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WET-NURSES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND: SOME EVIDENCE FROM THE TOWNSHEND ARCHIVE

by

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Between them Dorothy McLaren and Valerie Fildes have pioneered the study of English wet-nursing. In her work on the parish of Chesham during the late sixteenth century, McLaren drew attention to the way in which prolonged lactation reduced fertility. Believing that most mothers understood this, she suggested that some women might have become wet-nurses in order to limit family size.[1] Fildes, casting her net much wider, has looked at wet-nursing from the earliest times until the present day.[2] In her work on the early modern period, Fildes has focused upon the Home Counties, where nursing babies from London was almost a local industry.[3] In particular, she has pointed the danger of confusing parish nurses, who were often themselves on poor relief and therefore not in a position to do the best for their charges, with professional wet-nurses who were usually well-paid and well-respected.[4] A failure to distinguish between these two types of nurse has led some historians, most notably Lawrence Stone, to associate all wet-nursing with parental indifference and neglect.[5]

Yet despite recent research, there is still much we do not know about wet-nursing. We have an overview of the subject but little detailed information about the nurses themselves. And even where information is available, it relates mainly to professional wet-nurses such as those living in the Home Counties.[6] The need then is for more small-scale research, as in the following case study which concentrates on individual wet-nurses employed by a particular gentry family, rather than on wet-nurses as a

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Quotations: all suspensions and contractions have been expanded. Original spelling has been retained but capitalization has been modernized. Arabic numerals have been used throughout.

[1] Dorothy McLaren, 'Nature's contraceptive. Wet nursing and prolonged lactation: the case of Chesham, Buckinghamshire, 1578–1601', *Med. Hist.*, 1979, **23**: 426–41. See also *idem*, 'Marital fertility and lactation 1570–1720', in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English society 1500–1800*, London, Methuen, 1985, pp. 22–53.

[2] Valerie Fildes, *Breasts, bottles and babies: a history of infant feeding*, Edinburgh University Press, 1986: *idem*, *Wet nursing: a history from antiquity to the present*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988.

[3] *Idem*, 'The English wet-nurse and her role in infant care, 1538–1800' *Med. Hist*, 1988, **32**: 142–73. See also, Gillian Clark, 'A study of nurse children, 1550–1750', *Local Population Stud.*, 1987, **39**: 8–23.

[4] Fildes, op. cit., note 3 above, p. 143.

[5] Lawrence Stone, *The family, sex and marriage in England 1500–1800*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, esp. pp. 99–102. See also Lloyd de Mause, 'The evolution of childhood' in *idem* (ed.), *The history of childhood*, New York, Psychohistory Press, 1974 pp. 1–73, esp. p. 35; Edward Shorter, *The making of the modern family*, London, Collins, 1976, pp. 175–204.

[6] Note 3 above.

group. The study gives background information about the nurses and traces connections between them and their employers. It also questions our assumptions about what lay behind the widespread use of wet-nurses at this social level.

The wet-nurses to be looked at are those employed by Sir Roger Townshend of Raynham, a leading member of the Norfolk upper gentry. In 1627, Sir Roger married Mary Vere, the daughter of the famous military commander Sir Horace Vere.[7] The wedding took place in London, but soon afterwards the couple moved to Norfolk, where they made their home at Stiffkey Hall on the north Norfolk coast, while the family seat at Raynham was being rebuilt.[8] Over the next ten years, the marriage produced nine children, including one stillbirth and one posthumous child baptized some nine months after her father's death (table 1).

Like most seventeenth-century gentlewomen, Mary Townshend did not breastfeed her own babies but hired a wet-nurse instead.[9] Material relating to the employment of these wet-nurses can be found in the Stiffkey Stewards Book and in a series of account books kept by Sir Roger's personal servant, John Maddock.[10] Additional material is provided by local parish registers and by other documents in the Townshend archive. A. Hassell Smith's work on Stiffkey during the time of Sir Nathaniel Bacon (Sir Roger Townshend's grandfather) has also proved useful.[11]

Table 1: CHILDREN BORN TO SIR ROGER AND LADY MARY TOWNSHEND: based on the Stiffkey Parish Register and the Stiffkey Stewards Book.

