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THE INSTITUTE OF HERALDIC AND GENEALOGICAL STUDIES

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The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies [IHGS] is an independent educational charitable trust established to provide training and research in the study of the history and structure of the family. It was established in Northgate, Canterbury, in 1961.

Set in its own grounds in a charming property dating from the thirteenth century, the Institute runs courses of instruction leading to qualifications in genealogy and heraldry. We offer a range of Distance Learning Courses, including our renowned Higher Certificate Correspondence Course in Genealogy which was established to train professional genealogists.

The fees for membership comprise an initial fee of £37.50 for the first year, and then an annual fee of £22.50. Membership includes access to the library, discounts in the bookshop, and the bi-annual journal *Family History*.

The Institute is famed for its library and for its publications, including the celebrated *Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers*. Library opening hours are 10:00 – 4:00 pm, Wednesday, by appointment only. IHGS members and students have free access. The rate for non-members is £10 a day or £5 per half-day. Visitors wishing to use our FamilySearch facility can do so for free. Since space in the library is limited, all members and visitors must make an appointment with the librarian.

The Institute shares its premises with its sister company, Achievements, also founded in 1961. Achievements is an international research organisation devoted to, and specialising in, all aspects of genealogy, family tree research, heraldry and associated artwork. More information can be found at www.achievements.co.uk.

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Note from the Editor

We invite contributions of articles for our journal, Family History. Articles should focus on genealogy or heraldry, whether comprising historical analyses, personal research journeys, or insights into family history and heraldic traditions. Graduates and students are all encouraged to contribute.

Front cover:

The IHGS building with the newly renovated Coats of Arms of the Trustees.

IHGS produces a free monthly email newsletter.
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IHGS NEWS

NEW ONLINE BITESIZE COURSES

New Bitesize courses let students study at their own pace, focusing on essential resources to trace their family roots with a new platform for a more interactive, accessible, and flexible learning experience. The courses are suitable for beginners and experienced genealogists alike. To find out more please visit www.ihgs.ac.uk/bitesize-courses

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NEW ANYTIME RECORDED TALKS FROM IHGS

We are also delighted to announce the launch of a new series of recorded talks, now available to view online. These sessions further offer family historians the flexibility to learn at their own pace and to revisit key topics at any time.

The latest recordings include:

Getting the Most from FamilySearch with FamilySearch Ambassador Lucy Reynoldson – a free talk offering valuable guidance on making the most of this essential online resource.

Researching Your Ancestors Using Newspapers with Chloe O'Shea, exploring how to uncover stories and details that bring family history to life. Chloe's book "Tracing Your Ancestors Using Newspapers" will be published by Pen & Sword this spring.

Scottish Heraldry at its best: The Thistle Chapel and the Knights of the Order of the Thistle with Lorna Kinnaird.

Tracing Your Illegitimate Ancestors with Elizabeth Yule, offering sensitive and practical advice on tackling one of genealogy's more challenging areas.

Tracing Your Nonconformist Ancestors, also with Elizabeth Yule, delving into the fascinating records of those who worshipped outside the Established Church.

These recorded talks complement the IHGS's ongoing programme of live Zoom tutorials which cover subjects such as heraldry, manorial documents, and research techniques. To explore the full list of talks, or to book your place, visit www.ihgs.ac.uk/book-courses-4

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KENT ECCLESIASTICAL COURT DEPOSITIONS INDEX ADDED TO IHGS LIBRARY

Ecclesiastical Court Depositions are unique for family history research because they often preserve the spoken words of ordinary people, recorded in detail by clerks.

Unlike many official records, these depositions can include personal testimony about daily life, family relationships, disputes, reputations, and community ties. They may reveal information about individuals who appear nowhere else in the written record, offering vivid insights into character, behaviour, and societal values. For genealogists, they provide a rare glimpse of our ancestors' voices and experiences, enriching family histories with colour and context beyond names and dates, whilst at the same time providing valuable evidence of family relationships.

However, they can be difficult to search as many have not been indexed. This resource is invaluable in indexing depositions for Kent from the 1500s to 1700s, allowing you to find if your ancestor appeared in an ecclesiastical court case.

The information in the index varies but will usually provide you with a name and catalogue number so you can easily obtain a copy of the deposition from the relevant archive. For 20% of the entries more information is given which may provide other details, such as residence, occupation and family relationships.

EAST KENT DEPOSITION INDEX BY DAVID WRIGHT

Some forty-five years ago the late Duncan Harrington had already perceived the huge value of church court depositions and gathered a small group of volunteers to help in their transcription and indexing. Our grateful thanks to Dr David Wright for his recent work on collating the index, and for his description of the index below:

Between them the extremely rich records of the Archdeaconry and Consistory Courts of Canterbury which covered the entire diocese of Canterbury (that is, the eastern two-thirds of the county), as well as certain other lesser sources, have produced an index of some 25,000 entries, now searchable in an alphabetical sequence.

The depositions of witnesses in such ecclesiastical court cases are amongst the most valuable but hitherto least exploited sources for social history, and one from which local historians and genealogists could greatly profit. The witness statements are often recorded verbatim and include many details to be found nowhere else: parish and length of occupancy, age, status or occupation, lifetime moves and, crucially, age and birthplace. The details are then completed by the witness signing or making a mark. This is an extraordinary range of information and applicable to many kinds of study – parish or community structure, migration and distances travelled, and literacy.

All this will enhance research in parish registers, and in the case of the declared age and birthplace will surely extend many pedigrees and likely overturn some others where an assumption has only too easily and dangerously been made.

The depositions of witnesses in ecclesiastical court cases are part of the written records of the Instance Court and illustrate the many activities of the church courts which included non-payment of tithes, defamation, paternity, adultery, matrimonial disputes (often in the form of breaches of promise), illegal sale of glebe and wood, non-repair of vicarage property, non-payment of a parish clerk's wages, vestry affairs, and endless disputes over the provision and execution of wills.

Information given in the index

It should be said immediately that the index is based only on the start of each case where in an opening short preamble the witness details are recorded. These are in Latin (before 1733), but in a common form and should present no problems to anybody who can interpret Roman numerals (whether in words or figures) and has some familiarity with Kentish geography and surnames. Then follow perhaps several pages detailing the case where may be found references to family, neighbours, parish officials and other people. There are many deponents among both senior and junior clergy whose career movements (and college origins) may sometimes be revealed. The fuller entries tend to be in the middle part of the period, say 1580-1650, the earlier ones from 1411 and the later to 1755 giving less detail, but of course still equally valuable in at least establishing an individual's residence in a certain parish at a certain date.

About 80 per cent of the slips give a minimum of name and precise archival reference. Of the balance many add at least parish and occupation/status. Others add birthplace and parish moves, these are usually part of Duncan's casework and subsequently transferred. For some individuals there are multiple references which may prove particularly valuable in constructing a biography, but care should be taken that they do not relate to two or more persons of the same name.

Extraordinary as the depositions are, there are some caveats. Whilst those called as witnesses are from all social classes and occupations, they tended to be the more respectable and established in the case of tithe disputes and some other matters. Witnesses might not have recited all the places they had lived in, through ignorance or forgetfulness, and equally the officials may not have been willing or able to write down a tedious list, sometimes rather just giving the parishes of current abode and origin. Whether people moved alone or with family, masters or servants cannot be determined. No indication of routes taken between places is given and nor are moves within larger parishes, although moves within the various Canterbury city parishes are sometimes given. Whilst the details given are probably for the most part true, human frailty in a largely illiterate and innumerate population should always be borne in mind (ages are nearly always prefaced by 'or thereabouts'). How many of us today could recite with accuracy our lifetime's house moves?

Wealden Parishes

Here we are on much firmer ground. References to deponents in the eighteen Wealden parishes of Benenden, Bethersden, Biddenden, Cranbrook, Frittenden, Goudhurst, Hawkhurst, Headcorn, High Halden, Marden, Newenden, Rolvenden, Sandhurst, Smarden, Staplehurst, Tenterden, Wittersham and Woodchurch were transcribed and indexed by the late Jules de Launay and helpers into seven manuscript volumes with copious accompanying indexes (c. 4,000 entries).

In all cases the full details of the informative preamble are given. All this material is quite separate from the main card index and is taken from PRC39/1-55, X10/1-21 and X11/1-21.

Rochester Diocese

There is very little surviving deposition material for west Kent other than the national records mentioned elsewhere. The main index (and also the Wealden parishes) do have scattered references to such individuals but only if they have moved eastwards and then indicate a western birthplace.

There are, however, two Rochester diocese deposition books held at Maidstone which have been included:

- DRb/Jd1 (1541-1571) about 375 entries roughly transcribed into a paper book with accompanying calendar of surnames.
- DRb/Jd2 (1631-1636) about 125 entries fully transcribed into an index book arranged by initial letter of surname.

Sources and scope of the index

The following list of contents includes notes on individual coverage where known.

Kent Archives and Local History (Maidstone)

- PRC38/ 1-4 Depositions (1694-1755) complete
- PRC39/1-55 Depositions (1555-1649; 1661-1694) complete
- J/X/ 6, 8, 9 Depositions (c.1570-c.1610)
- J/X/10/1-21 Depositions (c.1540s-c.1580s) possibly complete
- J/X/11/1-21 Depositions (1585-1687; 1693-1696; 1713-1753) taken from and improving on the Tyler and Woodruff index which William Urry thought to have been compiled in the course of research but was incomplete.
- J/Z/2/29 Depositions (1693-1696) complete
- J/Z/3/20 Depositions (1717-1753) complete
- J/Z/4/13, 15 Depositions (1730s-1740s)
- PRC5/1 Caveats (c.1620-1630s)
- PRC18/42; 51-53 Miscellaneous (c.1700-1799)
- PRC44/3 Commission Acts
- PRC44/4/6-7 Allegations 1617-1620; 1723-1726
- PRC44/6; 14-16 Miscellaneous
- PRC48/5 Inventories
- Q/SRP Quarter sessions (c.1630-1631)

The National Archives

- Exchequer Depositions E134: Kent entries 1558-1695 complete
- Country Depositions C21; C22 (coverage unknown)
- Town Depositions C24 (coverage unknown)

- High Court of Delegates DEL 3/2; 3/6 (1634-1647) (coverage unknown)
- Star Chamber STAC J3, J22; T7, T17, T18, T20, T22, T31, T36 (coverage unknown)

Canterbury Cathedral Archives

- Boxes B51; K2; Marlowe 3
- U31/L1 (1709-1711)

Archdeaconry of Lewes

- Ep. II/5, 9, 18 Depositions (1580s-c.1606) (Kent references, perhaps complete)

Summary

The contents of the index offer a cornucopia of valuable detail easily worthy of far greater analysis, perhaps to dissertation level. Its contents stand as a remarkable finding aid, and although its exact coverage and completeness are now probably irrecoverable, this is not to look a gift horse in the mouth, for the range of surnames is vast and, armed with the basic entry, the researcher can then follow through in reading the full case to gain more information. Kentish researchers will be eternally grateful to Duncan Harrington for this extraordinary achievement.

* * * * *

RQG IHGS PRIZE WINNER 2025

Every year the Register of Qualified Genealogists (RQG) award prizes to students studying at Diploma or Master's level at the three institutions which are affiliated to RQG.

We are delighted to announce that the IHGS Student Award went to Jananne Rahman for her portfolio piece "William Maybank and the Hyde Park Riots of 1866"

Many congratulations to her and all the winners.

PRIZE WINNER

Institute of Heraldic & Genealogical Studies

Congratulations to

Jananne Rahman

"William Maybank and the Hyde Park Riots of 1866."





RQG STUDENT PRIZE WINNERS 2025

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UNRAVELLING THE MYSTERY OF HISTORIC WAX SEALS

IHGS Student and Members Research Project:

IHGS is delighted to announce a unique research opportunity for our students, graduates and members. We have been approached by a gentleman who has inherited a remarkable collection of over 200 wax seals dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. Discovered in 1959 during an attic clearance at a local hotel, the collection offers a rare opportunity to engage in original heraldic and historical research.

The Project

Approximately half of the seals bear handwritten inscriptions beneath them, enabling the owner to identify around one third of the individuals represented. These include prominent industrialists, two prime ministers, members of the aristocracy, knights of the realm, and even two previously unknown ancestors of HM Queen Camilla.

However, many seals remain unidentified, featuring heraldic symbols such as arms, crests, Latin mottos, and personal initials.

The aim will be to assist in identifying the origins and owners of these unidentified wax seals using your heraldic and genealogical expertise. Digital images of the seals will be provided to participants.

How to Participate

Open to IHGS students, graduates, and members, participants should have a sound knowledge of heraldry and access to standard heraldic reference works.

This project provides a hands-on opportunity to apply your heraldic and genealogical knowledge to a genuine historical puzzle. You'll gain valuable research experience, contribute to uncovering hidden histories, and help shed new light on this fascinating collection.

We look forward to your participation in this exciting collaborative venture. For any queries, please contact Sarah Bulson, education@ihgs.ac.uk.

* * * * *

IHGS on INSTAGRAM

You can also now find our IHGS community on Instagram and LinkedIn and we'd love it if you followed us! You can join us on Instagram @ihgs_familyhistory and on LinkedIn @The Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies.

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THE PROVOK'D HUSBAND:
The Divorce of William and Mary Yonge 1724
By Jananee Rahman, DipGen

Introduction

While perusing the records of the Diocese of London for Lecture 24 of the Higher Certificate, I came across thirteen very passionate and highly intimate love letters that had been transcribed into the book of the Vicar General in the Autumn of 1724. Apart from a brief postscript, there was no explanation of their purpose or relevance.

