

TWO FAMILIES: THE FALLING AND THE RISING WAVE

A STUDY IN SOCIAL MOBILITY

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“Every family hath, as it were, divers predominant qualities in it which, as they are tempered together in marriage, give a certain tincture to all the descent.” (Fulke Greville, Life of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Nowell Smith, 1907, p.4.)

These two families are the Bassets and the Betteridges. Bassetts are nowadays common enough all over the country, for their original feudal holdings were widely distributed in the Midlands and the South West. Betteridges, descendants of the Saxon serfs who over the centuries rose from under the heel of Norman overlords such as the Bassets (the usual aristocratic spelling) occur not nearly as frequently. They originally appear to have been clustered where Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire adjoin, as well as on the border of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. These sites probably indicate two lines of the original immigration and settlement via the Rivers Trent and Tame and the Rivers Severn and Avon.

My father was the eldest child of a union between these two very dissimilar families which took place in 1873.

The Bassets were established in Normandy at the end of the ninth century and one of them is listed on the memorial at Battle among those who fell at Hastings. It scarcely seems likely that the English line sprang directly from the adventurers and “bully-boys” who came over with the Conqueror; much more probable is that this Norman family supplied one of the “new men” who were brought over early in the next century and then rapidly came into power and property. From the Chief Justiciar of England under Henry I, through the Sheriff of Warwickshire under Henry II, the Sheriff of Staffordshire under Edward IV, until the line of male heirs died out at the beginning of the seventeenth century the pedigree of a dozen or more generations holding manors in the Midlands is well documented. The accuracy of this early pedigree is a question which lies outside my competence, and is in any case irrelevant to this enquiry. What does however seem clear is that, as the political influence of the family declined, their estates were for a time increased and consolidated through grants, purchase or marriage settlements, and were then later divided and dissipated by conveyance on the cadet lines. Towards the end of this period two daughters indeed rose in social status by marrying into the nobility, but the surviving male lines continued to decline.

It is one of these cadet branches that we must now follow. Between the middle of the fifteenth century and the end of the sixteenth there were six successive generations of Sir William Bassett of Blore. The second son of one of the earlier of these Williams was Thomas. In the 1583 Visitation of Staffordshire the Heralds recorded that he was the son of Sir William (1473-15G6); this was repeated by Dugdale. Here we are faced with our first puzzle. Since his

elder brother was born in 1493, Thomas could not have been earlier than about 1495. We know that his son Edward married Elizabeth Chetwynd, whose father had died in 1493, so she cannot have been born later than 1494. Their son was another Thomas, who from the marriage contract is known to have married in 1544. If this were all true it would mean that between 1495 and 1544 (49 years) three generations of bridegrooms must have married at the average age of 16 and further that Edward's bride would have been about twenty years older than he was. This all seems highly unlikely. The early age of marriage would not be inconceivable, though improbable, in one instance; but it is unbelievable that it could have happened three times in succession. My firm conviction is that the first Thomas must in fact have been the brother of the William born in 1473, not the son, as the Visitation claimed. If his birth had been around 1475 it would give a lapse of sixty-nine years, and an average age of 23 for all the grooms' marriages, which is what one would expect. And Edward's bride would then have been about six years his senior, which is more acceptable. With the repetition of the Christian names in both lines of the Bassetts, it is not surprising that the family itself should have been a little confused about the connections when they made their returns to the Heralds nearly a century after the events. Dugdale indicates the first Thomas as being "of Hints"; the earliest occasion the Visitation uses this description is for his son Edward. There is no first-hand evidence that either of these statements is correct. Among the records of the manor of Hints the first reference to the Bassetts occur on 12 Nov. 1544 at the time when Edward's son, again a Thomas, was married to his first wife. This document is an arbitration award (Staffordshire Record Office, 1344/1, fol. 47v, 48rv) concerning a dispute over a settlement (not extant) between Thomas Bassett, gent. of Barton Backpushe, Derbyshire, and Ralph Sacheverell, gent. of Melbourne, Derbyshire. Field names, each with its acreage are listed: they add up to pasture 107 acres, meadow 17 acres, arable 47 acres, woods 95 acres, and common for 400 sheep and 40 beasts. All were granted to Thomas against payment of £4 annual rent to Ralph.

Ten years later this same Ralph, now of Normanton on Soar, Nottinghamshire (eight miles east of Melbourne), conveyed as fee simple the manor of Hints to Thomas for the payment of £519-19s.2d. (Staffs. R.O. 1344/1, fol. 1v, 2rv, 3r.) Ralph was clearly a younger son, for was still described as gent. his father Ralph, esq. was dead, and his brother Henry was the esquire. Thomas Bassett's father, Edward, was also already dead, for Thomas had now assumed the status of esquire. Excepted from this conveyance were eight existing leases, identified by the names of the farmers, for which Thomas was to pay annual rent of £4 to Ralph.

Thomas's first wife had died early, after producing a son, Edward born circa 1545, and two daughters. His second marriage in 1558/9 is one of the earliest entries in the parish register of Hints. He died there, comparatively young, in 1569. The next document in the manorial records is the marriage settlement he had made on 5 Jul. 1564 for his son and heir, Edward (Staffs. R.O. 1344 1, fol. 3 ,4 ,5.) The bride was Jane Lynne, the niece of the wife of Humphrey Wellys of Hoar Cross, Staffordshire (twelve miles north of Hints.) Humphrey paid a dowry of £200, and Thomas conveyed in fief to Humphrey and a large group of executors and administrators an estate in Hints of a yearly value of £13-6s.-8d. This was for the use of Edward and Jane and their male heirs until Edward should make over to the executors an estate in fee simple of annual value of £16 as Jane's jointure. Thereafter the original fief should revert to Thomas for his lifetime, and then to Edward and Jane. In addition the jointure that had been settled on Thomas's wife should on her death revert to the newly married couple. This settlement also makes clear that in addition to the manor of Hints the family held ten acres of meadow at Wigginton (near Tamworth) and eleven acres of arable at Whittington (near Lichfield).

A further interesting point about this document is that the children were given the right of negative veto: for each in turn there was added the stipulation: "and if the said ... will thereunto consent and agree." In the literature dealing with marriage settlements it is generally agreed that this right began to be granted only around 1640, but the evidence for this view appears to be based largely on marriages among the aristocracy for it is only their settlements which have found their way into print. Can it be that parents' concern about an affective relationship as an essential part in "holy matrimony" was emerging among the lower gentry some half century earlier than among the higher orders? Or was it perhaps rather an attitude which developed first in the provincial backwoods, where family ties were closer, and only percolated slowly to the more metropolitan orientated nobility? The inclusion of this clause may of course not necessarily imply that parents were beginning to consider their children's wishes. In canon law consent was essential, and it may have been merely prudent to insert such a clause in a legal document. Further, its position in the document may be significant. Where the elaborate financial contract was drawn up in advance of the children's consent, they were then more or less faced with a *fait accompli*. If however, as here and in the case to be discussed later, the stipulation of the children's agreement immediately follows the proposed date of marriage and the requirement: "if the law of the holy church will it permit and suffer", and precedes the financial settlement, then its implications may be quite different. Much more research is needed before any firm conclusions can be reached.

