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“Of no sort of use”?: Manuscripts, Memory, and the Family Archive in Eighteenth Century England

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the afterlives of manuscripts preserved in the collections of three middling sort families during the long eighteenth century. It foregrounds the role that family archives played in the construction and curation of memory and identity among non-elite families during this period, the intersections between socio-economic status, gender, confessional identity and a subject's curatorial concerns, and the implications for our understanding of archival culture. By showcasing the different ways people engaged with written remains it also demonstrates *how* reconstructing the motives that underpinned family collections might be possible, offering a framework for the study of intergenerational archival transmission.

KEYWORDS

Family; archive; manuscripts; memory; intergenerational

In 1756, Woolsey Johnson, the former vicar of Olney in north Buckinghamshire, died. In the months following his death his widow, Jane, began the task of sorting and arranging his papers, deciding which items were worth preserving and which might safely be consigned to the fire. While the caches of various wills, deeds, and legal papers possessed a clear practical value, the status of his other written remains was less certain. In a note penned on the back of one memorandum, Jane expressed her ambivalence, observing that ‘The other side of this paper was wrote by the Revd Woolsey Johnson. Jane Johnson 1756. I apprehend it can be of no use’.¹ This is, in some ways, a rather paradoxical annotation. On the one hand, Jane acknowledged that the paper was, in her (self-consciously subjective) opinion, of ‘no use’ – and yet, in spite of this, she went to the trouble of inscribing and keeping it. This small scrap of paper raises the central question with which this article is concerned: What value – what ‘use’ – did manuscripts produced by deceased relatives possess for those who inherited them? Why were particular items kept and how were these remnants from the past re-read, re-used, and re-fashioned by later generations?

As literacy spread, and the quantity and diversity of written materials increased, which papers to keep – both for oneself and for posterity – was an issue that confronted increasing numbers of men and women from across the social spectrum. This article explores the posthumous afterlives of manuscripts preserved in the collections of three upper middling sort families – the Johnsons, the Wanseys, and the Attwaters – during the

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long eighteenth century. Tracing these materials over multiple generations, it foregrounds the significant role that family archives played in the construction and curation of memory and identity among the middling sort during this period. Further, by showcasing the different ways that people engaged with written remains – annotating, consulting, transcribing, incorporating, accumulating – it seeks to demonstrate *how* reconstructing the motives that underpinned family collections might be possible, offering a framework for the study of intergenerational archival transmission. In so doing, it illuminates the palimpsestic, polyvocal quality of the family archive, the multifarious – and sometimes competing and contradictory – meanings that these papers possessed for successive generations, and the relationship between familial and national memory.

Beginning with the papers of Jane Johnson and her daughter Barbara, the article then goes on to explore the extensive, intergenerational archive of the clothier George Wansey and closes with a discussion of the diaries of Jane Attwater. Broadly contemporaries, these figures all hailed from the neighbouring southern counties of Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire, and all were relatively wealthy members of the upper middling sort. However, there were also some crucial differences. They were of three different religious persuasions – Anglican, Presbyterian, and Baptist, respectively. Moreover, while the Johnson and Attwater collections were ‘matriarchives’, passed principally (though not exclusively) between female family members, the Wansey archive travelled down the male line.² These disparities help to account for some of the variations in, and underlying impulses behind, their preservatory practices, illuminating the complex intersections between socio-economic status, gender, confessional identity and a subject’s curatorial concerns. Taken as a whole, this article seeks to establish the family archive as a crucial – but, to date, overlooked – subject of historical enquiry, the ways it might be approached, and some of the implications that this has for our understanding of archival culture, both past and present.

Approaching the (family) archive

In his seminal guide for archivists, *A Manual of Archival Administration* (1922), Hilary Jenkinson outlined what he perceived to be the two defining features of archival collections: impartiality and authenticity.³ Archives were neutral repositories of facts about the past, archivists passive guardians who preserved this knowledge for future generations. This view was a product of the historiographical developments of the early nineteenth century and reflected an empiricist approach to history, now synonymous with Leopold von Ranke, that emphasised empirical analysis and objectivity as the gold standard of historical research. Though it retains a certain pull on the historical imagination – who has not, at some point, been seduced by the hidden ‘truth’ apparently contained in an archival document – since the 1970s and 1980s this view of archives as repositories of facts has been replaced with an increasing awareness that they are themselves the product of broader social, political and cultural developments. One consequence of postmodernism and its scepticism about our capacity to disentangle historical reality from language and discourse has been an obligation to interrogate the repositories in which such documents reside.⁴ Particularly influential were Michel Foucault’s account of the archive as a product and source of epistemic power and Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, a psychoanalytic meditation on, among many other things, the open-ended, expansive

nature of the archive in which every interpretation, every engagement is both an enrichment and an extension.⁵ These insights have engendered new approaches to the archive across a wide range of disciplines: the so-called ‘archival turn’.⁶

Within the field of history, the Foucauldian focus on the relationship between archives and power has inspired scholars, particularly those working in the post-colonial and feminist traditions, to interrogate the biases and hidden agendas through which agency and power have been encoded and negotiated.⁷ For others, it has prompted a self-reflexive meditation on the historian’s own engagement with the archive, most notably Carolyn Steedman’s *Dust* and Antoinette Burton’s collection *Archive Stories*.⁸ Finally, it has transformed the archive from a tool of historical study into its subject. Archives are historically and culturally situated phenomena, their contents, construction, and even the very nature of the ‘archive’ a product of broader historical conditions which they both inform and reflect. In the early modern context, this theoretical re-orientation has led to a surge of interest in the documentary collections accumulated by states, institutions, and eminent individuals, from the State Paper Office to the repositories of the Royal Society and various civic and ecclesiastical authorities.⁹ This reflects the traditional understanding of archives as formal, structured collections amassed by dispositions of power.¹⁰

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to make the case for conceiving of archives rather more expansively. In a groundbreaking 2016 special edition dedicated to early modern archives, Alexandra Walsham establishes the inclusive, flexible meaning of the term ‘archive’ in early modern discourse and uses it to refer, not just to collections that possessed the nascent hallmarks of modern archival practice, but to ‘a whole range of physical repositories and rooms fixed in particular places as well as to encompass collections that remained on the move and were transported around in cases and chests’.¹¹ By these lights, the many different manuscript materials that families stored in their wooden boxes and drawers, from personal letters and poetry to drawings and diaries, might fruitfully be approached as archives. As Walsham, Kate Peters, and Liesbeth Corens note, the early modern household is ‘a dimension of archival history that deserves more thorough investigation’, and has received significantly less scholarly attention than the collections accumulated by states and institutions.¹² This is particularly true of non-elite, middling sort households, who could rarely rely on muniments rooms, professional secretaries, or long-term residence on an ancestral estate to preserve their paperwork.¹³ This article argues that the family archive was a vital tool in the construction and transmission of family memory and identity among middling sort families during this period. In the absence of the ‘instant, unassailable status’ that accompanied a major landed estate or aristocratic title, these families sought other means to establish their social status and assuage concerns about their (often volatile) economic fortunes and religious credentials.¹⁴ This included the creation of archives that might act as paper bulwarks, preserving and projecting family memory and identity to posterity.