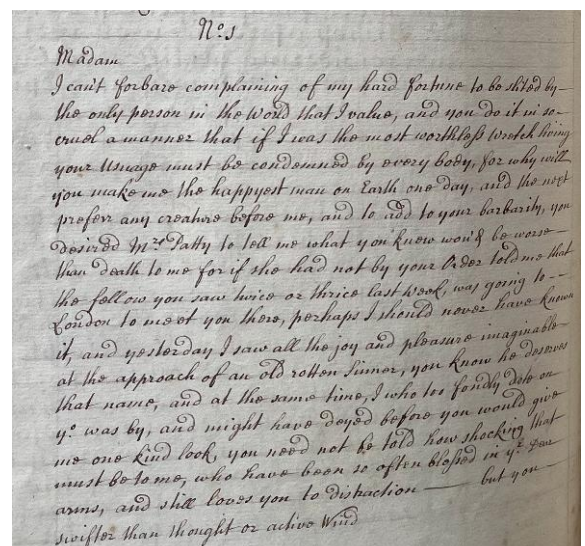
Returning to these letters subsequently, the realisation dawned that they were exhibits in an ecclesiastical court case Yonge contra Yonge for a judicial separation a mensa et thoro (from bed-and-board), a necessary prerequisite for a private Act of Parliament which was the only means at that time of obtaining a divorce where remarriage was permitted. This was a rare case: there were only 14 full divorces in the first half of the eighteenth century¹ and, partly due to its rarity, but also thanks to the social position of the people involved, it would have been a cause célèbre attracting newspaper coverage and widespread interest.

This report traces the case through the ecclesiastical court records of the Diocese of London (DL), held at the London Archives. It also made use of newspapers, journals of the House of Lords and published sources for the histories of the families involved, as well as parish registers and wills. In addition, chancery court records in the National Archives provided information on equity cases that recited significant documents the originals of which could not be traced.

The title *The Provok'd Husband* was that of a 1728 comedic play by Colley Cibber which centred on an unhappy married woman who tried to leave her husband and took a lover more to her liking.

The Letters

The first documents examined were letters entered as exhibits in the ecclesiastical court case *Yonge contra Yonge*². They were transcribed into the book of the Vicar General of the Diocese of London shortly after 20 November 1724. This dating was based on the postscript which stated the letters had been received on that date out of the Registry of the Consistory Court of the Bishop of London, in accordance with a decree dated 16 November 1724.



Letter 1 in the Vicar General's Book

¹ Probert. p. 25.

² Yonge con Yonge. Exhibit. Vicar General's Book, 1715-25. The London Archives (City of London Corporation). Diocese of London. Reference DL/A/A/021/MS09532/003 Pages 190-197. Original viewed 6 January 2025.

The letters were numbered 1 through 13. See the Appendix for full transcripts but in summary:

Letter 1: (undated) Addressed to “Madam”, the writer complained of her cruel manner and expressed jealousy about the recipient entertaining another man and arranging to meet this third party in London. Despite this the writer, who had been “so often blessed in your Dear arms”, remained faithful.

Letter 2: (undated) Addressed to “my Dearest Angell”, it talked about a meeting the previous day where the writer had reached the “extreamest extasie”. He asked whether the recipient might contrive to meet him the following Tuesday in the company of her uncle, though “Monseieur looks about him pretty sharply which was the reason I wou’d not be seen to come through your town today”. The writer signed off as “Philander”, a reference to Aphra Behn’s epistolary novel, *The Amours of Philander and Silvia*.

Letter 3: (undated and incomplete) Addressed to “Silvia”, the writer expressed a general dissatisfaction with their having to keep apart but stated “tis not possible for me to deliver you imediately without intire ruin to us both”.

Letter 4: (dated 27 September) Again addressed to “Dear Silvia”, the writer explained that it was fear of discovery that caused him to leave her “Dear Dear Arms” that morning, after the “Dear pleasures of last night”. It was again signed “Philander”.

Letter 5: (dated 28 March 1723) Addressed to “Dearest Molly”, the writer expressed concern for her health, hearing she had been ill after he left her. He signed off “Your most affectionate T.N.”

Letter 6: (undated and incomplete) Addressed to “my Dear Molly”, the writer indicated that his own circumstances kept them apart and that therefore he was not in a position to complain when, in his absence, she was “sharing her charms”. The recipient was planning to take lodgings in Edmonton and the writer hoped that she would then “not be under any obligation to any of your relations”.

Letter 7: (dated “Saturday morning”) Addressed to Mrs Yonge and “my Dear Molly”, this was an anguish plea for reassurance that she was constant in her affections while they were apart.

Letter 8: (dated “Saturday afternoon”) Addressed to Mrs Yonge and “my Dearest Molly”, it implied that she was ill and that he would be returning to her soon.

Letter 9: (dated 7th January 1723/4). Addressed to “my Dearest Molly”, the writer assured her that he would return to her as soon as business allowed.

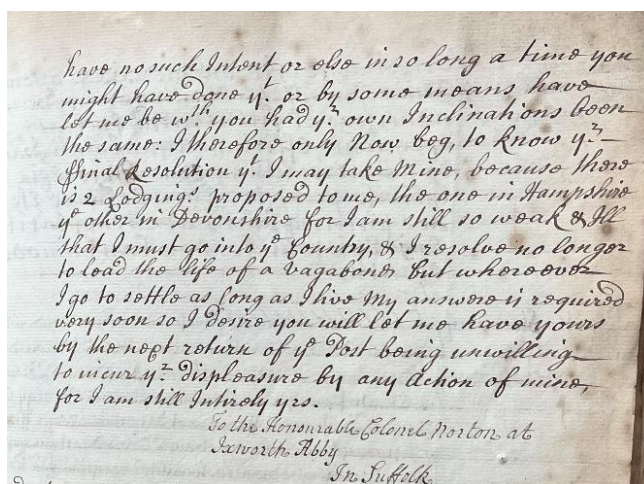
Letter 10: (undated) Addressed to “my Dear Dear Molly”, the author expressed concern for her and “would not for the world have you confirm the news you sent me... dreading the consequence of your not being able to carry it off without suspicion and greatly fearing the endangering of your health by using any other means.”

He went on to offer to find a place for her to retire to for two or three months “without discovering who you are.”

Letter 11: (undated) Addressed to “my Dearest Molly”, it explained that his continued absence from her was due to “sure information that Mr Y_____ has been upon the watch” and that he had received hints of “Mr Y_____s intentions which is to get a div_____ upon my Account which.... must be inevitable ruin to us both for in such a case your Allowance wou’d be taken away and I shou’d be reduced to such circumstances as not to be able to assist you.” In a postscript, he stated “I don’t know how soon your papers may be searched. Therefore for fear mine shou’d do you a prejudice I cou’d wish you wou’d burn them.”

Letter 12: (undated). Addressed to “Mrs Yonge at Mrs Smith’s two doors above the Sun Tavern in Great Russell Street”. In it, the author stated his abiding intention to “settle you somewhere neare me.”

Letter 13: (undated). Addressed “To the Honourable Colonel Norton at Ixworth Abby in Suffolk”. The writer chastised him for failing to visit her “after I miscarry’d” and asked to know whether it was still his intention to provide a furnished house for her, since she resolved “no longer to lead the life of a vagabond”.

A photograph of a handwritten letter on aged, slightly stained paper. The handwriting is in a cursive script, typical of the 18th century. The text is written in dark ink and is somewhat faded in places. The letter concludes with a signature and address. The paper is held in place by a dark binding on the right side.

have no such Intent or else in so long a time you
might have done it, or by some means have
let me be with you had y^r own Inclinations been
the same: I therefore only now beg, to know y^r
final Resolution y^t I may take mine, because there
is 2 Lodging^s proposed to me, the one in Hampshire
if other in Devonshire for I am still so weak & ill
that I must go into y^e Country, & I resolve no longer
to lead the life of a vagabond, but where-so-ever
I go to settle as long as I live my answer is required
very soon so I desire you will let me have yours
by the next return of y^e Post being unwilling
to incur y^r Displeasure by any Action of mine,
for I am still Truly y^rs.
To the Honourable Colonel Norton at
Ixworth Abby
In Suffolk

The conclusion of Letter No. 13

As most of the letters were undated, it was not known whether they were transcribed in chronological order. It was also unclear whether the layout and idiosyncrasies of spelling were lifted directly from the original letters or were made by the transcriber. However the letters contained useful details that allowed the parties to be identified: Colonel Thomas Norton of Suffolk and Mrs Mary Yonge – a married woman whose husband was looking to obtain a divorce. The dates of the court records indicated that the matter came to a head in 1724. To identify with certainty the parties involved, an initial search was made of the British Newspaper Archive for the name Yonge in 1724 and it produced three matches:

- 7 April 1724 - William Yonge had been made Commissioner of the Treasury³;
- 9 July 1724 - A trial in the Court of Common Pleas by William Yonge, MP for Honiton, against Colonel Norton for committing adultery with his wife⁴;
- 26 November 1724 - Mr Yonge had been given permission to bring a private bill to parliament to dissolve his marriage⁵.

³ Yonge. Caledonian Mercury. 7 April 1724 Page 3776. www.findmypast.co.uk. Digital copy of original image viewed 6 March 2025. Original data: The British Library Board.

⁴ Yonge. Stamford Mercury. 9 July 1724 Page 29. Ibid.

⁵ Yonge. Stamford Mercury. 26 November 1724. Page 272. Ibid.

These confirmed that the husband in the case was William Yonge who was an MP and government minister. He brought an action against Thomas Norton in the civil courts and later made an application to the ecclesiastical courts for a judicial separation, followed by a private act of parliament to obtain a full dissolution of his marriage with Mary Yonge.

Parties in the Case

Before interrogating the court records further, a search was made for information about William and Mary Yonge and Thomas Norton in order to provide context for the ensuing actions.

Thomas Norton

The eldest of the three parties was Thomas Norton. A simple Google search for ‘Thomas Norton’ and ‘Ixworth Abbey’ led to his entry in the History of Parliament because he had served as MP for Bury St Edmunds between 1727 and 1747⁶. The entry indicated that he had been born in 1684 to Colonel William Norton of Wellow, Hampshire, and that in 1708 he inherited a life interest in Ixworth Abbey in Suffolk from his uncle Major Richard Norton. He had been a Captain and Brevet-Colonel in the 1st Foot Guards but had entered the reserve in 1714. His marriage to Frances, the daughter of Sir Compton Felton of Playford, Suffolk, was mentioned but no further details were given.

A search for his marriage in the online sources drew a blank but a search for Frances Felton in the Suffolk Archives’ online catalogue produced a match to a marriage bond dated 28 May 1714 for “Thomas Norton, singleman, esquire of Ixworth and Frances Felton, singlewoman, daughter of Sir Compton Felton, Baronet. To be married at Playford.”⁷

Transcripts of the parish registers of Ixworth were examined and on 21 June 1715 a baptism was recorded for Richard, son of ‘Thomas Norton Esquire & Frances his wife’⁸. Less than two years later, the same registers recorded the burial of Frances, wife of Thomas Norton, on 3 February 1716/7⁹.

William Yonge

The newspaper account from July 1724 indicated that William Yonge was an MP and so his biography was also found on The History of Parliament site¹⁰. It confirmed that William Yonge had been born about 1693 and he was the son of Sir Walter Yonge, 3rd Baronet of Colyton, Devon. The biography also stated that his first marriage, dated 30 July 1716, was to Mary, daughter of Samuel Heathcote of Hackney, sister of Sir William Heathcote, 1st Baronet, and that this marriage had ended in divorce in 1724. He had served as MP for Honiton in Devon from 1715 until 1754.

⁶ Thomas Norton. www.historyofparliamentonline.org. The History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1715-1754, ed. R. Sedgwick, 1970. Transcript of original entry viewed 6 March 2025.

⁷ Thomas Norton/Frances Felton. Marriage licence bond 28 May 1714. Suffolk Record Office. Archdeaconry of Suffolk. Marriage Licence Bonds, 1703-1715. Reference FAA/23/6/348. Transcript viewed 5 March 2025.

⁸ Richard Norton. Baptism 21 June 1715. Ixworth SFK. www.familysearch.org. Parish register transcripts, 1559-1837. Film 991952 Items 8-11. Page 103. Digital image of transcript viewed 5 March 2025.

⁹ Frances Norton. Burial 3 February 1716/7. Ibid. Page 280.

¹⁰ William Yonge. www.historyofparliamentonline.org. The History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1715-1754, ed. R. Sedgwick, 1970. Transcript of original entry viewed 6 March 2025.

On learning that William Yonge had been a baronet, Cokayne's *Complete Baronetage* was consulted¹¹. It confirmed he was the only son and heir to Sir Walter Yonge, and that the family seat was in Escott, Devon. The entry referenced his first marriage as follows:

He married firstly, 30 July 1716, at Ely Chapel, Holborn (Hackney parish register), Mary, sister of Sir William HEATHCOTE, 1st Baronet [1733], daughter of Samuel HEATHCOTE, of Hackney, by Mary, daughter of William DAWSONNE, of Hackney aforesaid. She who was born 18 June and baptised there 2 July 1696, was divorced by Act of Parliament 1724.

Mary Heathcote

The published sources for William Yonge had confirmed Mary's maiden name and that her father was Samuel Heathcote of Hackney. They also referenced her brother William, a baronet, so a search was made for her brother in Cokayne which provided more biographical information about their father¹²:

WILLIAM HEATHCOTE, of Hursley, county Southampton, Esquire, 2^d but 1st surviving son and heir of Samuel HEATHCOTE, of Hackney, merchant, of London, a director of the East India and Eastland Companies (died 13 November 1708, aged 52), by Mary, 2^d daughter of William DAWSONNE, of Hackney aforesaid.

According to his son's entry in *Complete Baronetage*, Samuel Heathcote died in 1708 when Mary would have been 12 years old. His will was located in the probate records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) in December of that year and in it he charged his widow to divide up his estate as she saw fit when she came to write her own will¹³. Therefore a search was made for Mary Heathcote's will in the same probate court and it was found under 'Heathcoat' in May 1720¹⁴. It revealed that £12,000 had been advanced to her daughter Mary at the time of her marriage to William Yonge in 1716, but only a small legacy was left to her in comparison with those left to her siblings:

... my daughter Mary now wife of William YONGE Esquier Son and heir apparent of Sir Walter YONGE Baronett upon her marriage with the said William YONGE hath been... advanced and preferred with a portion of twelve thousand pounds... over and besides the sum of One thousand pounds and upwards which I paid... for Fitting her out with Cloaths [sic] and other necessities upon her said marriage.... I do by this my Will give dispose of bequeath and appoint unto my said daughter Mary the Further sum of One hundred pounds to be paid her within one month next after my decease.

William Yonge's entry in Cokayne gave the date 30 July 1716 for his marriage to Mary and the parish register for Hackney was consulted. This was Mary's home parish and it confirmed that the wedding took place at Ely House Chapel in Holborn¹⁵:

¹¹ Sir William Yonge. Cokayne. Volume III 1649-1664. 1st edition (1903). Page 232.

