. However, this is a generalisation which is not necessarily true at all stages of a family's life. As Lawrence noted, 'Most families were nuclear rather than extended but they might be complex'. She claimed that possibly 15 per cent of households were complex ones. As Chaytor demonstrated in her study of Ryton, death and re-marriage could lead to siblings, half-siblings and step-siblings living with a changing 'conjugal pair', who might even be their older siblings. Her methodology has been criticised, but the following examination of marriage in Thanet will look at the effect of re-marriage on kinship networks in the island. Bower found that the complications of kinship through re-marriage were demonstrated in probate material, where in one instance she found that Elizabeth Parramore of Herne became responsible for the estates of her late husband, his previous wife, and that wife's previous husband.

Some Thanet examples of the complications arising from re-marriage may be found in the wills of Julian Badcock, Thomas Deale, and Bennet Pollin. Julian left the residue of her estate and the execution of her will to her son John Pannell on condition that he brought up Thomas Badcock whom she calls her 'son in law' and who was presumably her deceased husband's son from an earlier marriage as this term is often used for what in modern usage would be a step-son. Thomas Deale, the deceased husband of Bennet Pollin, had asked her to keep Thomas his nephew at the grammar school for four years, and to keep him under her custody until he reached the age of twenty-four. It may be assumed that Deale had taken over responsibility for his nephew on the death of his brother. When Bennet made her own will having married again and been again widowed, she made no reference to this but wished to be buried in the churchyard 'neare unto my husband Deale'. Apart from some small bequests to her sister and her maid, she left all her goods to her brother Edward Hall and asked him to use his discretion on the goods of her late husband Thomas Pollin. If Thomas Deale was the brother of Richard Deale who had died in 1578, he had inherited his goods for twenty years, which were then to be equally divided among Richard's four sons. It is not altogether clear what is going on here, but it does demonstrate the complications of kinship and property arising from a series of re-marriage and early deaths.<sup>5</sup>

Although in most cases it was assumed that marriage would establish a new *household* and that one reason for the late age of marriage was to enable the couple to acquire enough resources and skills for this purpose, the realities of mortality and economic necessity could both affect this.

Tadmor discovered that at least in the eighteenth century 'phases of household-family affiliation are often temporary', and that Thomas Turner, whose diary she examined, used the term 'family' of his household even when he had no kin resident with him, or he himself was not at home.<sup>6</sup> Younger married couples did not necessarily live always in a household separately from the older generation. In the Cambridgeshire villages studied by Spufford, she found that wills suggested that 'living with in-laws or rather having a widowed parent to live with one ... was very much the ordinary expected thing to do'.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of household listings for Thanet, no definite conclusion can be reached on this point, but there are hints in wills that such provisions were not unknown. While there are several references to adult sons inheriting houses they already inhabited, we also find provision made for the widow to be accommodated in a part of a property, the remainder of which goes to a child. Two of the sons of William Parker of Minster received 'the house which he occupies' and John son of Roger Mockerness of Ramsgate received 'the tenement at Dumpton where he lives'. There is also one case of a married daughter inheriting: Anne Powell, daughter of John Coleman the elder, was bequeathed the house where she lived. So it would appear the norm for married children to be living separately from their parents and, in richer households, in a property belonging to the father which they would inherit at the time of his death.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, there are also instances of the widow being provided with part of a property, either for life, or until her re-marriage, the rest of that building being bequeathed to another, usually one of the children. Anne, wife of John Coleman the elder, for example, received the parlour and loft, the house in the court, and a cow in the barn. David Rolfe's widow Joan was given the chamber at the end of the house and half the close for her lifetime, and Thomas Holden's wife got the 'newly builded chamber' a chimney and free access for life. It is not possible to tell from the wording of these bequests how separate such accommodation would be, but it is clear that at least the widow and some of her adult children would be sharing a roof. The possibility also exists that these were unmarried children who still lived with their mother as would any younger children. The provisions may signal merely a legal division of the ownership without affecting the living arrangements.<sup>9</sup>

### *Networks involved in the formation of marriages*

In the remainder of this article we will consider who was involved in the formation of a marriage, information which is usually only available to us when the negotiations broke down, the complications of relationships caused by re-marriage, and the geographic extent of marriage horizons.

