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Malay, Jessica L.

Constructing Families: Associative Networks in the Seventeenth-century Cases of Mary and Katherine Hampson

### Original Citation

Malay, Jessica L. (2015) Constructing Families: Associative Networks in the Seventeenth-century Cases of Mary and Katherine Hampson. *Journal of Family History*, 40 (4). pp. 448-461. ISSN 0363-1990

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In August 1656 Mary Wingfield from Chatteris in Huntingdonshire married Robert Hampson, a twenty-nine year old London lawyer from a good family with a promising career and financial prospects. In every way this appeared to be an ideal marriage for the seventeen year old Mary, herself from the long established Wingfield family. In marrying Robert Hampson, Mary fulfilled both the expectations of early modern moralists and modern scholars who have long positioned marriage as the normative state for early modern women.<sup>1</sup> However, in that August of 1656 two other women joined the newly married couple in their London house in Holborn—Robert Hampson’s two unmarried sisters, Katherine and Margaret. The sixteen year old Margaret would marry Sir Giles Hungerford of Coulston as his second wife sometime before 1673, while Katherine, already thirty-nine, would remain unmarried throughout her life. The contrasting fortunes of the women who made up this household in 1656 provide a useful evidence on how marriage could benefit or disable a woman and shows that the single state was not necessarily disabling nor isolating. This exploration of the Hampson women also reveals that even within a single family the opportunities for women could differ significantly. By examining evidence provided by wills and related documents the importance of a network of relationships to a woman’s well-being and prosperity becomes apparant, while also revealing the the devastating effect the breakdown of this network could have on a woman.

The first years of Mary Wingfield Hampson’s marriage in the Holborn house with her sisters-in-law appear to have been peaceful with her first child, Elizabeth, born a little more than nine months after the marriage, and a son born thirteen months after the birth of his sister. However, this apparently content household was built on shifting sands. Robert Hampson

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<sup>1</sup> For early modern texts presenting the married state as normative see: Thomas Hilder, *Conjugall Counsell or Seasonable Advice* (London, 1653); William Thomas, *Christian and Conjugall Counsell* (London, 1661); Richard Baxter, *Mr. Baxters Rules and Directions for Family Duties* (London, 1681); John Dod and Richard Clever, *A Godly form of Householde Government* (London, 1612); William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622). For modern scholarship suggesting the marriage state as normative see: Gordon J. Schochet, *Patriarchalism in Political Thought*, New York: Basic Books, 1975; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Miriam Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century: The Verneys of Claydon House* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

owed money to his sisters Katherine and Margaret and two younger brothers. Shortly after the birth of Robert's son, his siblings were unwilling to wait any longer for their money. Mary Hampson describes the scene that broke out one evening in her autobiographical pamphlet. This pamphlet, published in 1684 presents a harrowing story of the decades of abuse she was to suffer, and which began that night in 1658:

He brought me up to London, to his house in Holbourn. Two of his sisters were with him some time ... His sisters were so civil as not to trouble him for their monys, untill I was brought to bed, and up again. Then the dispute between Mr. Hampson and his sisters was so hot in his study one night, that the out-cry came to me. Then Mr. Hampson told me he had no way to keep himself out of prison, and that he was ruined if I did not consent to the sale of my joynture.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Hampson owed his siblings £500 each according to the terms of his father, Sir Thomas Hampson's, will. This money was intended to buy his siblings out of investment property in the fenlands of East Anglia in order to give Robert a clear title. According to the terms of the will, this money was to be paid within six months of Sir Thomas's death in 1655.<sup>3</sup> By 1658 Robert's siblings were unwilling to wait any longer, and not only confronted him in the study as Mary describes, but also entered into suits against him.<sup>4</sup> Mary Hampson identifies this dispute and the subsequent loss of her first jointure as the catalyst for the physical, emotional, and financial abuse she was to suffer even after the death of Robert Hampson in 1688. It also marked the beginning of what would become her ostracism from the social and familial ties of her class and her complete estrangement from her children.

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Hampson, ed. Jessica L. Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson: Her Story of Marital Abuse and Defiance in Seventeenth-Century England*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) 23-56.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Hampson clearly believed he was providing his son Robert with a valuable asset given the wild optimism concerning the Bedford Levels project at the time. In reality, the draining of the fens was never very successful producing only poor grazing land, not the rich agricultural land once envisioned. In 1694 Robert's daughters sold Raveley fen for a hundred pounds, a tenth of what he paid Katherine and Margaret Hampson for that lot.

<sup>4</sup> C 6/42/100 Robert Hampson vs Katherine Hampson, 1659; C 6/77/30 Robert Hampson vs Ambrose, George, Katherine and Margaret Hampson, 1660, National Archives, Kew.

For the never married Katherine Hampson, this dispute was soon resolved to her satisfaction and not only helped further secure her life of financial prosperity, but was also instrumental in enabling her to enjoy the social and emotional benefits of motherhood as will be discussed below. In addition, Katherine Hampson's will reveals that despite the monetary conflicts she experienced with Robert she remained firmly imbedded in a family network of support and cordiality that continued to include her brother Robert throughout her life. The contrasting experiences of Mary as a married woman and widow, and Katherine Hampson, a never married woman, reveals the complexities inherent in the married and never married states of women in the early modern period that have at times been overlooked or underplayed in early modern scholarship.

Recent studies have begun to provide a more nuanced view of female status and roles in the early modern period, while others now probe the contention that the married state was most conducive to female well-being and fulfilment. Amy M. Froide's work on single women suggests that the number and the variety of roles single women played in society have been woefully under examined.<sup>5</sup> She also suggests that the choice of the married or never married state was always a complex interweaving of personal circumstances, attitudes, and opportunities. Sara Mendleson and Patricia Crawford have argued for the possibility that some women actively chose not to marry, and that there is some evidence that economic opportunities for single women were increasing.<sup>6</sup> Amy Louise Erickson claims that single English women "had more resources at their disposal than elsewhere in Europe."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> In Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-century England* (New Haven, Connecticut : Yale University Press, 2003). See also Sara Mendleson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Amy Louise Erickson, "Coverture and Capitalism," *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), 3.