The parish register now gives us the details of all the children of this marriage, though even here there remain some unresolved problems. A son was baptized as Thomas in March 1565/6 and a Thomas was buried in May; this looks like a straightforward death of an infant. However, in August another Thomas was baptized and buried on the same day, and with the same name these two cannot have been twins. It may be that the first baptism had been delayed after a birth around August 1565 until the sickly child was obviously near to death. With the marriage having taken place between July and September 1564 there was just sufficient time for two pregnancies before August 1566. On the other hand, since the burial entry of the first Thomas does not indicate the father's name, it may be that it concerned the death of another (unrecorded) Thomas from a previous generation. It cannot have been grandfather Thomas, for as was seen above, he did not die until 1569.

Then followed the baptism of two more sons, Walter in 1567 and John in 1569, and five daughters between 1572 and 1580, two of whom died as infants. Little more is known about their father Edward, except what appears from the marriage settlement for his son and heir Walter, which is discussed next, and the fact that in 1604 James I granted him a pension of 5/ per diem for life for his services in Ireland. An interesting note in the Tamworth parish register may be relevant here; in 1599 we read: "the 30th day of this April Robert Earl of Essex went from Drayton Basset towards Ireland with a host of men to make war against the Earl of Tyrone Perhaps Edward, even at the age of fifty, felt the call of adventure and joined the host as it passed through his land.

On 28 May 1586 Edward signed a contract and settlement (Staffs. R.O 1344/ fol. 5rv, 6rv, 7rv) for the marriage of his son Walter to Sconsolal described as "one of the daughters of" Sir Fulke Greville of Beauchamps Court, Warwickshire. This was to take place before Christmas 1588. Sir Fulke paid a dowry of £400, and before Christmas 1589 Edward was to convey to Sir Fulke a number of parcels of land (listed by their field names) for the use of the couple. The details of the reversion to other members of Edward's family do not concern us here. Over and above this he ensured as the jointure other tenements to the yearly value of £10 and an

annuity of £10 from his own tenements at Hints Park. A further clause was that Sir Fulke undertook to provide lodging and maintenance for the couple in his own home for three years following the marriage. At this time the bride's age was about twenty; it suggests that the bride was probably a child still too young to undertake a household of her own. (The three and a half years' delay before the birth of the first child may be some confirmation of this.) Just as in the settlement we examined earlier, the partners were here also given the option of refusal.

Here a digression about the Grevilles, while not essential to our story, is interesting in itself and for the problem which this union raises. When I first read this name I realized that my minor branch of the Bassetts was once more impinging in a small way on national history. There were three successive generations of Sir Fulke Greville, of whom our father-in-law was the second. Their story is told in the recent biographies of the third and more famous one. Sir Fulke I had married one of the wealthiest heiresses in England who brought with her thirty-two manors in seven counties. One of these was the manor of Alcester where they made their home at Beauchamps Court. Their son, Sir Fulke II, married Anne Neville from the well-known northern family, sister of the Fifth Earl of Westmorland. This Greville was described as "a gentleman full of affability and courtesy and much given to hospitality... In his time no man did bear greater sway in the county of Warwick than himself." He was twice Sheriff of the county, and Justice of the Peace until his death in 1606. Unlike his father and his son he was never a Member of Parliament. He lacked the education and refinement necessary at Elizabeth's court, and apart from some youthful excursions to the capital he had little contact with London. The Calendar of Patent Rolls reports two bloody affrays in which he was involved there - what we should nowadays describe as muggings: in 1555, when he was nineteen, his servant killed one of the assailants, and in 1563 one of his companions was mortally wounded in a street brawl. At the end of the century his austere Protestant son said rather sanctimoniously of him that he was a good man, but "pleasure is the commonest end of men, and the greater tide hath carried him that way... Ever since I knew him he hath been wise with the wise and provident among good husbands ... It was mischance that his excellent nature was not ever trained up in the best companies." (Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, XII. Appx. pt. 1, pp. 27-8: quoted in the biographies.)

The pedigrees of the family printed in the recent biographies mention only two children of the marriage between Fulke II and Anne Neville: Fulke III born 1554 and Margaret born 1561. Apart from our marriage settlement the only reference found to other children is in Warwick Record Office where the marriages of a Katherine in 1592 and of Sconsolate in 1587 (incorrect for 1586) are recorded. If one can read between the cautious lines quoted above, it would appear that Sconsolate may well have been illegitimate. The name is clearly Italian in origin - perhaps from some literary source - and would mean something like "the inconsolable one". Some confirmation of this view may be seen in the fact that in her father's will there is reference to both the other daughters, but Sconsolate is not mentioned. He may have felt that he had done his duty by getting her married off early with the "bribe" of a lavish dowry and careful concern for her future well-being. (It would be interesting to compare her settlement with those made for his other daughters.) The marriage bond for £100 was signed on 25 Nov. 1586 (Worcester Record Office: 73c, 1586), and there are oddly enough records of two ceremonies: in the Alcester parish register on 27 Nov. 1586, and fifteen months later at Hints on 3 Mar. 1587/8. This calls for some explanation. The Complete Peerage gives examples of people who married in private chapels and then repeated the ceremony publicly. Now it is known that there was a private chapel at Beauchamps Court, and perhaps it was here that the first marriage took place, although the parish register does not say so. It may be significant

that all other entries relating to the Greville family are in the bold honorific italic script as befitted the lord of the manor, but this marriage entry is in the normal secretarial hand, as if there had been a deliberate attempt to avoid drawing attention to it. The unusual repetition of the ceremony at Hints can only be explained by the necessity to publicize the legality of the union within the community in which the couple were destined to live after the period of patrilocal residence was ended.