Macfarlane described English marriage as 'on the whole ... a private contract of no concern to the state', but somewhat later in the same

book, he lists the 'friends' involved in marriage formation as including employers, guarantors, guardians and more distant relatives, showing that marriage was not a concern only for the couple themselves. Rushton found it 'not surprising to find master and mistresses intervening in the marriage of their servants', while in her examination of courtship in the Diocese of Canterbury, O'Hara found that those involved in forwarding or preventing a marriage included 'members of the nuclear family and such persons as friends, kinsmen, kinswomen, cousins, uncles and aunts, in-laws, neighbours, 'fellows (associates) bed-fellows, gossips, the god-mother of a kinsman, masters and mistresses'.<sup>10</sup>

The only source of information about those involved in the formation of Thanet marriages is to be found in the statements of deponents in the cases of disputed marriage brought before the church courts. The use of this material has been criticised on the grounds that it is evidence of matrimonial failure, and that most marriages took place and were successful. O'Hara faced the same criticism. However, where marriages did take place and were not disputed, we have no evidence of their making and who was involved. Occasionally the validity of a marriage which had taken place was questioned and those who had knowledge of the marriage were called upon to state what they knew and had witnessed.

The case between *Stephen Sampson* of St Lawrence and *Cecily Cantis* of Birchington demonstrates the conditional nature of some alleged marriage agreements and also illustrates the role family and friends played in these matters, as well as the degree of freedom claimed by some young women in the matter of their marriage. The depositions of Sampson himself, John and Ursula Cantis (Cecily's brother and his wife) and other witnesses are on record, but no deposition appears to have survived for Cecily herself.<sup>11</sup> According to Sampson he told Cecily that if his friends were agreeable he would be content to marry her; she accepted this condition, and also the angel he gave her.<sup>12</sup> He also asked the advice of prominent local resident, Sir Henry Crispe, for advice in the matter, as her brother knew. According to the sister-in-law, the couple made their agreement to marry in her house, where Cecily was living, in the presence of a group of neighbours: Goodman Barnes and his wife, Baker and Pettitt of Birchington. Cecily's brother thought the couple had been discussing marriage for about three years and 'used themselves familiarly together in company'. He said his sister was 'making merry' at the house of Thomas Barnes, with the householder and his wife, and Richard Rose and his wife, when he and Sampson arrived. In the presence of these witnesses promises were exchanged. Cantis said that Sir Henry had told him of Sampson's request that he show goodwill to the marriage. Sampson's father was also involved when Cecily was taken to stay at his house for five weeks. Sampson brought his case to court in 1560 but in spite of the alleged exchange of promises, the gift of a coin, and the support of kinsfolk,



neighbours and a patron, he appears never to have married Cecily Cantis. The parish register of St Lawrence records the marriage of one Stephen Sampson with Katherine Curling in 1562; no local record of a marriage for Cecily Cantis has been found.

A very complicated case at Minster involved another member of the Crispe family who was a justice there, and the master of the young woman concerned. *Susan Woollett*, the maidservant of John Blaxland, brought a case against *William Saunders*, on the grounds that he had promised to marry her, and was considered locally to be her husband. Later she included in her suit the wife Saunders had married in London. At his request witnesses to this London marriage had included Bartholomew Saunders, one of his kinsmen, and William Barbett of Minster. Among others present at this London marriage were Alexander Norwood and a London draper. After the wedding the couple returned to Minster and were accepted there as a married pair. Incidentally, this case also provides evidence that Thanet inhabitants travelled to the capital for various, probably business, reasons.