Froide's analysis of demographic data has found that between 1574 and 1821 the number of single women in England averaged 30.2 percent of the adult female population.<sup>8</sup> This suggests that the never married state was not unusual nor necessarily isolating. She also suggests that, "in a society where widowhood was common, child mortality high, and single-sex socializing the norm, we may have overestimated the relative significance of spouses and children in early modern England."<sup>9</sup> Here Froide challenges earlier scholarship such as that by Miriam Slater. According to Slater "spinsterhood condemned one to a lifetime of peripheral existence; it was a functionless role played out at the margins of other people's lives" without even the possibility of bearing children. Slater further argues that for women "the single life was hardly an alternative lifestyle."<sup>10</sup> And while Pamela Sharpe is more willing to interrogate this broad generalisation. She too, after examining the life of the never-married Hester Pinney, who ran a lace business in late seventeenth-century London, comes to the conclusion that "the independence of single women was ambiguous."<sup>11</sup> This hardly ringing endorsement for the never married state is interesting given that Sharpe's evidence regarding the Pinney family that suggests Hester's never married state was considered desirable by her family. Her brother Nathaniel counselled against marriage to a Mr Cutlove, telling his sister, "Doe you think any woman in your circumstances ... did Ever Exchange a life of Ease and Delight without care or Labour, for a life of Care, Danger and Toyle?"<sup>12</sup> Sharpe also concludes that Hester, despite her success in business and financial independence was unable to "remove herself from family discipline."<sup>13</sup> However, what Sharpe's evidence of Hester's imbeddedness within her family suggests is that rather than marginalization (a fate one of her widowed sisters experienced), Hester remained in mutually supportive relationships with her family, that yes included

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<sup>8</sup> Froide, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Froide, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Slater, 78; Pamela Sharpe, "Dealing with Love: The Ambiguous Independence of the Single Woman in Early Modern England, *Gender & History* 11.2 (1999), 210.

<sup>11</sup> Sharpe, 226.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Sharpe, 220.

<sup>13</sup> Sharpe, 226.

compliance with certain familial expectations, but also provided her with the benefits of a kin circle. Froide's much broader study confirms that Hester Pinney is not an isolated example. Froide found that never married women were most often "imbedded in various social relationships."<sup>14</sup> Her analysis of never married women's wills reveals a much broader spectrum of relationships than married or widowed men and women that included aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, in laws, kinsmen and women, god children, friends and servants, along with parents and siblings.<sup>15</sup> Carmel Bigg's research supports this finding noting that female testators tended to spread bequests wider than the nuclear family in contrast to male testators.<sup>16</sup> An examination of Katherine Hampson's will supports this contention that never married women were often part of a large network of relationships as will be discussed below.

Wills by women make up about 20% of surviving wills from 1550-1750 and thus as Ronald Bedford and Philippa Kelly suggest "can be regarded as one of the main genres in which women wrote, or dictated, during the period." As such they claim, "as authors of wills, early modern women of diverse social levels inscribe and exercise agency."<sup>17</sup> Froide also identifies these aspects of agency in the wills of never married women:

Single women in early modern England most definitely used their wills as a means to define their social relationships and their place in the extended kin group. A never-married woman's last will and testament can be read as an autobiographical text that explains how she wanted to present her life (at the moment of her death), how she hoped to display her relationships, and how she wished to perpetuate her memory. A legacy from a never-married woman was significant not only in material but also in emotional

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<sup>14</sup> Froide, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Froide, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Carmel Biggs, "Women, Kinship and Inheritance: Northamptonshire 1543-1709," *Journal of Family History* 32:107 (2007), 118. Biggs does not disaggregate never married women from wives or widows.

<sup>17</sup> Ronald Bedford and Philippa Kelly, *Early Modern English Lives: Autobiography and Self-Representation 1500-1660* (Burlington Vermont: Ashgate, 2007) 203, 206.

terms. Bequests not only allowed a single woman to assist those important to her, they also let her symbolically realize the bond she had with a particular relative or friend.<sup>18</sup> As texts, wills function as autobiographical narratives revealing relationships, networks, connections, attitudes, living conditions, religious and moral judgements, a particular notion of community, and the sense of an individual's place within that community. However, wills are not straightforward expressions of autobiographical intent. They are mediated texts, and this mediation often obscures its own mediation and the agency of the testator. A number of people could be involved in the devising of a particular will including professional scribes or notaries, members of the clergy, friends and neighbours, and most especially other family members. A number of formularies were widely available providing testators with models to draw upon when composing their own final testament.<sup>19</sup> Thus, while wills certainly contain within the text much autobiographical material, the formal aspects and institutional function must also be considered in their interpretation. Though surprisingly, as in the case of Katherine Hampson's will, these very formal aspects can also reveal relationships and connections beyond their formal function.

The wills of never married women while similar in many ways to wills more generally in the period, also contain elements that are indicative of the testator's single status. As already noted above, never married women bequeathed goods and money to a wider kin group, and Froide's research identifies twenty-five different types of social relationships represented in wills of never married women. Of these nieces were often primary beneficiaries, while cousins (of varying degrees) were the third most common legatees.<sup>20</sup> God children also appear and their place in the wills of never married women and the importance of this relationship as

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<sup>18</sup> Froide, 79.