Though the middling sort remains a ‘shadowy creature’ in the early modern landscape, an ‘amorphous’ social group that stretched between ‘the labouring classes [...] and the lower reaches of the gentry’, the families in this article all possessed characteristics that have been associated with middling status during this period: non-titled; educated; officeholding; and, in the case of the Johnsons and Wanseys, their wealth derived primarily from professions or trade.¹⁵ The Attwaters were somewhat more established

and owned significant portions of land in the parish of Nunton and Bodenham, Wiltshire, but, even so, they were ‘comfortable’, ‘middling folk’, as opposed to titled aristocratic gentry.¹⁶ In her study of the rural middling sort, Joan Kent argued that though such people ‘might constitute elites within their own villages, the level of their wealth placed them in the middle ranks of society as a whole’ – an important distinction, and one that means the Attwaters local prominence was not commensurate with elite, gentry status.¹⁷ These three families also possessed what Susan Whyman has identified as a ‘crucial trait’ of the middling sorts: reading and writing skills.¹⁸ This ensured that, by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, upon their death a person of middling status was increasingly likely to possess significant quantities of manuscript materials. These remnants were then passed, both more and less deliberately, to family members who – like Jane Johnson – had to decide what, if anything, was worth keeping.

Indeed, in many cases, the letters, diaries, and other cultural products of non-elite men and women owe their very survival to processes of family preservation and transmission. In all three cases considered in this article, the collections curated by families were only transferred into various local and national repositories in the mid-late twentieth century, where contemporary cataloguing and institutional dispersal have obscured their original objectives and arrangements.¹⁹ Reconstructing the meanings and motives that underpinned these materials enhances our understanding of our national archival heritage, revealing the hidden hands and preservatory practices that have shaped institutional collections. To read these items without due attention to these processes is, at best, to offer an incomplete account of their multi-layered meanings, privileging the priorities of a manuscript’s original author; at worst, it strips the non-elite men and women who ensured their survival of their historical and archival agency.

Historians working with family collections have, of course, long been aware that such survivals are the result of intergenerational transmission. Awareness, however, has rarely translated into attention. While several scholars working on nonconformist families during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have touched on the afterlives of manuscript material, arguing that dissent was a ‘special circumstance’ that might ensure the preservation of paperwork, studies that focus on the archival activities of families remain scarce.²⁰ In their influential work on the writing and cultural products of the middling sorts, James Amelang, Matthew Kadane, and Brodie Waddell have shown that acts of writing were crucial to the self-identity of middling sort people during the early modern period – but they have not considered how these materials, and their meanings, were transmitted and transformed as they moved across generations.²¹ Waddell briefly explores archiving practices in his study of the chronicles of the tradesman Joseph Bufton. His focus, however, is on Bufton’s role as a ‘village archivist’ within his own lifetime rather than the treatment of these manuscripts after his death.²² In part, this emphasis on the content of writing and its circulation within the life of the author is the result of the apparent dearth of materials that might enable us to reconstruct the impulses that underpinned the preservation of paperwork, particularly in collections that have not made their way into print.²³ As Ann Blair succinctly puts it, when it comes to archival collections the ‘reasons for preservation are rarely preserved themselves’.²⁴ Through careful analysis of the materials, annotations, and notes embedded in three family collections, one of the aims of this article is to show how reconstructing these ‘reasons’ might be possible – and, when it is not, to offer an account of some the multifarious

meanings that intergenerational items might possess. In so doing, it illuminates the polyvocal quality of family collections, the role that socio-economic status, gender and confessional identity played in shaping patterns of preservation, and the intersections between familial and national memorial culture.

Evidence and emotion in the papers of Jane and Barbara Johnson

Jane Johnson (1706–1759) was the daughter of Richard Russell, a ‘menial estate servant’, who, by the time of his death in the mid-1720s, had obtained some modest wealth.²⁵ In 1735, she married Woolsey Johnson, an Anglican vicar, with whom she had four children. Jane is perhaps best known to historians for her literary and pedagogical endeavours; she was the author of an extraordinary collection of home-made materials used to educate her children and she is credited with composing the first fairy story written in English.²⁶ However, these distinctive texts comprise only a small part of an extensive family collection that passed down through the generations, including Jane and her daughter Barbara. In their curation of family papers, these two women prioritised the preservation of materials that possessed either evidentiary or emotional import, often adding annotations that sought to establish an item’s significance for future generations. Their collection illustrates the role that family papers played in establishing and sustaining genealogical and emotional ties and their place within a broader web of domestic memory work, as well as their fluidity and flexibility – an open-endedness that, as we shall see, was a source of some concern among custodians.

Through her writings, Jane made a concerted effort to preserve her own memory, and that of the wider Johnson family, for future generations. She penned elaborate, decorative registers that recorded the birth and christening dates of her own children and those of her husband and his siblings.²⁷ Other items were specifically set aside as mementos for her children, in the hope that they would act as commemorative objects; to her son, George William, she left a series of paper cut-outs and a scrap of fabric to remember her by ‘When I am Dead’.²⁸ This practice of recording and preserving family memory appears to have been accelerated by the death of her husband in 1756. That same year, Jane wrote a record of ‘the names of the Ancestors of the Johnsons of Olney as far as I can Recollect’, listing her husband’s relatives on both his father’s and mother’s side stretching back to the early seventeenth century.²⁹ This was accompanied by a pair of wooden display boards that recorded the Johnson line, a project that was apparently continued by later family members; the last name was added in 1863.³⁰

Jane’s concern with preserving family memory, coupled with an enthusiasm for commemorative items, inflected her decisions about which of her husband’s papers were worth keeping. The memorandum which she apprehended to be of ‘no use’ had nevertheless been written by her husband, and it was perhaps this act of authorship which imbued it with a degree of sentimental value, if not practical utility.³¹ On another note, originally attached to a parcel of letters written by her husband’s grandparents to their son – Jane’s father-in-law – she made this distinction between the practical and the memorial value of written remains even more explicit. ‘This parcel of Letters are of no sort of use’, she commented, before continuing:

I only keep them because they were wrote by Thomas and Ann Johnson whose pictures are drawn with a Great Dog, <his> and hers with a mournful look leaning on her arm. These Letters were wrote by them to their son William Johnson Esqr. whose picture is drawn a little Boy with his Hair over his forehead. The girl with the preserve in a Basket and she with the Lamb his sisters. She with the flowers died at thirteen, she with the Lamb Died an Old Maid. Jane Johnson. 1756.³²

Once again, Jane acknowledged that the letters were of no 'use'. Yet, as she continued to write, she justified her decision to keep them by outlining the role that they played in commemorating several family members who were now dead. In so doing, she integrated the letters into the wider domestic space, linking them to a series of portraits that depicted the deceased correspondents. These layers of memorialisation worked in parallel. The paintings preserved their physical form, the letters immortalised their utterances, while her note connected the two and imparted additional, biographical information about the family, such as the marital status and death of the two sisters. Existing studies have demonstrated that the early modern domestic interior was a memory space in which decorative furnishings, paintings, and objects were used to construct and communicate memory.³³ Jane's note suggests that family papers were intended to be read within, and were in dialogue with, the material culture of the home, a connection that has often been lost in their transition from the family to the record office.³⁴ It also shows that the preservation of papers was explicitly understood as a kind of memory work, with physical epistles serving as paper monuments that both commemorated the dead and established their place in the family history of the living.