Roger Townshend m. Mary Vere 17 May 1627

	Baptized	Dead	Wet-nurse	Nurse's own child	Baptized
Roger	28 Dec. 1628		Nurse Powdich	Judith	23 Nov. 1628**
Mary	13 Jan. 1629/30		Elizabeth Hodges	Edward	10 Aug. 1629
Horace	16 Dec. 1630		?		
Ann	1 Nov. 1631		Nurse Goldsmith	?	
Jane	13 Nov. 1632		Elizabeth Hodges	Mary	13 May 1632
Stillborn son	(Oct. 1633)				
Elizabeth	18 Dec. 1634		Dorothy Tubbing	Mary	2 Apr. 1634
John	9 Sept. 1636*	14 Sept. 1636*	?		
Vere	30 Sept. 1637		?		

*East Raynham Parish Register
**Morston Parish Register

As table 1 indicates, we know the names of four Townshend wet-nurses, one of whom was employed twice. This accounts for the nursing of five out of the eight Townshend children born alive. Of the remaining three children, Horace and John

[7] Clements R. Markham, *'The Fighting Veres'*, London, Sampson Low, 1888, pp. 381, 434.

[8] Building work on the new house at Raynham continued throughout the marriage. See H. L. Bradfer-Lawrence, 'The building of Raynham Hall', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 1929, **23**: 93–146.

[9] Fildes, *Wet nursing*, op. cit., note 2 above, p. 79.

[10] For further details, see the list of main documentary sources printed at the end of this paper.

[11] For an overview of the work, see A. Hassell Smith, 'Stiffkey Project (SSRC): Unpublished End of Grant Report, 14 October 1981'. The Bacon documents collected by Professor Hassell Smith have been entered on a database, and I am grateful for his permission to quote from this material. See notes 17 and 42 below.

were almost certainly nursed near the family seat at Raynham and so were paid for through the Raynham accounting system rather than through Stiffkey.[12] Vere was born when the estates were being run by Sir Roger Townshend's executors, a period for which no detailed account books survive.[13]

Of the four wet-nurses whose names have come down to us, three can be positively identified. These are Elizabeth Hodges and Dorothy Tubbing, both of whom lived at Stiffkey, and Nurse Powdich—almost certainly Ann Powdich[14]—from the adjacent village of Morston. No positive identification can be made for Nurse Goldsmith because the Goldsmiths came from Langham, two or three miles from Stiffkey, and the Langham parish register has not survived. This makes it impossible to discover Nurse Goldsmith's maiden name. But we do know something about the Goldsmith family as a whole. They were the sort of family from whom local officials were chosen, payment being recorded to Thomas Goldsmith of Langham (perhaps Nurse Goldsmith's husband) "for quarter charges & towne armour".[15] The family would probably have been reasonably well-off, an idea confirmed by the fact that Sir Roger gave money not only to Nurse Goldsmith but also "to her maide".[16]

That Nurse Goldsmith should have come from a fairly prosperous sector of village society fits with what we know of the families of the other three wet-nurses. Elizabeth Hodges's husband Edward was the village carrier, his family before him having been carriers in Stiffkey since at least the 1590s.[17] Like the Goldsmiths, they were well-respected and financially secure.[18] In 1631 Edward himself held local office, collecting jointly with another villager "for King's dyett & other taxacions".[19]

The Tubbing family as well were quite prosperous. Dorothy Tubbing's husband, Speller, was related—as his name suggests—to the Spellers of Stiffkey, a family of yeoman farmers who also ran the village bakery.[20] In 1637 Speller was to inherit from his grandmother, Helen Speller, all her "houses, buildings, barnes, yards, backsides, landes, tenementes, meadows, pastures, and feedings".[21] Like the Goldsmiths, the Tubbings were sufficiently well-off to employ servants, payment of four shillings being recorded "to Speller Tubbine which he gave to Grove his maid servant . . . att her departure from his service".[22] And in Langham and Stiffkey, Speller Tubbing acted as bailiff to Sir Roger Townshend.[23]

[12] That Horace was nursed near Raynham, rather than Stiffkey, is suggested by the following accounting entry: "to yonge Hobson beinge sent from Raynham . . . to give notice of Mr Horace, his well beinge", 18 February 1630/1, Stiffkey Stewards Book. John was both baptized and buried at Raynham.