¹² William Heathcote. Cokayne. Volume V 1707-1800. 1st edition (1906). Page 75.

¹³ Samuel Heathcote. Will proved 2 December 1708. www.ancestry.co.uk. England & Wales, PCC Wills, 1384-1858. Original data: The National Archives. Reference PROB 11/505/189. Digital copy of original image viewed 6 March 2025.

¹⁴ Mary Heathcoat. Will proved 5 May 1720. Ibid. Reference PROB 11/574/48.

¹⁵ William Young/Mary Heathcote. Marriage 30 July 1716. Hackney MDX. www.ancestry.co.uk. London, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1812. Original data: TLA. London Church of England Parish Registers; Reference P79/JN1/024 Page 26. Digital copy of original image viewed 6 March 2025.

St John Hackney MDX. Parish marriages. 1716	
William YOUNG of Escott in Devon Esquire & Batchelor and Mrs Mary HEATHCOTE of this Parish Spinster were Married in Ely House Chapel in Holbourn London on the 30 th day of July by Lycens	1716

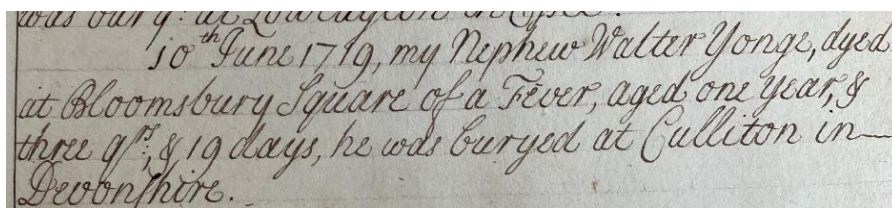
Although the published sources did not mention any children of the marriage, a search was conducted of FamilySearch for his baptism. This produced one match: a Walter Yonge was baptised at St Andrew Holborn on 10 September 1717. As Walter was the name of William Yonge's father, it seemed promising. The original parish record was located and found to contain the following information¹⁶:

St Andrew Holborn MDX. Parish baptisms. 1717	
Walter son of William YONGE Esquire & of Mary his Wife in Red Lyon Squire [sic] Borne the twenty second of August 1717 & Baptized the tenth of September	

It seemed likely that the child did not live, firstly because he was not mentioned in the published records but also because divorce cases at this time were generally predicated on a wealthy or titled man's need for a legitimate heir. A search in the London parish registers for a burial record before 1724 produced a single match in St Giles in the Fields, Holborn, in June 1719¹⁷:

St Giles in the Fields MDX. Parish burials. 1719	
29 June 1719 Sir Walter YOUNG's Child Carried Away	

This was a good match in terms of place and date but the father's name was incorrect. Knowing that the Yonge family had a seat in Colyton, Devon, a search was made of the parish registers there. Only the Bishops' Transcripts (BTs) were accessible and they contained a burial entry for 'Master Walter Young' on 17 June 1719 but no father's name was recorded¹⁸. A subsequent reading of Mary's brother's memorandum book in the Hampshire Archives revealed that he had recorded the boy's death from fever on 10 June as follows¹⁹:



*10th June 1719, my Nephew Walter YONGE, dyed
at Bloomsbury Square of a Fever, aged one year, &
three quarters & 19 days, he was buried at Culliton in
Devonshire.*

¹⁶ Walter Yonge. Baptism 10 September 1717. Holborn MDX. Ibid. Reference P82/AND/A/001/MS06667/008.

¹⁷ Walter Young. Burial 29 June 1719. Holborn MDX. Ibid. Reference P82/Gis/A/04.

¹⁸ Walter Young. Burial 17 June 1719. Colyton DEV. www.familysearch.org. Bishop's transcripts, 1609-1856. Reference DGS 4398658. Digital copy of original image viewed 5 March November 2025.

¹⁹ Walter Young. Death 10 June 1719. Memorandum book of William Heathcote 1716-1749. Original data: Hampshire Archives and Local Studies. Reference 63M84/287 Page 2. Original viewed 1 April 2025.

Libel and Answer

To locate the libel that initiated the divorce case, the London Archives' online catalogue was searched and a book of Allegations, Libels and Sentences for the Consistory Court of London between June 1722 and January 1724/5 was identified. A (poor-quality) microfilm copy was viewed and the libel found²⁰. It was undated but likely to have been submitted between 22 May and 2 June 1724. It comprised 22 articles of which the first 18 are summarised and were material to the complaint:

1. William Yonge had courted Mary Heathcote between April and July 1716 and they had married on 30 July the same year at Ely House Chapel, after which they had lived together for about three years at Sir Walter Yonge's house in Red Lion Square. Mary had borne a son.
2. During the time they had lived together William had shown love, kindness and affection towards Mary and provided for her needs.
3. Three years into their marriage, Mary had left her husband and refused to return, since which time she had pursued a "vicious loose and scandalous way of living". She had had affairs with several men, including Thomas Norton of Ixworth Abbey.
4. During the last five years Mary had moved between lodgings and since October 1723 had lodged at the house of Mrs Martha Maynial in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury. At Mary's suggestion Mrs Maynial had assumed the alias of Smith.
5. Mary had been pregnant when she went to lodge with Mrs Ballard (alias Bellwood) in Silver Street, Edmonton. She had lodged there between March and October 1723, during which time she had miscarried.
6. On 16 and 17 November 1723 Norton had stayed overnight with Mary at Mrs Maynial's.
7. In January or February 1724 Norton had stayed several nights with Mary at Mrs Maynial's.
8. In February 1724 Norton was lodging in Orange Street, Red Lion Square, and Mary stayed several nights with him there.
9. During the course of their affair, Norton wrote letters to Mary, specifically those numbered 1 through 12 in the exhibits.
10. Several acquaintances of Norton had positively identified the handwriting of the letters as his.
11. When Norton had used the terms "my dear dear Molly", "my dearest Molly" and "my dearest Silvia" in the letters, he was referring to Mary Yonge.
12. Norton, in letter 11, had referred to "Mr Y____" spying on them and seeking a divorce, and encouraged Mary to destroy his letters to her as they were incriminating.
13. Mary had failed to take Norton's advice and had instead entrusted the letters to John Salt.
14. Mary had told Mrs Maynial she was pregnant with Norton's child. About 25 March 1724 she had miscarried, requiring the attentions of a nurse.
15. On 15, 16 and 21 May 1724 Norton had stayed overnight with Mary at Mrs Maynial's.
16. In the early hours of 22 May 1724 Mary and Norton were discovered in bed together at Mrs Maynial's by William Yonge and several witnesses including Robert Manning and John Salt.
17. When discovered, Norton had leapt out of bed wearing only his shirt. He had been very nervous and confused but, after recovering himself, asked William Yonge why he should be singled out when Mary had many other lovers. William had replied that he suspected there were others but he was in a position to prove her relations with Norton.
18. Mary had written letter 13 in which she mentioned miscarrying and had sent it to Norton at Ixworth Abbey. Several acquaintances of Mary Yonge had identified the handwriting as hers.

²⁰ Yonge con Yonge. Libel. Allegations, libels and sentence book, Jun 1722–Jan 1724/5. TLA. Diocese of London. Court Records: Consistory Court of London. Reference DL/C/0160. Microfilm copy of original images viewed 6 January 2025.

This document indicated that William's courtship of Mary had been brief but their decision to marry appeared to have been mutual. However their relationship had broken down irrevocably in 1719 – perhaps not coincidentally a few months after their son Walter died, though this was not mentioned in the libel.

The two addresses that were identified as places she took lodgings correlated to the letters seen in Section 2 above: Letter 6 referenced a proposed move to Edmonton, while Letter 12 was addressed to Mrs Smith's in Great Russell Street. The libel suggested that Smith was an alias and the landlady's real name was Martha Maynial.

The libel stated that Mary had had two miscarriages since leaving her husband: one in Edmonton in 1723 and the second in Bloomsbury in March 1724. The latter fitted with the veiled references to a pregnancy made by Norton in Letter 10 and with Letter 13 where Mary said she had recently miscarried. This was material to William's case against Mary because there was a risk that any children Mary might have borne could claim to be his heirs.

The libel provided an explanation for how the cache of letters fell into the hands of the plaintiff: Mary had entrusted them to John Salt who went on to become one of the men who accompanied William in the surprise visit in the early hours of 22 May. This ambush was likely planned in order to catch them "in the act", providing incontrovertible evidence of Mary's adultery in the presence of at least two witnesses²¹. The description of Norton's reaction and his attempt to implicate Mary with other men, while ungallant, was not inconsistent with some of the jealous comments in his letters to Mary.

Answer

A search of the Consistory Court of London's matrimonial cause papers produced a match to a case called 'Young' in relation to a divorce for adultery heard between June and November 1724. The original file was examined and found to contain a document dated 2 June 1724 in which Mary appointed Edward Greenley as her proctor and "to give a negative Issue" to the libel²².

Mary had a right to lodge a formal response to the allegations against her, and had she done so it should have been found among the Answers Book of the Consistory Court. The volume which covered 1724 was examined but no answer was found²³. This absence indicated that Mary elected not to contest the case.

²¹ Stone. Road to Divorce. Page 197.

²² Young. Matrimonial cause papers, Jun–Nov 1724. TLA. Diocese of London. Court Records: Consistory Court of London. Reference DL/C/0547/094-095. Originals viewed 6 January 2025.

²³ Personal answers book. Jan 1719/20–May 1731. Ibid. Reference DL/C/0200. Microfilm copy of original images viewed 3 March 2025.

Depositions

Depositions for cases heard by the Consistory Court of London were filed by date and the book for the relevant period was located. Again this was on microfilm and the image quality was poor. It was found to contain depositions for the Yonge case from 11 individuals, all recorded during the week 20 to 27 June 1724²⁴.

Their testimonies have been summarised here in the order they were collected:

Martha MAYNIAL alias SMITH Lived in St Giles-in-the-Fields for 8 months. Born in St James Westminster. Age 25.
She had met Mary Yonge in July 1723 when they were both lodging with Mrs Ballard/Bellwood in Silver Street, Edmonton. Mary had told her she had been lodging there since March that year. Martha observed that Mary was pale and ill. Around 5 October 1723 Mary came to lodge in her house in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury, and Mary had suggested that Martha assume the name Smith to Mary's friends and acquaintances. When Mary miscarried in March 1724 she had said she had also miscarried in Edmonton the previous year but at that time had not received medical help. 16/17 November 1723 Norton had spent the night with Mary at Martha's house, held her hand, went upstairs with her, and the bed was observed to have the impressions of two bodies the next morning. Martha had been out of town between 29 January and 9 March and on her return Mary had told her that Norton had stayed with her three times and that she had also stayed at his lodgings in Orange Street. During their relationship, Mary and Norton exchanged letters and Martha recognised the handwriting of the letters 1 to 12 as being that of Norton and that Mary had shown them to her. On or around 25 March, Mary miscarried a child, and Mary had stated she was ten or eleven weeks pregnant. A nurse cared for her afterwards. Norton stayed with Mary at Martha's house on the nights of 15, 16 and 21 May 1724. In the early hours of 22 May, William Yonge had gone to Mary's room and had the door forced open. When Martha entered the room Norton was getting dressed in a state of shock. Mary had written several letters to Norton, including Letter 13 which Martha recognised as being in Mary's handwriting.
Thomas JONES Chief Constable of Holborn Division Lived in St Andrew Holborn for 8 years. Born in Tregarron, Cardiganshire. Age 45.
At about one or two o'clock in the morning of 22 May 1724 he accompanied William Yonge, Gwynne Vaughan (JP), Robert Manning and others to Martha Maynial's house and saw two people in bed together. He later found out they were Colonel Norton and Mary Yonge.
John SALT Mercer Lived in St Paul Covent Garden for five years. Born in St James Westminster. Age 28.
He had known William Yonge for 2 years. On 15 March 1724 he had received from Mary several letters she said had been sent to her by Norton. At about two or three in the morning of 22 May he had gone with Robert Manning and others into Mary's bedchamber and seen her in bed with Norton.
Elizabeth VARDEN Nurse Lived in St Martin-in-the-Fields for three years. Born in St Giles-in-the-Fields. Age 28.
On 25 March 1724 Martha Maynial asked her to come and care for Mary Yonge at her house in Great Russell Street. Mary had just miscarried and was in a very weak condition. She cared for her for about three days.
Ruth HOLMES Servant Lived in St Giles in the Fields for 6 years. Born in the same parish. Age 25

²⁴ Yonge con Yonge. Depositions book, Jan 1723/4-Jan 1725/6. Ibid. Reference DL/C/0262. Microfilm copy of original images viewed 6 January 2025.

She worked for Mrs Maynial at Great Russell Street. She had known Mary Yonge for seven months. On 16 and 17 November 1723, Norton had stayed the night with Mary at the house and Mary had directed her to put clean sheets and an extra pillow on the bed. She had seen Norton wearing his nightcap and also had fetched his slippers from his portmanteau in Mary's room. Norton had stayed with Mary on several nights in January and February 1724 and on one occasion he had gone straight to Mary's room and Mary had got out of bed to let him in. On several other occasions, Mary had been absent overnight and she had been given to understand that Mary had stayed with Norton at his lodgings in Orange Street on those occasions. Mary miscarried a child on 25 March 1724 and a nurse had come to care for her afterwards. When Norton stayed with Mary during May that year, on one occasion he had asked her to wake him early and she had called to him through Mary's bedroom door and he had answered. On the 22 May, at two or three o'clock in the morning she was roused by noises in the house and found Robert Manning and others in Mary's room. Norton was in Mary's dining room getting dressed.
William BURRIDGE (alias BERREDGE) Coachman Lived in St Andrew Holborn for 7 years. Born in Shaftesbury in Dorset. Age 40.
He had known William and Mary Yonge for seven years and had been their coachman. In or about July 1719 and about three years after their marriage, he drove Mary to Hackney and left her there. He understood she had then refused to return to live with her husband.
Sara LIGHTHAZELL Former servant Wife of William LIGHTHAZELL Gent of St Botolph Bishopgate. Born in Lombard Street. Age 26
She had known William and Mary Yonge for five years when she had lived with them as their servant. William had always treated Mary well. In September 1719 Mary had left William and refused to return to him. Since then she had consorted with various men, including Thomas Norton, according to the people who Mary had lodged with. She recognised Mary's handwriting in Letter 13.
Rachel HIERON Servant Lived in Escott, Devon for 12 years. Age 36.
She had known William and Mary for seven years having lived with them as their servant, including two years after they had married. William had always treated Mary well. She recognised Mary's handwriting in Letter 13.
Robert MANNING Knight Lived in St Clement Danes for 9 years. Age 40
He had known William Yonge for seven years and knew Mary too when she lived with William first in a house in Bloomsbury and then at William's father's house in Red Lion Square. He had seen Mary Yonge at Mrs Bellwood's in Edmonton in July 1723 when she appeared ill. He had seen Norton's handwriting and believed he wrote Letters 1 through 12. William Yonge had received information that Norton and Mary were together, so he went with William, Vaughan, Salt and Jones to Mrs Maynial's house at two or three in the morning and found them in bed together.
Robert EDGECOMBE Legal clerk Living in New Hospital, Middlesex. Age 23.
He had known William Yonge for three months but was a stranger to Mary Yonge. He had known Colonel Norton for a month and had seen Norton write so was able to identify the handwriting in Letters 1 through 12 as Norton's.
Robert MITCHENER Gentleman Lived in St Margaret Westminster. Age 53.
He had known William Yonge but didn't know Mary. He had known Norton for ten years, during which time he had received several letters from Norton. He was therefore confident in identifying Letters 1 through 12 as being in Norton's hand.