Particularly in this half-century following the Reformation it is dangerous to make assumptions about people's motives for their behaviour. The vacillation of the established church between the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth, and the uncertainty about its future had led men to be wary of opening their hearts. There were no more than a hundred or so ideological martyrs like Cranmer and Laud, and some thousands of unshakeable Catholic recusants who were prepared to incur the penalties for challenging the State. Most people chose conformity as the wisest course; if they had any position in society or held any office under the Crown, it was the only one open to them. Fulke I had been born Catholic, but managed to enjoy royal patronage under Henry VIII and Edward VI as sheriff of the county. Only under Mary at the end of his life would he have been able to acknowledge openly his true beliefs. Fulke II, born Protestant and married about the time of Mary's accession, had seen the Church change twice before he reached manhood, and had clearly been brought up to keep his mouth shut about these dangerous matters. He held his official positions until the end of his life in 1606, so it is not surprising that no breath of pro-Catholic sympathies has ever come to light. What his real affiliations were must remain a mystery. Fulke III was probably born and baptized a Catholic, and at the age of five the Mass changed to the Book of Common Prayer. In the Edward VI Grammar School at Shrewsbury he was under the influence of an ardent Protestant schoolmaster, and his stay at Jesus College, Cambridge would have confirmed him as an enemy of Catholicism. So we see that the religious attitudes of the three generations of this family were at best ambivalent, and never more so than in the middle period covering the birth and marriage of Sconsolate.

As regards the other family in this union the evidence is a little clearer. The mother of the last Sir William Bassett of Blore was Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Anthony Fitzherbert, the leading Catholic knight in the county. Her brother, Sir Thomas, died as an unrepentant Catholic in the Tower in 1591, and her other brother John only saved his life by paying the enormous fine of £10,000, and died in prison in 1590. John's son Thomas had been imprisoned for complicity in the Babington plot in 1586, but had turned queen's evidence and was released in return for betraying his father, his uncle, and "Mr. Bassett" (our Sir William.) However, since his case was heard in camera, we know no more details. The concrete evidence was apparently not forthcoming in the case of Sir William, but the suspicions about his loyalty to the Crown persisted, and in 1596 he was removed from his office as sheriff by the Privy Council. Further, the father of our bridegroom had a sister who had married into the Fitzherbert family. Thus their involvement and their Catholic sympathies are fairly evident, even if they were not actually crypto-Catholics. The fact that they never appeared in the Recusancy Rolls could be explained by the protection given to them by their near relative, Sir William.

From this point onwards everything appears to have gone downhill. Edward's soldiering suggests that he was an absentee landlord at a time when all the minor gentry were under heavy economic pressure and when efficient husbandry alone could enable them to survive the crisis. Perhaps because of his connection with the Grevilles he was trying to maintain too large an establishment and a standard of living higher than his failing means could bear. And certainly the bevy of daughters must have been an unwelcome drain on his resources. Be that

as it may, from 1588 he was clearly getting into debt. In that year some of his lands were leased for twenty-one years at a rent of 6s.8d. twice a year for the first five years and thereafter at 40/- twice a year, the lease to be terminated if within five years he could repay one hundred marks (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 46v, 47r.) In 1594 he transferred to Sir Fulke Greville's administrators all the properties which in the marriage settlement had been reserved for the jointure (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 7v, 8r), and two days later he devised the remainder of his estate to Walter for "unum denarium" (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fo18v.) He was clearly washing his hands of all prime responsibility for his affairs. The next indenture of 1597 with a man named Underhill (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 9r) reveals that Walter was faring no better. An (unspecified) fine was levied on the manor of Hints and some other lands in the parish of Hints for the use of Underhill "not fully agreed upon at the present" for ever, until such time as further agreements were reached "or else until the sum of £700 ... be paid." Two years later Walter apparently rescued the situation by obtaining £700 from the sale of these and other tenements, with common for eight score sheep, to his cousin, Ralph Fitzherbert (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 9v, 10rv, 11r.) They were still not out of deep water. The next indenture of 1600/1 (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 47rv) disposes the manor house of Hints and all its perquisites with other named closes and pastures to another local man. Then four months later it becomes clear that the £700 received from Fitzherbert had not solved their problems. A Northamptonshire esquire now had Underhill's 1597 indenture in his hands, but declared that in his presence and before other witnesses the £700 had been paid to Underhill. It appears that there was a dispute over who had right title to the properties, and the 1597 indenture was deposited for safe keeping with a lawyer of the Middle Temple until the matter could be settled. An indenture of May 1607 (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 30v, 31rv, 3Zrv) documents the further dissipation of the estate. For £500 a citizen and haberdasher of London named Endisor obtained another long list of named parcels of land, including the forge or hammer mill "and all other houses, buildings, and all ways, watercourses, brooks and streams thereunto belonging", as well as the land in Wigginton which was in Walter's tenure. All was to be delivered within ten months. Reference was also made here to an indenture of January 1601/2 (not extant), in which lands in Hints had been conveyed to three men, one of whom was a grocer. Under its terms the Bassetts could redeem these premises within seven years by the payment of £120. This they now agreed to do and there- after to convey these redeemed lands to Endisor. A month later in the last of these documents (Stafford R.O. 1344/1, fol. 48v, 49rv) Endisor leased other parcels of land "in consideration of a competent sum of money" already paid (presumably his £500 mentioned above) and without subsequent charge for rent. In the interest of consolidating his holdings Endisor also required that if within eight years Bassett should redeem other named parcels of ground which had been excepted from those transferred by the May indenture, these should within nine years be granted to him, and the above- mentioned leases declared null and void. Possession was taken by Endisor in March 1607.

Edward Bassett was buried at Hints in February 1608/9. The parish register described him here as "gent.", whereas earlier (and in all the documents described above) he had been "esq." Insofar as these designations were used significantly, this would confirm that he was no longer a landed proprietor, but merely a tenant on one of the properties which we have seen coming into the possession of lawyers and tradesmen who, in the terms of a contemporary comment "do attain to great wealth and riches which for the most part they employ in purchasing land, and little by little they do creep and seek to be gentlemen". Edward's son and heir Walter remained what one can describe as a "gentleman for life", virtually landless. He and his eldest son lived out their lives in Hints, presumably as tenant farmers; there is no further record of them until their burial entries in the Hints parish register, his in 1632 and his son's in 1617. No record has been found of the death of Sconsolate; her last child had been baptized in 1607.

Of his four daughters and five sons two of these last will concern us here. They both appear in West Bromwich, twelve miles away. This is the first discernible step from agriculture to industry, although back at home in Hints they must have been quite familiar with ironworking. There were two forges and two furnaces at Cannock, about ten miles away, and a forge at Middleton, three miles in the other direction, as well as the old-established forge on their own estates, which we have seen referred to in the manorial papers.