[13] The executors' accounts record only lump sum payments for "the maintenance of the children". See Executors Accounts of Edward Symonds, BL Add MS 41308 and Norfolk Record Office (NRO) Bradfer Lawrence MS VIa (xi).

[14] There was a whole family of Powdiches in Morston, but only Ann would have been nursing a child of her own when Roger Townshend was born.

[15] 20 September 1630, Maddocks Account Book.

[16] Michaelmas 1632, Stiffkey Stewards Book.

[17] Bacon Database, Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, *sub* Hodge, Hodges.

[18] See the will of Edward Hodge (d. 1600), NRO NAD Bastarde 76.

[19] 1 November 1630, Maddocks Account Book.

[20] See Linda Campbell, 'The women of Stiffkey', MA diss. University of East Anglia, 1985, p. 7.

[21] Will of Helen Speller (d. 1637), NRO NAD Bankes 251.

[22] 3 January 1634/5, Stiffkey Stewards Book.

[23] Executors Accounts, BL Add MS 41308, f. 3.

The Powdiches too were a family of yeoman farmers. Ann Powdich's husband, Richard, was a younger son who in 1623 had inherited all his mother's "howses, landes, and tenementes" in Morston, together with "four acres of freeland" in Langham.[24] Ann Powditch herself brought a portion of eighty pounds to the marriage.[25]

But the wet-nurses had far more in common with each other than simply their social backgrounds. Of the three who can be positively identified, all had previously been servants at Stiffkey Hall. Elizabeth Hodges, formerly Elizabeth Rickett, had been taken on as a servant when Sir Roger and Lady Mary married in 1627, and had stayed with them until her own marriage a year or so later.[26] Dorothy Tubbing, formerly Dorothy Jarman, had worked at the Hall between 1631 and 1633, when she too left to be married.[27] The case of Ann Powditch, formerly Ann Jeffreys, is rather different. Ann had probably grown up in the household of Sir Roger's mother, Lady Anne Townshend. When she died in 1622, Lady Anne bequeathed a legacy of thirty pounds to her servant Mrs Jeffreys—presumably Ann's mother—and ten pounds to Ann.[28] Ann was then taken on at Stiffkey, probably as servant to Sir Roger's sister, Anne Spelman, and remained there until her marriage to Richard Powditch in 1623/4.[29]

As former servants, these three wet-nurses would have been very well-known to the Townshends, especially because there was not at this time the same gulf between the gentry and their servants as was to develop later on.[30] In Sir Roger Townshend's time, servants still shared some of the living space used by the family rather than being hidden away in separate quarters, so the family came to know them well.[31] Servants were also quite literally part of the family, the term "family" having rather different connotations then than it does today. In the seventeenth century, the words "family" and "household" were used interchangeably. As head of the household, Sir Roger stood *in loco parentis* to his servants.[32] When maidservants married, it was therefore usually Sir Roger who paid the bills for the celebrations. The scale of what he provided can be judged by the six and three quarter gallons of "claret wyne" ordered for Dorothy Jarman's wedding, and the "eighty persons att dynner", "over sixty persons att supper" when Ann Powditch married.[33] When Ann Powdich married, it was also Sir Roger Townshend who negotiated her marriage agreement and paid over the eighty pounds for her portion.[34]

But there is another sense too in which female servants can be seen as part of the family, for some acted as companions to Sir Roger's wife. When Mary Townshend

