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978-0-521-78203-6 - Kinship and Capitalism: Marriage, Family, and Business in the English-Speaking World, 1580–1740

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Kinship and Capitalism

This uncompromisingly empirical study reconstructs the public and private lives of urban business families during the period of England's emergence as a world economic power. Using a broad cross section of archival, rather than literary, sources, it tests the orthodox view that the family as an institution was transformed by capitalism and individualism. The approach is both quantitative and qualitative. A database of 28,000 families has been constructed to tackle questions such as demographic structure, kinship, and inheritance, which must be answered statistically. Much of the book, however, focuses on issues such as courtship and relations between spouses, parents, and children, which can only be studied through those families that have left intimate records. The overall conclusion is that none of the abstract models invented to explain the historical development of the family withstand empirical scrutiny and that familial capitalism, not possessive individualism, was the motor of economic growth.

Richard Grassby is a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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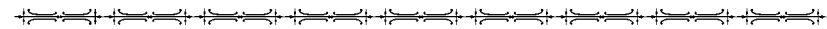
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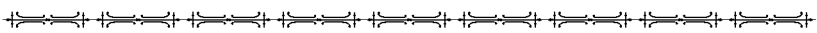
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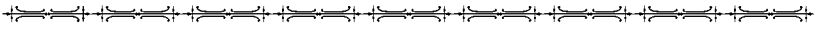
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To all vulgar empiricists.

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Abbreviations

Add.	Additional
BL	British Library
Bod	Bodleian Library, Oxford
C	Chancery
CLRO	Corporation of London Record Office
Cal. S.P.	Calendar of State Papers
CUL	Cambridge University Library
E	Exchequer
ESRO	East Sussex Record Office
GLL	Guildhall of London Library
GLRO	Greater London Record Office
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
India Off.	India Office Library, British Library
KAO	Centre for Kentish Studies
LAO	Lincolnshire Archives Office
Occ.	Occasional
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
PRO	Public Record Office
PROB	Probate records, Public Records Office
RO	Record Office
SP	State Papers
VCH	Victoria County History
WAM	Westminster Abbey Muniments

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Explanatory Notes

All statistics cited in the body of the text without a specific reference are derived from a database of London businessmen, the scope and construction of which is fully described in appendices A and B. Data cited from other studies of London without qualification refer to the whole metropolitan population.

A bibliography of manuscript sources has been provided, and the principal quantitative sources for the database have been listed in appendix A. All other works have been fully described on their first citation in each chapter. Place of publication is London for works published in English and Paris for works published in French.

Dates have been given in Old Style except that January 1 has been taken as the first day of the year.

Reference to wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury have usually been made by the old quire numbers, because the microfilms available to the author had been made before the wills were moved to the Public Record Office and foliated. Those wills read at the Public Record Office have been referenced by the folio numbers in the Probate records 11 class.

The database has been grouped into three subsets by period, wealth, and cohort, full details of which are provided in appendix B. These have been identified in the text as follows: Period I (deceased 1580–1659) and Period II (deceased 1660–1740); Brackets I (£0–500), II (£501–5,000), III (£5,001–50,000), and IV (over £50,000); and Cohorts I (born 1541–80), II (born 1581–1600), III (born 1601–60), and IV (born 1661–1700).

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Preface

Although this book is intended to stand on its own feet, it is also a sequel to *The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England*. When that volume was written the underlying data had not been computerized in a machine-readable format; some general issues were also set aside to be discussed in a separate book, *The Idea of Capitalism before the Industrial Revolution*, which has now appeared. In the present work, most of the relevant data have been presented, albeit in a compressed form, except that some data have been reserved for a planned, but still unfunded, final volume on the material culture of the business community. Although the technicalities of economic history usually provide a cordon sanitaire against the virus of cultural theory, any study of women or the family cannot adopt a neutral stance in the contemporary *methodenstreit* or culture wars. This work will probably be criticized for failing to use theory or to address gender issues. Any such omission is usually taken as a slight and interpreted as a threat to the security and validity of passionately held doctrines. On the other hand, weak scholarship, when dressed up in whatever theory is fashionable, is accepted without demur, providing that it conforms to and confirms orthodox doctrine.