References to this series of portraits recur elsewhere in the collection. On a letter sent by Ann Johnson in 1690 Jane added the words 'wrote by the Lady whose picture is drawn when a Girl with a little Lamb by her, & a crook', while a missive from Thomas to his father Ezekiel (her husband's great grandfather) was inscribed 'wrote by Thomas Johnson [...] The Pictures of this Thomas & Ann are drawn Thomas with a great Dog'.³⁵ These images appear to have remained a meaningful point of reference well into the next century. Alongside one of Jane's annotations is a ghostly pencil inscription in another, much later hand which confirms 'we have all these portraits at Encombe', though by this point the house in which they had originally resided had long been sold.³⁶

The age and origin of the two letters above suggests that they had initially been preserved by Woolsey Johnson, but while his endorsements on family letters were first-person and personal – 'My father and sister 1690' – Jane's were third-person and forward looking, containing extra details that established a subject's place within the wider family (Figure 1).³⁷ In Jane's hands, the letters became a site of family history writing, a history in which her recently deceased husband and his achievements were the central focus. Even materials that concerned relatively distant relations were linked back to her spouse. On a note from 1693 which confirmed one Dr Thomas Woolsey had gained permission to construct a house Jane implored the reader to 'Turn over before you destroy this paper'.³⁸ On the other side she explained why: 'The Doctor Woolsey mention'd in this paper was Grandfather by the mother's side to the Reverend Woolsey Johnson [...] I would have this paper kept. Jane Johnson 1756'.³⁹ Here, Dr Woolsey, best-known in his own right as archdeacon of Northampton, was principally of importance as a leaf on the Johnson family tree and identified via his relationship to Jane's husband. Indeed, the presence of Dr Woolsey's papers within the collection is itself revealing of the routes by

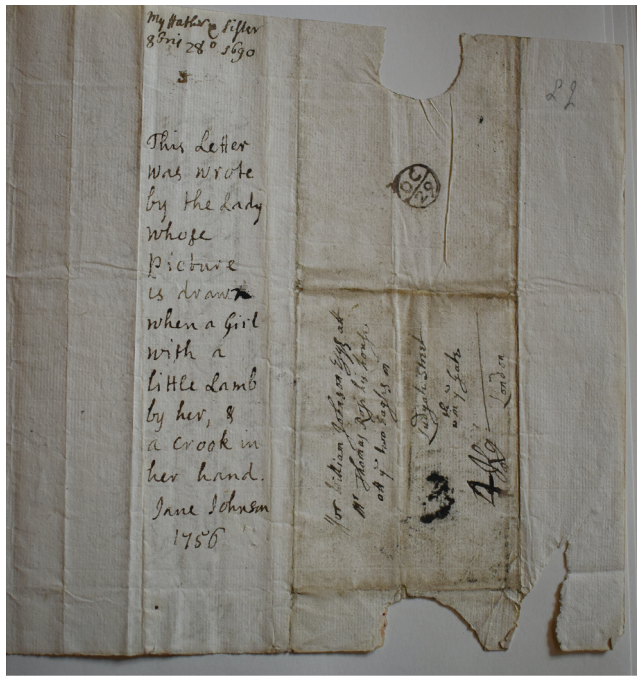


Figure 1. Jane Johnson's annotation, and her husband's endorsement, on a letter sent by Ann Johnson to her father William in 1690. Bodleian Library, MS Don c 196, f. 49.

which family papers might travel and the significant role that female relatives could play in their preservation; they had probably entered the collection via his daughter Ann, who was married to William Johnson.

As the years passed, Dr Woolsey's note, formerly evidence of the legality of his habitation, became an heirloom from father to daughter and, subsequently, evidence of the Johnson genealogy. A set of estate accounts that had belonged to William Johnson underwent a similar process of reinterpretation, from practical financial records to a repository of family history and cautionary tale of the risks of financial imprudence. Jane annotated them as follows:

This is of no manner of use, all the Estates within mention'd being sold. But I keep it, to testify to posterity what Estates William Johnson Esq (Father to the Reverend Woolsey Johnson) was possessed off [...] He was Left in great Difficultys & troubles by his Father Thomas Johnson Esq of Olney in Bucks who was a very Extravagant man [...] which made him oblig'd to sell many of his Estates. Jane Johnson. 1756.⁴⁰

The use of the word 'testify' here is suggestive, and points to another possible reason Jane favoured family papers as a site for recording this kind of memoranda: the provision of proof. By inscribing old papers, Jane was not just relaying family history – she was evidencing it, through the preservation of the documents themselves. The estate accounts spoke – they testified – of wealth gained and lost, even if further exposition was needed to ensure that future generations would draw the desired conclusions. Throughout the collection Jane contrasted various items' lack of practical utility with their ongoing

sentimental, memorial, and evidentiary significance. The value of these papers was not fixed, but was reshaped and reinterpreted as time went by.

This interest in preserving family history and arranging and annotating inherited family papers was continued by Jane's eldest child, and only daughter, Barbara (1738–1825). Barbara herself produced extensive genealogical records and registers of the births of her various nieces and nephews, mimicking her mother's elaborate, Celtic knot designs; Jane's papers inspired and shaped her daughter's commemorative activities. (Figures 2 and 3).⁴¹ As the eldest child, Barbara perceived that much of the burden of family memory work rested upon her shoulders, for, by their own admission, her younger brothers were able to 'recollect so few circumstances that happen'd while we lived at Olney'.⁴²

Like her mother before her, Barbara's notes betray a certain tension between an item's lack of obvious utility and a desire to keep paperwork that possessed commemorative and sentimental significance. In a missive to her nephew, William, she meditated on the 'great mischief' that might 'ensue in families by keeping letters', a censorious impulse that was particularly pronounced in her treatment of her own correspondence, in which sensitive or personal passages were obscured with heavy ink blots.⁴³ And yet, on another cache of letters she wrote, 'Various Old Letters I can not find in my heart to burn them'.⁴⁴ The letters in question included a missive reporting the death of one of Barbara's closest friends, Catherine Ingram, with whom she had resided for extensive periods in both Oxfordshire and London. As a record

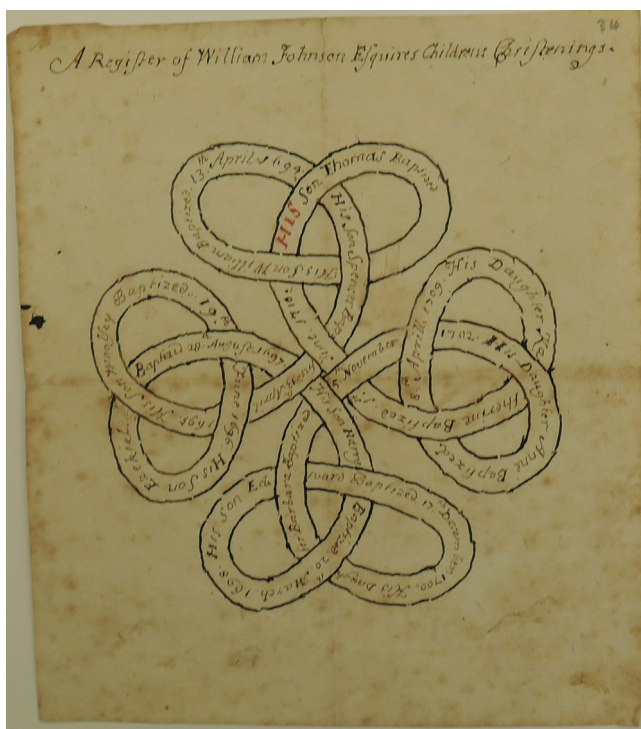


Figure 2. Jane Johnson's "Register of William Johnson Esquires Childrens Christenings". Bodleian Library, MS Don c. 190, f. 34.