[24] Will of Ursula Powdich (d. 1623), NRO NAD Hill 178.
[25] Marriage Agreement of Richard Powdich and Ann Jeffreys, NRO BRA 926/71.
[26] Stiffkey Stewards Book.
[27] Stiffkey Stewards Book.
[28] Will of Lady Anne Townshend (d. 1622), PRO/PCC/15 Swann.
[29] Stiffkey Kitchen Book, NRO microfilm 227/4.
[30] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English country house: a social and architectural history*, Yale University Press, 1978, pp. 138–43.
[31] This is evident from the inventory taken after Sir Roger Townshend's death. See H. L. Bradfer-Lawrence, 'Stiffkey alias Stewkey', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 1929, **23**: 308–40, pp. 321–35.
[32] Peter Laslett, *The world we have lost—further explored*, 3rd ed., London, Methuen, 1983, p. 2.
[33] 4 May 1633, Stiffkey Stewards Book; 14 January 1623/4, Stiffkey Kitchen Book, NRO microfilm 227/4.
[34] See note 25 above.

first came to Stiffkey, she was still very young and a complete stranger to the area.[35] Apart from some distant relatives of her mother's, she knew nobody in Norfolk.[36] In the early years then, Lady Mary would probably have looked to her female servants for friendship and support. From the account books, it seems that in turn both Elizabeth Hodges and Dorothy Tubbing were among Lady Mary's companions.[37] In addition, Dorothy Tubbing seems to have taken some responsibility for looking after the Townshend children, there being a record of money paid to Sir Roger Townshend "when Dorithy Jarman [Tubbing] was there with Mr Roger in her armes".[38] (Roger was the Townshends' eldest son, see table 1.) So not only would Lady Mary have known Dorothy well, she would also have known how she coped with young children.

Even after her servants married and left, Lady Mary seems often to have kept in contact with them. In 1632 she sent ten shillings to the christening of Elizabeth Hodges's daughter,[39] and in 1634 she had a visit at the Hall from Dorothy Tubbing who was by this time married with a child of her own.[40] Significantly, both Elizabeth Hodges and Dorothy Tubbing named their first-born daughters "Mary" (table 2). Former servants, then, were women whom Lady Mary knew personally and could trust. As such, her employment of them as wet-nurses was simply an extension of their previous role within the household. Ann Powdich, though, had been a servant before the Townshends married, so she could not have been known personally to Lady Mary. Sir Roger, however, would have watched Ann growing up in his mother's household and would have known her character well.

According to the account books, Townshend babies were wet-nursed until they were about a year old, nurses receiving a wage of ten pounds a year, usually paid half-yearly.[41] In addition, nurses could expect to be given presents of money at the christening.[42] These earnings compare very favourably with the three pounds a year paid to Elizabeth Hodges and Dorothy Jarman when they were employed as servants before they were married,[43] although as servants they would have received board and lodging as well. Whether they also received board and lodging as wet-nurses, is difficult to judge.

[35] Mary had been born in Holland and had spent the early years of her life there. When she was brought back to England, she seems to have lived in London. Markham, op. cit., note 7 above, p. 381.

[36] Sir John Tracey of Burnham (about eight miles from Stiffkey) appears to have been related to Mary's mother, whose maiden name was Tracey.

[37] Stiffkey Stewards Book.

[38] 9 March 1630/1, Maddocks Account Book.

[39] 23 May 1632, Stiffkey Stewards Book.

[40] 5 September 1634, Stiffkey Stewards Book.

[41] The following entries are typical. "To Elizabeth Hodges for the half yeare ended att or aboute Maie Day next, for the nurssinge of Mrs Jane Townshend (by command from my master), paid her, £5" (2 December 1633); "To Speller Tubbine for his wiffe nursinge Mrs Elizabeth for halfe the yere to be ended att or aboute the 10th of June next, £5" (28 May 1635), Stiffkey Stewards Book. For other examples of wages paid to wet-nurses, see Fildes, *Breasts, bottles and babies*, op. cit., note 2 above, p. 161.