Here perhaps a few words about the requirements and processes of these early ironworks will not be out of place. The furnace which smelted the ore into a pig needed to be sited within easy reach of the ironstone, required a plentiful supply of charcoal and a small water-wheel to work the bellows. Its location could not remain permanent, since the supply of fuel within economic distance rapidly became exhausted. (The Grevilles had taken over the Cannock works in 1589, but six years later had so ravaged the woods that less than a quarter were left standing.) The forge was where the pigs were re-heated and hammered into bars by a tilt-hammer. Its siting was more permanent, as it required only a small supply of charcoal, but a strong and consistent source of water to operate the powerful mill needed to lift the heavy hammer. The third stage was the smithy where the bar-iron was fashioned into finished goods. The heating for this could be done with coal, and the smiths had already established themselves in the area farther south, later known as the "Black Country", where the fuel was readily available.

The hammer-mill at Hints was at this time producing about 120 tons of bar-iron a year, and in one year at the end of the century its output exceeded 300 tons. It is quite probable that some of the younger landless sons of the earlier Bassetts had even been directly involved in its working. However, when the two we are concerned with, Thomas born in 1599 and George in 1607, had reached working age, the estate was already out of the family's hands and they had to look elsewhere for a livelihood. George's career was dogged with ill-luck; he married in West Bromwich in 1637, but his son lived only two days in March 1638/9 and the mother died two months later. He married again within five months, but a son born in October 1640 lived for only sixteen months. Two daughters, both baptized at Christmas 1645, apparently survived, if the albeit late marriages there in 1676 and 1697 apply to them. However, George's elder brother, Thomas, was the one who carried on the line. In 1629 he had been married in the neighbouring parish of Wednesbury to Jane, daughter of George Holden, gent. who held a large estate there and also ran a business as a nailer. This father-in-law is reputed to have been the last gentleman to wear his sword in the church at Wednesbury. Thomas then established himself as a tenant farmer in West Bromwich; in 1649 he was paying £1.13s.4d. for the land which he leased from John Shelton. Presumably, like all the inhabitants of West Bromwich, he also engaged in nail making as an ancillary occupation. When in 1641 the Long Parliament invited all males over eighteen years of age to sign the Protestation Oath affirming their opposition to the "designs of priests and Jesuits" three hundred and thirty-three West Bromwich men signed, but Thomas was not among them. He had clearly held to the traditions of his family with the courage of his convictions. It has not been established what penalty he suffered for this recalcitrance.

His children were: a son baptized and buried on the same day in 1630, daughter baptized in 1631, Thomas baptized in 1633, and a daughter and 10 sons between 1638 and 1648. We follow Thomas who married Jane, daughter 'George Parkes, a nailer and holder of various tenements in Sutton Coldfield, Tamworth and West Bromwich. The will made by Parkes

shortly before his death in 1660, apart from its intrinsic interest, gives the clue to the next move of our Bassett family; it reads as follows:

In the name of god Amen the 29th (..?) anno dom. 1659 I Georg Pearks of Sutton ColdFeeld In the county of Worweeck nayler being of perfect

mind and memory yet not verry heathfull thanks be to god Doe make and pronounce this my last will and testament In forme and maner Followieng first I comend my soule to allmighty god my Creator and maker trusting and faithfully believeing to be saved by the merits and pasion of Jesuse Christ his soin in Dyety god from the beginige and man taking I his Fleesh and bloud of the Vergin Mary and I will that my bodye be bured in the Parich Churchyard of Sutton ColdFeeld Itm I doe give to my soine Philip Pearks all that house or messuage or tennement barnes stablses chloses or meddues lying and being In the parich of Tanworth In the County of Worrweeck weth all the appurtenances there unto belonging now In the tener of Ane Farmer widd. and I also do give him my gret cheest Itm do give to my wiuf Ane Parkes those tenements liing and being In Line In the parich of Westebromech with the appurttnances there unto beloning now In the tenner of Ane Hadly and Kathern Standlye duering her naterll liufe after I do give it to my sonne Christopher Parkes and these tenements with the appurtnese to him and his heirs for ever for want of ares of the said Christopher to his nex brother Itm I do give to my wiufe Ane Parkes one bedsted standing In the littel chamber with tow bousters and one pillo one fether bed that whereon I lay tow blankets one grine one litell bras pot one littel cettell tow pare of sheets and one sheet to make her a winding sheet one coveuer one box one long coveuer one (..?) on litel firken tow new puter diches one salt being new Itm I doe give my sonne Christopher one coveuer Itm I do give to my doghter Jane all the rest of my goods within my house save only the Corne Itm I do give to my sonne Christopher Parkes all my wareing appereell and all my shop tules Itm I do give all the rest of my goods without my house to my sonne Christopher Parkes my sonne John Parkes my sonne William Parkes Cattell or chattel to set them forth and when my debts are paid I do give the remainder to my sonne John and William to goe surert for them and I do allso mak my daughter Jane Parkes soule executer of this my last will and testemant and I do allso ordaine my brother John Parke and William Walthen overseers of this my last will and testeament being In perfect mind and memory do Ratfie and confirme the same to be and so to stand for my last will and testament and there to I have put my hand and seale the day and yeare above writen in 1659

Georg Parks his mark Sealed and Delivered
In presents of William Walthen his marke
Thomas Marten his marke
John Parkes

Itm Before the sealeing of this my will and testement I do give to my daughter Jane the Leace of this house whare In I now Live

The particular bequests made to the widow suggest that these were the provisions for her independent retirement to the part of the house reserved for her when the daughter was to take over the running of the household.

The codicil (unfortunately undated) is on another sheet though in the same handwriting, and may well have been just an afterthought. It could however have expressed second thoughts when Jane's impending marriage was made known, in order to put her in legal possession of the house. She had obviously met Thomas Bassett when she was visiting her father's tenements in West Bromwich. When the will was entered for probate at Lichfield on 3 July 1660 she was still signing herself Jane Parks, but was already expecting her first child. When the marriage took place has not been established.

What Thomas Bassett took over was one of the larger farms. In the Hearth Tax returns for 1663, 1670, 1673 and 1674 he was charged for four hearths, which indicates a prosperous though not wealthy household. The forge, listed only in 1670, shows that for a time he was also occupied as a nailer. After the birth of their son George, baptized 27 Jan. 1660/1, the other children of the union were a daughter baptized and buried in 1663, another daughter baptized in 1664, and John baptized in 1668. Another daughter, Elizabeth, was buried in 1668 without a specific date being given, and without having been baptized. The mother had been buried in June 1668. Elizabeth could well have been the twin of John (later on there were twins in this line on at least two occasions,) dying before the mother's fatal illness had permitted a belated double baptism. If Elizabeth had been born during the three and a half years' gap before John, one would have expected her baptism before 1668.