Previously to this, William had been recognised as a suitor to Susan Woollett, although her master John Blaxland appears to have doubted his sincerity, and told him not to mock her. Saunders asked John Beer to enlist the help of curate James Bromwell to persuade his father Edward to consent to the marriage. According to this deponent, Saunders and Woollett were taken to be a married couple. Edward Saunders, however, had had Susan investigated and refused his consent on the ground that 'she was no fit wife for his son and dyvers matters were against her'. At this point, Mr Richard Crispe, a justice, was enlisted to help, but though Susan claimed that William was her husband and had promised never to forsake her, he appeared to have changed his mind, because of what he had heard about her. At this point, Mr Crispe washed his hands of the affair and advised Saunders *pere* to pay her off.<sup>13</sup>

Other depositions established the probity of witnesses and repeated that Minster parishioners considered Saunders and Woollett to be a conjugal pair. George Phineux, a local weaver, deposed that before the involvement of Mr Bromwell, the couple had been at his house at the time of the Monkton fair in 1588 and had repeated vows at his request, though no other witnesses were present. He also stated that William claimed to be Susan's husband and was locally accepted as such.<sup>14</sup> These depositions clearly demonstrate the wide range of people who could be involved in the proposed marriages and the freedom of the young women to act for themselves. They also show that the field of action was not confined to Thanet but could range as far as London. It may be that as a servant Susan was a migrant into the Thanet community and had no close kin or friends to support her, which would have been a disadvantage.<sup>15</sup>

One further case concerns a marriage which had in fact taken place



about twelve years earlier. We are not told why the marriage had been questioned, but as the man concerned was dead, it is possible that the legitimacy of the children had been called into question in a matter of inheritance. Two parishioners of St John's deposed that they had known *John and Margaret Collet* for about twelve years. Simon Sanders said there were two or three lawful children of this marriage, and Christopher Russell specified three sons and a daughter.<sup>16</sup>

Although in this period the state may not have been involved in the marriages of ordinary citizens, it was far from a private affair of the couple. 'The freedom of the couple to conclude their own affairs was counterbalanced by the interest of parents, or kinsfolk and friends'.<sup>17</sup> Parents, neighbours, kinsmen, clergy, justices and influential local men and parishioners in London were all involved in these failed marriages. There is no reason to conclude that successful courtships involved any fewer people, and we can see that Thanet society was not an enclosed isolated system, and that both close connections and more distant acquaintances could be involved in a proposed match, forming a complex network of those directly known to the couple, as well as others who became involved because they were present at a particular time when the matter was under discussion, or the couple were at church for their wedding.

### *Marriage horizons*

Two methods have been used to assess the marriage horizons of Thanet couples. One examines the geographic area shown in the marriage licence allegations collected and published by Joseph Cowper and consulted in microfiche form. The other starts from the evidence of gentry marriage given in William Berry's *Genealogies* as well as the information from the parish registers and bishop's/archdeacon's Transcripts which have been collected together in the database.<sup>18</sup>

O'Hara found that the eastern half of Kent was 'relatively self contained' in its search for marriage partners and she thought that they were more likely to come from Sussex than from west Kent. This is possibly because it was easier to reach Sussex by water than to cross the county through the Weald and its notoriously poor roads, though this is a conclusion that she does not appear to reach. She focuses more on types of community and people's taste or distaste for specific areas.<sup>19</sup> Of a total of 131 people, she found that 78% found partners within a radius of 5 miles; a further 11.5% up to 10 miles, and that the percentage decreased as the distance grew. She found no examples over 25 miles distant. These figures are based on matrimonial causes from the church courts. The apparent lack of partners above 25 miles may mean that there was too small a number to count. Short thought that coastal fringe parishes had small marriage