Clearly Martha Maynial, who must have been complicit in Mary and Thomas's relationship, had provided a considerable amount of evidence to support William's cause and her testimony sought to minimise her involvement and knowledge. She may even have been the person who told William that Thomas was staying with Mary on the night of the 21 May. Her servant, Ruth Holmes, corroborated much of Martha's testimony, but there was a sense that she was reluctant to accuse Mary too directly in her rather coy descriptions of nightcaps and slippers.

Sara Lighthazell and Rachel Hieron might have been expected to endorse William's statement that he had been a loving and tolerant husband to Mary while they were together because they were in William's employ. The coachman's evidence suggested that Mary's "elopement" in 1719 had been to the home of her widowed mother in Hackney rather than into the arms of a lover.

John Salt admitted to knowing William Yonge but did not give details of his relationship with Mary or why she would have entrusted him with the letters from Thomas. It was still necessary to prove authorship of the letters and that was why so many of the deponents testified to recognising Thomas or Mary's handwriting²⁵.

John Salt betrayed the trust that Mary had placed in him because the letters were entered in evidence and he was one of the party who burst into Mary's bedroom on morning of 22 May. It was an unpleasant fact that divorces for adultery generally required the accused party to be caught *in flagrante* and William left nothing to chance by taking along not just the required two but four eye-witnesses to Great Russell Street that morning: the local constable, Thomas Jones, and Justice of the Peace Gwyn Vaughan (whose authority he may have called on to gain entry to Mary's chambers), as well as Sir Robert Manning and John Salt.

From the tone and language of the depositions, all of the witnesses were called by William Yonge to support his case. No one provided an alternative perspective, nor were there any significant inconsistencies between them, though there were some small variations.

Mary had an opportunity to counter the narrative presented by her husband by calling her own witnesses or by challenging William's deponents through the use of interrogatories. Evidence of such an approach was searched for in the Consistory Court's files but none was found. Consequently Mary's perspective and reaction were largely absent. She was reported to have chatted happily about her relations with Thomas to both Martha Maynial and Ruth Holmes, but her reaction to the incursion into her bedroom on 22 May was not recorded and she appeared to have been quickly separated from Thomas who went to dress in her dining room while Mary remained in the bedroom.

²⁵ Stone. Road to Divorce. Pages 197-8.

Acts of Court

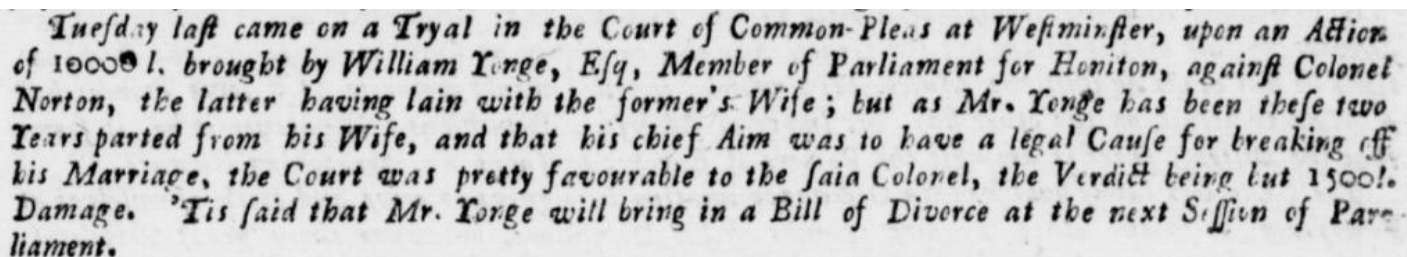
Civil case for damages

From the initial newspaper search it was found that, in parallel with the ecclesiastical court case, William Yonge had pursued a case for damages against Thomas Norton in the Court of Common Pleas. These civil cases for ‘criminal conversation’, if successful, were a deliberate prelude to a divorce petition²⁶.

This civil trial took place on 30 June 1724 and was presided over by the Lord Chief Justice. A copy of the verdict was preserved with the libel in the records of the Consistory Court²⁷. It confirmed that the jury had found in favour of William Yonge and awarded him £1,500 in damages.

The various newspapers reports on the civil case contained many useful details that did not make it into the official records. The *Newcastle Courant* on 4 July stated that Thomas, “in his defence, produced a Deed of Separation between the plaintiff and his Lady”²⁸. Such private agreements were not uncommon, but the existence of one in this case was omitted from the libel. Some deeds of separation were filed in Chancery but a search failed to produce a match²⁹ and no references to it were found in Yonge and Heathcote family papers in the Devon and Hampshire archive catalogues.

Another report in the *Stamford Mercury* suggested that the award of £1,500 damages had been reduced from William’s initial demand for £10,000. This was because the jury had some sympathy towards Thomas and felt that William Yonge had deliberately targeted him³⁰.



Tuesday last came on a Tryal in the Court of Common-Pleas at Westminster, upon an Action of 1000£ l. brought by William Yonge, Esq, Member of Parliament for Honiton, against Colonel Norton, the latter having lain with the former's Wife; but as Mr. Yonge has been these two Years parted from his Wife, and that his chief Aim was to have a legal Cause for breaking off his Marriage, the Court was pretty favourable to the said Colonel, the Verdict being but 1500£. Damage. 'Tis said that Mr. Yonge will bring in a Bill of Divorce at the next Session of Parliament.

The outcome of the civil case made its way into the ecclesiastical court records through Robert Edgecombe, clerk for the legal firm that prosecuted the civil case on behalf of William, in a second deposition made on 8 July 1724.

²⁶ Probert. Page 25.

²⁷ Yonge con Yonge. Allegations, libels and sentence book, Jun 1722–Jan 1724/5. TLA. Diocese of London. Court Records: Consistory Court of London. Reference DL/C/0160. Microfilm copy of original images viewed 6 January 2025.

²⁸ Yonge. *Caledonian Mercury*. 6 July 1724. Page 3971. www.findmypast.co.uk. Digital copy of original image viewed 14 March 2025. Original data: The British Library Board.

²⁹ A search was made using Discovery of the Chancery Close Rolls in C 54 for the period 1700-1799.

³⁰ Yonge. *Stamford Mercury*. 9 July 1724. Page 29. www.findmypast.co.uk. Digital copy of original image viewed 6 March 2025. Original data: The British Library Board.

Acts of the Consistory Court

To track the case's passage through the church court, the Instance Act Books for the Consistory Court of London were consulted for the relevant period³¹. The case initially appeared during the first week of Trinity term 1724 and then in each subsequent session of Trinity and the first three weeks of the ensuing Michaelmas Term. This coincided with the June to November timeframe indicated by the libel, depositions and later newspaper coverage.

Most of the entries related to routine court business such as the appointment of proctors and the admittance of documents like the libel and depositions. In the entry from the second Trinity week, the libel was discussed and two of the articles (10 and 17) were rejected by the court³². The absence of an answer, interrogatories or witnesses for Mary left her proctor, Edward Greenley, little to work with: the few arguments he employed related to the costs submitted by William's side and he also objected to the admission of Edgecombe's second deposition about the outcome of the civil case (overruled)³³.

Unlike the common law courts, there was no jury in ecclesiastical courts and the judge issued his sentence in the third week of Michaelmas term in favour of the plaintiff³⁴. The registrar was instructed to enter the exhibited letters in the records (see Section 2 above) and to produce copies of the grant of separation for all the parties involved.

Divorce *a mensa et thoro*

The file of matrimonial cause papers included a copy of the grant of judicial separation, bearing the date 11 November 1724³⁵.

The Condition of this obligation is such That Whereas there is to be given in the said Consistory Court of London by the above named Humphrey HENCHMAN Doctor of Law a certain definitive Sentence of Divorce or Separation from bed and board and mutual Cohabitation on the part and behalf of the above bounden Honourable William YONGE Esqr Husband of Mary YONGE and against her the said Mary by reason of Adultery by her the said Mary committed If therefore the said Honourable William YONGE shall not at any time hereafter during the Life of the said Mary YONGE intermarry with any other Person then they obligation to be void and of none Effect or of so to remain in full Force and virtue.

Having obtained this grant from the ecclesiastical court, William Yonge was then in a position to bring a private bill to parliament to dissolve his marriage and enable him to remarry.

³¹ Yonge. Act instance book, Jan 1723/4-Jan 1727/8. TLA. Diocese of London. Court Records: Consistory Court of London. Reference DL/C/047. Microfilm copy of original images viewed 6 January 2025.

³² Ibid. Page 61.

³³ Ibid. Pages 70 & 79.

³⁴ Ibid. Page 93.

³⁵ Young. Matrimonial cause papers, 1724 Jun–Nov. Ibid. Reference DL/C/0547/096.

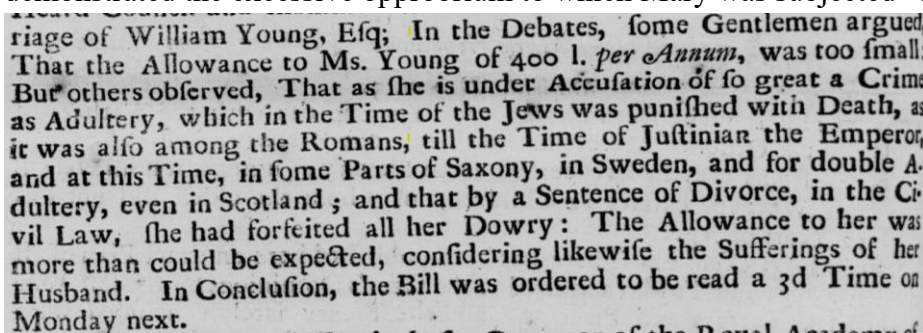
Act of Parliament

To trace the path of William Yonge's petition, the Journal of the House of Lords for 1724 was examined³⁶.

The first reference was the initial petition on 19 November, just one week after the grant of separation had been issued. Permission was given for the bill to be read, and this went ahead on 23 November. The record stated that Mary Yonge was to receive a copy and that she was at liberty to be speak against it at the second reading.

This second reading took place on Friday 27 November but no one appeared for Mary. The deponents, as well as Sir Walter Yonge (William's father) gave evidence, and the 13 letters, the verdict of the civil case, and the sentence of the Consistory Court were also read out in full.

On 30 November and 1 December a committee from both houses of parliament reviewed the bill and several amendments were made. A report in the *Caledonian Mercury* from 3 December demonstrated the excessive opprobrium to which Mary was subjected³⁷:



riage of William Young, Esq; In the Debates, some Gentlemen argued, That the Allowance to Ms. Young of 400 l. *per Annum*, was too small: But others observed, That as she is under Accusation of so great a Crime as Adultery, which in the Time of the Jews was punished with Death, as it was also among the Romans, till the Time of Justinian the Emperor, and at this Time, in some Parts of Saxony, in Sweden, and for double Adultery, even in Scotland; and that by a Sentence of Divorce, in the Civil Law, she had forfeited all her Dowry: The Allowance to her was more than could be expected, considering likewise the Sufferings of her Husband. In Conclusion, the Bill was ordered to be read a 3d Time on Monday next.

The bill received its third reading on 2 December and was then passed. Two weeks later, the House of Commons gave their agreement without amendments, and the Act received royal assent on 16 December 1724.

The original copy of the Act was held in the Parliamentary Archives but at the time of enquiry it was being relocated to The National Archives where it had not yet been catalogued and could not be viewed³⁸. However a search in Discovery flagged up a later chancery suit made against William Yonge which recited the terms of the Act. It listed several Yonge properties that had been placed in trust with Mary's brother, William Heathcote, from which he was to pay Mary the sum of £400 a year³⁹.

³⁶ Yonge. House of Lords. November and December 1724. Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 22, 1722-1726. Pages 343-376. British History Online <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/lords-jrnl/vol22/pp343-361>. Original data: His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1767-1830. Accessed 14 March 2025.

³⁷ Young. *Caledonian Mercury*. 21 December 1724. Page 2. www.findmypast.co.uk. Digital copy of original image viewed 14 March 2025. Original data: The British Library Board.

³⁸ Young. Private Act, 11 George I, c.1. 1724. Parliamentary Archives. Records of the House of Lords: Private Bill Office 1509-2019. Reference HL/PO/PB/1/1724/11G1n2. www.achives.parliament.uk. Catalogue viewed 14 March 2025.

³⁹ Walker v Yonge. Bill and Answer 1748. Court of Chancery. TNA. Reference C 11/571/14. Original viewed 21 March 2025.

Later Lives

Thomas Norton

Despite the publicity that his affair with Mary Yonge had attracted, in 1727 Thomas Norton was elected as the Whig MP for Bury St Edmunds, a position he held until his retirement in 1747⁴⁰.