Many of the questions raised in this book occupy that no man's land where empirical history meets theory-based disciplines. A prudent historian would genuflect to the reigning ideologies, drop the right names, and then quietly ignore them. Academics, as their past history of political collaboration suggests, are not noted for their courage or self-denial. Historians who loathe current shibboleths are reluctant to challenge those who control access to funding, preferment, and publication or risk becoming the messenger who is shot. It is safer to massage the egos

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Preface

of the intellectual celebrities and concur that the emperor is fully dressed.

In contrast, the tactic adopted here is full speed ahead with every battery firing and damn the torpedos. So uncompromisingly empirical an approach to the history of the family is likely to alienate all interest groups and provoke retaliation. But it is the duty of the scholar to extirpate error, root, and branch, without regard for the consequences. George Oxenden, when asked why he did not attempt to mollify his critics, replied that he had no time to alight from his horse to cast stones at every cur that barked at him (BL Add. MS 40,700, fo. 36).

Over the past twenty years the history of the family and of women has attracted several distinguished scholars, and this study builds on their work. The literature on the family also includes much pretentious rubbish. It is the practice of the present author to read everything, no matter how absurd, incoherent, derivative, long-winded, or boring, in the hope of finding some germ of an idea or some crucial fact. But many of these works have to be dismissed with the contempt that they deserve; nonsense is still nonsense, no matter how often it is repeated or by whom. Books and articles published after 1996 have only been consulted when available; much depends on random factors, such as the speed and order of cataloging by libraries and the timing of binding of periodicals.

It would have been impossible to complete this work without access to the New York Public Library, the Library of Congress, the Huntington Library, the Bodleian Library, and the library of the Institute of Historical Research in London. Essential funding has also been provided by fellowships from the National Endowment of the Humanities, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the American Philosophical Society, which provided a grant to microfilm thousands of documents.

Henry Horwitz turned over all his biographical notes on post-Restoration businessmen (which included material originally collected by Robert Walcott), and Sonia Anderson supplied similar information on the Levantine merchants. D. W. Jones responded immediately to an enquiry, enclosing the original copy of his thesis with data from the 1695 port book. The Center for Metropolitan Studies at the University of London provided access to a database on London in the 1690s. Bill Rothfarb helped to install and maintain essential software programs, and Ruth-Ellen Proudfoot provided statistical support. Al Laranjeiro shared the dreary task of inputting data.

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The general response rate to letters of enquiry has, on the other hand, been abysmal, and the author has had virtually no opportunity to discuss the ideas of this book with others in the field. Communication between scholars seems to have been easier in the seventeenth than in the late twentieth century. An independent scholar who lacks “accreditation” in effect has pariah status; he is treated with indifference or hostility, charged for access to libraries, excluded from conferences, and shunned by the journals. Specialized cliques seek to monopolize subject areas, exclude outsiders, and resist any competition, particularly if their views are challenged. In such a protectionist academic world there is little room for the free-trading interloper. Indeed, the academy has ceased to be a community of scholars; the writing of history, like soldiering and publishing, is no longer a profession for gentlemen or gentlewomen. Those who study English language and literature are incapable of constructing a meaningful sentence, and those who study the history of culture have no manners.

The battle between the ancients and moderns has been refought by successive generations for at least three centuries. But the destructive capacity of the weaponry has increased, and what began as limited warfare governed by chivalric conventions has become a total war of annihilation. The theoretical revolution also devours its own children. A contemporary obsession with novelty has accelerated the pace of revision and reduced the shelf life of any idea. The intellectual structures of the past have not been adapted to new needs, but bulldozed, leaving a wasteland.