horizons because people did not travel far for partners.<sup>20</sup> The marriage licence allegations for Thanet do not entirely accord with this and show that marriage horizons for at least a minority of people did in fact extend further both for gentry and others. Of a total of 162 examples, there was a fairly marked difference between the sexes in the geographic spread of their horizons. For women 51% extended up to 20 miles, and for 49% over 20 miles. For men the figures were 79% up to 20 miles and 20% over that distance. In 22 cases both of the couple were from Thanet parishes and applied for a licence to marry, though in eight cases no parish was specified for the marriage. Of the remaining fourteen, ten licences were issued for the woman's parish and four for that of the man. Seven of these women were widows. In another 43 cases, consisting of thirteen widows and one man named in two applications, both of the couple were from Thanet but wished to marry elsewhere. The reason for this is not usually stated, though in some cases for other areas one of the couple will claim a connection with the chosen parish, such as it being the home of a parent. Possibly for widows it was to avoid local gossip and comment if the banns were read in their parish church. Twenty of the couples came from the same parish and one gave no parish for either. Three of these couples chose Thanet parishes other than their own: Henry Dingley and Alice Blechenden of Minster were licensed to marry at Birchington, William Sampson of St Peter's and Jane Langley chose St Nicholas, which may have been her parish. Henry Blowfield and Mary Norton of Birchington were licensed to marry at St Peter's. Four other couples were licensed to marry at Sandwich, Chislet, Thanington and Woodnesborough, but the great majority of licences named Canterbury. None of these parishes is more than 20 miles from Thanet and most of them are places which records show to have other links with the island.

The remaining couples can be categorised as Thanet men and non-Thanet women (56), and Thanet women and non-Thanet men (44). It is notable, and accords with the information already discovered on male and female marriage horizons, that the parishes of the women with whom Thanet men are associated were all within Kent. Of a total of 33 only 8 were not in east Kent. Two (Orlestone and Wittersham) are in the area beyond Ashford on the way to Romney Marsh, a distance of about 40 miles. Harrietsham, Challock and Bearsted are along the road between Canterbury and Maidstone; Lynsted is in the hinterland between Sittingbourne and Faversham near the Swale waterway. Twenty-six of these parishes occur only once in these records, but Reculver, Ash and Fordwich appear three times each; Herne, Elham and Northbourne twice. Canterbury and Sandwich occur eight and nine times respectively. Two of the women from Ash were associated with men of the Thanet branch of the Parramore family, which is believed to have originated in the hamlet of Paramor Street in that parish. These couples were licensed to marry in

a total of thirteen places, and Elham and Ash occur twice and Sandwich three times. However, here again Canterbury predominates with twenty-one licences issued. Fifteen of these were the woman's home parish and three that of the man. One man was named in two licences for different women, showing that not all these proposed marriages in fact took place. Status and occupation are rarely noted but where this information is given, we find four widows, four gentlemen, one gentlewoman, a cleric and a bricklayer from St Peter's.

The forty-four Thanet women wishing to marry non-Thanet men exhibit a different pattern. Twenty-three of the parishes of these men are in east Kent, and seven in west Kent, but two are outside the county: Arundel and Westminster. The majority fall to the east of a line drawn from Whitstable on the Thames Estuary to Dover on the Channel coast, passing through Canterbury, but some of the others are in clusters round the county: Ashford, Mersham and Smeeth form one cluster; another consists of Bearsted and Maidstone. Two parishes further along the estuary are Harty on the Isle of Sheppey, and Sittingbourne just the other side of the Swale, on the main road to London. Hadlow is in the west of the county near Tonbridge. Most of these parish supplied one man each, but Goodnestone, Chislet and Faversham, all places with other Thanet links, provided two each, as did Ashford. Five men came from Sandwich and Canterbury. Eleven parishes where the marriage was licensed were that of the woman, and six of the man. One licence was for the parish of either. Status or occupation for this group consisted of twelve widows, five gentlemen, three clerics and one M.A. Two of these Thanet women were associated with two different men each.

Even if many of these marriages never in fact took place (and in many cases where a Thanet parish was mentioned and can be checked, they do not appear to have done so) they demonstrate clearly that in matrimonial matters Thanet was definitely not an enclosed community. It may be that some of these people had in fact originated in Thanet, but clearly they were resident elsewhere when these applications were made. The links with Romney Marsh which appeared in other aspects of social relationships are once again shown in the mention of Orlestone and Wittersham. Where these marriages did take place, they would have entailed more movement of population into and out of Thanet as spouses moved to the parish of their partner and thus acquired new networks of kin, friends and neighbours.