Thomas very soon married again. He and Katherine ..?. had eight more children before he died at the age of fifty (bur. 5 Apr. 1684). The inventory attached to his will (which has not been found) is worth quoting here. It is clear that this does not apply to the house with four hearths which had been left to his first wife. The Hearth Tax returns had located this in the Moor and Ashfurlong Quarter to the east of the parish, whereas in the parish register Thomas when he died in 1684 was described as "Thomas of Little Sutton", and later on Jane's son John as "John of Hill" - both Little Sutton and Hill being in the Quarter further to the north. It must be presumed that after Jane's death the holding of the Parkes family had reverted to one of her brothers. Thomas Bassett's brief spell of comparative prosperity had come to an end, and he and his family were reduced once more to the ranks of small-scale tenant farmers. The inventory shows that he too was occupied as a nailer.

The Goods and Chattells of Katherine Bassett widd. being
 Executrix to Thomas Bassett deceased attached ady Humfry
 Jennens Esq. and apprizd by us the 11th day of June in the
 36 yeare of King Charles the second of England etc. Anno
 Dni. 1684

In the house	
One cupbord	0 6 8
4 pewter dishes three flaggons one gaune 2	
porrengers 2 sawcers one Salt, all pewter	0 10 0
Seaven cushens	0 2 0
One Frying panne two Iron Spitts Fireshovell	
and tonges linckes and pott gayles and other	
odd things there	0 3 0
In the best Parler	
One old feather bedd coverlett blankets and bolster	1 0 0
The bedsted Curtaines and vallans	0 10 0
The table there and old formes	0 10 0

One Coffe and one Chaire	0 6 0
Sheetes	0 3 0
In the little Parler	
One table one Forme and one Chaire	0 5 0
In the Buttery	
One Barrell 4 Kenderkins and shelves	0 10 0
In the Kitchin	
One Furnace being an old Kettle one old Tubb one cheese presse	0 10 0
In the Shopp	
The Bellowes and other Tooles there	1 4 0
The Muck	0 10 0
The husbandry Implements	1 0 0
In the Chamber over the house	
One Joyned bedsted Curtaines vallans and other thinges thereunto belonging	1 0 0
One feather bedd one Flock bedd one Chaffe bedd one Trundle bedsted and all thinges thereunto belonging	1 0 0
Coverletts and blanketts thereunto belonging	0 6 8
Two wooden Coffers one old Chaire and one Table	0 6 6
Two paire of hurden Sheetes and other old linnen there	0 6 8
In the Chamber over the Parler	
One wheele and one reele	0 1 6
Two straw Whitches	0 1 6
An old Coffe and other lumber there	0 1 0
Wooll and hurdes	0 1 0
	11 0 6
Ralph Cooper	
George Syers	
Theis goods were attached apprzed and condempned as widd. Bassett was Executrix to her husband in Sutton Cofd ad Mr. Jennens and will not halfe pay Mr. Jennens - that debt is above 30£	
[Then in a different handwriting]	
Thomas Bassets wearing Clothes	1 00 00
Two Cowes	5 6 8
One old Cowe	1 00 00
Twinter Heifer	2 00 00
One Earling calfe	1 00 00
One Coolte	00 10 00
Sheepe	7 00 00
One Guilte	00 15 00
One little pigge	00 5 00
	Somme is £19 6 8

That Thomas Bassett was considered good for credit of £30 suggests that he had been well thought of in the community. The widow, stripped of all moveables, was left with a large family of dependants. From the previous marriage there was George age 23, a daughter of 19, and John 16; her own children were three sons, who all died before reaching manhood, a

daughter, followed by four more sons, the last of whom was born only shortly before her husband's death - their ages ranging from 14 down to 1-3 months. Only George was of an age to carry on the working of the holding, but there is no further record of him, neither marriage nor death. John could have played his part until he married in 1697 and took over another tenement, as was noticed above. If George had also died (unrecorded) among the many others, it is fairly clear that for some years at least this family must have been a burden on the parish. The line was continued in Sutton Coldfield by the eldest surviving son, Bartholemew, baptized 6 Sept. 1677.

First however we may look at his younger brother Edward, baptized 6 June 1680. He is only peripheral to our main discussion, but illustrates one line of development which was forced on the landless younger siblings when they were driven away from home. First he married Elizabeth ..?, by whom he had two sons born in 1707 and 1710. Apart from the fact that this was in the parish of Grendon, they need concern us no further. In 1720 in the neighbouring parish of Austrey Edward then married Mary Coleman, daughter of a Grendon farmer. He settled there as a tenant farmer, became Constable in 1729 and was churchwarden and overseer of the poor. They had two sons and six daughters, but only the eldest will be followed here, Edward (bapt. in 1721, d. 1784.) He continued where his father left off, occupying the same offices in the parish, but adding victualler to his livelihood as a farmer. In 1757 he married Elizabeth Wyersdale from Shustoke, by whom he had four sons and two daughters, one of whom married a miller. The eldest surviving son, Thomas (bapt. 1763, d. 1809) married Elizabeth Smith in 1792 and produced six sons and three daughters. He did not stay long in Grendon, where the first two children were born in 1793 and 1795, for the subsequent family was baptized in Polesworth, a village three miles away. However, the connection with Grendon remained close, presumably with his wife's family, for he, she, and three of the children were buried there. The farmer was being superseded by the victualler, and two of his sons became innkeepers, of the Chetwynd Arms and the Royal Oak Inn in Polesworth. The youngest son, William (b. 1806, bapt. 1807, d. 1845), described as an agricultural labourer and boatman, married Mary Ann Wootten at St. Martin's, Birmingham, in 1837, and their son Richard (bapt. back at Polesworth in 1838, d. 1906) was innkeeper of the Game Cock Inn in Birchmore, a hamlet on the outskirts of Polesworth. He married the daughter of a Tamworth labourer at a Registry Office in 1863 and had eleven children; one daughter married a postman, another a grocer, and the youngest son, George Charles (bapt. 1891, d. 1957) was a miner who married in Polesworth 1912. His younger son (b. 1924) was killed in action serving with the navy in 1944; the elder son (b. 1913) was a fitter, and of his children one (b. 1941) is a welder now living in Coventry with one son, another b.1944) a photographer with three sons and a daughter born between 1968 and 1972. So here the male line of succession appears safe.

