A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500-1700

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Author: Tara Hamling

Catherine Richardson

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A Day at Home in Early Modern England does precisely as the title suggests – it takes its reader through the minutiae of a day in early modern England in painstaking detail using a combination of literary sources, historical documents (including court records, wills and inventories) and household objects. The monograph successfully establishes the social significance of the household as a site for constructing and shaping early modern experiences and identities, with a particular emphasis on the households of the upper-middling sort. The originality of this work lies in its chronological and social focus. Firstly, it expands the extensive existing scholarship on elite patterns of consumption and the materiality of the country house to include non-elite households. For the middling sorts, this monograph argues, the household and the objects within it were crucial in both the generation and consolidation of family wealth and social standing and the expression of a distinct identity. Secondly, it seeks to place the scholarship on the consumer revolution of the 18th century within a much broader historical context thus deflating somewhat the revolutionary nature of changes in patterns of consumption post-1750. Finally, in the detailed exploration of the uses and contents of domestic architecture, this book adds nuance to the scholarship around W. G. Hoskins' 'great rebuilding' theory by exploring urban as well as rural properties, and the investment in interior remodelling as a form of significant building modification. It identifies strong ties between the rebuilding and renovating of properties and key events in the middling household's lifecycle – appointment to civic office, a marriage, or a death and the subsequent shift in ownership.

The sheer scale of this undertaking presents the authors with a range of methodological difficulties. The 'middling sort' is an historiographical categorisation, imposed upon a vast proportion of early modern society and the authors argue that it is the very size of this social layer along with mutability of their fortunes that led those at the top to invest in buildings, decorative items and furnishings in an attempt to distinguish and consolidate their position. These individuals were influential on a local level, often holding civic positions and responsibilities and this justifies the geographical boundaries of this project: restricted to the midlands and the southern counties. The authors seek to mitigate the problem of fragmentary sources by analysing a huge range of historical documents, layering approaches and information to build a rich picture of life in early modern England. This 'interdisciplinary record linkage' (p. 17) requires them to engage with

a vast historiography, using case studies to illustrate each historiographical point. Inevitably with such an extensive undertaking, depth is sacrificed for breadth, but the result is a text that remains accessible for scholars across a wide range of disciplines and specialities.

A recurring theme throughout this book is the sheer volume of different functions and activities that took place in within the boundaries of the early modern household at any one time. This is clear from the beginning of the first chapter, in the waking patterns of different household members, and in the difficulties inherent in identifying the rooms in which the household slept. Prescriptive manuals reveal the morning routine to be a space for contemplation and prayer and this is further supported by Hamling and Richardson's use of court testimonies in which the quiet of this morning reflection was disturbed. The space and time in which to perform these spiritual obligations was, they argue, the first of many luxuries afforded to the middling sorts which set them apart from their poorer neighbours.

Once the family had breakfasted and dressed the middling household became a permeable space. Domestic servants and journeymen arrived from their own homes, whilst other members of the household ventured out to purchase provisions. This permeability changed the horizons of the household and the way in which it interacted with the local community and with commercial networks. Chapter two therefore focuses on the boundaries of domestic space. It highlights the problematic areas of the marketplace and the household's outdoor spaces in the construction of middling status and reputation. As middling households made provision for the usually communal activities of washing and cooking within the boundaries of their property, the backyard or the marketplace became informal points of contact between the middling sorts and their neighbours. They were the places in which the actions of the household came under scrutiny and, as such, were key to middling perceptions of correct behaviour and the creation of a group identity. The importance of the midday meal required both the mistress of the household and her servants to spend the remainder of the morning engaged in processes of preparing, preserving and cooking food. This chapter therefore explores the patterns of movement between food preparation spaces, and cooking spaces and how this altered perceptions of household boundaries. It locates developing ideas of middling identity in the kitchen, through the preservation of certain foods allowing them to be consumed all year round, through the possession of the skills and equipment to cook in many different ways, and in the acquisition of kitchen goods prized for their novelty rather than their durability.