### *Gentry marriage*

In this study of gentry marriage, the investigation will be confined to the local marriages appearing in the database. In his *County Genealogies* W. Berry lists the pedigrees of ten families mentioned in Rouge Dragon's

Heraldic Visitation of 1619. The Thanet families named are Norwood, Harty (probably Hartres), Pettitt, Crispe, Tench of Sandwich and Birchington, Cleybrooke, Johnson, Parramore and Sanders. Tench of Sandwich is noted as marrying *into* Thanet. It is clear from local records that there were more gentry families present in Thanet during the early modern period, but presumably they were not included in the Visitation and so do not feature in Berry's book. One of these gentry is Edward Atterbury, who was connected by marriage with the Norwood family.<sup>21</sup> The picture is also complicated by the fact that not all members of these families claimed gentle status in their wills. Some gave no status at all. Several members of the Norwood family either give no status or call themselves yeomen.<sup>22</sup> Members of the Parramore and Sanders families did likewise. Although it has been assumed throughout that in a comparatively small population all bearers of the same name were likely to be kinsfolk, three bearers of the name Crispe, a family which contained knights and esquires, either claimed no status or listed themselves as mariners, which may mean there were two unrelated families bearing this name.<sup>23</sup>

Berry shows that these families had married widely across the county, and also beyond its borders, noting marriage partners from Bucklebury in Berkshire (near Newbury), London and Slyfield in Surrey. The present intention is to examine local practice using the Norwood family as a case study. Berry lists marriages in Rochester and Canterbury for this family. The family is usually thought of as a St Peter's family, associated with Dane Court in that parish, but it had branches in several other Thanet parishes and provides a good way of determining whether marriage in Thanet was a closed or an open system.

According to the marriages recorded in the database, members of the family, both male and female, inter-married with thirty other local families. These families in their turn married into a total of 129 other Thanet families, and of these families, fourteen had also married members of the Norwood family. The majority of these families are not recorded as claiming gentle status. In the case of five families (Atterbury, Mussett, Day, Beard and Mount) the Norwood marriage appears to be the only local marriage at this period. These marriages illustrate the open network of marriage connections in Thanet; both gentry and families of lesser status inter-married quite freely. Phythian-Adams noted that multiple marriage to the same families 'establish[ed] a wide kinship network'. This would appear not to be the case in Thanet, as although some families married into another family more than once, the general picture is of a very wide range of marriage horizons, both socially and geographically.<sup>24</sup> The local records of marriage give a somewhat misleading impression that both partners were always from the same parish. From what we know of the mobility of the population this was unlikely to have been so; kin mentioned in wills show that in-laws were often resident in another

parish. As we have seen the marriage licence allegations show that the horizons of marriage were at least county wide. They also show that not all the marriages in the parish registers were between people from the same parish, or that they were even both from Thanet. In one example where a local record does show that a marriage for which a licence was issued did take place, Mary Lincoln's marriage to Alexander Thornton is entered in the register of St John the Baptist with no indication that the groom was not a Thanet man. The marriage licence allegation shows him to have been Vicar of Lyminge.

### *Remarriage*

Although marriage was intended to be life long, and could not legally be ended by anything other than the death of one of the partners, except in very unusual circumstances, the low life expectancy of the time meant that both men and women often lost a spouse at a comparatively young age. For both sexes, re-marriage, especially if there were young children to be considered, was the best option. Although a woman with very young children might not be considered an advantageous match, many did marry again quite quickly, while for a father left with a young family, a stepmother was probably the best solution. Also, the widow of an established artisan or farmer could be an attractive proposition for a young man with his way in the world to make. There are many cases on record of journeymen marrying their master's widow.