[42] It was usual for both the midwife and the wet-nurse to be given presents at the christening. Since the gentry habitually gave gratuities to servants when they visited each other, nurses might well have been given presents on other occasions too. For examples of presents given to Sir Roger Townshend's own nurse by his grandfather Sir Nathaniel Bacon, see Bacon Database, Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 4/15818 and 4/16500.

[43] Stiffkey Stewards Book.

Table 2: CHILDREN BORN TO TWO OF THE TOWNSHEND WET-NURSES: based on the Stiffkey Parish Register.

Edward Hodges m. Elizabeth Ricket 7 Oct 1628			Speller Tubbing m. Dorothy Jarman 2 May 1633		
	Baptized	Dead		Baptized	Dead
Edward	10 Aug. 1629		Mary	2 Apr. 1634	
Mary	13 May 1632		Speller	30 Dec. 1637	
Robert	30 Mar. 1634	10 Nov. 1634	William	23 May 1640	
Elizabeth	20 Oct. 1635		Dorothy	20 Oct. 1643	
Robert	12 Nov. 1637				

In general, it is thought that only royalty and members of the upper aristocracy employed living-in wet-nurses, other families keeping nurses with them only until the baby was baptized.[44] It also seems unlikely that a wet-nurse would have wanted to live in, given that she would have had domestic responsibilities of her own. In the Townshend household, the steward arranged for repairs to the nursery windows at around the time the first baby was born, suggesting that in the early weeks the wet-nurse was in residence.[45] Subsequently he bought pins for the use of both Lady Mary and the nurse and, two months after the baby was baptized, "a new bedcorde for the bedd in the nursserie".[46] This suggests that the nurse remained in residence for some while. It may be, however, that the situation was not clear-cut. A wet-nurse who lived locally, particularly a former servant, would have found it quite easy to live at home and yet still spend some time at the Hall. It may also be that special arrangements were made for this first baby, because he was the family heir.[47]

But whether she lived in or not, a Townshend wet-nurse was certainly well-paid.[48] Her work also carried with it a degree of prestige since the Townshends were so important locally.[49] Close links with Sir Roger, who wielded considerable power, could only be beneficial both to the wet-nurse and her family. And the Townshend babies too would, in turn, grow up to be influential in their own right.[50] There was every incentive then—if incentive were needed—for the Townshend wet-nurses to take very good care of their charges. That they did so is evident from table 1. Of the eight Townshend children born alive, only one died before weaning. Even here there is no evidence of neglect. The very close proximity between the date of John Townshend's

[44] Fildes, op. cit., note 9 above, p. 79, 81.

[45] 27 November 1628, Stiffkey Stewards Book.

[46] The pins were purchased 10 January 1628/9 and the bedcord was purchased 27 February 1628/9. Roger Townshend was baptized 21 December 1628; see table 1.

[47] It has been suggested that different arrangements were sometimes made for different children within the same family. See Fildes, op. cit., note 9 above, p. 81.

[48] This confirms Fildes's findings: ibid., p. 100.

[49] Gary Lynn Owens, 'Norfolk, 1620–1641: local government and central authority in an East Anglian county', Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1970, esp. pp. 32–33.

[50] It was quite usual for the children and their families to remain in contact with former wet-nurses: Fildes, op. cit., note 9 above, p. 100.

baptism and the date of his burial, suggest that he was probably a sickly baby, baptized soon after birth and dead a few days later.[51]

Yet although the Townshends chose their wet-nurses with care, they did not apparently choose them according to the prevailing wisdom of the day. Fildes tells us that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical literature, the sex of the nurse's own baby was considered very important. Variously, writers advised either that the nurse's child should be a boy, because mother of boys produced better quality milk, or else that it should be the same sex as the baby to be suckled, to prevent inappropriate sexual characteristics transmitted in milk.[52] As table 1 indicates, the Townshends seem to have paid little attention to either theory. Nor do they seem to have worried much about the age of the nurse's baby. This was another matter on which contemporary advice books had much to say, there being a dispute as to whether a mother's milk improved or deteriorated as her baby grew older.[53] At the time of their initial appointment however, wet-nurses to the Townshend family had babies ranging from as little as a few weeks old to as much as six or eight months (table 1).[54] It was presumably more important for the Townshends that a wet-nurse was well-known to them and considered trustworthy, than that she should have a baby of a particular sex or age.