Chapter three explores the midday meal not only as a means of sustenance but as a ritualised display of patriarchy and hospitality. Where the household retained a great hall, Hamling and Richardson note that this was generally furnished for dining. Evidence taken from inventories, however, shows that most properties also furnished the upstairs parlour (usually located above the hall) for dining. Moreover, the parlour was generally furnished more comfortably, indicating that it was used for dining on a regular basis. Halls, this monograph suggests, were retained by wealthy middling households as a symbolic indicator of hospitality. This symbolism was heightened by a tendency to bequeath large pieces of furniture associated with dining, such as tables and cupboards, to the eldest son as part of the property. Dining in this period therefore represented an ordered and well-governed household, and symbolised a commitment to the ideals of family and community that were fast becoming central to middling identities. As an important location for hospitality, the room in which the household dined was also a space in which to express this growing sense of identity using increasingly cheap ceramics and decorative tableware. Hamling and Richardson draw attention to a rapidly increasing market in tableware targeted at the middling sorts on which customised sentiments, or names and dates, could be added. As such they extend the reach of the scholarship on consumption put forward by Maxine Berg in *Luxury and Pleasure in 18th-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and others by identifying changing consumer behaviours almost one hundred years before 1750.

Once the midday meal had been taken, the household returned to work. Chapter four is therefore concerned with the unique position of the middling household as both producer and consumer of domestic goods in particular, which then shaped their domestic environments. Having explored the boundaries at the back of middling properties in chapter two, this chapter looks at the shop as a mediatory space between the

household and the community. Just as the location of parlours at the front of the house connected the household to the sights, sounds and smells of the local community, the opening of the shop board opened the house to the street. The shop board allowed scrutiny not just of the items for sale and the means of production, it was also a key physical and conceptual point of contact between the house and the community. It opened up sightlines to other's homes and businesses, and encouraged the watching and commenting on neighbours that characterised early modern life. This chapter also examines middling attitudes to business administration, particularly as the emphasis moved from the production of goods to the retail of (often imported) goods. As the business of middling sorts changed and expanded, so did methods of organisation and storage. These changes impacted upon the domestic environment through specialised items of furniture and the creation of areas within the household for business administration. Investment in, and ownership of, these business spaces and items further separated the middling sorts from their neighbours.

Chapter five explores 'cockshut light' (p. 177) – the period between work and bed in which the middling sorts engaged in sociable activities. This engagement in, and expectation of, leisure time was a defining element of middling identity and, as such, would be often be shared with neighbours and friends of similar social status. Hamling and Richardson trace many of these leisured activities to the parlour, itself a demarcation of upper middling status. These household spaces were richly decorated with images designed to inspire discussion and contemplation as well as expressions of institutional identity such as Church, State or profession. The formality of this leisure time amongst the middling sorts is, this chapter argues, yet another defining element of status in comparison to servants and lower status neighbours. Movement – between the household and the neighbourhood – also defined middling status, this chapter suggests. As the middling sorts moved inwards, towards the more private rooms of the house in a show of settled domesticity that was fast becoming a cultivated part of middling identities, young people and those of lower status moved outwards towards the boundaries of properties, or neighbourhood spaces, in order to enjoy time away from their parents, masters and mistresses.

Finally, the book closes with a return to the chamber for sleep with all the early modern householder's contingent fears of theft and fire. The threat posed by negligent or corrupt servants was ever present and this chapter cites numerous cases in which lower status neighbours, or servants took candles to bed, endangering the sleeping household. This book's consideration of the route through the house to return to the bedchamber highlights the transitional nature of household space, and gives a real sense of the cyclical character of early modern life and the nightly rituals of locking doors and putting out candles. A very visceral image of the early modern bedtime routine is created by Hamling and Richardson's descriptions of the changes in light, colour and temperature created by climbing the stairs, entering the bed chamber and drawing the bed curtains. It is a great pity that the publication of this book overlapped with Sasha Handley's monograph on *Sleep in Early Modern England* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016) as this would really have enhanced the material evidence contained in this chapter.

The overlap between Handley's work on sleep and this monograph highlights the breadth of topics covered by Hamling and Richardson. Each chapter of *A Day at Home in Early Modern England* contains sufficient scope and scholarship to be expanded into a monograph. What is presented here is, therefore, a beautifully detailed overview of the daily lives of the early modern middling sorts. As might be hoped of any study of material culture, almost every page contains colour images of rooms, buildings, and objects to illustrate and illuminate the authors' arguments. Importantly, Hamling and Richardson do not present the household as a contained unit. Throughout *A Day at Home in Early Modern England* they emphasise the links between household, neighbourhood and community and the way in which this was mediated by the building itself. As such, this book makes explicit the connections between the household and the social, cultural, economic, religious and political environment of the early modern period. Ultimately, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England* presents the complex issues surrounding early modern domesticity in an accessible and engaging manner, making it essential reading for anyone exploring the intricacies of life in this period.

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