We return after this digression to Bartholemew, eldest surviving son of Thomas and Katherine. He married Mary..?, who died in 1756, and between 1702/3 and 1722 had eight children: three sons and five daughters, two of whom died as infants. Bartholemew himself died in 1766 at the great age of 89. The eldest son Thomas (b. 1705) married Elizabeth Brookes at Sutton Coldfield in 1734, and between 1735 and 1758 there were eight children, as well as twins who were buried without baptism: five sons, two of whom died as infants, and three daughters. For the youngest surviving son Samuel (b. 1758) there was plainly no future in Sutton Coldfield, though the families of two of his uncles were still being born there sixty to eighty years later, before they too moved into Birmingham. Samuel married Sarah ..?, but neither time nor place has yet been discovered. It was probably not in Birmingham, as the Marriage Index there has now been completed without revealing it; it is likely to have been in

one of the adjacent parishes, and may turn up when the Warwickshire and Staffordshire Indexes are more advanced. However, all the five children of Samuel and Sarah were baptized at St. Philip's, Birmingham, between 1781 and 1802. It has not been ascertained what Samuel was doing in Birmingham; he is not recorded in any of the earliest trade directories. It is a fair guess that he was in some way connected with the metal trade and that his undertaking was later taken over and developed by his eldest son Thomas, as will be seen below. Thomas had been married at St. Philip's in 1804 to Elizabeth Heathcock (here and in all but one of the subsequent baptismal entries she is called Betty.) Between 1805 and 1820 they had four sons and four daughters, the sixth and seventh being mixed twins. The first child, also called Thomas, was baptized at St. Martin's, all the others at St. Philip's. We are now reaching the stage when, in the words of the Daily Mail's review of Stella Colwall's recent book, we can begin "to dress up the bare tree with branches, leaves and acorns." In the baptismal entries after 1814 the father is described as a caster and plater of metals living in Navigation Street (26) then on the edge of the built-up area at the west of Birmingham. He signed his will three weeks before his death on 29 June 1835 (probate Nov.) in which he bequeathed "all my share and interest of and in the trade capital store and effects in the partnership business of a metal dealer and brass founder now existing and carried on between me and Charles Wallbank" to his eldest "son Thomas, metal dealer, William Bryan, metal dealer, and Thomas Thornton, gentleman", as well as everything in the house not already disposed of to his wife. It appears that the "gentleman" had undoubtedly furnished the capital for the son's partnership business. His wife received "all the household furniture and plate such china and all other articles of a like sort or kind whatsoever which she brought to me at the time of my marriage with her". This suggests that he had not been on the poverty line at that time. His wearing apparel was divided between the two younger sons, and the twin sister joined them in sharing equally the proceeds from the sale of all his personal effects. The cash bequests are not very clear: £40 was to go to his wife, and the remainder (from what?) to be invested to pay income to the "three youngest children until the youngest is 21 ... then to pay the eldest son £100 and then divide the remainder among all the children". These were all listed except one son who had apparently pre-deceased his father. The three elder daughters were already married, in 1835, 1831 and 1830. However this is understood, it is clear that he was quite a substantial businessman with a share in a partnership and considerable sums of money at his disposal.

This legator's younger brothers and their families of up to ten children have been identified in Birmingham. Apart from the fact that they too were occupied in various branches of the metal trade - as fender makers, etc., their further development has still to be researched. And as they do not affect our main story, further details about them may be omitted here.

The first of the children of Thomas and Elizabeth who must concern us is the eldest son Thomas, who during the next thirty years really hit the jackpot. The partnership with Bryan, already referred to in his father's will, continued to flourish; in fourteen directories between 1835 and 1871 which have been examined the firm of Bassett and Bryan, metal dealers, is listed at 3 St. James Street (21) in the eastern working-class * (The numbers following street names locate them on the appended plan of Birmingham). area of the town. Until 1863 Thomas Bassett's home address was 15 Tenby Street, (5) on the edge of the Jewellery Quarter, but in 1865 he had moved to the more fashionable Ladywood Road (22) just being built. After his death in 1874 the firm continued as Bassett and Bagnall at least until 1908. It is fortunate for us that his ostentatious pride in his achievements spilled over as unnecessary remarks on the census returns: in 1861 after "metal dealer" he added "empl. 3 men and 7 boys", and ten years after "empl. 21 men and 8 boys". However, the full extent of his rise to prosperity is revealed in his will. He wrote: "To my late wife's niece Phoebe ... all the furniture in the

bedroom and dressing room in my house led by her. To my friends ... and ... whom I appoint executors 19 guineas.) the deacons of the Catholic Apostolic Church, Newhall Street,(13) £100. To the Treasurer of the Protestant Dissenting Charity School, Graham Street,(7) 9 guineas. To purchase a suit of mourning for each servant in my employ. To my late wife's nephew William Bagnall £150 and to his brother John Bagnall £40. To the following nieces and nephews of my late wife" (ten listed) "£40 each. To my nephew Thomas Samuel Bassett £100. **To my sister Clara ... widow..." (in America) "£300.** Residue to be divided in four parts, one quarter to my brother Samuel Bassett, ... to my brother Edward Bassett ... to my sister Ann ..., to Phoebe" (mentioned above) "Late of Oban House, Ladywood. Died 19 Apr. 1874. Probate 28 May 1874. Under £35,000."

As this appears to deal only with the disposal of his personal property, making no reference to realty or the assets of the business, he must be seen as having died in considerable affluence. Certainly all his family saw him in this light. Here, for what it is worth, the family legend passed on to me by my father is in place. He, born two months before the death of this uncle of his mother, of course never knew him. However, the firm that had produced this prosperity continued to flourish, and one may assume conducted its business on similar lines; the snide remarks about such inaccessible wealth must have been common in my father's family when he was growing up. The story went that the firm's profits were so obviously in excess of what one would expect of a scrap metal merchant that something underhand must have been going on. They had had the novel idea that from the sweepings of the workshops in the Jewellery Quarter they could rescue the waste filings of precious metals. It was believed that a disproportionate amount of what was salvaged had remained in the crucibles and was never seen again by the proper owners. It was even said that the firm had been warned several times about sailing very close to the wind, and that only friendship with the Chief of Police in Birmingham had kept them out of trouble. The story, when it reached me, may well have been exaggerated, my father was never very enthusiastic about his family, but doubtless there was more than a grain of truth in it.

Thomas had married Phoebe Lowe from Oldbury on 7 June 1830 and they either never had children, or those born had died before the 1841 census. Their place was filled in all the census years 1841 to 1871 by children led Bagnall and described as nieces, which implies that Phoebe's sister 'probably sisters) had married into the Bagnall family. The connection with this family was close: in 1851 a William Bagnall was living in the house next door in Tenby Street;(5) two Bagnalls were listed among the nieces and nephews in Thomas's will; and a Bagnall replaced Bryan in the partnership after Thomas's death.