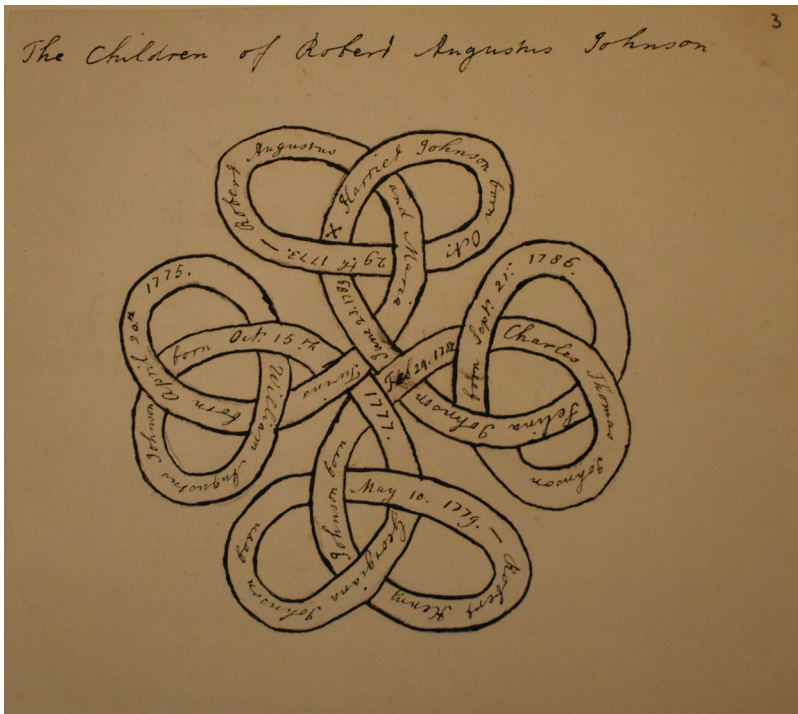


Figure 3. Barbara Johnson's record of "The Children of Robert Augustus Johnson". Bodleian Library, MS Don c 195, f. 3.

of the final hours of a beloved friend, this letter perhaps possessed a sentimental value that overrode any detrimental side effects that might arise from its conservation. Friendship, and the preservation of letters that commemorated female friends, was a recurring theme in Barbara's collection. This reflected a broader concern among the middling sorts of the eighteenth century with sociability, in which friendship played a crucial role, as well as Barbara's status as a single woman who spent a significant amount of time corresponding and residing with friends.⁴⁵

Those family papers that Barbara did see fit to keep were often appended with future-oriented notes that sought to explain their characters and contents. Like her mother, Barbara used these materials as a place to record and evidence snippets of family history – though, for Barbara, the locus of this history was not her father, Woolsey, but Jane herself. For example, on a letter from her mother to Mrs Garth she added the inscription 'To Mrs Garth, wife of John Garth Esqr Member of Parliament for Devises Wiltshire. Mrs Garth is first cousin to Jane Johnson that wrote this letter'.⁴⁶ Jane's writings were themselves integrated into the family collection she had done so much establish, as Barbara borrowed her mother's habit of inscribing inherited materials with third-person summaries that would furnish future readers with the requisite contextual information.

Barbara, however, was rather more inclined to dwell on the emotional resonances of particular items than her mother had been, and, in so doing, she sought to commemorate, not just the people who featured in these materials, but the emotions that they

embodied. For example, on the back of a copy of another letter sent by her mother she penned a lengthy note:

To Miss Henrietta Ingram, then fourteen, after her first Visit to Olney, with my Uncle and Cousin Johnson – she three years afterwards came to Wytham [i.e. Witham], and was there when my Mother died – this was the Origin of the Friendship between our family and the Ingrams, which has continued ever since, and been a source of great happiness to Barbara Johnson, who desires this Letter may be preserv'd.⁴⁷

From a position of later knowledge, Barbara was able to perceive the significance of this first letter as the origin of, and monument to, an important friendship – one to which her note also testified, as she supplemented the letter with an account of the enduring connection between the Ingram and Johnson families and the emotions that it evoked. Barbara speaks to future readers about her commemorative aspirations in the third person, hopeful that she has justified the letter's permanent place within the collection. Its sentimental affect may only be of direct relevance to her, but the 'desire' that it should be kept in perpetuity is an effort not just to preserve family history but also the associated emotions: Barbara's 'happiness'. The agencies of the archive's various users resonate down through the generations, as Barbara imagines future curators of the Johnson archive being in some manner beholden to, or influenced by, her wishes.

This anxiety about whether future guardians would respect an item's significance is discernible elsewhere in the collection. For example, when rifling through her mother's papers, Barbara came across, and copied out, an 'old Memorandum' that described several notable events from the childhood of her recently deceased brother, George William.⁴⁸ This included an incident that had occurred in the summer of 1743, when George had been rescued from the fast-flowing currents of the river Ouse by his heavily pregnant mother, 'at the extreme hazard of her own life'.⁴⁹ By copying the memorandum, Barbara attempted to enshrine the memory of her infant brother's preservation, and her mother's heroism, in the annals of family history. As with the Ingram letter, her remarks concluded with a direct appeal to her reader: 'I beg it may be preserv'd Barbara Johnson'.⁵⁰ Here, Barbara reaches out across time and space to appeal to an imagined, but unknown and unknowable, future audience. Perhaps as a response to this uncertainty, and in the absence of any children of her own, Barbara selected her nephew George William as her successor as the custodian of the family papers.⁵¹ Yet she was also aware of – and sought to guard against – the possibility that, as time passed, the relevance of material which, for her, was imbued with emotional and affective significance may be liable to fade.

Expertise, education, and intergenerational intertextuality in the works of George Wansey

A similarly self-conscious curation and preservation of family memory also occupied our next subject, the Presbyterian clothier George Wansey (1713–1762). Though historians have tended to emphasise the role that women played in maintaining family memory, Wansey's collection shows that this was not an exclusively female pursuit.⁵² He was, however, far less concerned with the emotional and affective dimensions of family paperwork than this article's female subjects, a distinction which suggests a gendered

dimension to the contents and curation of these collections. A tradesman and a non-conformist, Wansey's engagement with written remains had two main aims: first, to cement his family's status as successful local tradesmen and the middling values that this embodied; and second, to transmit moral and religious lessons to posterity. While the former was grounded in the accumulation and consultation of manuscript materials, the latter often relied as much on transcribing and reshaping these texts as it did their preservation. The reason *why* an item was preserved often informed *how* it was kept (or not), as the remainder of this section will show.

As at least the fourth generation of his family engaged in Warminster's clothing trade Wansey's collection contained several business accounts: both his own and those he had inherited from his forebears, including his grandfather, also George Wansey (1649–1707).⁵³ Records of prices and sales, debts owed and paid, even fabric samples, these books were repositories of information about local business affairs and they were valued, at least in part, for the role that they played in the preservation of knowledge. However, they also helped to convey the family's broader economic and moral identity, establishing the Wanseys as a dynasty of godly, industrious tradesmen. As Adam Smyth and Jason Scott-Warren have emphasised, early modern account books were more than just records of financial affairs: they were rhetorical tools that constructed and communicated a person's moral and spiritual worth.⁵⁴ The process of writing accounts was an act of autobiography that simultaneously informed and reflected the self both in the present and future. As Stephen Monteage wrote in his guide to accounting, *Debtor and Creditor Made Easie* (1682), the ledger 'sets before thee the true state of every Mans Account' and 'remain[s] to Posterity to be scanned, to his Praise or Dispraise'.⁵⁵ Well-ordered accounts demonstrated creditworthiness, industry, and prudence, values which 'played a major part in the self-classification of the middling sort' during this period.⁵⁶ By keeping these records – both their own, and those of their ancestors – successive generations of Wanseys were able to convey these values to posterity and position themselves as the latest in long line of virtuous tradesmen – sometimes literally, inscribing their own name on the cover of these books alongside those of their forebears (see [Figure 4](#)).