The next section of this article focuses on re-marriage, and what it might tell us of the social networks and relationships of those involved. Widows re-marrying locally are usually so recorded in the parish registers, although it is impossible to know if any widows are not so described when they re-married. There is only one instance of a widower being recorded as such, though it is clear from the evidence of wills that many men were married more than once. These men can also be traced with some difficulty in the parish registers, but as usual it is not easy to decide whether or not the same individual is meant when a name appears more than once, owing to the small number of Christian names in use and the habit of sharing a name in a particular kindred; several Norwood men, for example, were named Alexander. The database of local marriages lists 103 widows re-marrying, but it has not always been possible to trace their previous marriage(s). In view of the high degree of immigration into Thanet, many of them may already have been married when they arrived in the island; nor, because of the lack of entries for mothers in the baptism registers is it always possible to know if the previous marriage produced children or not. Occasionally we can be fairly confident from other evidence, as in the case of widow Dorothy Cosen who married Thomas Jinkin at St Peter's in 1585. A woman named Dorothy married

William Cosen in 1575. Three children baptised between 1576 and 1581 were the offspring of William Cosen, and though the mother's name is not recorded, one child was also called Dorothy. This was not a very common name in Thanet, so the probability is that it is the same woman, and when she married again she took two or three young children into her new family. The problem of the duplication of names arises again in the case of Joan Curling, who as a widow married Thomas Beane in 1585. Three men with the surname Curling had earlier married a woman called Joan: Nicholas in 1570, Thomas in 1578, and Robert in 1580. No children are recorded for Robert, but a total of seven are listed for Nicholas and Thomas, but with no mother recorded. Again, this widow may have had a young family when she re-married.

There are nine Thanet wills where the testator refers to his wife's children, sometimes just as her children, but often giving their surname. So Henry Cocke refers to his wife Agnes and her children Susan and Mary Penny. Agnes seems to have been married a third time in 1603 to Henry Bingham. The offspring of a former marriage were not always young children when the step-father died: Hugh Bachelor refers to his wife Agnes' son John Alderstone, who was old enough to be chosen as Bachelor's executor, though this does not necessarily mean he was of age: Gregory Bate's daughter Agnes was his executor, even though she appears to have been still a minor.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes these wills refer to daughters or sons 'in-law' where the modern style would be to call them stepchildren. Joan Kempe refers to her 'son-in-law' Henry Kempe, who was probably her deceased husband's son from a previous marriage. Nicholas Shelby had three 'daughters-in-law', Sibyl Wright, Joan Simkin and Christian Dadds, who may have been his un-named wife's married daughters, or, less likely, step-daughters from three previous marriages of his own; there is no record of any local marriage for Nicholas.<sup>26</sup>

The wills of nine widows and one wife, who made a will with her second husband's permission, give evidence of children brought into the marriage by either partner. Katherine Moor had married first William Dowle and then Richard Moore of Canterbury, who also predeceased her. There was a son called John Dowle, but no children of the second marriage are mentioned in her will. Frances Blechenden of Monkton, whose memorial still survives in the parish church, had three husbands: Thomas Epps of New Romney, Nicholas Robinson who died in 1594 and with whom she had three children, and thirdly John Blechenden (obit 1607) possibly Nicholas' cousin, whose children were John, William, Frances, William and Jane. Both Julian Badcock (see above) and her unnamed husband must have been previously married as her will refers to her children, Edward, Alice, Thomas and Roger Pannell, and her 'son in-law' Thomas Badcock. The wife of Agnes Drayner, whose husband William permitted her to make a will, referred to John Drayner as *William's* eldest son, so



he was possibly not her own child. Other widows name children with different surnames, though it is not always possible to trace the marriage which produced them. John Squire specifically asked his wife Anne to care for Stephen, John and Edward, the children of his first marriage. He had four more children from his marriage to Anne.<sup>27</sup>

Further information about re-marriage and the children of previous marriage is found on some church memorials. Margaret Robinson, widow of George, married Thomas Parker, according to his memorial in Monkton church. She brought six children into her childless second marriage. Even if not all these children were young they still complicated and extended the social network of the couple and other kin. The first marriages of some widows recorded in J.M. Cowper's listing of marriage licences can tentatively be traced back to the previous husband's wills and six of them are shown by these to have had children of the first marriage. If Mary Doggett the widow associated in a licence allegation of 1603 with William Laward was the widow of Isaac Doggett, there were five children of that marriage, and one, Richard Jennings, who could have been either Mary's son by an even earlier marriage, or Isaac's stepson from a previous marriage.<sup>28</sup>