Apart from Thomas's three sisters who married and so pass off our line, we are left with the younger children of the previous Thomas and Elizabeth: the twins Sarah and Samuel, born 1817, and the youngest son Edward, born 1820. Of Sarah nothing further has been found, but Samuel is well documented. At Edgbaston on 18 July 1842 he married Harriet Robinson from Oldbury, who signed with her mark. She was living then in the Crescent (17) a small row of large fashionable houses; one may guess that she most probably in service there. In 1851 they were established in Edward Street,(12) where he was a button-tool maker with four children, and living with them was his wife's brother, a carpenter employing five men. Ten years later the youngest of these children had died and three more had been born. The two eldest sons were already working: Thomas Samuel, age 17, as a warehouseman's mate, and Henry, age 15, as a toolmaker (doubtless working with his father.) They were now living in Ingleby Street. The other children were: Mary Elizabeth, born 27 Jan. 1848, who became my grandmother John Frederick, born 1850 but died in the next year; Clara Maria, born 1853/4;

Phoebe, born 1855/6; and Matthew Herbert, born 1860, who died soon after the census. This brings our history to within living memory, for as a child I often went with my mother to collect grandmother's rents from her properties in Ingleby Street.

Samuel died on 9 Jan. 1891. From the will of his elder brother Thomas it has been seen that his share had been between £7,000 and £8,000. From his own will signed on 13 Aug. 1878 with a codicil of 7 Mar. 1890 (probate Feb. 1891) it is clear that his legacy had been invested in house property. All was left to his wife, and after her death the four houses in Ingleby Street, nos. 56, 57, 58 and 59 separately to his four surviving children. Further, all real estate and leasehold property was then to be sold and the proceeds divided into five parts, one to go to each of the children and the fifth placed in trust for the two children of his deceased eldest son Thomas Samuel until they reached the age of twenty-one. The gross value of his personal estate was just under £5,000. This will also contains interesting revelations which will be referred to when the marriage of Mary Elizabeth is discussed.

It is clear that the eldest son, Thomas Samuel, whom we last saw in 861 as a warehouseman's mate, had been groomed to take over his uncle's business. He was the only Bassett of his generation to be mentioned in the uncle's will. He had married in 1869, and when he died suddenly as a result of an accident six years later he was already established in the business. The coroner's report states the facts briefly: "Thomas Samuel Bassett at Queen's Hospital, metal dealer, 3 Grand Buildings, Rann street (15) Ladywood, 32 years, 2 July 1875. Thrown out of a four-wheel dog-cart drawn by an affrighted horse. Cause of death, fractured base of skull. Died in St. Vincent Street(16) in a cab on the road to hospital." Further details were given in the Birmingham Daily Mail on the same evening:

**SHOCKING AND FATAL ACCIDENT IN
BIRMINGHAM THIS MORNING.
A MERCHANT KILLED AND OTHERS INJURED.**

A very shocking and painful accident occurred at the corner of Clement Street(11) this morning, by which Mr. Thomas Samuel Bassett, of the firm of Bagnall, Bassett, and Company, metal merchants of Gem Street,(20) lost his life. Mr. Bagnall has also been very seriously injured and the coachman, Richard Latham, lies in a dangerous state at the Queen's Hospital. A little before nine o'clock Mr. Bagnall and Mr. Bassett were driving in an open carriage in the direction of Gem Street, and when near the Railway bridge in the vicinity of Clement Street, a shrill whistle from one of the railway engines caused the horse to become restive, and in an instant he dashed on at a furious pace, the driver losing control over him. On reaching the corner of Clement street, the affrighted animal rushed up against the manufactory of Mr. Phillips, throwing Mr. Bassett headlong against the brickwork of the building, smashing his skull and causing other serious injuries. Mr. Bagnall attempted to save himself by jumping from the vehicle an instant before it came into collision with the manufactory, but he also was hurled against the building, as was also the coachman. An immense crowd at once collected, and the three men were picked up. It is said that no man amongst all those present could be found to volunteer to take Mr. Bassett to the hospital, who, although terribly bruised and bleeding freely from his wounds, was still alive. A woman named Mrs. Gold, who lives close by, after a little delay, called a cab, into which Mr. Bassett was lifted, the woman following. She

laid the injured man's head upon her apron, and bound it up as best she could on her way to the Queen's Hospital, but when the cab had gone a little way in the direction of the institution, Mr. Bassett gave a deep moan and expired. The coachman, who is insensible from the injuries he has received, was also taken to the institution, and it is doubtful whether he will survive. Mr. Bagnall, who is severely injured about the head and other parts of the body, was removed to the house of a friend, and it is said that his case is also dangerous. The terrible news was indiscreetly communicated to Mrs. Bassett, when the unhappy lady, who is within a few days of her confinement, swooned away, and medical aid had to be at once sent for.

Thomas Samuel's son had been born in 1871, and as the newspaper cutting indicates, the daughter Phoebe was born a few weeks after the accident. **The son later emigrated to America; in 1896 he was settled in Bridgeport, Conn., where he married and had two sons.** Until the out-break of war he occasionally corresponded with my father (they were cousins), and he died in 1941 without ever having taken American citizenship. Both his sons have subsequently died leaving no issue, but the widow of the younger one is still living in Bridgeport.

The last child of Thomas and Elizabeth was Edward, born in 1820. The name first appears in the 1851 census as a provision dealer in Albion Street(6) with a wife named Harriet and five daughters, Catherine, Eleanor, Harriet, Emma and Clara, ranging from seven years to eight months. He recorded at this address in the directories of 1854 and 1855 as a shopkeeper. This is certainly the same man who married Matilda Farnsworth St. Martin's on 26 June 1855, as is proved by the bequests made in his will. In 1871 he was living in a back court of Ingleby Street as an electroplater with two children by this second marriage, Ann and Arthur William, age 12 and 8. In the intervening twenty years three of the earlier daughters had married; two had apparently died, for they were not mentioned in the will. Until his address at the 1861 census can be found, further details as to the fate of this earlier family cannot be established. In 1881 he had retired to an address in Sycamore Road, Handsworth, with is wife and her two children; also entered at this census was Edward Jodall, grandson, age 7 (presumably a visitor, for ten years later his other was a legatee in the will.) One curiosity is that the girl who as called Ann in 1871 appeared in 1881 at the proper age under the name of Mary - in the will she is again Ann. It will be recalled that Edward Bassett had received between £7,000 and £8,000 when his elder brother Thomas had died in 1874. This explains how it had been possible for him to retire from work in his mid fifties and escape from the confined back court to the more salubrious area of semi-rural Handsworth. He too had invested his legacy in house property, and in his will, signed on 31 Jan. 1891, he bequeathed nos. 23, 24, 25 and 26 Barr Street, Hockley, and nos. 70, 72,74,76,78 and 80 Sycamore Road, Handsworth, to his wife, and after her death two of these houses to each of his five children, Catherine Flemming, Emma Smallwood, Clara Goodall, Ann Bassett and Arthur William Bassett, with a further £100 to Catherine and Emma. At least two generations of Arthur William's descendants were known to exist thirty years ago.