That the later George Wansey actively engaged with inherited accounts is evident from his own financial records. In 1760, for example, he made of a note of the 'Extraordinary' price of a cloth sold by his brother John, commenting that it was highest 'known either in my own, or my Fathers, or Grandfathers Trade'.⁵⁷ Here, Wansey drew on figures he had obtained from his ancestor's account books in order to construct and convey notable business information – and, in so doing, he situated himself as a figure of authority, asserting his own place in a long line of expert clothiers. Nor was he the first Wansey to use these accounts to establish expertise and convey patrimonial continuity: his father, Henry, had chosen to write some of his own accounts inside one of his deceased father's books.⁵⁸ This practice had the practical benefit of keeping financial records that referred to the same properties or products together. But it also had a symbolic value, as Henry stepped, on the page and in the wider world, into his position at the head of the family.

If one concern in Wansey's collection was the preservation and projection of the family's economic expertise and its associated virtues, another was the construction and transmission of moral and religious lessons for the benefit of posterity. To achieve this, he revisited and revised the papers of deceased family members, seeking exemplars that would be 'worthy [of] our Esteem and Imitation, and [...] of great use to us all in the

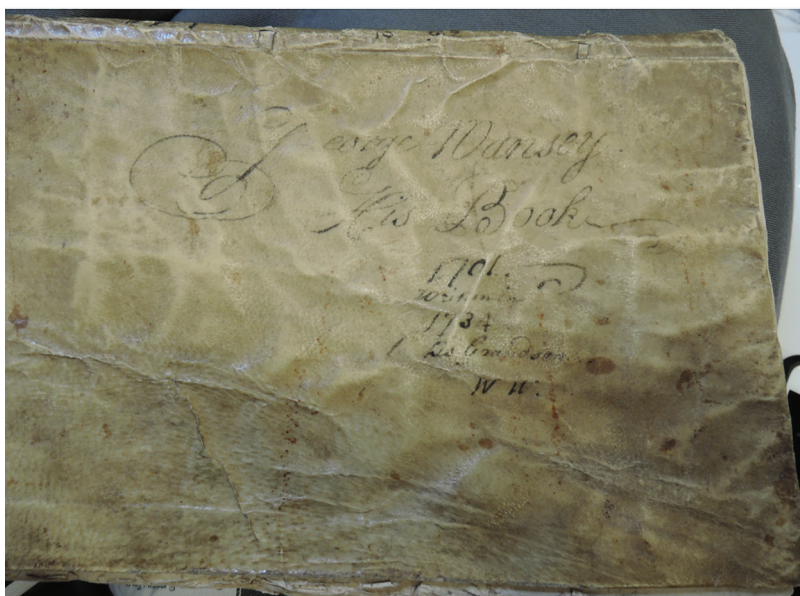


Figure 4. Names inscribed on the cover of a seventeenth century account book (1683–92): “George Wansey His Booke 1701 William 1734 his Grandson W.W.”: Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, 314/1/1.

future Conduct of our Lives’.⁵⁹ In this process the materiality of inherited artefacts was less important than their contents, and, as a result, Wansey was more concerned with transcribing and reshaping writings than the physical preservation of original texts.

In 1740, Wansey’s brother, Henry, died of consumption aged twenty-one. The year after his death, Wansey explained to his remaining brother William that he was in the process of ‘transcribing the valuable Remains of our dear Brother deceased’, a choice of phrase that elided Henry’s written material with the corporeal body.⁶⁰ While the flesh would rot, by copying up his brother’s written ‘remains’ Wansey sought to preserve him; the textual corpus sustained what the physical corpse could not. These writings, however, were to be more than just a memorial to his sibling. They possessed a pedagogic purpose and were intended to offer a religious exemplar from which the family might learn. The ‘value’ of Henry’s written remains lay in the lessons that they held for those still living, and, by copying up this material, Wansey sought to transform his brother into a model of Protestant piety. To do so, he edited and organised Henry’s writings, transcribing the shorthand and filleting out extracts that best demonstrated religious lessons.

Wansey’s project drew on England’s broader religious culture, in which the last words and meditations of godly figures were regularly printed for the moral and religious edification of their readers.⁶¹ These texts, and accounts of exemplary lives more generally, were particularly popular among nonconformists, and, in the book’s introduction, Wansey sought to connect his efforts to those circulating in the wider press.⁶² He opened with a piece of verse penned, not by his brother, but the Presbyterian divine Richard Baxter: ‘When God had taken up this Vine/We thought no more to tast[e] its wine/[...] But unexpectedly we find/Some Clusters w[hi]ch are left behind’.⁶³ These lines appeared in Baxter’s poetic reflection on the life and works of fellow nonconformist minister

Richard Vines, whose final treatise, on the sacrament, had been published soon after his death. While Wansey's reworking loses the pun on his name, it served both to articulate the text's purpose and to situate it within a broader dissenting culture of posthumous publication.

Wansey applied a similar method of editing and rewriting to many of the other papers he inherited from his forbears. For example, in 1739 he began to write a family history. The basis for this text was an earlier manuscript written by his grandfather, and, as Wansey worked through this material, he sought to update and extend it.⁶⁴ New family members were added while relations who were no longer considered sufficiently relevant were excised, a decision that bears out Barbara Johnson's fears of the obliterating hand of later generations.

For Wansey, however, the family history was more than just a repository of genealogical information: it also possessed a didactic function, furnishing readers with examples of the admirable acts and virtuous lives of their – self-consciously non-elite – ancestors. 'Since we can find no nobility in our pedigree', he wrote, 'let us endeavour to make ourselves noble by virtuous Honorable actions'.⁶⁵ To this end, he dedicated much of his 'supplementa' to recording the exploits of his predecessors, and particularly the daring deeds that they had performed for the Parliament during the British Civil Wars. Though a few of Wansey's Civil War stories came from printed histories, such as Edmund Ludlow's *Memoirs*, the vast majority had been relayed by friends and relatives – 'Mr J Buckler says', 'James Wansey told me'.⁶⁶ The intersection here between printed and oral culture points to the ways family collections might reshape and resist, as well as reflect, broader memorial cultures. By recording tales of his 'brave bold' Parliamentary ancestors Wansey drew upon established national narratives – but he also went beyond them, including details that were absent from the printed record and which established both his family's political and religious sympathies and their pivotal place in national history.

The educational value of Wansey's history was further emphasised by the back cover, which contained a copy of a letter of advice sent from his Uncle Henry to his Uncle George and an extract from Robert Dodsley's *The Preceptor* (1749) on the moral improvement derived from reading history.⁶⁷ The choice of printed passage affirmed the value of Wansey's historical project, while the missive was, like so much of Wansey's writings, intensely intertextual. In his letter, Henry offered his brother, not just his own advice, but that of their father, quoting from a letter of advice that the first George Wansey had apparently left to his sons. By the time Wansey finished his history, this letter of advice had passed through at least three incarnations and multiple generations: as letter, letter within letter, and letter within letter within history.

Wansey's writings and archive enjoyed a similarly multi-layered afterlife, both within and beyond the immediate family. In his will, Wansey left his papers to his wife and eldest surviving son on the express condition that they should make them available to other family members who might wish to consult and copy them.⁶⁸ The year after his death, Wansey's brother, William, lent Henry's spiritual reflections to the Bristolian William Dyer, who remarked approvingly on the religious commitment of the Wanseys, musing that 'surely there had been religion in that family'.⁶⁹ In this next stage of transmission, Henry's writings passed out of the custody of his immediate relatives and into broader local and religious networks where they conveyed, not just theological lessons, but the identity and religious commitment of the whole Wansey family. As they moved through

the hands of subsequent readers, these materials communicated an image of the family that might incorporate, but also reached expansively beyond, the individuals who had initially composed, collected, and curated them.