As well as providing background material about individual wet-nurses, the Townshend material can also be used to illustrate the way in which prolonged breastfeeding delayed conception.[55] Lady Mary, who put her babies out to nurse rather than feeding them herself, produced a child almost every year. Her wet-nurses, who probably suckled their own babies for two years or more, and sometimes other babies besides, produced children only every two or three years (tables 1 and 2).[56] So, by employing wet-nurses, gentlewomen like Lady Mary condemned themselves to almost yearly childbirth, a gruelling and very debilitating prospect.[57] Why they should have allowed themselves to be put in this situation when there was an obvious remedy close to hand, is difficult to say. But it is impossible to believe that gentlewomen simply did not notice ordinary women giving birth less often, nor is it likely that they had not worked out for themselves the reason why.[58]

One of the explanations most often put forward to explain why wet-nurses continued to be used by the upper classes of this period, despite the disadvantages, is

[51] It is possible that John Townshend was born prematurely, for it is difficult to see why else Lady Mary should have chosen to give birth at Raynham where building work was still going on. See table 1 and note 8 above.

[52] Fildes, op. cit., note 41 above. More recently, Fildes has noted that the ancient Greek physician Soranus believed the sex of the wet-nurse's child to be irrelevant: Fildes, op. cit., note 9 above, p. 21. Whether the writings of Soranus were available in early modern England, is not clear.

[53] Fildes, op. cit., note 41 above, pp. 176–7.

[54] These calculations assume that the wet-nurse's own children were baptized within a week or so of birth: see Roger Schofield and E. A. Wrigley, 'Infant and child mortality in England in the late Tudor and early Stuart period', in Charles Webster (ed.), *Health, medicine and mortality in the sixteenth century*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 62.

[55] See note 1 above.

[56] Families have been reconstituted for only two of the three identifiable wet-nurses, because the records for Ann Powdich appear to be incomplete.

[57] See Jean Towler and Joan Bramall, *Midwives in history and society*, London, Croom Helm, chs. 4 and 5.

[58] McLaren, 'Marital fertility', op. cit., note 1 above, p. 25.

that this is what husbands preferred. It is said that breastfeeding distracted a wife from the duty of ministering to her husband, and that it interfered with a couple's social life and with their sex life, there being a taboo against sexual intercourse with nursing mothers.[59] Breastfeeding is also thought to have spoiled the shape of a woman's breasts and, being a messy business, to have prevented the wearing of fashionable clothes.[60] This too was presumably displeasing to her husband. Such explanations are convincing only up to a point however, and there are other factors of which they take no account.

Whilst it is indeed likely that nursing mothers found their lives somewhat disrupted, regular childbearing in itself would also have caused problems. Many women would have been ill at some stage during their pregnancies and most would have found it difficult to travel. As a result, they were likely to find themselves left behind at home if their husbands had to go away for some reason.[61] Childbirth too was a time of extreme upheaval for everybody concerned.[62] The disruption caused by breastfeeding then was probably slightly less than the disruption caused by repeated childbearing. As for the alleged taboo on sexual intercourse, as Fildes points out, this was associated with Roman Catholicism and evidence for its existence in England has never been found.[63] That such a taboo was not observed by the Townshend wet-nurses is indicated in tables 1 and 2 which show that Elizabeth Hodges's second son, Robert, was conceived when his mother was acting as wet-nurse to Jane Townshend. On the question of disfigured breasts, midwifery textbooks of the day do suggest a real basis for these fears.[64] But we should take some account too perhaps of the effects of repeated pregnancies, both on a woman's figure and her health.