We move on now to the remainder of Samuel's and Harriet's children. Before coming to my grandmother, her elder surviving brother Henry and her younger sisters must be dealt with briefly. Two of them were the only other Bassetts whom I knew personally. When we last saw Henry in 1861 he was a boy living at home and working as a toolmaker with his father. He married in 1865, but has not been found in the 1871 census. Ten years later he was in Ingleby Street in one of the properties which his father had acquired with the legacy he had received in

1874. He was described as a button-tool maker and had a daughter, Alice Blanche, age 10. According to the directories and the address on his will he later moved out to Lozells. He must have been fairly successful, and with the help of the property he inherited in 1891 and his fifth share of his father's personal state of £5,000 he was able to retire into the country. When we as children knew him in the 1920s he and his family were living in a large house at Alvechurch on the outskirts of Bromsgrove. Our visits there were always a great treat for us "townies" - his large garden, the pony and trap, and the novelty of being able to turn the chaff-cutting machine opened up a new world to us. I remember that he always said that our father was his favourite nephew. At the time this puzzled us, but now I understand that in him he had recognized the only trace of the Bassett enterprise and initiative which had penetrated through to the next generation. His daughter, a consumptive invalid, and her husband were living with them. This husband was an Australian, said to be a distant relative (presumably of Henry's wife.) He never worked, and lived the life of a country gentleman at the expense of his parents-in-law. He was at least an excellent woodcarver, and to this day is remembered by the inhabitants of Alvechurch as a great and good man for his work on the internal fittings of the ancient parish church of St. Laurence. Henry died in 1926. His will had been made thirty-four years earlier in 1892, and in spite of all his verbal promises to my father he never emended it: "All real and personal estate and effects to my wife Julia Ann for maintenance and benefit of herself and of my daughter Alice Blanche, and after the death of my wife to my daughter." Both his wife and his daughter died in the early 1930s. When the son-in-law died without issue he left everything to the local cats' home. Not much is known about Henry's sister Clara Maria. With her father she witnessed my grandmother's marriage in 1873, and when her father's will was made in 1878 she was still unmarried. However, in the codicil added in 1890 the man she married (or was to marry)* was made an executor. It seems that she must have died early, as apart from the names grandmother's stories never contained any reference to her.

With the other sister Phoebe the situation was a little different. She married a widower with several children named John Bowe, and for some years had my father's eldest sister living with her. The reason for this has never been explained, but its consequence was that in 1904 this aunt married one of John Bowe's sons by his first marriage. After Phoebe's without issue her husband took as his third wife a widow with a family, and so all records of the connection with the Bassetts were destroyed.

Remarkably little is known about the early life of our grandmother though we were in close contact with her during the last thirty years of life, she never spoke of herself. As will be seen when I treat of her children, when the youngest son died only five years after her death in 1938 all the family relics and heirlooms, including a fascinating collection of old photographs, were lost to us. From the documentary evidence all that is known is that in 1871 at the age of twenty-three she was described as a seamstress, and two years later she married my grandfather. The rest will become clear when he is discussed in the next section.

The development of these Bassett collaterals illustrates splendidly as the main line expired, the disadvantaged lines managed to proliferate. Economic necessity had forced them to abandon the traditional ethic of the gentleman landowner, who never worked with his hands for a living. They sank to the level of yeoman freeholders who had to reconcile themselves getting their hands dirty by themselves working their land. And finally, either through mismanagement, or by irresponsibly trying to live beyond means, or even perhaps because of the drain on their resources as a result of producing daughter after daughter, they became husbandmen who out the meagre living from rented land with the only available ancillary work as nailers. Then, even without education (a number of them could sign with their mark,)

energy and enterprise enabled them to make their in the hurly-burly of expanding industrialism. It shows also how different the opportunities offered by Birmingham in the nineteenth century those available in the rural backwaters of Warwickshire only a few miles away.

It is a pity that the most successful of the Birmingham men had no children. It would have been interesting to see what he would have had in mind for them; like most of the successful entrepreneurs he would probably be given them a public-school education in order to turn them back into productive gentlemen. As will be seen in the next section, all that the smell of his prosperity did was to raise among his relatives dim expectations of easy pickings, which served only to inhibit all initiative and nullify any gifts they were endowed with.

Without making any pretensions to be a demographer it is possible reach some tentative conclusions about the size of the families we have been discussing. As long as his property was entailed the first concern of a landowner was that he should produce a male heir, and thereafter only sufficient children to safeguard the succession in case the heir did not survive the critical early years. He would hope that in this gamble not too many of these later children would be daughters, for their marriage portions could be a disastrous drain on the resources of the estate. With the tenant farmer the position was reversed. A large family ensured more hands for working his land, and offered the prospect that in time he might extend his holding. This can already be seen in the case of Edward who died in 1608, whose last child was born fifteen years after the first, and of his son Walter, who still produced a son when his heir was seventeen years old. With Thomas in Sutton Coldfield the economic brake on fecundity was definitely off: between 1660 and 1683 there were thirteen children; and his sons Bartholemew and Edward had respectively eight and ten. This would appear without doubt to have been an important factor in the population explosion among the lower orders. These tentative conclusions are supported by some rough statistics compiled from sixty-five family reconstructions covering marriages which took place between 1690 and 1960. In addition to the Bassetts and Betterridges who are the subject of this study, they include a line of small metalworkers who moved from Sheffield to Birmingham around 1820 and nine generations of miners in the Leicestershire coalfield. Aggregated into thirty-year periods the results are as follows:

Marriages

1690-1720:	3,	producing	22	children.	Average	7 1/3
1720-1750:	2,	"	15	"	"	7 1/2
1750-1780:	5,	"	50	"	"	10
1780-1810:	5,	"	34	"	"	7
1810-1840:	17,	"	106	"	"	6
1840-1870:	8,	producing	52	children.	Average	6 1/2
1870-1900:	8,	"	18	"	"	2 1/4
1900-1930:	11,	"	29	"	"	2 1/2
1930-1960:	11,	"	19	"	"	1 3/4

The factory legislation in the middle of the 19th century will have had little effect in Birmingham; the small domestic workshops employing members of the family were exempt from these laws and escaped even the rudimentary system of inspection. So here, just as with the tenant farmers, a large family could be exploited to increase output. There was only one marriage among the miners which might have been influenced by Shaftesbury's bill of 1842 prohibiting the employment of children under the age of ten, and the evidence is that the

children of this marriage moved out of the coal mining area. The sudden fall in the birthrate after 1870 can undoubtedly be attributed to the Elementary Education Acts of that and subsequent years. It is well known that the bitterest opposition to this move came from the working classes; it prevented them from viewing their young children as economic units. When school attendance virtually doubled the period of the family's dependence on a single wage-earner, there was every incentive to keep the numbers down.