Six decades later, one of Wansey's great grandchildren revisited his book of reflections, copying out a poem that he had written to mark his fortieth birthday. A meditation on the fragility of life and the happy reunions that awaited in death, this copy of the verse was accompanied by records of the deaths of the author's brother and sister in 1829.⁷⁰ For its later reader, Wansey's poem spoke to their own recent losses, perhaps offering some comfort that the siblings, parted in life, would be joined together in death. Though the verse was headed with the words 'Lines written by my Great Grandfather George Wansey', it was in fact an adaptation rather than a strict copy. The later adapter, while they retained the spirit of the composition, added phases that further emphasised the joys of the spiritual realm – 'joys without end', 'realms of bliss', 'eternal life' – and, in so doing, they imbued the verse with a fresh emotional potency.⁷¹

The spiritual and the sentimental in the diaries of Jane Attwater

The desire to re-read family papers with an eye to their spiritual and sentimental significance is also evident in the writings of our third and final figure, Jane Attwater (1753–1843), a Baptist from Bodenham in Wiltshire.⁷² Perhaps as a result of her family's more established social status, Attwater was less concerned with preserving items that evidenced her family's genealogical lineage than the Johnsons and Wanseys, an omission that mirrors the relative inattention of the conformist Johnsons to matters of faith: anxiety and insecurity, it seems, often guided the contents of middling sort archival collections. Rather, Attwater incorporated the papers of her Baptist predecessors into her extensive journals, especially the writings of her mother, Anna, (1710–1784) and great-aunt, Anne Cator Steele (1689–1760), both of whom were co-religionists. As Cynthia Aalders notes, Attwater 'had a sense of herself as an archivist'; for Jane and her kin, written remains were integral to the construction and communication of the family's religious identity across generations.⁷³ When these lines of intergenerational transmission were disrupted, as they were following the untimely death of Attwater's daughter, Anna-Jane, family paperwork continued to play a vital role as a source of comfort, consolation, and the emotional embodiment of loved ones who, though absent, remained forever present on the page.

In 1786, Attwater travelled to Broughton to visit her distant cousin Mary Steele. It was on a similar trip in 1766 that Attwater had first begun her journal, inspired, perhaps, by the efforts of her great-aunt, Anne Cator Steele.⁷⁴ Twenty years later, she took the opportunity to read Steele's diary and to copy extracts that were of particular personal import into her own journal. Her aunt's text was a spiritual guide, an exemplar of 'diligent' 'religious duties' which would enhance her own faith and practice.⁷⁵ Attwater was particularly interested in passages that concerned her direct relatives – especially her recently deceased mother – a focus which suggests the diary also helped her to acquire a more intimate knowledge of her own family. For example, in March 1786, Attwater copied an entry from May 1739 that described her mother's own visit to Broughton and her desire 'God willing to offer herself to ye church the ensuing day in order to be baptised and rec[eive]d a member'.⁷⁶ In her transcription, Attwater ventriloquised her aunt's reflections in order to find, in the language of somebody more

distantly related, a greater knowledge of her immediate family – a suggestive movement outwards and back again.

Further, by recording the ‘sweet agreeable talk’ held between her aunt and mother, Attwater was able, not just to preserve their discourse, but to participate in it.⁷⁷ More than once, Attwater referred to her diary as a site to ‘converse’ – with God, with herself, but also with earlier generations of Baptist kin, in whom she found scope for meaningful and instructive exchange.⁷⁸ In his study of nonconformist identities, John Seed has argued that dissent ‘required a continuing commitment to the past and the production of meaningful connections with Dissenters of previous generations’.⁷⁹ While Seed had in mind the many printed histories and biographies produced by nonconformists, such as Edmund Calamy’s catalogue of ejected ministers, a similar insight can be applied to those manuscripts that circulated within dissenting families.⁸⁰ Indeed, in her study of women’s domestic manuscript culture – including the collections of Attwater and the wider Steele network – Aalders has argued that, as a sect with a strong memory of religious persecution and an ecclesiology that favoured the local and personal authority of the ‘gathered church’ over centralised denominational confession, for Baptists the connection between faith, family, and memory was particularly acute.⁸¹

Though Attwater was generally more inclined to seek advice and exemplars in the works of her female forbears – a gendered distinction that mirrors Wansey’s engagement with his male relatives – she also drew some parallels between her own life and that of another Broughton diarist, ‘Mr Thos’ (possibly her brother-in-law, Thomas Whitaker, who died in 1784). In an entry from 1786 she observed that she had found ‘many parts of [his] Experience similar to my own’.⁸² In this case, the original diary survives only as an echo within the pages of Attwater’s manuscript: the act of writing is, itself, a form of archiving, preserving the voices of the past even where the original documents have fallen out of view.

While her great-aunt’s diary remained in the hands of the Steele family, affording Attwater only occasional opportunities for consultation, her access to her mother’s diary was less constrained, and, instead of copying pertinent passages, Attwater excised whole pages, tucking them into her own notebooks. As with Steele, Attwater’s choice of entries suggests that she approached this text as a source of posthumous guidance for her and her relatives. In 1795, the year her husband was baptised, Attwater inserted her mother’s account of her own baptism.⁸³ The lesson here was perhaps intended as much for Joseph’s benefit as her own, furnishing him with an instructive example of a figure who had successfully overcome their ‘doubts and fears’.⁸⁴ He was certainly one possible reader of Attwater’s diary: the same year, Attwater delineated one of her notebooks as a ‘mutual Repository for particular providence that occur and thoughts on them for JGB and JB’ and in the next entry he affirmed his commitment to this collaborative project.⁸⁵

Attwater also incorporated her mother’s reflections into her own meditations. When, in 1809, Attwater’s only daughter Anna died, she inserted the entry from her mother’s diary that recorded the death of her son some fifty years before: ‘The Death of my Dear little Babe was a sharper affliction then any one can think it was [...] I set my heart too much upon him I lov’d my child too well; my Dearest Lord will have no Rival’.⁸⁶ Her mother had suffered a similar blow, and in her expressions of anguish mingled with devout resignation Attwater sought a guide, and perhaps some comfort, as she attempted to navigate her own loss.

Attwater returned to Anna's death repeatedly in her subsequent journals. Sermons reminded her of her daughter's dying words, hymns her funeral, and each year she marked the anniversary of 'that solemn day'.⁸⁷ On some occasions, her remembrances were prompted by encounters with Anna's written remains, incidents which remind us that in this age of lower life expectancy the transmission of manuscripts down the generations – as opposed to across or even up them – was far from guaranteed. In 1810 Attwater began a new diary in a textbook that had once belonged to her daughter, and, on reading Anna's inscription of ownership – 'Anna Jane Blatch, Bratton, 1804' – she was moved to remembrance and reflection (Figure 5).⁸⁸ Alongside Anna's name she wrote:

Alas my beloved Anna little did I think w[he]n I desired you to make this textbook [...] I should survive you and fill it up – at least begin to fill it. Dear Happy spirit you are now arrived where the instruction from mortals are no more needed [...] O my God prepare me to reunite my beloved child and permit me to join with her in unceasing praises to God and ye lamb forever.⁸⁹

The notebook provided Attwater with a physical reminder of her daughter, even as it confronted her with Anna's unwritten life literally held before her in its unfilled pages. By