<sup>19</sup> See J.D. Alsop, "Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40.1 (1989), 20-21. See also Lloyd Bonfield, *Devising, Dying and Dispute: Probate Litigation in Early Modern England* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Froide, 46-47. See also Biggs, 107 and Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 190-1; 201-3.

shown through wills, may be underestimated because these legatees are often identified as nieces, nephews or cousins. It is also important to note that wills do not necessarily represent the entirety of a testator's estate nor gifts bestowed in life, thus the appearance of a primary relationship in a will based on the value of the legacy while suggestive, cannot be considered conclusive.

The will of Katherine Hampson conforms in many ways to these findings concerning the wills of never married women and the position of never married women in society more generally. It provides further evidence of the variety of relationships experienced by never married women and the possibilities for the exercise of agency. Moreover it tells a story, corroborated by other textual evidence, of Katherine Hampson's imbeddedness within a community and the nature of her primary relationships, most especially with Mary Wingfield Hampson's daughter Elizabeth.

Details of Katherine Hampson's life survive in a handful of documents and the oblique reference to her as one of the two sisters of Robert Hampson in Mary Wingfield Hampson's autobiographical pamphlet. Two of the documents are chancery suits concerning money owed to her according to the conditions of her father's will. The first of which entered in 1659 was in her name only.<sup>21</sup> Katherine also appears in three wills. In the will written by her uncle and godfather Nicholas Hampson she received a bequest of £250. She was left £2000 in her father's will, and also a fifth of any money left from his disposable estate after all his bequests and debts were paid, the exact amount of this bequest if any, is unknown.<sup>22</sup> From these texts it is clear that Katherine Hampson had a comfortable financial position upon the death of her father in 1655, and also that she resided with her brother Robert Hampson from around the time of his marriage in the summer of 1656 until the autumn of 1658. However it is her will dated 1

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<sup>21</sup> C 6/42/100, Robert Hampson vs Katherine Hampson, 1659 and C 6/77/30 Robert Hampson vs Ambrose, George, Katherine and Margaret Hampson, 1660, National Archives, Kew

<sup>22</sup> Prob/11/175, Will of Nicholas Hampson 1637; Prob/11/246 Will of Sir Thomas Hampson 1655, National Archives, Kew. The third will where she is mentioned is that of her sister, Rebecca Benet who makes a posthumous allusion to her, see below.



November 1677 (and proved in 1678 after her death that year) that is most suggestive of her financial condition, her life style, her community and the nature of her relationships.

This document is unusual in several respects. It is just over 3000 words and was written in Katherine Hampson's own hand. She states:

And I do make and ordain the said Robert Forest and Henry Hampson overseers of this my last will and testament containing seven sheets of paper all written with my own hand, and each sheet signed with my name, and sealed with my seal and on the label at the upper end, and I do revoke hereby all former wills and do publish this my last will and testament.<sup>23</sup>

One might be tempted to conclude from this careful instruction that Katherine Hampson was perhaps concerned that someone would meddle with her will. However, this is not the case. Instead, a comparison between Katherine Hampson's will and her father's makes clear she used his will as a template for her own. In his will Sir Thomas Hampson writes:

And I make and ordain the said Mr Ambrose Benet and Robert Forest the overseers of this my said last will and testament contained in three sheets of paper all written with my own hand and each sheet signed with my name and sealed with my seal and the label also I have sealed which fixeth the said three sheets together at the upper end thereof.<sup>24</sup>

There are also several similarities in the preamble between the two wills.<sup>25</sup> Two decades later, Katherine's sister, Rebecca Benet would also use her father's will as a template. Yet, while this formal aspect of Katherine Hampson's will illustrates the survival of paternal influence, it also provided an opportunity for Katherine Hampson to shape her will in ways that would not have been possible with the mediation of a lawyer, scribe, or printed format. Thomas

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<sup>23</sup> Will of Katherine Hampson Prob/11/357, 1678, National Archives, Kew. This will was written in 1677, but was proved after her death in 1678. Spelling and punctuation in quotations from this will and all other wills in this essay have been updated to conform to modern usage. All further references to Katherine Hampson's will refer to this document.

<sup>24</sup> Will of Sir Thomas Hampson, 1655. Katherine's sister Rebecca Benet also includes a similar passage in her will written in her own hand. The will of Rebecca Benet, Prob/11/428, 1693, National Archives, Kew.

<sup>25</sup> Rebecca Benet also uses this preamble in her will.

Hampson clearly felt that a written will in his own hand communicated his wishes with more authority and provided a greater authenticity in the expression of his desires. By adopting her father's practice Katherine Hampson was also able to draw upon both this authority and authenticity.

Katherine Hampson made her will in November 1677 in as she puts it, "serious consideration of the frail condition of men and women" followed by assurances that she was at the time of writing "being at this present in health of body, and of a good sound and perfect memory." Her stated intent was to be able to make arrangements for the disposal of her estate during a time of health so that:

Seeing the door to death so many ways opened upon us and that many times so suddenly that the surprize thereof breeds no small distraction betwixt the Soule and body, especially when wee have most to doe in making-up our great accompt with Almighty God and but little time and less ability to perform the same: I doe therefor most humbly and heartily implore his Divine Majesty for the assistance of his Grace and good Spirit in the so ordering of this my present life, that I may not be found unready or unwilling whensoever it shall please God to call me to his abundant Mercy.<sup>26</sup>

What follows are instructions for the burial of her body, and then on to the business of disposing of her estate.

The will does not mention any land or houses. Arrangements for these may have already been made by deed of gift or other legal mechanisms, or it may be that Katherine did not own any free or leasehold property. Extant wills do not indicate that she inherited any land, but rather that she inherited money. In the will there is clear evidence that she invested this money as she refers to bonds owed to her by Sir William Bowers and Mr Compears, as well as interest due on loans to her by her nephew Henry Hampson and her brothers Robert and

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<sup>26</sup> This statement is copied verbatim from the will of Thomas Hampson, though Katherine Hampson's choice to use this statement and the timing well in advance of her death suggests that she endorsed the sentiment and found that it accorded with her beliefs and concerns. Rebecca Benet also uses this preamble in her will two decades later.