The main problem with the explanations put forward so far, however, is that they take no account of love and affection. Yet there is ample evidence, from at least the sixteenth century onwards, of husbands and wives who cared for each other very much. And when a wife was pregnant her husband knew the risks involved.[65] In such a marriage, then, pregnancy and childbirth might be almost as harrowing for the husband as for the wife. Sir Roger Townshend, who was often away from Norfolk, especially during the early years of the marriage, managed always to be home with his wife when her delivery was imminent.[66] That he should always be there was taken for granted, the London agent writing in 1632: "I dare nott looke to see you heare before

[59] Fildes, op. cit., note 41 above, pp. 102–5.

[60] Ibid., pp. 100–1.

[61] Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, p. 62. It is evident from John Maddock's account books that Lady Mary only ever managed to visit London in the spring, when she was either between or in the early stages of her pregnancies. Otherwise, Sir Roger went to London on his own.

[62] See note 57 above.

[63] Fildes, op. cit., note 41 above, p. 105.

[64] Ibid., p. 101.

[65] See Linda Pollock, *A lasting relationship: parents and children over three centuries*, London, Fourth Estate, 1987, pp. 31–8.

[66] This is evident from both John Maddock's account books and the Stiffkey Stewards Book. It is unlikely that Sir Roger was actually present at the birth, since childbirth in the seventeenth century was usually attended only by women. See Patricia Crawford, 'The sucking child: adult attitudes to childcare in the first year of life in seventeenth-century England', *Continuity and Change*, 1986, **1**: 23–52, p. 42.

my Ladye be brought to bedd, for I knowe she lookes shortlye".[67] This sentiment is echoed elsewhere in the archive as well. Another Norfolk gentleman, Philip Woodhouse, wrote from Thetford in 1636/7: "Sir, I must entreat to be excused from coming to Raynham for some four days. My wife being lately brought to bedd, she remayneth still in that weaknes as I may not be absent from her".[68]

For a devoted husband then, the birth of a new baby was a very anxious time and he had every reason for not wanting his wife to run the risk too often. But there were other reasons a well for a husband not wishing his wife to have too many babies. In the long term especially, children could be expensive. At the level of gentry, it was not just a question of bringing up children and educating them, there was also the need to set younger sons upon suitable careers, and to provide daughters with marriage portions.[69] All this could be very costly. Too many children, particularly in successive generations, could spell financial ruin for a family.[70] So although there was probably a general desire for children and most especially for a son and heir, the disadvantage of excessive numbers of children must also be recognized.

But if it was in the interests of both gentlemen and their wives that births should be deliberately spaced and family size limited, it seems almost perverse of them to have used wet-nurses. It seems even more perverse when we consider that gentlewomen usually married in their teens or early twenties, some ten years earlier than women lower down the social scale.[71] This meant that they were sexually active for longer than other women and, more importantly, that they were sexually active during the most fertile period of their lives.[72] Given what we know of the contraceptive effects of breastfeeding and given too that early modern women must have had this knowledge, there is no logic to the gentry's use of wet-nurses. Logic may have had little to do with it, however. The use of wet-nurses was traditional among the English upper classes and went back at least to medieval times.[73] The thinking behind the practice may therefore have been rather more deep-seated than is sometimes allowed for. It is just possible, for instance, that over the years breastfeeding had come to be associated only with the lower orders. If so, some might have seen it as degrading for a gentlewoman to suckle her child.

But if breastfeeding was seen as degrading, this is in direct conflict with what we know of those few gentlewomen who did nurse their own children. For these women were apparently seen by contemporaries as exceptionally good mothers.[74] It is also in conflict with the notion put forward by some puritan ministers, that it was every

[67] Folger Shakespeare Library MS Ld 420.

[68] BL Add MS 41654, f. 12.

[69] Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English family 1450–1700*, London, Longman, 1984, ch. 7.

[70] For some examples, see Mary Finch, *The wealth of five Northamptonshire families 1540–1640*, Northamptonshire Record Society, 1956, p. 78, 175.