A search for his name in the newspaper archives produced a match to various appointments he received including, in May 1730, Lieutenant-Governor of Royal Hospital Chelsea⁴¹. The list of former officials of the hospital was checked and it confirmed that Colonel Thomas Norton, MP for Bury, held the position of Lieutenant-Governor from 22 April 1730 until his death⁴². According to his parliamentary profile, Thomas died on 28 April 1748. The record of his burial was found at the Royal Hospital Chelsea on 4 May 1748⁴³. Although there was no indication that Thomas remarried, published sources stated that he died without issue. However this was found to be inaccurate: his son Richard outlived him, writing his will in 1777 (proved 1781)⁴⁴.

William Yonge

William's entry in the Dictionary of National Biography stated that on 27 May 1725, less than six months after his divorce, he received a knighthood as one of the 36 founder knights of the revived Order of the Bath⁴⁵. He succeeded as 4th Baronet on his father's death in 1731 and served as Secretary of War from 1735 until 1746. Despite his success as a politician and statesman, it seemed he was not widely admired:

It was the general opinion that he would have gone much higher but for his inexplicably evil reputation.... 'It is true,' adds Hervey, 'he was a great liar, but rather a mean than a vicious one... He had no wit in private conversation, but was remarkably quick in taking hints to harangue upon in parliament; he had a knack of words there that was surprising considering how little use they were to him anywhere else... and a talent of talking eloquently without a meaning.'⁴⁶

William married for a second time on 14 September 1729. His wife was Anne Howard, daughter and co-heiress of Thomas, 6th Baron Howard of Effingham. They had two sons and six daughters. William died 9 August 1755 and was buried in Colyton, Devon. He was succeeded by his eldest son George⁴⁷.



Sir William Yonge by John Vanderbank
Source: National Trust (Wikipedia)

⁴⁰ Thomas Norton. www.historyofparliamentonline.org. The History of Parliament. The House of Commons 1715-1754, ed. R. Sedgwick, 1970. Transcript of original entry viewed 6 March 2025.

⁴¹ Norton. Ipswich Journal. 2 May 1730 Page 2. www.findmypast.co.uk. Digital copy of original image viewed 14 March 2025. Original data: The British Library Board.

⁴² Thomas Norton. Royal Hospital: Paymasters-General and Officials. www.british-history.ac.uk. Original data: Survey of London. Volume 11, Chelsea, part IV: the Royal Hospital. Ed. H Godfrey. London. 1927. Pages 37-60. Digital transcript viewed 14 March 2025.

⁴³ Col Thos Norton. Burial 4 May 1748. Chelsea Hospital MDX. www.ancestry.co.uk. England & Wales, Non-Conformist and Non-Parochial Registers, 1567-1936. Original data: TNA. Reference RG 4 PN 4330. Digital image viewed 14 March 2025.

⁴⁴ Richard Norton. Will proved 23 March 1781. www.ancestry.co.uk. England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858. Original data: TNA. Reference PROB 11/1076/202. Digital copy of original image viewed 14 March 2025.

⁴⁵ Sir William Yonge. Dictionary of National Biography. Volume 21 pages 1246-9. www.ancestry.co.uk. Original data: Sir Leslie Stephen, ed. OUP (1921-22). Digital copy of original image viewed 14 March 2025.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sir William Yonge. Cokayne. Volume III 1649-1664. 1st edition (1903). Page 232.

Mary Heathcote

In a footnote to William Yonge's entry in *Complete Baronetage* was a reference to Mary remarrying within days of the divorce. This was under the name Mrs Mary Heathcote and her new husband was "Patrick McMahon, Esq, co. Tipperary".⁴⁸ The source of this was found in a newspaper report dated 26 December 1724⁴⁹:

London, Dec. 26. We hear, that on Tuesday last, Ms. Mary Heathcote, late Wife of the Right Honourable William Yonge, was married to Patrick Macmahon, Esq; a Gentleman of a vast Estate, in the County of Tipperary in the Kingdom of Ireland.

However a search for the marriage record failed to produce any likely results and the book by E D Heathcote proffered a different version of events: "Shortly after [her divorce] she married Mr. John Marsh, an attorney, and had two sons by him, Samuel and John, and died in 1766."⁵⁰ A search for this marriage record met with more success. It was found in the parish register of St Leonard Shoreditch on 24 December 1724⁵¹.

St Leonard Shoreditch MDX. Parish marriages. 1724

John MARSH & Mary HEATHCOTT were married December 24 [1724] Licence

878
23 Decemb 1724
Appears personally John Marsh of lb parish
of St Andrew Brothorn London Bachelor aged
Twenty four years & upwards & alleges That
he intends to marry with Mary Heathcote of
lb parish of St Ann Blackfryers London
Spinster aged twenty four years at her own
dispose her parents being dead & does not
know nor believe any lawfull Lett or
Impediment by reason of any Precontract
Consanguinity Affinity or otherwise to hinder
the said intended Marriage of the both of
which he made Oath & prayed Licence for
them to be married in lb parish Church of St
Leonard Shoreditch in lb County of Middlesex
John Marsh
Mr. Kinnaston
Jurat.

The marriage licence was issued the day before with Mary appearing under her maiden name (Heathcott) and recording that she was "of the parish of St Ann Blackfriars, spinster"⁵².

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Mary Heathcote. Caledonian Mercury. 4 January 1754 Page 5036. www.findmypast.co.uk. Digital copy of original image viewed 14 March 2025. Original data: The British Library Board.

⁵⁰ Heathcote. Page 114.

⁵¹ John Marsh / Mary Heathcott. Marriage 24 December 1724. St Leonard Shoreditch MDX. www.ancestry.co.uk. London, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538-1812. Original data: TLA. London Church of England Parish Registers, 1698-1753. Digital image of original viewed 27 February 2025.

⁵² John Marsh/Mary Heathcott. Marriage license 23 December 1724. www.ancestry.co.uk. London & Surrey, England, Marriage Bonds and Allegations, 1597-1921. Original data: TLA. Marriage Bonds and Allegations. 1724 Page 878. Digital image viewed 27 February 2025.

A search for possible baptisms of Mary and John's children was carried out in the London area in the 20 years following their marriage. There were four potential matches in three parishes:

St George Hanover Square MDX. Parish baptisms. 1726
1726 October 6 Baptized Mary MARSH of John and Mary Born 20 [September] ⁵³
St Anne Soho MDX. Parish baptisms. 1728-1730/1 ⁵⁴
1728 Born July 16 Anne MARSH of John and Mary baptized August 9
1730/1 Born February 3 John MARSH, of John and Mary baptized March 3
St James Piccadilly MDX. Parish baptisms. 1733
1733 June 15 Baptized Samuel MARSH, of John & Mary born 17 [May] ⁵⁵

Burial entries were found in the registers for St Anne Soho for two of the children, Mary and Anne:

St Anne Soho MDX. Parish burials. 1728/9-1731/2 ⁵⁶
1728/9 January 6 Anne MARSH Child
1731/2 January 15 Mary MARSH Child

Confirmation that Mary and John Marsh were living in that parish in 1731 was found in chancery records where a search produced a match to a case from that year. The couple "of St Ann Soho" sued Mary's brother William Heathcote for the use and benefit of the personal estate left by their mother to their uncle William Dawsonne⁵⁷. It therefore seemed probable that John and Mary had at least four children together, of which only the two boys survived.

No further record of Mary was confidently identified. A search for her sibling's wills produced matches for her brother (written 1748)⁵⁸ and her younger sister (written 1751)⁵⁹. Neither bequeathed Mary anything although her brother left £1000 for her two (unnamed) sons.

"Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband"

While Mary seemed to have remained silent during the divorce case, a corrective was delivered in the form of a poem written by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Though the poem remained unpublished during her lifetime, Montagu composed it in Mary's voice, decrying the double-standard that allowed men like William to take mistresses yet when a woman behaved likewise she lost her fortune, place in society and good name. Montagu was almost an exact contemporary of Mary Heathcote and it was likely that they moved in the same circles.

⁵³ Mary Marsh. Baptism 6 October 1726. St George Hanover Square MDX. www.ancestry.co.uk. Westminster, London, England, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1558-1812. Original data: City of Westminster Archives. Church of England parish registers. Reference STG/PR/1/1 Page 22. Digital image of original viewed 14 March 2025.

⁵⁴ Ann Marsh and John Marsh. Baptisms 1728 & 1730/1. St Anne Soho MDX. Ibid. Reference STA/PR/1/2 Page 34 & 45.

⁵⁵ Samuel Marsh. Baptism 9 August 1728. St James Piccadilly MDX. Ibid. Reference STJ/PR/1/3.

⁵⁶ Ann Marsh and Mary Marsh. Burials 1728/9 & 1731/2. St Anne Soho MDX. Ibid. Reference STA/PR/6/2 Page 56 & 85.

⁵⁷ Marsh v Heathcote. Bill and Answer 1731. Court of Chancery. TNA. Reference C 11/1769/1. Original viewed 21 March 2025.

⁵⁸ Sir William Heathcote. Will proved 1 June 1751. www.ancestry.co.uk. England & Wales, Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills, 1384-1858. Original data: TNA. Reference PROB 11/788/123. Digital copy of original image viewed 1 April 2025.

⁵⁹ Dame Ann Drake. Will proved 17 November 1768. Ibid. Reference PROB 11/943/293.

However it cannot be known how much Montagu based her ‘epistle’ on firsthand knowledge of Mary’s sentiments or whether (more likely) she was using Mary’s situation as an opportunity to rage against sexual inequality, a topic that Montagu explored repeatedly across her work⁶⁰.

‘Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband’	
Think not this paper comes with vain pretense To move your pity, or to mourn th’ offense. Too well I know that hard obdurate heart; No softening mercy there will take my part, Nor can a woman’s arguments prevail, When even your patron’s wise example fails. But this last privilege I still retain; Th’ oppressed and injured always may complain. Too, too severely laws of honor bind The weak submissive sex of womankind. If sighs have gained or force compelled our hand, Deceived by art, or urged by stern command, Whatever motive binds the fatal tie, The judging world expects our constancy. Just heaven! (for sure in heaven does justice reign, Though tricks below that sacred name profane) To you appealing I submit my cause. Nor fear a judgment from impartial laws. All bargains but conditional are made; The purchase void, the creditor unpaid; Defrauded servants are from service free; A wounded slave regains his liberty. For wives ill used no remedy remains, To daily racks condemned, and to eternal chains. From whence is this unjust distinction grown? Are we not formed with passions like your own? Nature with equal fire our souls endued, Our minds as haughty, and as warm our blood; O’er the wide world your pleasures you pursue, The change is justified by something new; But we must sigh in silence—and be true. Our sex’s weakness you expose and blame (Of every prattling fop the common theme), Yet from this weakness you suppose is due Sublimar virtue than your Cato knew. Had heaven designed us trials so severe, It would have formed our tempers then to bear. And I have borne (oh what have I not borne!) The pang of jealousy, the insults of scorn. Wearied at length, I from your sight remove, And place my future hopes in secret love.	In the gay bloom of glowing youth retired, In the gay bloom of glowing youth retired, I quit the woman’s joy to be admired, With that small pension your hard heart allows, Renounce your fortune, and release your vows. To custom (though unjust) so much is due; I hide my frailty from the public view. My conscience clear, yet sensible of shame, My life I hazard, to preserve my fame. And I prefer this low inglorious state To vile dependence on the thing I hate— But you pursue me to this last retreat. Dragged into light, my tender crime is shown And every circumstance of fondness known. Beneath the shelter of the law you stand, And urge my ruin with a cruel hand, While to my fault thus rigidly severe, Tamely submissive to the man you fear. This wretched outcast, this abandoned wife, Has yet this joy to sweeten shameful life: By your mean conduct, infamously loose, You are at once my accuser and excuse. Let me be damned by the censorious prude (Stupidly dull, or spiritually lewd), My hapless case will surely pity find From every just and reasonable mind. When to the final sentence I submit, The lips condemn me, but their souls acquit. No more my husband, to your pleasures go, The sweets of your recovered freedom know. Go: court the brittle friendship of the great, Smile at his board, or at his levee wait; And when dismissed, to madam’s toilet fly, More than her chambermaids, or glasses, lie, Tell her how young she looks, how heavenly fair, Admire the lilies and the roses there. Your high ambition may be gratified, Some cousin of her own be made your bride, And you the father of a glorious race Endowed with Ch——l’s strength and Low——r’s face. LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU (1724)

Conclusion

Yonge con Yonge was an early example of a divorce when such cases were very rare and only within reach of the wealthy. In this respect, the case was typical. It also reflected the majority of early divorces in that it was brought by a husband against an adulterous wife.

The odds were all in William’s favour. Not only were there servants who provided circumstantial evidence of shared nights and pregnancies, there were letters that alluded to a physical relationship and, the *coup de grace*, the discovery Mary and her lover in bed together. William had a water-tight case, at least in the eyes of civil and church law.

⁶⁰ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. The Poetry Foundation. www.poetryfoundation.org. Viewed 16 March 2025

It was probably for this reason that Mary did not contest, understandably, but the absence of an answer to the complaint or any depositions favourable to her meant that the official record was very one-sided.

Despite Thomas's reported statement to William Yonge that he was just one of many lovers that Mary had taken and the letters showed a cooling off of Thomas and Mary's passion, by May 1724 they had evidently reconciled enough to spend several nights together. However their relationship did not survive the scandal and they did not marry when Mary was free to do so.

The male parties in the case were wealthy men and their positions in society did not appear to suffer any setbacks as a result of their association with such a notorious case. This reflected the double-standards inherent in 18th century society. However Mary had an advocate in the shape of Mary Montagu and it was when her poem came to light that the unfairness of Mary's position was placed centre-stage at last.

A summary showing the timeline of the events, pedigree charts for the families and map of location is provided.