Ambrose.<sup>27</sup> It is clear from the items bequeathed in the will that Katherine Hampson invested the various legacies left to her wisely and used them to sustain a comfortable gentry existence. Her will reveals a lifestyle that provides an example of what Natasha Korda describes as a life “centered around and mediated by objects.”<sup>28</sup> Katherine lists 154 items specifically, while indicating a large number of goods more generally: “a little Cabinet inlaid with black and white, with those things that are in it”; “all my wearing clothes that I doe not give away in writing or by word of mouth”; “a chest with a drawer, and those things that are in it”; “Great Cabinet and the china that stands on top of it”; “pictures”; “books”. More than this, the objects identified in Katherine’s will create what Bill Brown describes as a “general dynamic by which human subjects depend on inanimate objects to establish their sense of identity.”<sup>29</sup> From an examination of the objects listed in the will: the diamond rings, the rich lemon coloured hangings and fabrics, the riding saddle, the many beds, cabinets, sets of drawers, chairs, stools, china, and pictures and books, emerges a picture of a richly dressed interior space, signifying membership in the gentry class through which Katherine Hampson, as richly dressed, performed her identity as a gentlewoman. This materiality can be “understood as an effect registered by the human body and the human psyche.”<sup>30</sup>

Katherine’s will provides a container wherein a memory, a limited afterlife of this bodily effect, remains. It also functions as an agent of Katherine’s desires/intentions that allow Katherine’s identity to exist within her community after her death. The will attempts to influence future events enhancing the possibility that Katherine’s “will” and thus her identity,

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<sup>27</sup> For a discussion on the role of single women in providing credit in the early modern period see Judith M. Spicksley, “ ‘Fly with a duck in thy mouth:’ Single Women as Sources of Credit in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Social History* 32:2 (2007), 187-207 and Judith M. Spicksley, ‘Women, ‘Usury’ and Credit in Early Modern England: The Case of the Maiden Investor.’ *Gender & History* 27. 2 (2015), 263–292. Alexandra Shepherd also discussing this topic in “Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy,” *History Workshop Journal* 79.1 (2015), 1-24.

<sup>28</sup> Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies : Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) 8.

<sup>29</sup> Bill Brown, “The matter of materialism: Literary mediations,” in *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, eds. Tony Bennet and Patrick Joyce. (London: Routledge, 2010) 65

<sup>30</sup> Brown, 75.

will survive for potentially generations. The mechanisms for this extension are those objects mentioned in the will. Bruno Latour suggests that “things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence” human interaction, and that “by the very nature of their connections with humans, [objects] quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries.”<sup>31</sup>

At the death of the testator the will begins to function. This moment of crisis makes visible the transition of the object from mediator to intermediary. The objects, which once unobtrusively mediated Katherine Hampson’s performance of identity, become visible through the will in the first instance and their physical transference in the second. After death, these objects are deployed to ameliorate the effect of death through the construction of a community. Death provides objects with what Brown describes as a hyper-presence in the social and psychological dynamics between human beings.<sup>32</sup> For this short period the objects “appear associable with one another and with social ties” though as Latour reminds us, this is only momentary.<sup>33</sup> But within this moment communities are constructed. Katherine Hampson’s will forms a complex and extensive community through her bequests. A momentary network of associations emerges with a variety of actors including individuals such as the executors and overseers, legal and cultural processes, mechanisms of physical transfer, and communication systems. Both the catalyst for the construction of this network and imbedded within it is the identity of Katherine Hampson. This momentary network emerging from the crisis of her death overlays Katherine Hampson’s lived community. It is represented through the dispersal of those objects that once informed her identity and that after her death retained this identity through the function of the will, at least for a time.

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<sup>31</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social : An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 72, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Brown, 62

<sup>33</sup> Latour, 79.

Katherine Hampson lists seventy-two beneficiaries by name, along with six anonymous maids, the poor of the parish where she died and the poor of the parish where she would be buried. These named beneficiaries represent a number of relationships. It is useful then to think of Katherine Hampson's bequests as forming associative communities of degrees of intensity (and longevity). The largest and least intense were those who received cash bequests alone. These included people listed as cousins, godchildren, friends, the six-maids who were to accompany her body to its resting place, and the poor of the parish. This gift of money was certainly designed to remind the beneficiaries of their association with Katherine Hampson and at least create a momentary associative community. And while the longevity of this particular community was likely to be short-lived, it does indicate that the named individuals made up some part of Katherine Hampson's lived community. The next, more intimate group, included a number of individuals who received both cash bequests and the bequests of objects. This is a group made up of both friends and relatives. The most powerful indication of the degree of intensity of the relationship of this group with Katherine Hampson was the bequest of mourning objects that were to include a knot of her hair. In her will Katherine states: "I give and bequeath to my worthy kindred, relations, and friends hereafter named twenty shillings apiece to make their mourning rings or seals or lockets with a knot of my hair in it ... to wear for a memorial of me." She lists seventeen names in this bequest.

Angela Rosenthal describes late seventeenth-century gifts of hair in memorial jewellery "as a practice simultaneously performative and absorptive. For mourning jewellery though made to be worn, consciously encloses hair as an intimate treasure of personal reflection."<sup>34</sup> According to Maureen DeLorme, the purpose of memorial jewellery of the later seventeenth century changed from functioning as a *memento mori* reminder of the transience of life, to a

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<sup>34</sup> Angela Rosenthal, "Raising Hair," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.1 (2004) 11 (1-16).