[71] E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The population history of England, 1541–1871: a reconstruction*, London, Edward Arnold, 1981, p. 255; Houlbrooke, op. cit., note 69 above, pp. 65–6.

[72] Wrigley and Schofield, op. cit., note 71 above, p. 254.

[73] Fildes, op. cit., note 9 above, ch. 3.

[74] Ibid., pp. 84–7.

wife's duty to nurse her own child.[75] This last point poses particular problems where the Townshends are concerned, since Sir Roger Townshend is known to have been a devout puritan.[76] It may be, therefore, that we have only a partial view of what lay behind the use of wet-nurses, and that there are aspects of the matter taken for granted by contemporaries, of which we are unaware.

The importance of the Townshend material is that it allows us to identify and look very closely, albeit only through the records of one family, at a type of wet-nurse not previously studied. For unlike the privately-employed nurses studied by Fildes, the Townshend nurses were almost certainly not professionals, there being little call for professional wet-nurses along the north Norfolk coast. Given that most gentry children would have been brought up on country estates, however, the Townshend nurses probably represent a not insignificant proportion of early modern wet-nurses as a whole.

The Townshend material is also important for the details it provides about the relationship between the women employed as wet-nurses and the Townshend family themselves. That these women were well-known to the family and had been so over a period of years, suggests that they were chosen with considerable care. This in turn undermines any notion which links the employment of a wet-nurse automatically with parental indifference and neglect.[77] As such, this material adds further weight to previous criticisms of the work of Lawrence Stone.[78]

So far, the Townshend material is the first to suggest that the gentry might have chosen former servants to be wet-nurses. Whether this material is typical, awaits the publication of comparable research. Given the difficulties of tracing former servants though, and the time-consuming detective work involved, such information is only likely to become available as a by-product of a detailed family study.[79] Similarly, questions raised as to our understanding of the use of wet-nurses, may only be answerable when more in-depth research has been carried out.[80]

[75] Ibid., p. 88.

[76] Kenneth W. Shipps, 'Lay Patronage of East Anglian Puritan clerics in pre-Revolutionary England', Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1971, pp. 147–8. See also, Edmund Gibson (ed.), *The English works of Sir Henry Spelman Kt., published in his life-time; together with his post-humous works relating to the laws and antiquities of England; and the life of the author*, London, 1728, p. lxiii.

[77] That the employment of a wet-nurse need not necessarily imply a lack of concern for the child, is also noted by Crawford, op. cit., note 66 above, p. 33.

[78] See for example, Linda Pollock, *Forgotten children: parent-child relationships from 1500 to 1900*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 58–9.

[79] This paper draws upon a much wider piece of research based around the life of Sir Roger Townshend, which is to be submitted to the University of East Anglia for the degree of Ph.D. It also draws on Professor Hassell Smith's research, see note 11 above.

[80] There is a considerable body of material which has yet to be studied by historians; see Crawford, op. cit., note 66 above, p. 25.

MAIN DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Account Books

John Maddock's Account Book (1627–8)	Folger Shakespeare Library MS vb 161
John Maddock's Account Book (1628–9)	NRO Towns MS 1601 1 C 7
John Maddock's Account Book (1629–30)	NRO RAY MS 464
John Maddock's Account Book (1630–1)	NRO Towns MS 1602 1 C 7
John Maddock's Account Book (1631–2)	NRO Towns MS 1603 1 C 7
John Maddock's Account Book (1632–3)	NRO Towns MS 1604 1 C 7
John Maddock's Account Book (1633–4)	NRO Towns MS 1605 1 C 7
John Maddock's Account Book (1634–5)	Raynham Hall Muniments
John Maddock's Account Book (1635)	NRO Towns MS 1606 1 C 7
Stiffkey Stewards Book (1626–1636/7)	Huntington Library HM (26559)

Parish Registers

East Raynham	NRO PD 369/1
Morston	NRO PD 492/2
Stiffkey	NRO PD 492/1

(NRO: Norfolk Record Office). I am grateful to the present Lord Townshend for allowing generous access to documentary material still at Raynham Hall.