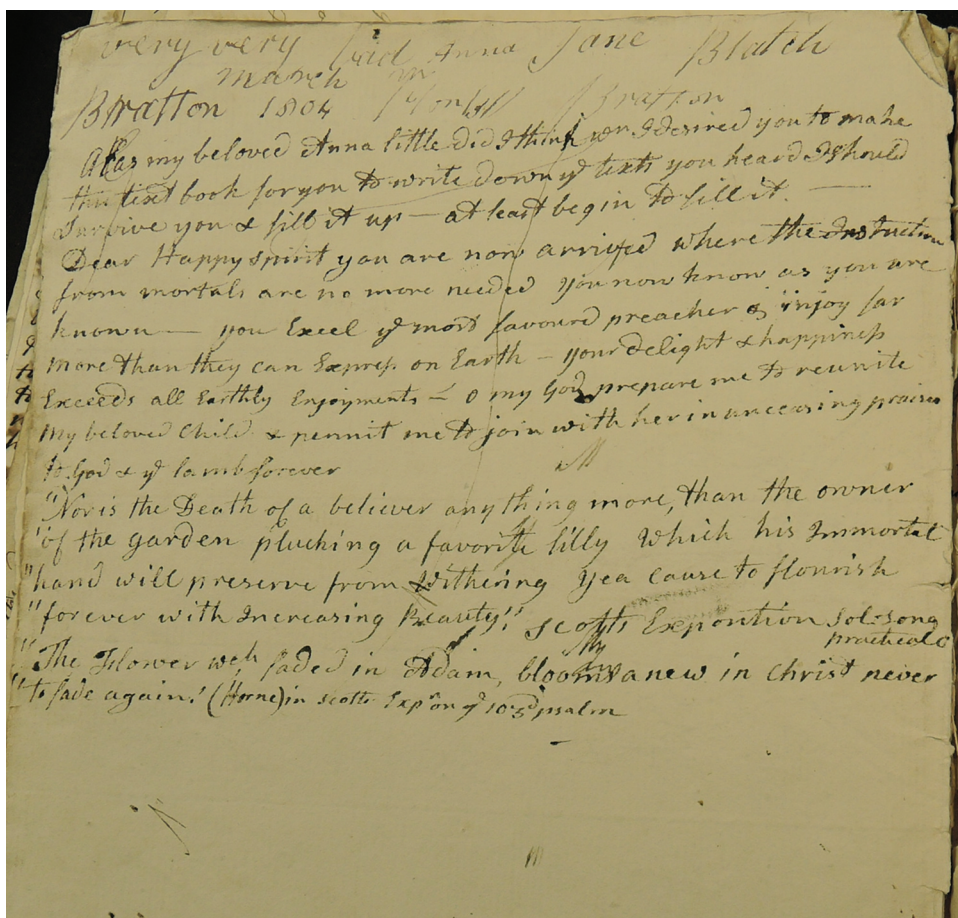


Figure 5. Jane Attwater's inscription in her daughter Anna's textbook (1810). Angus Library and Archives, D/ATT/1/22.

choosing to continue the book herself, Attwater was able to connect her reflections to her daughter, transforming them into an act of communion with the dead. 'Permit me to join with her', she wrote, a choice of phrase that referred to their eventual reunion in heaven, but also to her efforts to join together with her daughter in the pages of the textbook.

Elsewhere in her journals and papers Attwater stored other scraps of writing penned by Anna, items which, like Jane Johnson's letters, possessed a renewed memorial and sentimental significance after their author's death.⁹⁰ Though in happier times Attwater had expressed her desire that her diaries should pass to her daughter for her own religious edification, on Anna's death they acquired a rather different, memorial function, preserving the words and written works of her dead daughter alongside those of other relatives.⁹¹ Attwater's journal was 'a kind of repository', both metaphorical and literal: a receptacle of life events, God's providence, and the words, deeds, and written works of the wider Attwater family.⁹²

Conclusion

'When one is dead, all is lost that is not deposited in some public repository': so opined the antiquarian and natural scientist John Aubrey in 1692.⁹³ His comments reflected the growing archival consciousness of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century and the new institutional collections that this fostered, from the archives of the Royal Society to the formation of the Public Record Office in 1838. However, as this article has shown, these 'public' repositories were part of a broader culture of manuscript preservation and transmission, one that infused the lives and homes, not just of aristocratic elites, but of middling sort families who increasingly found themselves the custodians of significant quantities of manuscript materials. These collections were lively sites of intergenerational discourse and emotional expression, and they played a vital role in the construction and curation of family memory and identity.

Though engagement with written remains was widespread, the processes and impulses that underpinned the archives of these upper middling sort families varied considerably and were shaped by a subject's socio-economic position, gender, and confessional identity, as well as their own personal priorities and anxieties. The conformist Johnson women, secure in their religious identities, primarily preserved manuscripts that embodied emotional and sentimental ties alongside items that evidenced the lineage of the male Johnson line. For non-conformists like Wansey and Attwater, by contrast, engagement with the papers of their predecessors was, to a significant extent, an act of faith. The family was an important locus of nonconformist memory, in which familial and spiritual identities were intertwined. Quite what form this took varied between denominations. As a member of a sect that favoured the local and personal authority of the 'gathered' church, Attwater placed considerable weight on the words and works of her (largely female) Baptist forebears, re-reading texts and incorporating them into her own spiritual meditations. By contrast, Wansey's activities drew on a broader, and by this period well-established, culture of non-conformist writing published in print. His efforts to reshape and edit the papers of deceased relatives often drew on these texts – but they also had the potential to resist and reshape, as well as reflect, these broader narratives. This process was most evident in his Civil War 'supplementa', which foregrounded stories that were

absent in the period's printed accounts, and, in so doing, established the Wanseys' pivotal place in national history.

The reasons *why* an item was preserved also informed *how* it was kept, and the ways in which its custodians might engage with it. From annotating and accumulating to copying and incorporating, the subjects in this article engaged with written remains, and shaped their archives, in different ways. In drawing attention to these varied practices, it demonstrates how reconstructing the meanings and motives that underpinned family collections may be possible – and, in cases when it is not, provides an account of some the multifarious meanings that intergenerational items might possess.

As their unintended – and probably unimagined – readers, family papers require historians to pay closer attention to the presences, absences, and impetuses that lay behind their curation. If we do not, we are liable to overlook the multiple layers of meanings that these materials contain, privileging the priorities of their original creator over the many hands that have subsequently ensured their preservation. Indeed, by writing histories, we are but the next participant in this process of revision and reinterpretation, utilising the manuscripts of the dead for our own ends, just as generations have done before us. To explore these family archives, then, is to do more than reconstruct the experiences of England's middling sort: it illuminates the polyvocal quality of our archival heritage and the priorities and anxieties of successive generations that have shaped the sources on which we rely.

Notes

1. Bodleian Library (hereafter Bod.), Papers of Jane Johnson, MS Don c 190, f. 60.
2. For the 'matriarchive' see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996), pp. 35–6.
3. Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archival Administration* (Oxford, 1922), p. 12.
4. Alexandra Walsham, 'The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe', special issue, *Past and Present*, 230.11 (2016), pp. 9–48 (p. 11).
5. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972), and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 2006); and Derrida, *Archive Fever*.
6. For a detailed account of the impact of the archival turn across a wide range of fields see Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authorities in History and Archives* (Oxford, 2011).
7. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2010).
8. Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, 2006); and Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, 2011).
9. For a small selection of this expansive body of work see Michael Hunter (ed.), *Archives of the Scientific Revolution: The Formation and Exchange of Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Woodbridge, 1998); Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England: The Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke, 2004); 'Archival Knowledge Cultures in Europe, 1400–1900', special issue, *Archival Science*, 10.3 (2010); Nicholas Popper, 'From Abbey to Archive: Managing Texts and Records in Early Modern England', *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), pp. 249–266; Filippo de Vivo, 'Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice, 1400–1650', *Archival Science*, 10 (2010), pp. 231–248; Rosemary Sweet, 'Borough Archives and the Preservation of the Past in Eighteenth Century Towns', in Jean-Philippe Genet and Francois-Joseph Ruggi (eds.), *Du papier à l'archive, du privé au public: France et îles Britanniques, deux mémoires*, (Paris, 2011), pp. 129–149; 'Archival