*memento illius* commemorating another person.<sup>35</sup> These objects made from the body of Katherine Hampson again attempt to secure a community associated with Katherine that like her hair could survive her physical death. The function of each piece of mourning jewellery was to serve as an intermediary between Katherine and each of the recipients of this bequest. This bequest also created a connection with Katherine's primary familial group.

Katherine's bequest of mourning rings contains within it an allusion to a narrative of intimacy between Katherine Hampson, her widowed sister Rebecca Benet, and Elizabeth Hampson—her niece, god-daughter and long time foster daughter. Katherine explains in her will that her named beneficiaries are to “make their mourning rings or seals or lockets with a knot of my hair in it, *as my Sister Benet knoweth how to tie them, and so doth my niece Mrs Elizabeth Hampson.*”<sup>36</sup> This phrase suggests that the three women had shared the making of memorial knots of hair from the dead in the past, with perhaps Katherine and Rebecca teaching the young Elizabeth the craft. The statement imagines a future intimate moment when Rebecca and Elizabeth join together to take Katherine's hair, shorn off her dead body, and shape at least seventeen mourning knots. The knots, transferred to the seventeen “worthy kindred, relations, and friends,” created a community of remembrance with Katherine at its centre.

Katherine Hampson's largest bequests remained within her primary familial group that can also be divided into those individuals who formed part of her household and those outside her household with whom she was most closely aligned. The group outside her immediate household was made up of Katherine's surviving brothers Robert and Ambrose, her married sisters Margaret and Anne, her brother-in-laws Sir John Laurence and Sir Giles Hungerford, her nephews John Laurance, Dennis Hampson and George Hampson, her nieces Margaret Hungerford and Anne Laurence, her sister-in-laws Grace and Mary Dennis Hampson, Thomas Turner (a close family friend), and Robert Forster (overseer of both her and her father's wills,

<sup>35</sup> Maureen DeLorme, *Mourning Art and Jewelry* (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer, 2004) 65. See also Kathleen M. Oliver, “‘With My Hair in Crystal’: Mourning Clarissa,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23.1 (2010) 36.

<sup>36</sup> Italics added.

and a relative). She bequeaths members of this group objects of intimacy including diamond rings, and makes large cash bequests to them from 50 to 200 pounds.<sup>37</sup>

Katherine's most intimate family group was made up of her sister Rebecca Benet, and her nieces Elizabeth and Mary, daughter of the unfortunate Mary Wingfield Hampson and Robert Hampson. Elizabeth was placed in Katherine's care sometime between 1663 and 1664, when Elizabeth was five or six. In a deposition taken during the legal battles between Robert and Mary Wingfield Hampson, Robert explains to the court that he placed Elizabeth with his sister Katherine.<sup>38</sup> In a legal document dated 1694 Elizabeth told the court that she was "bred up with her aunt Katherine Hampson who had "a love and affection" for her.<sup>39</sup> It is unclear how long the young Mary Hampson (second daughter to Robert and Mary Wingfield Hampson) resided with her aunt Katherine and her sister. Robert Hampson's testimony in 1670 says that he placed his daughter Mary with her Wingfield relatives. However, as the second largest beneficiary in Katherine Hampson's will, the young Mary was clearly a part of Katherine's closest familial group.<sup>40</sup>

The bequests to the members of this all female household are extensive including several rooms of furniture, hangings and fabric, valuable jewellery including rings of diamonds and other precious stones, large strings of pearls, pendants, and other objects. Here is where Katherine bequeaths her books, most of her pictures, her silver, her linen as well as more mundane household objects such as andirons and bellows. She gives to her niece Elizabeth Hampson a carved bed and bedding including rich lemon coloured hangings, carpets, cushions, eight yards of scarlet fabric, a knot of 25 diamonds, a gold watch, an 82 pearl necklace, one pair of pendants, two perfume bottles, a ladle, five spoons, all the goods in her closet including pictures, tables, books, dressing box, stools, chairs, carpets, hangings and pictures. She also

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<sup>37</sup> Katherine's her sister-in-law Mary Dennis Hampson also names Thomas Turner as her dear friend.

<sup>38</sup> Hampson vs Hampson 1670, Del 1/110, National Archives, Kew. f 174v.

<sup>39</sup> Hampson and Bill 1694, C 9/276/62, National Archives, Kew.

<sup>40</sup> The young Mary Hampson went on to live with her sister, Elizabeth Hampson Bill until at least 1703.

gives her a press cupboard and her side-saddle with its embroidered cloths. In addition Elizabeth is the single largest cash beneficiary receiving 800 pounds. Katherine's niece Mary Hampson receives less than her sister, but is also a major beneficiary. She receives a 155 pearl necklace, a pair of pendants, a gold scale, a silver porringer and spoon, a silver candlestick, a little pot and cover, a shovel and tongs, a pair of andirons and bellows, a bed and bedding along with rich silk hangings, a one table, a looking glass, a chest with a drawer and its contents, and a little cabinet and its contents. She also receives a cash bequest of 200 pounds.

Katherine's bequests to her sister Rebecca Benet are interesting in a number of ways. Rebecca Benet was forty-eight when her sister made her will. Rebecca's financial situation at the time is unclear, but evidence suggests that she was not left with a great deal of resources as a widow. She was the widow of Ambrose Benet and documents appearing in the aftermath of his death reveal he died heavily in debt as his executors were forced to sell his estate in Buckinghamshire including Bulstrode House in 1673.<sup>41</sup> Rebecca's will proved in 1695 reveals an estate of about £1500 and indicates that her main residence was with her sister Margaret Hungerford, though she also lived in London at times during the year.<sup>42</sup> It may be that concern for her sister's financial position in 1677 led Katherine Hampson to change her bequest to Rebecca.<sup>43</sup> Initially she bequeathed her sister Rebecca £100, but she changed this to provide an annuity of £12 a year throughout Rebecca's life. Katherine also entailed certain items she gave to Rebecca, the only entails placed on items in the will. Clearly Katherine saw her sister as a conduit through which goods would pass to the next generation. In this she was correct, but not quite in the way she instructed. Samuel Cohn explains that testators during the period often used bequests of valuable or prized objects "to manipulate the future actions of beneficiaries to

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<sup>41</sup> Ambrose Benet's dire financial situation is catalogued in a series of actions against his estate which continued into the late 1670s. See Bulstrode estate, D-RA/1/1-39, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Aylesbury.