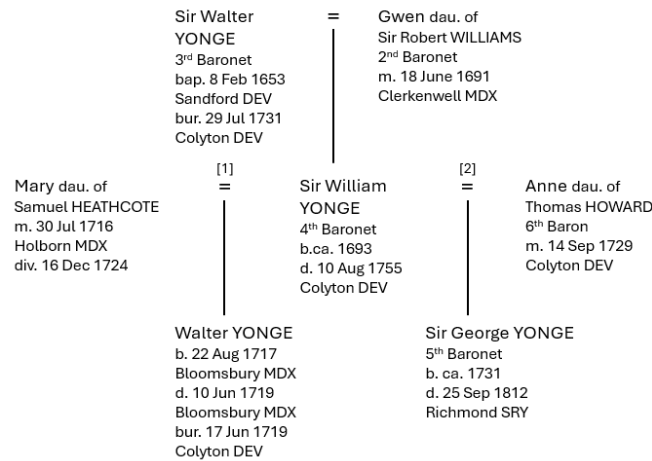
A Timeline of the Events

1716 Apr to Jul	Courtship of Mary Heathcote by William Yonge
1716 Jul 30	Marriage of Mary and William at the chapel of Ely House
1717 Aug	Birth of son Walter
1719 Jun	Death of son Walter
1719 summer	Mary leaves William and goes to her mother in Hackney
February	Mary's mother dies and Mary stays on in her mother's house living with her brothers
1722	Mary and William make a separation agreement giving her £300 pa
c.1722	Mary begins relationship with Thomas Norton
1723 Apr	Mary goes to lodge with Mrs Ballard/Bellwood in Silver Street, Edmonton
c. 1723 Jun	Mary suffers a miscarriage
1723 Jul	Mary makes the acquaintance of fellow lodger Martha Maynial
1723 Oct	Mary moves to a house with Martha in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury
1724 Mar	Mary has a second miscarriage
1724 May 22	William Yonge, John Salt, Robert Manning, Gwyn Vaughan and Thomas Jones discover Mary with Thomas Norton
1724 May	William submits libel against Mary to Consistory Court of London and sues Thomas for £10,000 damages
1724 Jun 20 to 27	Taking of depositions
1724 Jun 30	Civil case ruling in favour of William Yonge
1724 Nov 11	Divorce <i>a mensa et thoro</i> granted
1724 Dec 16	Act of Parliament receives royal assent
1724 Dec 24	Mary Yonge marries John Marsh
1729 Sep 14	William Yonge marries Anne Howard
1731	Mary and John Marsh bring a suit against her brother William Heathcote

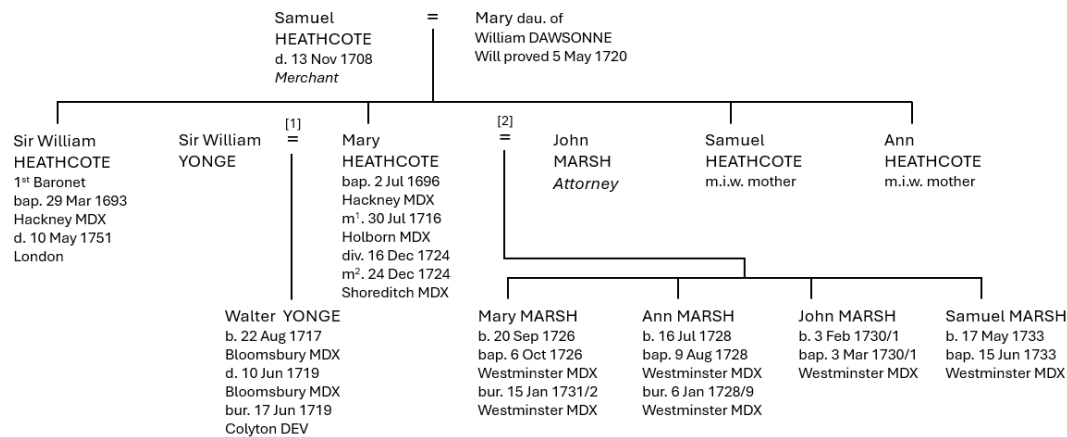
Pedigree Charts

The following pedigrees were created using information provided by Cokayne’s *Complete Baronetage* and The History of Parliament Online, plus the primary research detailed in this report.

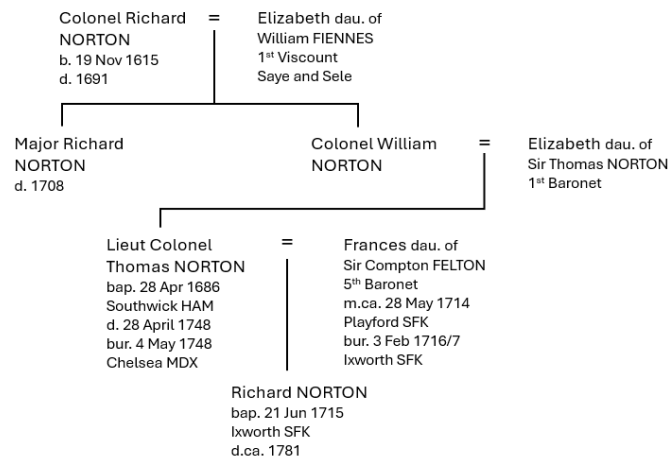
The YONGE family of Devon



The HEATHCOTE family of Hackney



The NORTON family of Hampshire and Suffolk



Key

b. - born

b.ca. - born about

bap. - baptised

bur. - buried

d. - died

d.ca. - died about

m./ = - married

m.ca. - married about

m.i.w. - mentioned in will

DEV - Devon

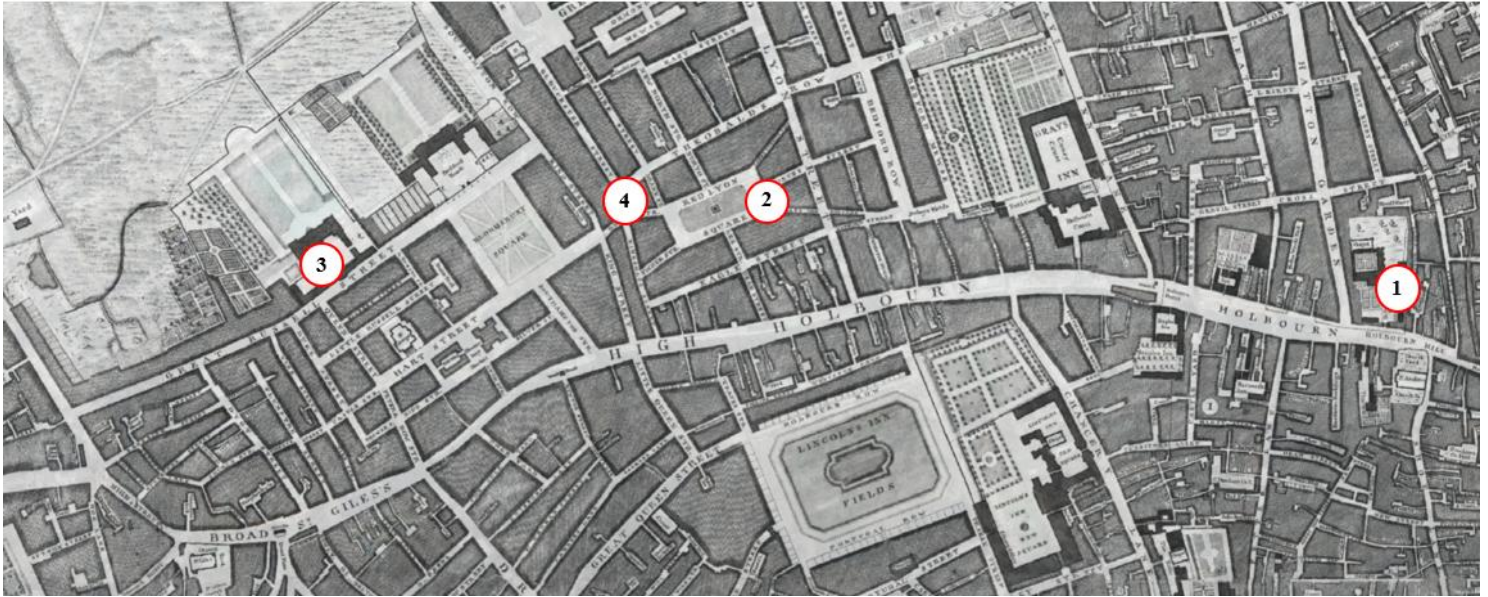
HAM - Hampshire

MDX - Middlesex

SFK - Suffolk

SRY - Surrey

Maps of Locations



1. Ely House Chapel – location of William Yonge and Mary Heathcote’s wedding in July 1716
2. Red Lion Square – London residence of the Yonge family and location of the birth and death of William and Mary’s son Walter.
3. Great Russell Street – location of Martha Maynial’s house where Mary Yonge lodged between October 1723 and May 1724
4. Orange Street – location of Colonel Thomas Norton’s lodgings

Source: John Rocque’s map of London, Westminster and Southwark 1746 (Layers of London).

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Acknowledgements

Images from the Diocese of London collections held at the TLA reproduced courtesy of the Bishop of London and the London Diocesan Fund.

Appendix – Transcripts of the correspondence entered as evidence (1724)

Letter 1	
Madam I can't forbare complaining of my hard fortune to be slited by the only person in the World that I value, and you do it in so cruel a manner that if I was the most worthless wretch living your Usage must be condemned by every body, for why will you make me the happiest man on Earth one day, and the next prefer any creature before me, and to add to your barbarity, you desired M^{rs} Patty to tell me what you know wou'd be worse than death to me for if she had not by your Order told me that the fellow you saw twice or thrice last week, was going to London to meet you there, perhaps I should never have known it, and yesterday I saw all the joy and pleasure imaginable at the approach of an old rotten sinner, you know he deserves that name, and at the same time, I who too fondly dote on you was by, and might have deyed before you would give me one kind look, you need not be told how shocking that must be to me, who have been so often blessed in y^r Dear arms, and still loves you to distraction – but you swifter than thought or active Wind are fled, but left your form behind within my heart you fixt it there loves wanton wings so fann'd the aire	you've kindl'd in my brest such cares I ne're shall quench them with my tears perhaps this is the last peice of impertinence I shall ever trouble you with, and tis with as much reluctancy, that I conclude this letter as a deying man speaks his last Words – therefore if ever I shou'd (for want of pleasanter thoughts) come cross your mind, think of me as one who entirely dotes on you, and shall be for ever most faithfully yours. P.S. let beg of you for Gods Sake to take y^e Servant I recommended to you, as I hope to be sav'd to don't do it with any view of enquireing into any of your actions, for I scorn to do so mean a thing as that, but if I was I am sure it wou'd be to no purpose for I am so well convinced of he[] integrity, that if she was once admitted into your Service, all the world cou'd never make her discover one word that you wou'd not have her, upon my Soul I speak this purely out of the tender regard I have for your happyness because I know there is not a better or properer Servant you in the world I beg you to send me one word by M^{rs} PATTY before you go if it be but one line from your Dear hands I shall esteem it the greatest favour imaginable.
Letter 2	
I am certainly undone my Dearest Angell if you will not make great allowances, for a Man in my Condition, but let compassion find a little rome for me, in your Dear Dear breast and don't judge of my sence, by the letter (you in a manner) forc'd from me, nor of my person as it Then appeared to you, for if you do I am sure you will dispise both, but for Gods sake my Dear creature, think of it, as it really was, the effect of too powerfull a passion for when I had your charming tender body in my Arms I thought the greatest bliss, and height of all my wishes nigh, but oh, extreamest extasie quite stupifei'd me, which has made me curse myself ever since you left me, therefore in pity to my lovesick mind, contrive how we might meet without being disturb'd by impertinents as we were yesterday, then, wou'd I trembling cry, with eager hast O let me feed as well as taste I die, if I'm not wholly blest.	I cou'd never thank you enough if you wou'd come to Giffords on tuesday next, and be sure you insist upon going upon y^r uncles pad then if he is invited he will be forc'd to go in y^e coach and then with your leave I may have y^e Dear Dear pleasure of seeing you safe home, which is a compliment, that y^e most observing eyes about you will not think particular, tho I must tell y^o that Monsieur looks about him pretty sharply which was y^e reason I wou'd not be seen to come through your town to day, I wish I was not so poor a scribiler, for there is nothing so delightfull in your absence as writing to you, and if any thing can inspire me to mend my stile, it must be your charms that have power to animate a Stone, and has filled me with a thousand fond things, I want to say to y^o, but damn'd business, that constant enemy to love, forces me away that I must conclude with assuring your, that in spite of all ill fortune, if you will smile I shall think myself your happy and faithfull Philander
Letter 3	
Indeed my Dearest Silvia I never pass'd a more restless night than The last, for being so near you all the afternoon, and be allow'd no liberty but to gaze on my Charmer at last to part like Strangers without one Dear kiss, made me reflect so strongly on my wretched condition, that tir'd of my bed so soon as I was in it, I immediately rose and went into my Guarden, where with folded Arms, I sigh'd away the Night, and the conclusion of each melancholy thought convinced me that I am the most miserable Creature living, without you can deliver yourself from your confinement, for as the fallen Angells are doubly damn'd by having known what Heaven is, so is my pain increased by being debarr'd the joys I know to be so killing sweet, that the thoughts of them makes everything else insipid, therefore my Dearest life exert a Spirit, and attempt something in my favour	and if for the present you can't quite breake the chaine,yet get a little liberty, I'm sure you wou'd, if you knew how my faithfull heart longs for you, tis not possible for me to deliver you imediately without intire ruin to us both, but if you will begin as I shall inform you whenever I can have an hours talk with you I hope y^e event will make us both happy, but at present there must be some discretion us'd of my Side, or the enemy may undermine me and make us uneasy for ever, as for my own part, my condition is so desperate that there is no difficulty imaginable that I wou'd not readily undertake to gain you, but my regard and love for you is so tender, that if I shou'd ever see you let fall a tear upon my account t'wou'd pain me worse than death, I hope you [incomplete]
Letter 4	
The fear of discovering my Dear Silvia this Morning made me leave thy Dear Dear Arms so rudely that I'm almost distracted when I think upon our hard fate, that forces us upon these shifts, and yet the blessing is so vastly great, that I swear I wou'd rather give all I am master of, than loose the hopes of repeating those charming pleasures, which none but my Silvia can give, and nothing can lessen them (so long as you love me) but your unkind suspision of my not loving you so well as I did, I'm sure my Dear life cou'd have no reason so often to tell me so last night, when I was in the highest extasie of delight, the whole time I lay upon thy Dear panting heart, but	heart is bound to yours, if I had given all I have, for the Dear pleasures of last night, and fortune was so kind, to give me ten times more to day, I'd freely give it for this very nights company that used to divert me before I knew my Dear Silvia is now grown troublesom to me, especially at this time, for I'm now call'd down to some who are come to see me, so I hope you will excuse the correctness both of my Stile and writing, and accept this as it really is the hasty expressions from the sincere and fond heart of your faithfull Philander G__D lay here last night and has been pretty much upon the pump this Morning, I'm resolved to stricke out someway to