Twelve of the Thanet widows listed in Cowper are likely to have married men from non-Thanet parishes including the woman whose partner was from Arundel in Sussex. Catherine Whitlocke, licensed to marry John Heneker of Biddenden in 1595, was the widow of Edward Whitlocke, who had died in 1594, and whose will had listed four children (John, Henry, Mary and Elizabeth Dugdall, wife of Thomas) as well as one unborn when Edward died. This child did not survive and there was a later dispute concerning Edward's will.<sup>29</sup> It is likely that some at least of these children were already out in the world fending for themselves at the time of the re-marriage, but many were not. Their presence in the new families shows that Thanet households were as likely as those of Ryton to contain step-parents, children and siblings of half blood. In addition, where these children were still young enough to be living with their parents, other kin such as surviving grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins would also have been involved in a widespread complex network of new relationships.

This investigation of the formation of marriage in early modern Thanet shows that like other areas researched by writers such as O'Hara, Armstrong *et cetera*, a wide range of interested parties were involved in the making of a marriage, although this can only be discovered when the process breaks down and one or other party brings the case to court. The personnel involved included close kin such as parents and siblings, but also employers, local clergy and gentry, neighbours, and uninvolved 'others' who were present on various occasions such as in church, and were called upon for their testimony. Furthermore, the evidence of marriage licence

allegations and wills shows that the social and geographic horizons for the formation of marriage were not confined to the parish of origin or even the Isle of Thanet as a whole, but spread widely throughout the county of Kent and as far as London, while in a few cases, spouses came from neighbouring counties or occasionally from much further afield. In only a purely geographic sense could Thanet at this period be described as insular.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> G. Wyatt, 'Social Networks and Relationships in Early Modern Thanet, c.1560-c.1620,' (M.Phil. thesis, University of Kent, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> G. Wyatt, 'Marriage, Family and Kinship in an East Kent Parish: St John the Baptist in Thanet (Margate) 1559-1603 (M.A. dissertation, University of Kent, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> A fuller description of early modern Thanet and the sources available will be found in Chapter One of 'Social Networks'.

<sup>4</sup> CCAL, PRC fo. 218v (Will of Henry Crispe esquire 1588); CCAL, PRC 32/37 fo. 226v (Will of Richard Hartres 1595).

<sup>5</sup> D. Armstrong, 'Birth Marriage and Death in Elizabethan Cumbria', *Local Population Studies* 53 (Autumn 1994), 29-41; J. Hajnal, 'European Marriage Pattern in Perspective', in *Population in History*, eds D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley (London, 1968), pp. 101-143; A. Lawrence, *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1994), p. 35; M. Chaytor, 'Household and Kinship: Ryton in the late 16th and early 17th Centuries', *History Workshop Journal* 10 (1980), 25-60; K. Wrightson, 'Household and Kinship in 16th Century England', *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1982), 25-60; J. Bower, 'Probate Accounts as a Source for Early Modern Social and Economic History', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 109 (1991), 51-62 (p. 56); CCAL, PRC 17/42 fo. 58v (Will of Julian Badcock, widow 1571); CCAL, PRC 17/47 fo. 79v (Will of Thomas Deale, vintner 1587); CCAL, PRC 17/51 fo. 22v (Will of Bennet Pollin 1598); CCAL, PRC 17/44 fo. 177 (Will of Richard Deale 1578).

<sup>6</sup> N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England; Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, (Cambridge, 1979), p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> CCAL, PRC 17/45 fo. 230 (Will of William Parker); CCAL, PRC 32/36 fo. 189 (Will of John Coleman the elder).

<sup>9</sup> CCAL, PRC 17/51 fo. 221v (Will of David Rolfe); CCAL, PRC 32/34 fo. 204v (Will of Thomas Holden).