<sup>42</sup> Will of Rebecca Benet, 1695 Prob/11/428, National Archives, Kew.

<sup>43</sup> Katherine Hampson was also a creditor to Ambrose Benet. She accepted payment of £463 to on a debt of £900 shortly before his death. Bulstrode estate, D-RA/1/21 (Katherine is incorrectly listed as Katherine Kempson in the catalogue entry).



extend beyond the grave their grip over these persons and their possessions.”<sup>44</sup> And while Katherine’s requests are relatively benign, she did attempt to retain some control of certain objects beyond the grave. The evidence of Rebecca Benet’s will shows that in this Katherine was unsuccessful. Katherine leaves Rebecca:

My silver-plate upon my dressing table during her natural life and after her decease I give it to my loving niece Mistress Elizabeth Hampson being a looking glass with silver about it, two powder boxes, one comb box, and two little boxes and little brush.

In Rebecca Benet’s will there are no bequests to Elizabeth Hampson and only a small cash bequest of five pounds to Elizabeth’s daughter Diana. A number of items Rebecca owned are not itemized in her will as she bequeaths all of her remaining “goods, chattels, jewellery, plate and linen” to her sister Margaret Hungerford. Another item Katherine gives to Rebecca, on the understanding that after her death it will be passed to their nephew Thomas Laurence, is a silver tankard. Again this tankard is not listed in Rebecca’s will. Rebecca does leave Thomas £100. However another item which Katherine gives to Rebecca, but which is not entailed does appear in Rebecca’s will. This is described as “my great cabinet” in Katherine’s will. In Rebecca’s will it is described as “my walnut tree cabinet which my dear sister Mistress Katherine Hampson gave me.” Rebecca leaves this piece of furniture to the young Mary Hampson,<sup>45</sup> her niece and one of Katherine’s major beneficiaries. She also leaves Mary two table cloths and twenty-four napkins “of my own making.” Rebecca appears to have understood her role as a conduit of goods between generations making this explicit in her will. However, she chose the objects to bequeath according to her intention rather than any stated desire by previous owners of the objects. In another place she gives furniture and fabric to her nephew George Hampson which she writes, “were given me by my dear father Sir Thomas Hampson.” Rebecca Benet’s will provides evidence that objects can continue to function as

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<sup>44</sup> Samuel Cohn Jr., “Renaissance Attachment to Things: Material Culture in Last Wills,” *Economic History Review* 65.3 (2012), 993.

<sup>45</sup> Also the daughter of Robert Hampson and Mary Wingfield Hampson.

intermediaries through generations, while at the same time revealing the vulnerability of a testator's intentions after death.

Through her will Katherine Hampson deploys objects to form a momentary association that brings together disparate individuals to create a particular community. Katherine Hampson inserts herself into the centre of this association, this network of affinities constructed through the material objects she bestows. In one sense this association, this social network is temporary—as the objects disburse in space and time the affinity between the possessors, each other, and more explicitly Katherine Hampson weaken. However, certain aspects of the will, seemingly prescient about the very momentary nature of this association constructed by this dispersal of objects, include strategies to at least postpone this dissipation, this weakening. These injunctions or entails on certain objects attempt (however unsuccessfully) to ensure they will continue into a second generation, thus shoring up in a limited way the association. And while the will of Rebecca Benet shows that testamentary intention can be ignored, it also attests to the possibility of extending associations decades after death through objects as the bequest of the walnut cabinet to the young Mary Hampson reveals.

Katherine Hampson's will, along with other documents related to her, show that very imbeddedness of never married women within the social relations that Froide discusses. Far from the peripheral existence imagined by Slater, her will and other evidence suggests that Katherine Hampson lived within a dynamic associative structure made up of several degrees of intimacy, including a primary social group that included her sister and nieces at the time of her death. Her will illuminates this associative structure,<sup>46</sup> and it is here that we see the most striking contrast between the life of this never married woman, and her married sister in law, Mary Wingfield Hampson.

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<sup>46</sup> Erickson suggests that women made wills in order to acknowledge significant relationships in their lives. See Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge 1993) 209.

Mary Wingfield Hampson is a powerful absence in Katherine Hampson's will. Katherine's will includes all her surviving sister in laws except Mary. Considering that Katherine lived with Mary in the early years of Mary's marriage, was likely present at the birth of both her daughter Elizabeth and her son Robert, and went on to become a mother figure to that daughter Elizabeth, Mary's absence in the will represents her complete effacement from the Hampson familial community. In 1664 Mary Wingfield Hampson left England for a stay in France to recover her health after six years of neglect by her husband Robert Hampson, and a severe beating while she was pregnant with her last child Anne,<sup>47</sup> which left her ill and depressed.<sup>48</sup> While there was an attempt to reconcile with Robert in 1666, the marriage was effectively over in the autumn of 1669. With the end of the marriage, a large part of Mary's associative network collapsed. While some gentry friends remained supportive during the early period of her legal separation, Mary's will reveals that at the time of her death her social associations were limited to a very small group of people whose social status is unclear. There is no evidence that she had any social connections with the gentry class of her birth at the time of her death.