you must intirely banish all those fears, and believe that your Philander is not so insensible a creature, but he must value your charms above all the world, and by all that's good, your Dear company, instead of Cloying (as you unkindly said) in me creates an appetite, and the more I clasp you in my longing arms, the faster my faithfull	make me happy with your leave when you go to S____y and you'l have to a good deal of time to work Nancy G____D to y ^r mind, I shall be obliged to go to Farnham this afternoon or tomorrow morning. Sep ^r y ^c 27 th
Letter 5	
After the repeated proofs of my Dearest Mollys love for me, I should be the most ungratefull to doubt your reall concerne for my happyness, therefore I wou'd avoid telling you what an uneasy journey I had hither (knowing the pain it will give you) but that I fear you wou'd impute the Shortness of this letter, to want of affection for my Dearest Life, which is only occasion'd by my indisposition, for I am at this time so full of pain that I can hardly hold the pen in my hand. I have often told my Dear Molly that I never cou'd express how much I loved her but now I do assure you tis a much harder task than ever, for every time I see you my love and tenderness for you encreases to a higher degree than I could have imagined, and nothing cou'd make me so	sensible of it, but the double pain I feel for y ^r absence surely nothing cou'd add to my uneasyness, but hearing last night that you was ill after I left you, and if y ^c next post don't bring me the good News of your recovery I shall not be able to support myself, I am sure one kind letter from you wou'd do more towards my cure than any thing else and my dearest life may depend upon my taking the best care I can of myself, that I may be able to see you soon, for without y ^r company, if I was well my life wou'd be a burthen to me, I am forced to write in bed therefore am afraid you will hardly be able to read this scrawle from y ^r most affectionate T N 28 th March 1723
Letter 6	
I wish my Dear Molly's actions did not give me a great deal of reason to suspect her sincerity, and I do assure you, that what I say does not proceed from any information I had from the person you imagen takes pains to make me hate you, neither do I write this by way of complaint, because I have no pretence to find fault with any thing y ^o do, for since my unlucky affairs will not give me leave to be always with you, it is highly unreasonable that I should desire you to debarr yourself from all pleasure for my sake, don't think my Dear Creature by what I say that I am so stupid, as to be easey with y ^c thoughts of sharing your charms with anybody, but reason bids me not repine at what I can't help, and to think myself y ^c happiest man alive whenever I can be bless'd with your company, one smile of my Dear Molly, pays with interest for all y ^c anguish your absence gives, therefore you may be sure that as often as my unhappy circumstances will	give me leave, I shall fly to your Dear Arms with the utmost transport, then don't deny me the only thing that can afford me any pleasure in your absence, and that is a letter to tell me that I shall be welcome to you at any time, and tho' you enjoy all the pleasures this life afords tell me you will not quite forgett me, I think you will be intirely in right to take y ^c lodgings at Edmonton if you believe you gett y ^c woman of y ^c house into your interest, for then you will not be under any obligation to any of y ^r relations tho' I think it very hard for you to scruple y ^r demands I shall take care to discharge your lodgings and beg you to believe that whenever you will be so kind to ask any thing in my power, it will be a greater pleasure to me to grant it, than to you to receive it, your suspicion of my being in town since I saw you is intirely [incomplete]
Letter 7	
I can't tell my Dearest life when I shall be again bless'd with her sight, and if my torments for your absence encrease as they have hitherto done, I fear I shall never live to see that happy day. I thought I never could repent my acquaintance with my Dear Molly, but since we are obliged to part so often <and> so long, I think it y ^c greatest misfortune that ever befell me, for what can be worse than just to know you and admire you, and then to have no comfort left, but to moun the loss of the softest, dearest, gentlest creature that ever lived, much dearer than life to me, but (hard fate to say it) dear in vain, but surely the time will come, when ill fortune will be weary of persuing me, and restore my dearest Molly to my longing Arms, and in the meantime, show so much kindness to me, as to send me word that I am still so dear to you, that you sometimes sigh for my absence, and in return I assure you my Sighs and Tears for your absence are innumerable, and every moment, I recall those dear dear Nights that used to close my toilsom days and all my cares were lost in most ravishing pleasure when I hugged your Dear white tender bosom close to mine, I would willingly exclude those thoughts at	present, but tis in vain I strive sometimes to forgett you, for if I retire from company you are always fresh in my mind, if they endeavour to divert me, that seems most provoking, for my thoughts naturally tell me there can be no pleasure without my Dear Molly, in such circumstances I wou'd not wish to live, if I did not believe my Dearest wou'd be constant to me, and then no time or distance can alter our love, and <when opportunity serves we may be the happiest pair living> I am sure if excess of love, will bring excess of happyness mine will be compleat, for Gods sake write as kindly to me as you can that your letter may a salve to my pains that I suffer for you, and pray send me word how I may direct to you for I shall not care to send any more letters to Mrs TEMPLE, my Brother is this minute come into my room which forces me to leave of very abruptly for I have only time to assure that I am and every shall be intirely yours Saturday Morning To M ^{rs} YONGE
Letter 8	
The post was just going out when I came home, but I could not forbear (tho' I was very weary) writing two lines to my Dearest Molly to tell you that leaving you so uneasy makes me the most melancholy creature living, indeed your absence alone gives me more pain than I can express, but y ^c thoughts of its encreasing your illness almost distracts me, and if my company affords you any pleasure, you may be assured that I shall return	as soon as possible, therefore my Dear life let nothing make you uneasy to the prejudice of your health for upon that depends all my happyness, I heartily wish the post would give me leave to say half y ^c tender things my mind is full of, and are justly your due, but I am now forced to conclude with assuring you that I shall always be intirely yours Saturday afternoon To M ^{rs} YONGE
Letter 9	
7 th Jan: 1723 After receiving my Dearest Mollys most kind and obliging letter I can want nothing but her company therefore am very sorry that I can't	my letters at present are they will be more agreeable when I tell you I conclude hours sooner than my inclinations wou'd lett me because I wou'd imploy every minute to finish my business that I

exactly fix y^e time of my coming to town for you know my business hither was to attend a commission and that does not begin till ten next Thursday and those employed in it being always paid by the day they generally make as many delays as they can but to prevent that I assure you I have offered them double pay if I perceive their diligence in dispatching ye business I promise you there never shall be any reason for you to complain of my staying from you for I shall always think my endeavours too little to show you how painful your absence is to me, but by the pleasure you know I enjoy in your Dear Dear Arms I hope I need not say any more to convince you of the truth of it. I flatter myself that y^e shorter	may be the sooner with my Dear Molly I am now call'd away and can say no more but that I have infinite pleasure in concluding this with your own words yours intirely P.S. I am extreemly oblidg'd to you for y^e work you are about which I shall always value for y^r sake and I hope we shall live together long enough to imploy you a hundred times more for you may be sure I shall take care of myself when y^e bid me and think my life worth saving so long as you are kind to me I wish you a great many happy years
Letter 10	
I am now got into the most melancholy retirement in the world, and in this Solitude, I have no companion but the thoughts of my Dear Dear Molly, but alas how altered are they from what they used to be, when in your absence I pleased myself with being in a hurry be it would bring me the sooner into thy Dear Arms, but now I have only the dismal prospect of my own misfortunes which are doubled upon me by keeping me at such a distance from you, that now your letters are a Week before I receive them, and surely the most rigid of all your relations, wou'd have some compassion on me, if they saw me open them, for I have hardly strength to break the Seal, your well known hand awakens all my woes, and tho' the remembrance of my pleasures fills me wth y^e utmost melancholy, yet they will be for ever Dear, therefore Dear Dear creature write to me as often as you can, for it will be some releif to me if you will joyn your Greifs to mine, and that's not in y^e power of your religious parents to hinder, and my Molly may believe me I have no use now of my Eyes but to read your letters and weep over them but my imaginations almost hurrys to madness and make me forgett to answer the material part of my Dear Molly's last letter, which I assure you gives me the utmost concerne for I can't bear the thoughts of giving you a moments pain, and therefore wou'd not for the world have you confirm the news you sent me, because I am so much at a loss what to advise, dreading the consequence of your not being able to carry it of without suspection, and greatly fearing the endangering of your health by using any other means, therefore my Dear life you must be the best judg in such a case, I think I need not caution you to be particularly carefull who you intrust with such a secret, but as	you are entire Mistris of yourself and not obliged to account to any body where you go you may certainly when you think it necessary retire with some friend for two or three months, if there should be such an occasion I can't think of any body so proper as the French Gentlewoman, and I will make it my business to find out a place where you may go directly to without discovering who you are and no body shall ever so much as ask your name, as to your going down to my house, was I to be at home nothing could make me so happy, but till my affairs are a little more settled it will be impossible to let my Dear Life know where or when I shall be so happy to see her, and the last part I received a letter from my Lady to let me know the small pox is very much near her house and that she is uneasey for fear of the child therefore desires tho' I am not at home to give her y^e Liberty of my house for the Summer, which I can't possibly refuse, so that if you don't think it convenient to stay where you are I will endeavour by some friend to find out another place for you, and since I can't propose to be with my Dearest Molly for a continuance at present you must not have the least regard to anything but what will make yourself perfectly easey, for you may be assured that I have nothing so much at heart as the desire of making you happy whenever it is in my power. and tho you are so unkind as to think I have not y^e same regard for you that I had, you do me y^e greatest injustice in the world, but that I must leave to time to determine, and my Dear Dear Molly if you have y^e least desire to make me happy it must be by hearing you are so and telling me that you still desire that I should continue to be intirely yours.
Letter 11	
I am sensible my Dearest Molly will lay all y^e blame of my not seeing her before I go out of town to my indifference because you have always been so unkind not to attribute any of my Actions to the necessity of hard fortune but to a vileness in my mind to which I think I am as much a Stranger to as any man living for I always detested the thoughts of using any indifferent person with unhumanity how then can I be guilty of any thing like it to you who by all that's good I love above anything in life therefore don't be so cruel to say I can't value you because I fear to ruin you for at this minute and ever since I came to town that has been really my care and the only reason why I have not been almost every moment of my time with you is not my want of love for you or a dislike to the place where you are or any person belonging to it but because I have had sure Information that M^r Y ____ has been upon the watch ever since I came to town and I must confess that for fear of any spies following you hither has often put a damp upon y^e pleasure I should have had the few very few times I have had y^e happiness of seeing you here for I have had a good while hints given me of M^r Y ____ intentions which is to get a div ____ upon	reduced to such circumstances as not to be able to assist you. what I now tell you may be depended upon for truth and M^r PAWLETT who y^e know came yesterday Morning to me with a great deal of concerne to inform me of some particulars of M^r Y ____ proceedings I am this minute going and am in such a hurry that I fear you will hardly be able to read this scrawle but I cou'd not forbear writing to endeavour to justifie myself and in one word tell you my sincere thoughts which are <that> I shou'd <think> my self the happiest man in y^e world if cou'd always live unmolested with you, and that in y^r absence I shall never think of anything so much as to bring that to bare and I have several scheems in my head to bring it about which I have not time at present to tell you therefore for Gods sake cease to complain of my unkindness when nothing but mere force oblidges me to act as I do and if you have not a mind entirely to destroy my quiet let me hear by the bearer that you believe me. sincerely yours P.S. I don't know how soon y^r papers may be searched

my Account which if it cou'd be effected must be inevitable ruin to us both for in such a case your Allowance wou'd be taken away and I shou'd be	Therefore for fear mine shou'd do you a prejudice I cou'd wish you wou'd burn them
Letter 12	
I have hardly assurance enough to call you my Dearest Molly, after my ill fortune has obliged me to use you in a manner very unbecoming a lover, and I must own you have a great deal of reason to accuse me, since I am the only person living that is debarred the pleasure of waiting on you, and I ought not to wonder if you use me as one who neglects his own happyness, tho' as I hope to live tis not in my power to do otherwise, I shou'd make a great many more apologys for writing to you, but I am this minute come to town and long to tell you that I have brought with me a most fond and passionate heart, which I dey with impatience to lay panting upon your Dear Dear Breast, (if you will having y ^e goodness to accept of it) I am sure you wou'd not deny me if you knew the torment your absence has given me, and my whole thoughts have been entirely employed in contriving how to settle you some where neare me, and with such privacy, that our	pleasure may not be interrupted, for I find tis impossible for me to be easy till I can accomplish that design, I have ten thousand things more to say to you, which I hope you will give me an opportunity of doing, by taking me once more into your Dear Arms, and I must repeat, that tis my hard fate, and not fault in my heart that has made my behaviour so odd towards you, I long to have one word from you, and Dear Creature let it be a little kind, for by all that's good I am, and for ever shall be entirely yours. My Service to M ^{rs} SMITH and pray excuse all faults in this Scrawle for I am in hast[e] to tell you I dey for you, and am in a damn'd noisey Coffee house To M ^{rs} YONGE at M ^{rs} SMITH's two doors above the Sun Tavern in Great Russell Street
Letter 13	
The letter M ^{rs} SMITH wrote you after I miscarry'd to inform you of my being so extreemly Ill, and how very desirous I was to see you (for I do assure you every body about me thought I cou'd not live an hour) would I am perswaded made any Man except y ^r self if he had the le[a]st regards for the Woman come away post: But unkind cruel you, only thought fit to write me a Letter, the Stile of w ^{ch} was pet[t]ly Cold & fill'd with nothing but needless fears & frivolous excuses The just resentment of such Usage I thought Good to show, by sending it you back again; & this is only to Inquire whither y ^r treatment of me for y ^e future is to be in y ^e same manner it has been for this 12 Months past, or if you have really any design, to make me w ^t I have a Million of times requested of y ^e . Happy forever, in y ^r Dear Society and which you so often promised, by taking & furnishing a little	house for me very near you, But y ^r not proceeding in it makes me fear that y ^e have no such Intent or else in so long a time you might have y ^t or by some means have let me be w th you had y ^r own Inclinations been the same. I therefore only Now beg to know y ^r Final Resolution th ^t I may take Mine, because there is 2 Lodgings proposed to me, the one in Hampshire y ^e other in Devonshire for I am still so weak & Ill that I must go into y ^e Country, & resolve no longer to lead the life of a vagabond but where ever I go to settle as long as I live My answee is required very soon so I desire you will let me have yours by the next return of y ^e Post being unwilling to incur y ^r displeasure by any Action of mine, for I am still Intirely yrs. To the Honourable Colonel NORTON at Ixworth Abby In Suffolk
Concordant cum originalibus.... facta fideli collatione per Nos William SKELTON John GREENWAY Receiv'd out of the Registry of the Consistory Court of the Lord Bishop on the twentieth of November Anno Domini 1724 by the hands and delivery of Mr William SKELTON Principal Register thereof the foregoing Exhibits in ye Cause of YONGE con YONGE, I say receiv'd pursuant of a Decree of the said Court bearing Date y ^e sixteenth day of November 1724. Robert PEIRSON. Witness Edward WILLIAMS	

* * * * *

The Woodruffs of Fordwich and Canterbury: A Kentish Line Reconsidered

by Elizabeth Yule, DipGen

The Woodruff Family of Kent

The Woodruff family of Kent represents a good case study in using the Kent Ecclesiastical Depositions Index.