- Transformation in Early Modern European History', special issue, *European History Quarterly*, 46.3 (2016); Vera Keller, Anna Marie Roos, and Elizabeth Yale (eds.), *Archival Afterlives: Life, Death, and Knowledge-Making in Early Modern British Scientific and Medical Archives* (Leiden, 2018); Markus Friedrich, *The Birth of the Archive: A History of Knowledge*, trans. John Noel Dillon (Michigan, 2018); and Randolph Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe: Proof, Information, and Political Record-Keeping, 1400–1700* (Cambridge, 2019).
10. See, for example, Head, *Making Archives in Early Modern Europe*, p. 14.
 11. Walsham, 'The Social History of the Archive', p. 17.
 12. Alexandra Walsham, Kate Peters, and Liesbeth Corens, 'Introduction', in Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham (eds.), *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 1–26 (p. 22).
 13. For studies based on elite family archives see Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: the Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660–1720* (Oxford, 1999); Rosemary O'Day, *An Elite Family in Early Modern England: The Temples of Stow and Burton Dasset, 1570–1656* (Woodbridge, 2018); Maris de Lurdes Rosa, Rita Sampaio da Nova, Alice Borges Gago, and Maria Joao da Camara Andrade e Sousa (eds.), *Recovered Voices, Newfound Questions: Family Archives and Historical Research* (Coimbra, 2019).
 14. Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009), p. 113.
 15. Henry French, 'The Search for the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1600–1800', *The Historical Journal*, 43.1 (2000), pp. 277–293 (p. 277); Matthew Cragoe, 'The Parish Elite at Play? Cricket, Community, and the "Middling Sort" in Eighteenth-Century Kent', *History*, 102.349 (2017), pp. 45–67 (p. 45).
 16. Marjorie Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses: Female Education and Nonconformist Culture, 1700–1900* (Leicester, 1997), p. 1. According to land tax assessments, Jane's brother, Gay Thomas Attwater, was not the largest landowner in the parish, was not styled as an 'Esq.', and there are no tenants listed as occupiers of his properties (tenants are listed for properties owned by other people in the parish). This suggests he was a substantial farmer rather than an estate owner whose wealth derived principally from rental income. Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre (hereafter WSHC), A1/345/311.
 17. Joan Kent, 'The Rural "Middling Sort" in Early Modern England, c. 1640–1740: Some Economic, Political, and Socio-Cultural Characteristics', *Rural History*, 10.1 (1999), pp. 19–54 (p. 21).
 18. Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 112.
 19. Parts of the Johnson archive are split between the Bodleian, the Lincolnshire and Buckinghamshire Record Offices, and Indiana University Library, the Wansey collection resides in the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, and the Attwater archive is divided between the Angus Library and Archives and the Bodleian Library. For reflections on contemporary cataloguing and its implications for early modern archival material see James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 222–228.
 20. Reeves, *Pursuing the Muses*, p. 5; Sandra Stanley Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory, and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends, 1780–1930* (Abingdon, 2007); Helen Smith, 'Quaker Women, Family Archives, and the Construction of Identity: Analysing the Memoirs and Personal Papers of Elizabeth Taylor Cadbury (1858–1951)', *Quaker Studies*, 16.1 (2011), pp. 124–134; Cynthia Aalders, 'Writing Religious Communities: The Spiritual Lives and Manuscript Culture of English Women, 1740–1790', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2014, pp. 251–298; and Alexandra Walsham, 'Archives of Dissent: Family, Memory, and the English Nonconformist Tradition', *Friends of Dr William's Library*, 73rd Lecture (2020).
 21. James Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus: Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, 1999); Matthew Kadane, *The Watchful Clothier: The Life of an Eighteenth-Century Protestant Capitalist* (New Haven, 2013); and Brodie Waddell, "'Verses of My

- Owne Making”: Literacy, Work, and Social Identity in Early Modern England’, *Journal of Social History*, 54.1 (2020), pp. 161–184.
22. Brodie Waddell, ‘Writing History from Below: Chronicling and Record-Keeping in Early Modern England’, *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), pp. 239–264 (esp. pp. 254–257).
 23. On the circulation of manuscripts in wider social and religious networks see Margaret Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore, 1999); George Justice and Nathan Tinker (eds.), *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication, 1550–1800* (Cambridge, 2010); and Rachel Scarborough King (ed.), *After Print: Eighteenth Century Manuscript Cultures* (Charlottesville, 2020).
 24. Ann Blair, ‘Afterword’, in *Archives and Information*, pp. 311–316 (p. 311).
 25. Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 168.
 26. Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles, *Reading Lessons from the Eighteenth Century: Mothers, Children, and Texts* (Shenstone, 2006); and Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, pp. 161–217.
 27. Bod. MS Don c 190, f. 34–5.
 28. Ibid., f. 5.
 29. Ibid., f. 36.
 30. Ibid., item 14.
 31. Ibid., f. 60.
 32. Ibid., f. 37.
 33. Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England: Material Culture and Domestic Life, 1500–1700* (New Haven, 2017); Margot Finn and Kate Smith, ‘Introduction’, in Margot Finn and Kate Smith (eds.), *The East India Company at Home, 1757–1857* (London, 2018), pp. 1–24.
 34. For other examples of the connections between family paperwork and paintings in the collections of middling sort families see Dr William’s Library, Say Family Papers, SS/12.107/3 and Northampton Record Office, MC175/1/3–4.
 35. Bod. MS Don c 196, ff. 49, 11.
 36. Ibid., f. 11.
 37. Ibid., f. 49.
 38. Ibid., ff. 25–7.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Bod. MS Don b. 39.
 41. Bod. MS Don c 192, f. 108–9, 110, 112, MS Don c 195, f. 3 and 4.
 42. Bod. MS Don c 191, f. 10v. In 1753, Woolsey Johnson resigned his living and the family prepared to move to a property at Witham-on-the-hill in Lincolnshire.
 43. Bod. MS Don c 195, f. 47v.
 44. Bod. MS Don c 192, f. 54v.
 45. See, for example, Valerie Capdeville and Alain Kerherve (eds.), *British Sociability in the Long Eighteenth Century: Challenging the Anglo-French Connection* (Woodbridge, 2019).
 46. Bod. MS Don c 190, f. 20r.
 47. Ibid., f. 24v.
 48. Bod. MS Don c 192, f. 88r.
 49. Ibid.
 50. Ibid.
 51. Though it was another woman, George William’s wife, Lucy, who took the more active role in this process, inserting portions of ‘old Jane’s’ papers into her own family album.
 52. Daniel Woolf, ‘A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre, and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500–1800’, *American Historical Review* 102.3 (1997), pp. 645–79; Susan Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, 2004); and Holton, *Quaker Women*, pp. 24–8.
 53. WSHC 314/1/1–3. For discussion of the Wansey’s economic affairs see J. De L. Mann, ‘A Wiltshire Family of Clothiers: George and Hester Wansey, 1683–1714’, *Economic History Review*, 9.2 (1956), pp. 241–253.

54. Adam Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 57–122; and Jason Scott-Warren, ‘Early Modern Bookkeeping and Life-Writing Revisited: Accounting for Richard Stonley’, *Past and Present*, 230.11 (2016), pp. 151–170.
55. Stephen Monteage, *Debtor and creditor made easie, or, A short instruction for the attaining the right use of accounts after the best method used by merchants* (London, 1682), sig. A3v, B1r.
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