<sup>10</sup> A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England, Modes of Reproduction 1600-1840* (Oxford, 1986), p. 128; P. Rushton, 'Property, Power and Family Network: the Problem of Disputed Marriage in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1986), 205-219 (p. 213); D. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint, Re-thinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor and Stuart England* (Manchester, 2000), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> CCAL, X10.8 fo. 304 (Deposition of Stephen Sampson); CCAL, X10.8 fo. 32v (Deposition of John Cantis); CCAL, X10.8 fo. 7 (Deposition of Ursula Cantis).

<sup>12</sup> See D. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, for the significance and type of tokens.

<sup>13</sup> CCAL, X11.2, fo.192 (Deposition of Bartholomew Saunders); CCAL, X11.2, fo.193 (Deposition of William Barbett); CCAL, X11.2 fo.24 (Deposition of John Blaxland); CCAL, X11.2, fo.62v (Deposition of John Abeer); CCAL, X11.2, fo.73 (Deposition of Mr Richard Crispe).



<sup>14</sup> CCAL, X11.2, fo. 43v (Deposition of George Phineux).

<sup>15</sup> C. Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London, 1984), p. 246. Gittings noted in the case of a young man whose marriage plans were unsuccessful, 'Leak might have been more successful had he had his father to speak for him'.

<sup>16</sup> CCAL, X12, fo. 138v (Deposition of Simon Sanders); CCAL, X12, fo. 139 (Deposition of Christopher Russell).

<sup>17</sup> D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death; Ritual Religion and the Life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 235.

<sup>18</sup> J.M. Cowper, *Canterbury Marriage Licences 1568-1618*, 1st series (Canterbury, 1892); W. Berry, *County Genealogies. Pedigrees of the Families in the County of Kent* (Sherwood, Gilbert and Roper, 1830).

<sup>19</sup> D. O'Hara, *Courtship*, p. 131 and Table 8.

<sup>20</sup> B. Short, ed., *The English Rural Community; Image and Analysis* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> CCAL, PRC 17/49, fo. 227 (Will of Edward Atterbury of East Northdown, gent. 1591).

<sup>22</sup> Members of the Norwood family who claimed no status: CCAL, PRC 21/37, fo. 98v (Will of John Norwood); CCAL, PRC 17/39, fo. 246 (Will of Hugh Norwood); CCAL, PRC 17/42, fo. 299v (Will of Martin Norwood). Those who claimed yeoman status: CCAL, PRC 17/41, fol. 192 (Will of Thomas Norwood the elder); CCAL, PRC 17/42, fo. 293 (Will of Thomas Norwood).

<sup>23</sup> Members of the Crispe family who gave no status: CCAL, PRC 32/35, fo. 35v (Will of John Crispe); CCAL, PRC 32/41, fo. 6v (Will of John Crispe). Mariners: CCAL, PRC 17/48, fo. 41 (Will of John Crispe); CCAL, PRC 17/40, fo. 256 (Will of Robert Crispe).

<sup>24</sup> C. Phythian-Adams, editor, *Societies, Cultures and Kinship 1580-1850*, Collected Papers in English Local History (Leicester, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> CCAL, PRC 34/38, fo. 69v (Will of Henry Cocke); CCAL, PRC 17/44, fo. (Will of Hugh Bachelor).

<sup>26</sup> CCAL, PRC 32/34, fo. 212 (Will of Joan Kempe 1582); CCAL, PRC 17/43, fo. 411 (Will of Nicholas Shelby 1575).

<sup>27</sup> CCAL, PRC 17/43, fo. 92v (Will of Katherine Moore 1577); CCAL, PRC 32/42, fo. 255 (Will of Frances Blechenden 1611); CCAL, PRC 17/42, fo. 58v (Will of Julian Badcock 1571); CCAL, PRC 32/35, fo. 48 (Will of Agnes Drayner 1583); CCAL, PRC 32/29, fo. 51 (Will of John Squire 1561).

<sup>28</sup> Cowper, *Canterbury Marriages*; CCAL, PRC 32/31, fo. 340 and 342 (Will of George Robinson 1570); CCAL, PRC 32/39, fo. 87v (Will of Isaac Doggett 1601).

<sup>29</sup> CCAL, PRC 32/37, fo. 30 (Will of Edward Whitlocke).