The surname Woodruff can be found across East Kent in the Early Modern Period, and research began on the assumption that there was probably a connection between these various families. The focus was on Simon Woodruff, who died at Minster-in-Thanel in March 1600/1, seeking to establish whether he was related to the Woodruff family of Fordwich and St Mary Northgate, Canterbury.

Thomas Woodruff [or Woodrove] of Fordwich's great-grandson John Woodruff died in Canterbury in 1611, and his son in turn emigrated to America.⁶¹ Thomas himself paid church tithes from 1508 onwards, showing the family's presence in Fordwich from at least the early 16th century.

Mapping the Family: Fordwich to Thanet

Simon Woodruff married at Minster-in-Thanel in 1572, having moved there from nearby Birchington. An inventory of his goods created after his death showed that he was a 'mault man' and was thus involved in the brewing industry⁶².

The will of his father, Thomas Woodroffe [sic] of Birchington, was written in 1542 and proved in 1544⁶³. It recorded that his son Simon was then under the age of 21.

When mapped geographically, the places where these Woodruff families lived form a narrow corridor stretching from Canterbury and Fordwich eastwards to the parishes situated on the Isle of Thanet – a distance of just ten miles. The positions in East Kent of the parishes of Birchington on the coast, Minster-in-Thanel, Fordwich and the city of Canterbury are all shown on the 18th century map on page 34.⁶⁴

This also shows clearly the River Stour and the marshy area which would once have been the Wantsum Channel, which had silted up by the 16th century.

⁶¹ Woodruff, Francis E. *The Woodruffs of New Jersey*. Yale. 1864.

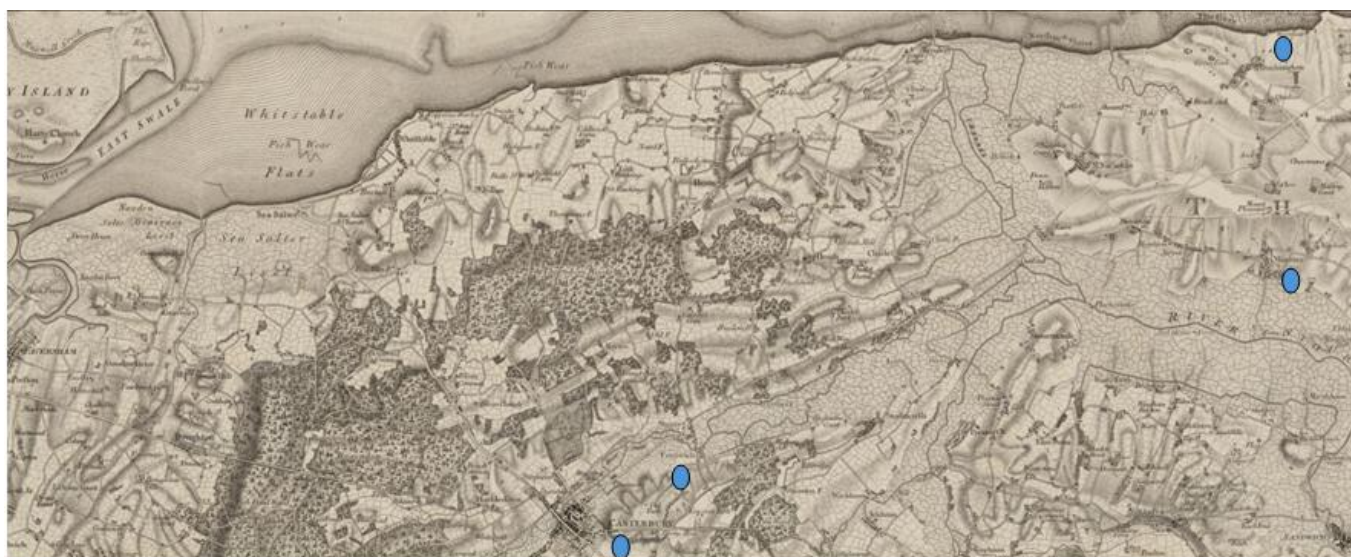
<https://ia801306.us.archive.org/32/items/woodruffsofnewje00wood/woodruffsofnewje00wood.pdf> accessed 26th November 2025

⁶² Inventory of Simon Woodroffe, 1600, Consistory Court of Canterbury register ref PRC/10/29/447

⁶³ Will Thomas Woodroffe of Birchington made 1542 proved 1544, Consistory Court of Canterbury PRC/32/19/40a

⁶⁴ Kent NE, Surveyed: 1788 to 1798, Published: 1801,

<https://maps.nls.uk/view/257576891#zoom=3.5&lat=4953&lon=13275&layers=BT> accessed 26th November 2025



The Woodruff Family in the Kent Depositions Index

The Kent Depositions Index was checked to see whether any evidence of these various Woodruff families could be found, which in turn could help link them together. Instead, an entirely unexpected discovery was made.

An entry from this Index from 1590 showed that Simon Woodruff's origins actually lay outside Kent:

Symon Woodrove of Minster in the county of Kent, maultman, where he has lived for forty years; originated in Beetley, county Norfolk; aged seventy or thereabouts.

Simon was involved peripherally in an ecclesiastical court case, regarding which his details were recorded as a witness. This statement was invaluable for its specific information and now revealed that Simon was about 70 years old and had come from Beetley. This was in the Breckland of mid-Norfolk.

Whilst the Birchington-Minster connection thus formed a coherent line, stretching from Thomas's will in 1542 to Simon's death in 1600/1, their earlier origins were actually outside the county.

Based on his given age in 1590, Simon was probably born in the 1520s, and presumably the family group migrated to Kent sometime prior to 1542, when his father's will was written.

In turn, this now made it perhaps less likely that this Thanet branch of the family was closely related to the Fordwich Woodruffs. In itself the surname was not rare, given its varying etymological origins.

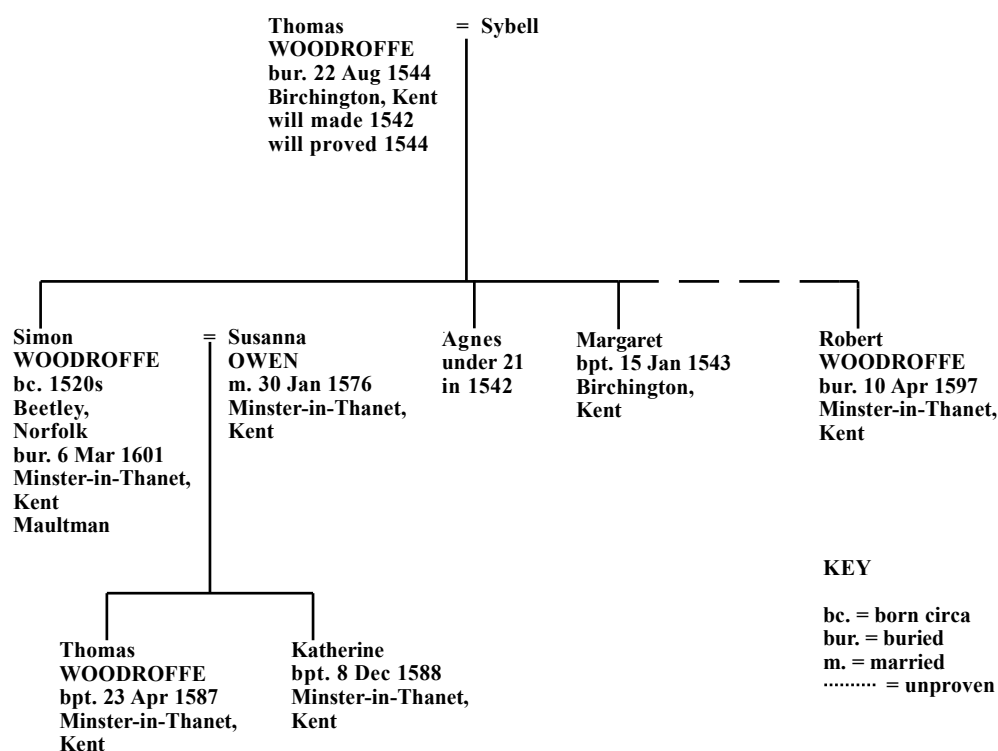
Context: Migration in the 16th century

Gill Wyatt's study 'Migration and Mobility in the Isle of Thanet in the Late Elizabethan/Early Jacobean Period'⁶⁵ provides valuable additional context. Her analysis of the Kent Ecclesiastical Depositions shows how individuals from across the country, and even further afield from countries within Europe, migrated both into, and out of, the Isle of Thanet in the 16th century.

Conclusion

This research shows that by the early seventeenth century, multiple Woodruff families were established across Canterbury and elsewhere in East Kent. One Woodruff branch was living in Fordwich from the earliest years of the 16th century, whilst Thomas Woodruff and his son Simon moved from Norfolk to Birchington, Kent, most probably in the 1530s. Whilst geographically Fordwich and Birchington are not far apart, it is now less likely that these two families were closely related.

The Woodroffe Family of Kent



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⁶⁵ Gill Wyatt, 'Migration and Mobility in the Isle of Thanet in the Late Elizabethan/Early Jacobean Period', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, Volume 135, 2014. <https://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/journal/135/migration-and-mobility-isle-thanet-late-elizabethanearly-jacobean-period> accessed 26th November 2025

GENTLEMEN OF UNCERTAIN FORTUNE:

How Younger Sons Made Their Way in Jane Austen's England by Rory Muir

Yale University Press 2023

IHGS Tutor Recommended

Muir's *Gentlemen of Uncertain Fortune* shines a revealing light on the fate of younger sons of the gentry and aristocracy who, deprived of inheritance by the laws of primogeniture, had to find their own way in a world structured around property, status and reputation.

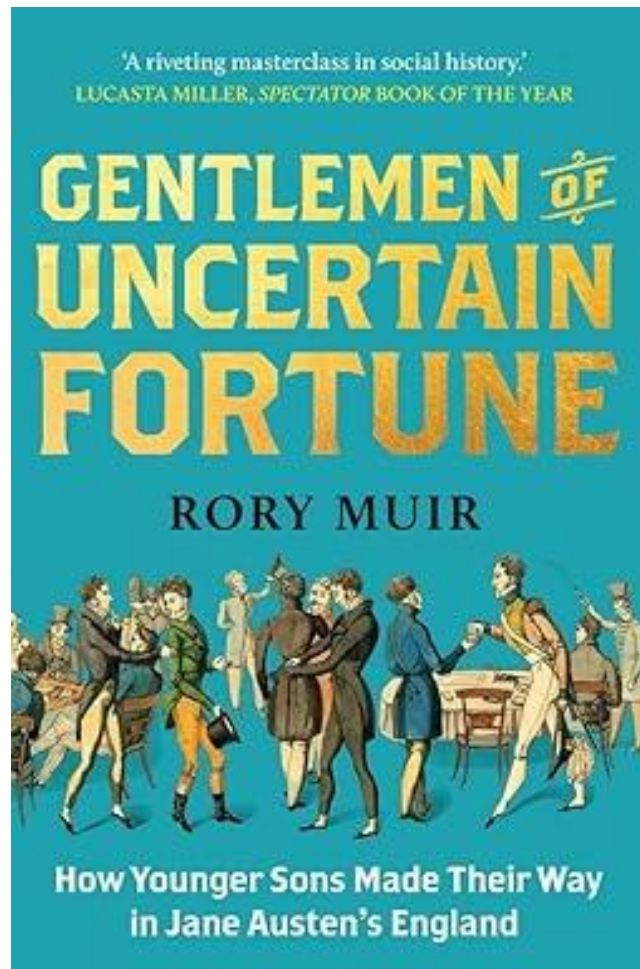
He draws on a wide array of family letters, diaries and archival data, including examples drawn from the world of Jane Austen, her family and her contemporaries, to reconstruct the options realistically available to these younger sons of Regency England.

The book is structured thematically, each chapter considers a different "respectable" profession, the Church, medicine, law, banking and commerce, civil service, the army and navy, and life in India or the colonies, analysing what might count as a viable career for a gentleman without an inheritance.

The book provides details on incomes, cost of living, and the money required to sustain various "gentlemanly" lifestyles.

Likewise, each professional path is explored in depth - what qualifications or patronage were needed, how long a family would typically support a younger son before he might stand on his own, and what realistic prospects there were for advancement or stability.

A great read for any family historian that gives a fascinating insight into how and why gentlemen in Regency England entered the professions and military.



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10/12	Wed	12pm	An Ancestral Christmas with Mrs Yule Herself! With Elizabeth Yule
8/1	Thur	6:30pm	Heraldic Sources 1: Blazoning and Using Papworth with Ann Ballard
14/1	Wed	9:30am	How to Draw Pedigrees Using PowerPoint: Advanced with Ann Ballard
15/1	Thur	6:30pm	Heraldic Framework 1: Language, Design and Description with Ann Ballard
21/1	Wed	12pm	Census Substitutes with John Hanson
29/1	Thur	12pm	Treasures of the Parish Chest with Judith Batchelor
29/1	Thur	6:30pm	Heraldic Framework 2: Blazoning and Introduction to Papworth with Ann Ballard
5/2	Thur	6:30pm	Heraldic Sources 2: Blazoning and Using Fairbairn with Ann Ballard
5/3	Thur	12pm	An English Village – How to Find Out About a Place with Judith Batchelor

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