Mary Wingfield Hampson's will is only 425 words long. According to testimony caused by a challenge to the will Mary dictated this will the day of her death.<sup>49</sup> In this will only two beneficiaries are named, the first and largest beneficiary is the young Mary Opaven, daughter to a Mistress Mary Opaven:

I give, devise, and bequeath to Mary Opaven or Uphoven for her kindness and long assistance to me and in consideration of obligations I have to her father and relations all

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<sup>47</sup> Anne, age three, died in the care of another never married aunt, Dorothy Wingfield who died a few days after Anne in July 1666.

<sup>48</sup> See Hampson, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson*, 29-31; 57-71.

<sup>49</sup> There were some irregularities with the will, including the fact it was signed by only one witness. Later testimony describes the events of the night of Mary's death and explains why only one witness was able to sign the will. The courts accepted this testimony and proved the will. See Will of Mary Hampson 1698, Prob/11/446; Mary Opaven (Uphoven) vs Charles and Elizabeth Bill and Mary Hampson, 1698 Prob/18/25/200; Robert Arundel [for Mary Uphoven] vs. William Baker 1698, C9/454/122; Sentence regarding Will of Mary Hampson 1698, Prob/11/448. All in the National Archives, Kew.

the goods that I have in the boxes in the room when I now lie and also everything else that is mine within the said room and to my estate lying in Bury and Wistow in the County of Huntingdonshire<sup>50</sup> both lands and tenements and all arrears of rent of the same howsoever now due and owing to me.

The second bequest is a general bequest that any other property be divided equally between the young Mary Opaven and the executor of her will John Newman. No objects are mentioned and there is no attempt to use the will as a mechanism to perpetuate her memory. Indeed the will effectively effaces the identity of Mary Wingfield Hampson from social memory. In this it enacts what was effectively Mary's third social death. The first was brought about by her separation from Robert Hampson which unmoored her from the social associations that are so abundantly displayed in the will of Katherine Hampson, including with her own daughters. The second came in 1689 when her daughters reported to the tenants of the Bury and Wistow property that their mother was dead (though Robert Hampson in other documents as early as 1674 also reported Mary as dead).<sup>51</sup> In legal documents the two daughters were reported to have told the tenants that their mother had died in a ditch.<sup>52</sup> Her battles to re-establish her identity and to claim the Bury and Wistow property provide stark evidence of her complete ostracism from the social associations into which she was born and married.

Instead Mary's will illustrates alternative social associations. Other documents, including Mary's letters written in 1680-81 to Sir William Trumbull reveal that George Van Opoven, a lawyer in Delft received her letters and apparently acted for her in some capacity. He may have been the young Mary Opaven's father whom Mary mentions in her will. Later testimony concerning the will shows that Mary Wingfield Hampson lived with the young Mary

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<sup>50</sup> This freehold land was bequeathed to Mary Wingfield Hampson by her uncle John Whalley in 1664. At the time of her death the leases brought in approximately £100 per year.

<sup>51</sup> After her legal separation from Robert Hampson, Mary lived much of her life in France and the Netherlands, with infrequent visits to London in attempts to claim her alimony that Robert Hampson refused to pay.

<sup>52</sup> See Jessica L. Malay, *The Case of Mistress Mary Hampson* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014) 105-116; *Mary Hampson vs Charles and Elizabeth Bill*, and *Mary Hampson*, 1693, C 5/109/21, National Archives, Kew.

Opaven and her mother.<sup>53</sup> Mary Wingfield Hampson's will also functions as a repudiation of her prior social associations. Her decision to bequeath all objects associated with her to Mary Opaven, a young girl with absolutely no connection (she and her mother were likely immigrants) to the Hampsons, Wingfields, or her mother's family the Whalleys or even to the English gentry class was an act of separation for Mary, a erasure of her gentry identity. Through the will Mary replaces her gentry identity with an identity constructed through friendship and mutual reliance. Mary's will created a moment of crisis through which a transitory but intense community emerged made up of those individuals to whom she had associated herself after the social ostracism of her separation and her rejection by her daughters. This community was constructed in relation to her request concerning the lands in Wistow and Bury, which may or may not have been intentional. However given the litigious nature of Mary's son in law Charles Bill, Mary was clearly provoking her daughters thus perpetuating the memory of the wrongs she believed were inflicted upon her by them and their father.

This crisis brought into association John Newman the executor, Robert Arundel the young Mary Opaven's guardian, Charles Bill, Elizabeth Hampson Bill, the young Mary Hampson, the long dead John Whalley uncle of Mary Wingfield Hampson, the two Mary Opavens, along with the legal machinery and individuals involved in its functioning. While this network of associations functioned the identity of Mary Wingfield Hampson, and her life long resistance to the legal restrictions forced on married women continued to inform it. This temporary associative community dissolved on Friday 22 July 1698 when the court accepted the will as legitimate and found that the young Mary Opaven was the rightful legatee.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Opaven (Uphoven) vs Charles and Elizabeth Bill and Mary Hampson, 1698, Prob/18/25/200, National Archives, Kew.

<sup>54</sup> Sentence regarding will of Mary Hampson, 1698. In fact, had any of the lawyers searched the records more diligently they would have found documents quoting from John Whalley's will that stated he bequeathed these properties to Mary Hampson his niece and the "heirs of her body." Thus legally they should have descended to Elizabeth Hampson Bill and the young Mary Hampson. Mary Wingfield Hampson, who once had the will of her

In those early years from 1656 to 1658 when Mary Wingfield Hampson lived apparently happily in a lively household made up of her husband Robert, her two sister-in-laws, Katherine and Margaret along with her new born daughter Elizabeth, Mary certainly benefitted from the social status and personal fulfilment that was believed to come to women in the married state. Katherine Hampson, on the other hand, while perhaps not existing on the periphery in this household—she acted as the infant Elizabeth’s godmother and was likely there at the birth—she lived as an adjunct. While her father’s will reveals Katherine had a room at Taplow during his life, in these early years after his death it is unclear whether she still had that room, or whether her brother Thomas had decided to lodge her with Robert. It may be that this arrangement was of her own choosing as she possessed the financial means and had reached an age where she could live where she liked. However, on that night in Robert’s study, when she and her sister Margaret confronted Robert concerning the money he owed according to their father’s will, so graphically described by Mary in her pamphlet, the fortunes of Mary Hampson the married woman and Katherine Hampson the never married woman would diverge dramatically. Their experiences reveal that married and never married states in the early modern period were more diverse than their monolithic portrayals in popular literature and later scholarship suggests.

After this night Mary Hampson saw her household dissolved, her social associations restricted, her financial position compromised, and her emotional support removed. Her relationship with Robert Hampson disintegrated as she sought to protect her jointure and other property rights. She experienced physical abuse, exile (both physical and social), the loss of her daughters’ affection, and a host of other painful experiences. It was only in the final years of her life as a widow in the association she shared with the two Mary Opavens that Mary

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uncle John Whalley in her possession would have know this and thus in her bequest to Mary Opaven she rejected both the wishes of her deceased uncle and the rights of her daughters. See Harpson [Robert Hampson] vs John Whalley, 1664, C 10/103/65 and Elizabeth and Mary Hampson vs John Whalley, 1674, C 5/610/78, National Archives, Kew.

Hampson managed to secure a very modest financial and emotional stability within a very limited non-elite social group. Her only real assets were the two pastures in Wistow and Bury with their rent of £100 per annum. Her personal effects were just those found in her bedchamber.

In comparison, Katherine Hampson, while also having financial disagreements with Robert, even taking him to court at one point, thrived through her ability to operate as a *femme sole*, entering lawsuits in her own name. She was able to invest her inheritance of about £2000, dying with an estate worth at least £8000. In comparison Mary Wingfield Hampson brought to her marriage £1000 along with freehold property worth between £80-100 per year. Upon the death of her mother further money, jewellery and lands worth £1100 came to Robert Hampson.<sup>55</sup> However at her death Mary managed to retain only the income from the freehold pasture land worth about £100 per year and a few personal items. Mary's marriage was unusual in that it led to legal separation. And yet, Katherine's sister Elizabeth Benet also found the married state far from financially rewarding. She also received from her father about £2000 which formed her part of her marriage settlement. At her death as a widow she possessed an estate of approximately £1500 and lived in her sister Margaret Hungerford's household. In monetary terms the never married state of Katherine Hampson provided more financial stability than those experienced by at least one of her married sisters and certainly Mary Wingfield Hampson. Katherine Hampson also benefitted from a more stable social environment if the bequests in the will can be accepted as representing a large and affectionate kin group. Certainly Katherine benefitted from her primary emotional relationship with Elizabeth Hampson. Their relationship, as attested by Elizabeth Hampson was akin to that of mother and daughter, with Katherine caring for Elizabeth from 1664 until Katherine's death in 1678.

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<sup>55</sup> Hampson vs Hampson, matrimonial cause Del 1/110, National Archives, Kew.

The divergent experiences of Katherine Hampson and Mary Wingfield Hampson, who shared primary familial relationships, add further evidence of the complexities of the married and never married states in early modern England. As Mary Wingfield Hampson's experiences reveal, the legal restrictions of coverture could be severely disabling, while the never married state of Katherine Hampson provides an example of how a single woman could shape a comfortable, secure and emotionally fulfilled life imbedded within a supportive community. At the end of her study of never married women Amy Froide explores the increasingly negative representation of never married women in popular culture in the late seventeenth-century, commenting that:

The increasing negativity of the stereotypes about never-married women correlated directly to the growing power and significance of real single women in English society. And the negative representations targeted at that class of single women—middling and genteel women—who had the means to exercise the most influence.<sup>56</sup>

Katherine Hampson provides an interesting example of one of these single women, and illustrates the possibilities for never married women within the culture that refutes Slater's contention that the single life was not a viable option. We do not know why Katherine Hampson, eldest daughter of a baronet with a sufficient dowry to attract a suitable husband, remained unmarried. It was unlikely to have been a straightforward life choice. However, the structures of society in relation to single women provided opportunities for Katherine Hampson to engage in legal, financial, and social practices that contributed to her well-being. The social structures governing married women on the other hand disabled the married Mary Wingfield Hampson's in her attempts to secure any kind of living and at times placed her life in danger. The lives of these two women invite much greater investigation into the role marital status

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<sup>56</sup> Froide, 218



played in the ability of early modern women to participate in and construct communities.<sup>57</sup> An investigation of the intersecting networks of objects, social structures, legal agency, and familial associations in the early modern period provides the means to challenge long held conceptions of normative behaviour in the period, providing a richer and more nuanced understanding of the role of marital status in the development of the early modern subject.

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<sup>57</sup> Alexandra Shepard has done extensive research into the economic activities of early modern married women who engaged in a number of economic activities independent of, or with the consent of their husbands, suggesting that both married and unmarried women occupied a complex economic landscape in the early modern period. See “The worth of married women in the English church courts, c.1550-1730,” in *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe*, eds. Cordelia Beattie and Matthew Frank Stevens (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2013), 191-212. See also Joanne Bailey, “Favoured or oppressed? Married women, property and ‘coverture’ in England, 1660-1800. *Continuity and Change* 17.3 (2002), 351-372. However, the economic flexibility of married trapped in domestic abuse has still to be explored. Certainly, while Mary Hampson suggests in her letters to William Trumbull that she believed she may have greater legal rights than coverture would suggest, she was unable to exercise any financial agency concerning marital goods and resources during her marriage or separation, and was at one point brought before a magistrate by her husband for selling household goods.